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THE EU IN CHINESE PRINT MEDIA

Mapping the Image

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Abstract

'Image' as a kind of softpower plays an increasingly important role in international relations and is drawing more and more attention from international actors. In the process of national image (or international actor's image) construction mass media is an inevitable actor not only because it can prominently reflect perceptions from the government, elites and the public but can also affect or even lead the direction the perception takes to an extent. Previous studies have suggested that international actors usually respond to their images when they make decisions or take action. This paper investigates articles about the EU in two influential Chinese newspapers, People's Daily and Nanfang Daily, which were published from 2002 to 2011, employing empirical research methods in the analysis of the intensity, content and attitude of the newspaper articles. The comparison of news reports and EU-China relations enables us to discuss the relationship between international relations and actors' media images. Thus, this study sets out to determine how the Chinese media perceive the EU and whether EU-China relations and the media might have co-constituted and co-determined each other in the decade between 2002 and 2011.

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1. Introduction

Since the Cold War, conceptual factors in international relations have become increasingly important (Cobb/Elder 1973: 305; Rusi 1988: 30; Wendt 1999a: 20). As many scholars have stated, "the traditional power politics which based itself dominantly on the military-political capacity of nations is under a process of transformation" (Rusi 1988: 29), and "When the physics of power declines, the psychology of power, in consequence, rises" (Jervis 1970: 223).

As an essential component of ideas, increasing importance is attached to national image. Image policy is evaluated as part of foreign policy at the state level (Rusi 1988: 31). John Herz thinks that "It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that today half of power politics consists of 'image making'. With the rising importance of publics in foreign affairs, image making has steadily increased" (Herz 1981: 187).

In the process of national image construction, mass media play a vital and powerful role. Only a very limited number of people have opportunities to make contact with the image-objects directly. Most people shape their images in international politics through second-hand contacts (Rusi 1988: 32-33). Mass media is a useful channel, not only for decision makers but also for the populace, to collect information about image-objects and to influence the image. To some extent, "the mass media are the major international image makers of today"(Screbeny-Mohammadi 1985: 54).

This paper aims to uncover the relationship between international relations and international actors' images in mass media. It suggests a hypothesis based on constructivist Alexander Wendt's theory that international relations and interactions can co-constitute and co-determine the actors' images.

The EU and China are two poles in contemporary international society. Since China joined the WTO and the Euro was successfully launched in Europe, communication between the EU and China has grown frequent and deep, and the relationship between them has become more and more significant. This paper chooses EU-China relations and the Chinese media perception of the EU as the starting point, employing empirical research methods to demonstrate the relationship between the two and the way the system works.

Two influential Chinese newspapers were selected for this study. One is People's Daily, which is distributed nationally and the other is Nanfang Daily, whose target market is Guangdong Province. This paper will analyze all the articles covering the EU in these two newspapers during the period of 2002-2011, evaluating the dimensions of intensity, content and valence.

The analysis will sketch out an outline of the EU's image, while two case studies are used to illustrate how the hypothetical system works and whether US-China relations as an intervening variable can affect the EU's image in Chinese news media.

The paper proceeds in four steps. First, image studies in the field of international relations are introduced. Second, the hypothesis is drawn from constructivist theories. Third, the hypothesis I will be tested by statistical data which come from the empirical analysis of the newspaper articles. Fourth, the hypothesis will be modified according to the findings of the previous step.

## 2.	National/Actors' Images

Till the Cold War period, emphasis was on the importance of material aspects in international relations and very little attention was given to the conceptual elements like national image, which were always considered a tool for pursuing national power or interests.

The Cold War gave the study of national image a chance to develop. Firstly, during the Cold War the United States and the former Soviet Union viewed each other in a distorted and irrational way, like "a mirror image in a twisted glass" (Bronfenbrenner 1961: 46). They considered themselves to be trustworthy, peace-loving, honorable, and humanitarian, but the other to be treacherous, warlike, and cruel (Frank/Melville 2001). The enemy's images caused negative impacts on US-UdSSR relations and the two superpowers' diplomatic policies. Then, as the nuclear arms race was escalated, the East-West conflict was intensified, these phenomena aroused the world's awareness of the role national image could play in international relations.

Secondly, failure of both neorealism and neoliberalism to predict and interpret the end of the Cold War and its consequences led to new ideas such as constructivism – which advocated "that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature" (Wendt 1999b: 1). Thirdly, "the Cold War climate highlighted a symbolic dimension of international politics" (Rusi 1988: 30). The development of mass media, especially the high-speed growth of television in this period, promoted the tendencies towards symbolization and visualization. One of the dominant responses to these tendencies is to lay great stress on national image and external perceptions.

Kenneth E. Boulding, a pioneer in the study of 'national image' argued that the valuable images in international systems are those "which a nation has of itself and of those other bodies in the system which constitute its international environment" (Boulding 1959: 121). He analyzed national image in three dimensions: simple geographical space, hostility or friendliness (attitude), and strength or weakness (physical power) (Boulding 1959: 123-125).

Some studies correlated national image with the belief system. In their point of view, it could be denoted as a subpart of the belief system(Holsti 1962: 244). The belief system, composed of a number of "images" of the past, present, and future, includes "all the accumulated, organized knowledge that the organism has about itself and the world" (Holsti 1962: 245; Miller et al. 1960: 16).

Affected by the historical background, theories about national image in international relations have often focused on its negative aspects, such as images of the enemy, deception, hostility and friendliness (Boulding 1959; Holsti 1962; Jervis 1970).

Nowadays however, studies of national image are more positive. As a sort of soft power, it is always related to national identity and branding. The former intends to build up an inspiring internal image which can enhance the cohesion of the nation (Anholt 2011: 7). The latter aims at projecting a positive image to the external world in order to create a favorable environment for national interests (Sheng 2011: 293).

National image is a complex concept. It can be divided into two interconnected parts:

internal image and external image. Internal image is "the total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavioral unit, or its internal view of itself and its universe"(Boulding 1959: 120-121). External image consists of "collective judgments of a foreign country's image and character" (Wang 2006: 91). Considering the fact that an international actor usually makes decisions or takes action depending on the comparison between self-perception and the perceptions of others, the relationship between the internal image of one nation and the external image of other nations involved in the relations is closer than that between one nation's internal and external images.

There are three major characteristics of national image. First, regardless of whether or not it is distorted, national image is a psychological perception of the real world. It is based on reality, but is not the reality itself. Second, national image is not a kind of unified cognition. It is always interpreted quiet differently by different people in different circumstances. Third, national image can be reshaped. However, the process is a long-term plan. It is difficult to see immediate responses over a short time, because the national image is essentially a historical image which is formed mostly in childhood and usually in the family group (Boulding 1959: 122). This means that it changes slightly from time to time. However, it is not easily completely changed by one or two actions or events.

The international environment has changed greatly since the 1950s. Many new kinds of actors in addition to nations have emerged, and the components of international society have become more complicated. These actors too attach great significance to their images. Therefore, the term "international actor's image" would be more universal than the term "national image".[1]

This paper will focus on the external images of international actors. It defines "international actor's image" ("actor's image" for short) as the external perceptions, impressions and evaluations of an international actor which build up over the course of international interactions.

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[1] "National image" is the image of a nation or a country. "International actor's image" is the image of an international actor. As I mentioned above in the paper, in international relations, actors are not only nations but also other kinds of actors, such as international organizations, like EU, UN. So, in this regard, "international actor's image" is more universal than "national image".

3.   Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this paper is derived from and based on the following three assumptions. Firstly, global politics is said to be guided by the intersubjectively shared ideas, norms, and values held by actors, which are ideational structures constraining and shaping behavior. Secondly, the ideational structure, which leads actors to redefine their interests and identities in the process of interacting, has a constitutive and not just regulative effect on actors. Thirdly, ideational structures and actors ('agents') co-constitute and co-determine each other. This means that structures constitute actors in terms of their interests and identities, but also that structures are produced, reproduced, and altered by the discursive practices of agents (Copeland 2006: 3).

In his opinion, the distribution of power in international politics is constituted in large part by the distribution of interests; the content of interests are in turn constituted in large part by ideas, the structure (or international relations) is constructed partly by material power and partly by ideas, and ideas (the goals, threats, fears, identities, and other elements of perceived reality that influence states and non-state actors within the international system) are constructed by interaction between agents who are in the relations/ structure (Wendt 1999a: 92-138).

The hypotheses in this paper will focus here on demonstrating the relationship between "structure/relations" and "ideas", which are selected from these four elements.

The EU as an economic and political union of 28 independent European countries and China are regarded as two important poles in contemporary international society. Since the beginning of the 21st century, when China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Europe successfully launched the Euro, communication between the EU and China has grown frequent and deep, and their relations and interactions have become more and more significant.

Perception is one type of idea. Studies on it can be sorted into four groups: the government's perception, the media's perception, elites' perception and the populace's perception.

The value of mass media in international relations was first realized in World War I (Lasswell 1927), then reevaluated and resurged during the Cold War (Cobb/Elder 1973; Edelman 1964, 1971). The Vietnam War was considered the first one to be televised and the first of the modern era to be fought without official military censorship (Rusi 1988). It made mass media a more keen topic in international relations studies (Halline 1986; Jervis 1968, 1970, 1976), in which field the mass media are appraised highly. As Rusi stated, "superpower diplomacy" has become a kind of "media diplomacy", and the intrusion of the media into every phase and level of the negotiation process changes the world spirit and nature of diplomacy (Rusi 1988: 30).

It can be argued that the mass media play a series of special roles in international relations, especially in the process of constructing an actor's image. First, they play a role in surveillance of the environment. McLuhan pointed out, "we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media" (Mcluhan/Lapham 1964: 1). Media can be said to act as an individual's eye, ear, hand, foot and skin, watching the world around us, searching and gathering information from every corner. The power structure of the community reflected by mass media (Schiller 1975: 78) is necessary for the government, elites and populace to build up an image of reality and make decisions.

Second, they act as a hub of information. Mass media are the most efficient information exchange platform, which connects directly with each part of the society and holds them all together. They centrally reflect and distribute images from the government, elites and populace, and affect their perception of the image-objects as well.

Third, they act as a dynamic system. Because of the media's extraordinary capability of centralizing and distributing information, images formed by mass media will be magnified. Mass media indicate their standpoint, set public agenda and make impacts on people's perception by selecting, analyzing, processing, emphasizing and controlling information flow. It is thought that "control of images and information is already central to the exercise of power and influence in international politics" (Halline 1986: 214). This paper will take the relationship between EU-China and the Chinese perception of the EU as the starting point. As mentioned above, mass media play a dominant role in the construction of an image system. In China, the government's perception will strongly affect the media's perception, and receive weak feedback in turn. The media have greater influence on the populace than that populace can exercise on them. The information exchange between media and elites may be more equal. From the media's image of the EU, we can see how the political circle and the intelligentsia view the EU and what kind of image they want the public to have about the EU.

Consequently, the major hypothesis in this paper will be narrowed down to the relationship between EU-China relations and the Chinese media perception of the EU (Figure 2): "EU-China relations and interactions" and "Chinese (media) perception of the EU" can co-constitute and co-determine each other.

In the relationship, "EU-China relations and interactions" is the independent variable, and "Chinese (media) perception of the EU" is the dependent variable.

EU-China Relations and Interactions   Chinese (Media) Perception of EU

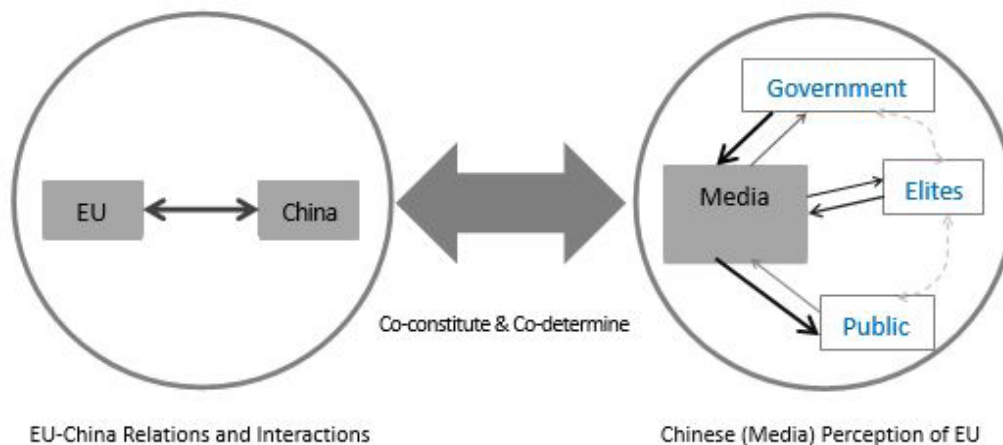Figure 1: Hypothesis: relationship between EU-China relations and Chinese media perception of the EU

The major hypothesis can be split into several sub-hypotheses:

H1: The EU's image in Chinese media is consistent with its status as China's largest trading partner.

H2: The quality of EU-China relations and the frequency of their interactions will constitute and determine the EU's image in Chinese media.

4.   Methodology

All articles concerning mainly the EU are selected here as subjects investigated for this study, including news reports and commentaries. If the Greek Debt Crisis is taken as an example, then if an article is mainly about what the EU does in the crisis, or how Greece responds to the EU, it will be chosen. But if it is mainly about the Greek Debt Crisis itself, or what actions Greece takes, it will not be included.

The subjects investigated come from two Chinese influential mainstream newspapers, People's Daily and Nanfang Daily. People's Daily, which is published daily in Beijing and distributed nationwide, is an organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. It is the most authoritative and influential national press in China. In some cases, it can set the tone and guidelines for other media.[2] Nanfang Daily, which is published daily in Guangdong Province and distributed mainly throughout the Pearl River Delta, is an organ of the Guangdong Communist Party, although it successfully integrates the features of partisan and commercial press. It is one of the most popular regional newspapers in China. Guangdong province is deeply involved in trade relationships with the EU. So, Nanfang Daily's audience has more interests in EU than that of most other Chinese media. The audience is important to consider when making news decisions because they are the ones who consume it (Marris/Thornham 2000).The audience "drive" Nanfang Daily to be concerned with EU.[3] Also, Guangdong is the frontier of Chinese media reformation. Nanfang Daily is to be known as a high level representative of Chinese regional media. Therefore the paper chooses these two newspapers to be analyzed, trying to reflect EU's image in Chinese media comprehensively, not only from the national perspective but also from the regional angle.

The EU and China have enhanced their communication and upgraded their relations to a partnership in 2003. In that year, EU adopted policy paper "A maturing partnership: shared interests and challenges in EU-China relations" on September 10th, and EU Council of Ministers endorsed it, and China released its first ever policy paper on EU on October 13th. Since then, reports and commentaries about the EU have evidently increased in Chinese news media. Therefore, this paper samples the 2002-2011 news articles on the EU to show how Chinese media perceive the EU throughout this decade.

The following describes some dimensions for studying the international image(s) of an actor in international relations. In this section, three dimensions will be introduced to study the EU's image in Chinese newspapers. The first two dimensions are always included in examining an actor's image in the media: visibility and valence (Manheim/Albritton 1984). Visibility, referring to the sheer number of articles and paragraphs published (Zhang/III 2012: 82). In this paper, visibility is defined as: (1) the frequency

2 People's Daily is an essential news source for other Chinese news media. In some special time and some important events, other media are required to keep identical with the report policy of People's Daily. Its editorials and reports are always reproduced by other media. So, in this regard, we can say People's Daily can set the tone and guideline of other media.

3 Besides Nanfang Daily, I have done some research on other two influential regional newspapers, Beijing Youth Daily and Shanghai Morning Post. The preliminary data obviously show that the quantity and quality of EU's reports of Nanfang Daily far exceeds that of the other two newspapers.

with which EU articles are published in the press, and (2) the length of the articles. In the field of journalism, length refers to the number of standard characters the space of the article can contain, not the word number of the article. A photo report, for example, is transformed into a text article of equal area. This dimension will indicate whether the EU's image in Chinese media is significant or negligible. The other dimension is valence, referring to whether the EU is portrayed unfavorably or favorably in the media (Manheim/Albritton 1984). It is a measurement of attitude. Three sub-dimensions of valence are identified: positive, negative and neutral. No matter whether the article is about good news or bad news regarding the EU, if its tone is laudatory, then it is coded as positive; if its tone is critical, then it is coded as negative. Take an article about the Euro Debt Crisis as an example. If the article focuses on the active action the EU takes to deal with the crisis, it is coded as positive. If the article focuses on the desperate results and the EU's failure it is coded as negative. An article is coded as neutral if it exhibits a balance of both positive and negative, or displays indeterminate interests or values (Zhang/III 2012: 84).

Valence is a dimension about the tone of the article, which shows the media's attitude towards EU. And "content" is a dimension about the subject of the article, which shows what kind of EU's event will attract Chinese media's attention. Therefore, besides the two above, there is a third dimension which will be introduced in this paper: content.

Content shows the Chinese media's interests about the EU, such as what kind of issues the media is most concerned about, what field the media pays more attention to, etc. Samples are classified into three levels of this category according to their subject matter. The lowest level is an "event", such as an arms embargo, the Euro Debt Crisis, anti-dumping, etc. The second level is a "sub-theme", which is defined by similar properties of events, such as economic conflict (including the events like anti-dumping), etc. The highest level is a "theme", which refers to the field to which the sub-themes belong, such as politics, economics, social life, etc. This dimension will show what kinds of content the mass media would like the audience to know.

In a word, three dimensions are employed to examine image in this paper: visibility, content, and valence (Table 1).

Dimension	Visibility	Content	Valence
Illustration	• Average number of articles per year • Average length of articles per year • Percentage of articles (amount) • Percentage of articles (length)	• Theme (Politics, Economics, …) • Sub-theme (Economic conflict, Technological cooperation, …) • Events (Arms embargo, …)	• Tone of articles: positive, neutral, negative

Table 1: Four Dimensions of data analysis

5.   Findings

Findings from the investigation of news articles in People's Daily and Nanfang Daily can support or partly support the four sub-hypotheses:

The EU's image in Chinese media is consistent with its status as China's largest trading partner.

Among EU-China relations, political relations and economic relations are the two dominant ones. And China defines the EU as the largest trading partner on all occasions. In the Chinese media's perception, is the EU an important partner for China? A political partner or a trading partner? Is the Chinese media's perception of the EU consistent with this? The number and length of articles on the EU are two basic indicators demonstrating whether or not the EU is important.

In total, there were 2228 articles published in People's Daily and 696 in Nanfang Daily between 2002 and 2011. That means on an average People's Daily published 223articles on the EU per year and 18 per month, while Nanfang Daily published 70 EU articles per year and less than 6 per month. The news sections of People's Daily and Nanfang Daily contain approximately 150 articles per day, among them about 40 articles concerning international affairs. So, the portion of EU articles is quite small, and it is smaller than that of articles on the US, Russia, Japan, Iraq, Iran, and even some of the EU's member states such as France, Germany, Britain, etc. However, if we discuss the EU on the level of international organizations rather than that of nations, it is the one mentioned most often.

The average length of EU articles in People's Daily was 1100 characters. In Nanfang Daily, the number of characters was 1200. In China, an 800-character article can be classified as a long and important report. In this regards, the EU was important. However, People's Daily has sixteen 10,000-character pages in its news section, while Nanfang Daily has twenty such pages in its news section. Only 668 characters in People's Daily and 220 characters in Nanfang Daily about the EU could be seen per day. Therefore, the EU was not a very attractive subject for Chinese media, especially for regional media.

The themes of the news articles indicated whether the EU was China's political partner, trading partner, or a third type.

Both People's Daily and Nanfang Daily paid most attention to the fields of politics and economics. Few articles were about social life, culture, technology achievements or other topics.

59.3% of EU articles in People's Daily were about politics, while 33.3% of them were about economics (Figure 2). Only in 2006, 2010 and 2011, the number of economic reports exceeded that of political reports. That means, until the Euro Debt Crisis, People's Daily preferred to portray the EU as a political actor rather than as a trading partner.

Nanfang Daily exhibited a similar tendency to that of People's Daily, but the percentage figure was different. 44.4% of EU articles in Nanfang Daily were about politics, while 52.0% of them were about economics (Figure 3). The EU's image in Nanfang Daily was more likely a trading partner. Therefore, since the image is not consistent, H1 is only partially supported on the basis of the data.

Others
7,4%

Economics
Articles
33,3%

Political
Articles
59,3%

Others
3,6%

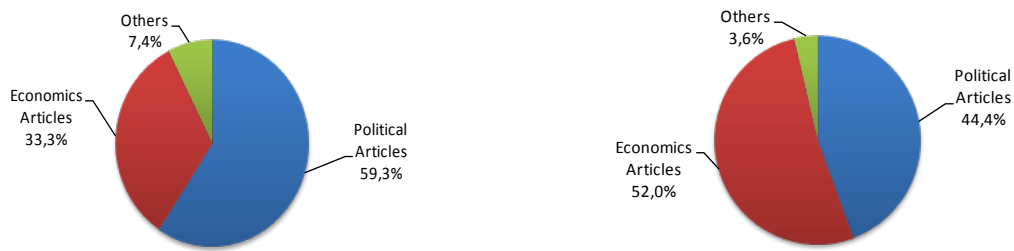Political
Articles
44,4%

Economics
Articles
52,0%

Figure 2: Content Share in People's Daily   Figure 3: Content Share in Nanfang Daily

The quality of EU-China relations and the frequency of their interactions is reflected in the EU's image in Chinese media.

Since the first communication "A long-term policy for China-Europe relations" was published on 15 July 1995, the EU released one or two policy papers almost every two years. Until 2003, the EU had published five China policy documents. In 1998, the EU published the communication "Building a Comprehensive Partnership with China", supported China's entry into the WTO, and held the 1st EU-China Summit in London. EU-China relations then entered a new phase of development. In 2003, when the EU presented the policy paper "A maturing partnership: shared interests and challenges in EU-China relations" and China released it's first-ever "EU policy paper", EU-China relations began its "honeymoon" period. Publishing "EU-China Trade and Investment - Competition and Partnership" in 2006 indicated that the EU not only viewed China as a partner but also a competitor. The EU readjusted its attitude and policy towards China. Their relations grew tense and declined to the lowest point in 2008, when many negative events happened. Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited Brussels at the beginning of 2009. Since the so-called "journey of faith" sent out China's friend-ly signals to the EU, the relations between the two actors have shown some obvious improvement.

I Visibility: The number of articles in the two newspapers climbed to its summit in 2005, and declined significantly in 2006. In People's Daily, the lowest point appeared in 2008 and bounced back the next year, especially after the "journey of faith". In Nanfang Daily, the curve continued to decline, and the lowest point appeared in 2010. The curve bounced back when the Euro Debt Crisis worsened at the beginning of 2011. (Figure 4). The data in Figure 5 shows that the EU's visibility in the media was influenced by EU-China relations, but the numbers in People's Daily was more affected by the EU and China's political relations than by their economic relations, while the numbers in Nanfang Daily was affected by the economic relations rather than political relations.
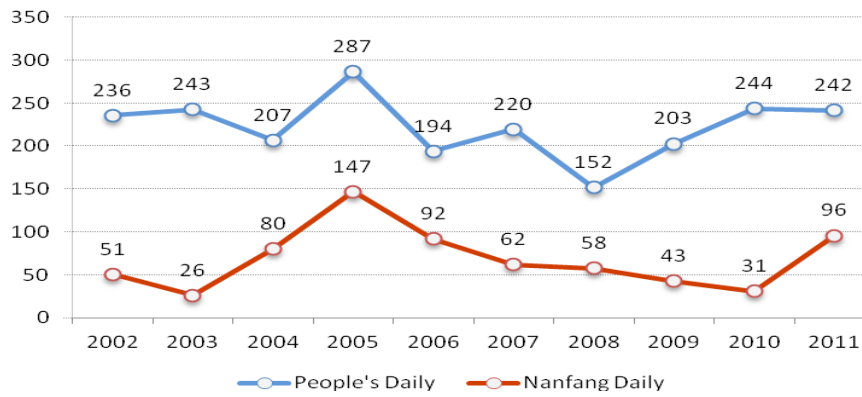
Figure 4: Changes in the quantity of articles on the EU: 2002-2011

II Content: Politics is just one reason for media to make decision. Though it is important, it is not the only one. News values, market benefit, audience requirement, media's reporting plan and other factors also play big roles in news selection. The rule applies to contemporary Chinese media, too. In this part, we organized the articles into a three-level framework (Table 2; Table 3) composed of theme, sub-theme, and event.

Theme	Sub-theme	Event	Number
Politics	Domestic affairs	EU enlargement	129
		European constitution	93
		European parliament	30
		EU Summit	37
		Common Security and Defense Policy	76
		Schengen agreement	8
		General affairs[1]	142
	Foreign affairs	EU-China relations[2]	324
		EU-US relations	58
		EU-Russia relations	69
		EU-Asia relations[3]	198
		EU-Africa relations	28
		EU-Non-EU relations[4]	44
		EU-America relations[5]	25
		Climate & energy	78
		Others	11
Economics	EU's economics	EURO and EURO zones	91
		Economic development	178
		Debt crisis	134
	International trading	EU-China conflicts and cooperation	233
		EU-US conflicts	44
		Anti-monopoly	17
		Doha world trade negotiation	7
		Export-import management	11
		Others	28
Others	Social life	Immigration	18
		Culture	18
		Aviation management	15
		Others	27
	Education & Science	Education	8
		Galileo plan	14
		Telecommunications	14
		Technology development	20
		Conferences	6
	Health	Food safety	7
		Public health emergency	16

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[1] "General affairs" includes relations between member states, reformation, parties, changes in top management, and other affairs which cannot be classified into the other 6 categories.
[2] "EU-China relations" includes leaders' meetings, cooperation and conflicts, arms embargoes, and attitudes towards China's integrity.
[3] "EU-Asia relations" includes all the relations between EU and Asian states except that between the EU and China.
[4] "EU-Non-EU relations" refers to relations between EU and European non-EU states except that between the EU and Russia.
[5] "America" here refers to countries located in North America, South America and Latin America, excluding the USA.

Table 2: Content framework of EU articles in People'sDaily

Theme	Sub-theme	Event	Number
Politics	Domestic affairs	EU enlargement	33
		European constitution	59
		European parliament	2
		EU Summit	1
		Common Security and Defense Policy	9
		Schengen agreement	6
		General affairs[1]	39
	Foreign affairs	EU-China relations[2]	57
		EU-US relations	8
		EU-Russia relations	14
		EU-Asia relations[3]	42
		EU-Africa relations	6
		EU-Non-EU relations[4]	4
		EU-America relations[5]	1
		Climate & energy	9
		Others	4
Economics	EU economics	EURO and EURO zones	37
		Economic development	24
		Debt crisis	63
	International trading	EU-China conflicts and cooperation	201
		EU-US conflicts	14
		Anti-monopoly	10
		Doha world trade negotiation	1
		Export-import management	0
		Others	4
Others	Social life	Immigration	1
		Culture	0
		Aviation management	13
		Others	11
	Education & Science	Education	0
		Galileo plan	4
		Telecommunication	1
		Technology development	0
		Conference	0
	Hygiene	Food safety	0
		Public health emergency	5

[1] "General affairs" includes relations between member states, reformation, parties, changes in top management, and other affairs which cannot be classified into the other 6 categories.
[2] "EU-China relations" includes leaders' meetings, cooperation and conflicts, arms embargoes, and attitudes towards China's integrity.
[3] "EU-Asia relations" includes all the relations between EU and Asian states except that between the EU and China.
[4] "EU-Non-EU relations" refers to relations between EU and European non-EU states except that between the EU and Russia.
[5] "America" here refers to countries located in North America, South America and Latin America, excluding the USA.

Table 3: Content framework of EU articles in Nanfang Daily

The agendas of People's Daily and Nanfang Daily show some significant similarities. They both attach the most importance to EU-China relations and their political and economic interactions. "EU-China trading cooperation and conflicts" (especially anti-dumping conflicts), "leaders' meetings", "EU economic development", "EURO debt crisis", "EU enlargement", "EU-China political cooperation and conflicts", "Iran nuclear issue", and "European constitution" are the top 8 topics (Figure 5, Figure 6) in the two newspapers, although the sequence is a bit different. They are also the main topics in EU-China relations and interactions. However, there are still some important EU-China issues deliberately ignored by the media, such as issues regarding their relations with Africa.
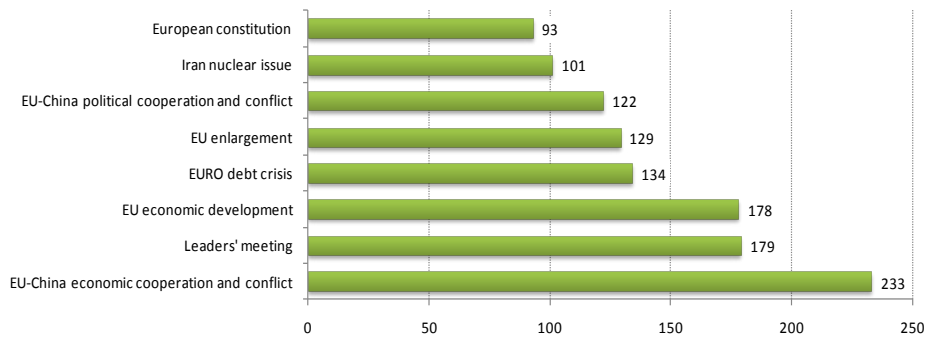
Figure 5: Top 8 topics about the EU in People's Daily

Figure 6: Top 8 topics about the EU in Nanfang Daily

People's Daily as an official national newspaper emphasizes EU-China political relations, especially leaders' meetings and EU-China cooperation. However, Nanfang Daily as an organ of Guangdong Province with strong trade relations with the EU, highlights EU-China economic relations, especially their trade conflicts. In the field of EU-China economic cooperation and conflicts, the two newspapers both place importance on topics of anti-dumping and limiting Chinese textile export (Figure 7).
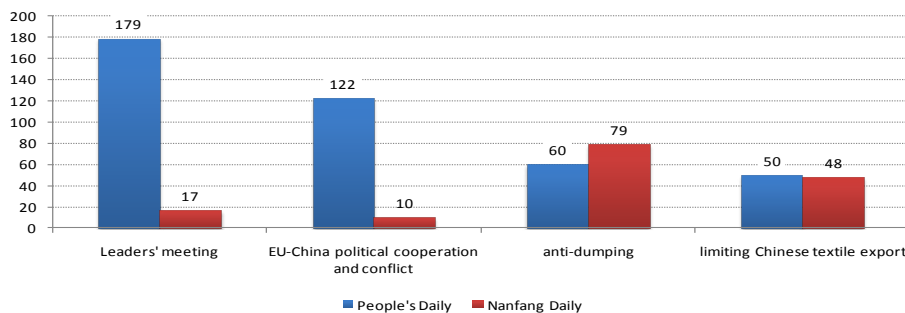
Figure 7: Comparison: different inclinations in topic selection

From the data we can see that EU-China relations can set the agenda of Chinese media. Differences between the two newspapers indicate that People's Daily views the EU from the perspective of the nation, reflecting the relations between the EU and the nation, while Nanfang Daily views the EU from the perspective of the region, reflecting

the relations between the EU and Guangdong province.

III Attitude: In general, the two newspapers demonstrate different attitudes towards the EU. But People's Daily prefers a more positive attitude than Nanfang Daily. Moreover, the attitude changes from time to time. During the years 2003-2006, known as the EU and China's "honeymoon" period, the positive attitude is obvious. Even when encountered with some negative events, the media try to make the report seem hopeful. The media attempted to display the EU's positive attitude and efforts. For example, reports on European Constitution not only present its failure objectively, but focus on how the EU and the members do to try to retrieve the situation. After 2006, with the failure in lifting the arms embargo and the increase in trade conflicts, the attitude became more negative. Even when the topic covered some good news, the article's tone remained doubtful. In 2009, the situation improved a bit to the more positive side (Figure 8; Figure 9). Thus, the data on attitude show that on the premise of respecting the objectivity principle of news reporting, the media's attitude towards the EU was to some extent affected by the quality of EU-China relations.

Therefore, H2 is strongly supported by the visibility and content analysis, while support from the attitude analysis is somewhat weak.
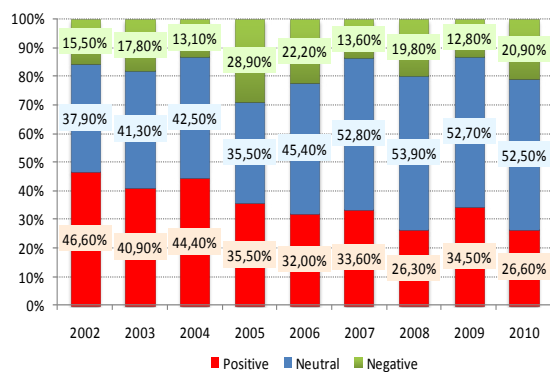

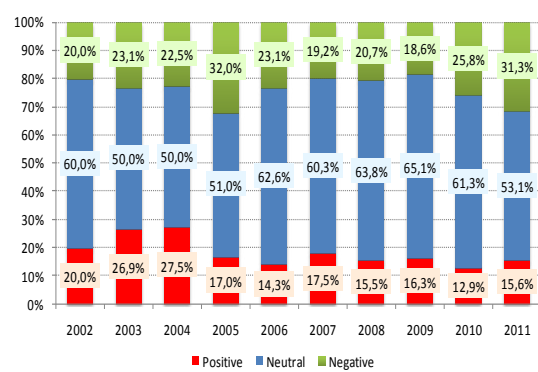Figure 8: Attitude tendency of People's Daily towards the EU

Figure 9: Attitude tendency of Nanfang Daily towards the EU

6.   Conclusion

The data and case study above show that EU-China relations can strongly determine and constitute the EU's image in Chinese news media. However, the opposite relation is weak and indirect.

For H1, although the data only partly support that EU's status as China's largest trading partner, EU's consistent image in these two newspapers EU-China relations from different level. People's Daily is a national press. It stands at the height of the nation and shows the two actors' relations from the political angle. So, People's Daily views EU as China's political partner. While Nanfang Daily is a regional press, it reflects more economic relationship and interactions between EU and Guangdong Province, at the level of region. Then, Nanfang Daily sees EU as China's - especially Guangdong's- trading partner.

For H2, the curve of EU reports' visibility and attitude and the structure of their content coincide with that of the development of EU-China relations. Also, EU's reports in People Daily give more attention to EU-China political relations, while those in Nanfang Daily highlight EU-China economic relations.

Therefore, Figure 1 needs to be modified with regard to Figure 10: EU-China relations and interactions and Chinese (media) perceptions of the EU can co-constitute and co-determine each other. However, their positions are not equal. The variable "EU-China relations and interactions" gains in this relation an overwhelming advantage.
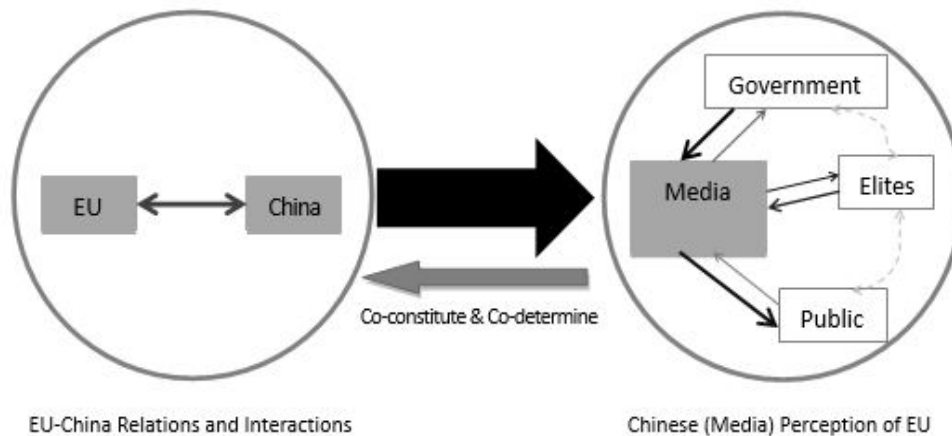

Figure 10

The study on the relationship between "EU-China relations and interactions" and the "Chinese (media) perception of the EU" is a starting point at which to demonstrate the hypotheses on the relationship between "international relations" and "ideas". We can add the "EU's (media) perception of China" into the hypothesis to make it more complete. Also, we can introduce the elements "US" and "US media" into the hypothesis as well, turning the bilateral relations into trilateral relations.

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