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**"What's China's comment?" Confrontational maneuvering in spokespersons' argumentative replies at the regular press conferences of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

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argumentative replies at the regular press conferences  
of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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## PROEFSCHRIFT

WU, Peng

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tative replies at the regular press conferences of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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## PREFACE

After I received my first Ph.D. degree in 2011 from Zhejiang University in China, I had always been thinking about how to make a contribution to the research field of Argumentation Theory, particularly Pragma-Dialectics, which had attracted my attention when I was carrying out my first dissertation project in China. During my one-year stay as a visiting scholar in Amsterdam from 2013 to 2014, during my weekly academic appointments with Frans van Eemeren, my chief supervisor at that time, I gradually realized that it was necessary for me to receive a systematic and rigorous doctoral education into argumentation theory if I really wanted to do solid works in this research field.

Thanks to Frans van Eemeren and Ton van Haaften's decision to act as my supervisors, I got the opportunity to carry out this doctoral dissertation project at Leiden University. I am grateful to both of them for the careful way in which they supervised my research and for the insightful and constructive suggestions they offered to me in the process.

Special thanks go to Bart Garssen. His insightful and in-depth explanations of fallacies and argument schemes helped me a lot when I was writing this dissertation. He has been witnessing and supporting my growth in the field of Pragma-Dialectics, for which I am very grateful. Francisca Snoeck Henkemans was my co-supervisor when I stayed as a visiting scholar in Amsterdam in 2013-2014. I not only appreciate her patient advice regarding my earlier writing projects, but also her encouraging and moving words when she knew that I wanted to do this doctoral dissertation. Her explanation of research methods prevented me from making useless efforts. In the same period, Jose Plug and Annemiek Hoffer helped me adapt to the new working environment and encouraged me to step out of the most miserable period of my life. I want to thank them for being so nice to me.

My appreciation should certainly be extended to Riet Bonnemaïjers, Francis van IJzendoorn, and Monique Leenstra. Since I started this dissertation project, they have spared no effort to stimulate and comfort me. In the last phase of my dissertation writing, they made a concerted effort to encourage

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me to save every minute to finish this project: Riet delivered me delicious “congratulatory cookies” immediately after I finished a chapter, Francis kept sending me messages almost every day to urge me to go on writing, and during the dinners she served me every two weeks in her nice house Monique let me explicitly and implicitly know how much excited she would feel if I could defend my dissertation in Leiden as scheduled. I am very glad and honored that Riet and Francis have agreed to be my “paranimfen”. I am sure that their company will make me more courageous and confident in the defense.

During my half-year stay in Amsterdam from May to October 2019, I finished the last chapters of this dissertation. In this unforgettable period, Henrike Jansen, Corina Andone, Agnes van Rees, Elleke Boschma-Mebius, Hans Maureau, Steven Smith, Lida Schoen, Inge van der Vlies, Sally Jackson and Scott Jacobs were supportive in different ways. I thank them all for being interested in my research and for being always ready to help.

I also have to thank Hong Chen, my former Dean, who is now the Deputy President of Jiangsu University. In 2004 she helped me to acquire a position in the School of Foreign Languages and after that she helped me in all kinds of ways to get a firm foothold in my School. More important, I would like to thank her for having supported me to do this second dissertation project, which in my university would not have been permitted in any other faculty.

All my best friends in China, particularly Huixia Xu, Lijun Ji, Linqiong Yan, Yuanyuan Wu, Xiujie Pan, Aihui Wu, Pinchao Lu, Jieyun Feng, Rining Wei, Xiaojing Wu, Weiqiang Mao and Lingxuan Kong, have been much concerned about the progress of this research project. I feel very guilty for letting them wait for such a long time to see this dissertation come out. I very much appreciate their loyalty to our friendship as well as their trust in me.

Thanks are also due to Shi-xu and Minghui Xiong. Without their guidance in different ways, I would not have known the term “Pragma-Dialectics”, not to mention that I would not have had the chance to write this dissertation.

When I was in Amsterdam in 2013-2014, Ding Ma, Jing Zhou and Zuozhen Liu were my only Chinese companions, with whom I spent most of my spare time. I appreciate their unconditional help in getting me out of my tempo-

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rary miseries at that time. When I finished this dissertation, the encouraging words they said to me when I told them that I had decided to start a second dissertation project at Leiden University crossed my mind.

I am indebted to my family in so many ways that I cannot enumerate them. They have never complained about my undue neglect of them when I was writing this dissertation. I hope this dissertation will be a nice comfort to them. More important, I hope that they will really be proud of me for finally finishing this project.

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences

Since China's reform and opening-up in the 1980s, dramatic changes have taken place in the Chinese political arena. A conspicuous change is the government's willingness, and even enthusiasm, to justify its policies to the international community via various channels of communication. Among the official channels the regular press conference held by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (China's MoFA hereafter) on each business day is for its unrivaled authoritative-ness the most crucial one. At China's MoFA's regular press conferences, after announcing one or more pieces of updated news, the spokespersons answer the questions asked by journalists from different countries. More often than not, these questions concern sensitive and controversial issues. The ultimate goal of the spokespersons in responding to these questions is to argue for the government's standpoints regarding those issues against criticism and opposition. In order to optimally realize this goal, the spokespersons' argumentative answers should be on the one hand so reasonable as to remove all doubts and on the other hand effective enough to make them convincing.

Press conferences have been a much-favored means of communication between politicians and journalists since the 1970s (Ekström 2006). MoFA's regular press conferences are a specific kind of political press conference. Compared with other forms of communication between politicians and the media, such as political interviews on TV, radio and in periodicals and newspapers, political press conferences not only enable politicians to get wider media coverage, since a great many journalists from all over the world attend these press conferences, but they also provide politicians ample freedom to manipulate their standpoints and arguments, since journalists at press conferences are routinely neither allowed to ask follow-up questions nor to refute or criticize the politicians on the spot.

In the past decade, some research has been done on China's diplomatic press conferences, particularly on how they are to be managed (Chen 2007; Sun 2012). Notably, most of this research merely involves offering normative

guidelines for spokespersons. So far no systematic attention has been paid to the actual interactions between spokespersons and journalists. Besides, in discussing the discursive guidelines that are to be followed, the research concentrates on the effective use of rhetoric, failing to recognize the requirement of dialectical reasonableness that spokespersons' discourse must also meet.

Generally speaking, although interesting work has been done on other communicative activity types in political communication, there has been very little research on political press conferences, let alone on diplomatic press conferences. Among the other communicative activity types that have been examined are the use of official documents (Reisigl & Wodak 2001; Fairclough & Fairclough 2012; Fischer & Forester 2012), political debates (van Eemeren & Garssen 2012; van Eemeren 2013), political editorials/opinions (Fairclough 1998; van Dijk 1998), political speeches (Schaffner 1997; Benoit 2000; Kien-pointner 2013), and political interviews (Atkinson 1988; Andone 2013).

In the few studies on political press conferences that are published two kinds of research can be differentiated. One strand focuses on theoretical issues such as the relationship between press conferences and public relations (Manheim 1979; Yi & Chang 2012), the communication process at political press conferences (Ryfe 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha 2003, 2013), and the role that press conferences play in political campaigning (Barkin 1983). These studies are deeply rooted in the traditional research paradigm of the political sciences and seldom pay attention to the actual discursive interactions between spokespersons and journalists. By contrast, the other strand of research, largely inspired by discourse studies, principally targets actual language use in political press conferences (presidential press conferences in particular), especially the discursive strategies used to hedge unwanted questions (Fraser 2010), to occupy the floor (Ekström 2006), or to build community (Bhatia 2006). A major problem with the second strand of research however is its failure to recognize the dialectical boundaries of the politicians' and spokespersons' discourse.

In order to make up at the same time for both the scarcity of research concentrating on the argumentative dimension of the discourse at political press

conferences and the limitations of current research concentrating on China's diplomatic press conferences, this study intends to provide a fully-fledged analysis of a crucial phase in the spokespersons' argumentative discourse at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. The focus of the study is on revealing the spokespersons' efforts to keep a balance between reasonableness and effectiveness in the argumentative discourse advanced in defining the issues when replying to the questions of journalists.

## 1.2 The pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation

The theoretical framework within which we are going to examine the spokespersons' argumentative replies is the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, or Pragma-Dialectics, which is developed by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, 1992, 2004) and then extended by van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2002) and van Eemeren (2010).

According to Pragma-Dialectics, argumentation is a "communicative and interactional (speech) act complex aimed at resolving a difference of opinion before a reasonable judge by advancing a constellation of reasons the arguer can be held accountable for as justifying the acceptability of the standpoint(s) at issue" (van Eemeren 2010: 29). With this definition as the point of departure, Pragma-Dialectics proposes a combined pragmatic and dialectical approach to argumentative discourse. Following the pragmatic approach, enlightened by pragmatics (particularly speech act theory and Gricean theory), argumentation is viewed as a complex speech act aimed at resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. Following the dialectical approach, drawing on insights concerning validity, consistency and rationality in dialogical exchanges from formal dialectic and critical rationalism, argumentation is investigated by making use of an ideal model of a critical discussion that stipulates the norms instrumental in resolving a difference of opinion on the merits (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984).

In the ideal model of a critical discussion just mentioned the resolution of a difference of opinion passes through four stages: (1) the confrontation stage

(identifying the standpoint(s) at issue and defining the difference of opinion); (2) the opening stage (allocating the roles of protagonist and antagonist and agreeing upon the material and procedural starting points); (3) the argumentation stage (defending the standpoint(s) at issue by means of argumentation by the protagonist and eliciting further argumentation by expressing further doubts or criticisms by the antagonist); (4) the concluding stage (establishing whether the difference of opinion has been resolved and in what way). To keep the argumentative discourse on a reasonable track instrumental in resolving a difference of opinion on the merits, 15 critical discussion rules must be observed by both the protagonist and the antagonist (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, pp. 136-157).

The rules for critical discussion constitute the basis for a code of conduct for reasonable discussants that provides in principle all the norms pertinent to resolving a difference of opinion on the merits in argumentative discourse and covers all fallacies that can be committed (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, pp. 93-217). Any speech act constituting an argumentative move that violates any of the rules for critical discussion should be deemed a fallacy, as it may prevent the difference of opinion from being resolved on the merits. In other words, the rationale for calling an argumentative move a fallacy is that this move hinders the resolution of a difference of opinion on the merits (van Eemeren 1984, p. 182). Although, as a matter of course, the exemplary list of violations provided by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, pp. 93-217) is not (and cannot be) complete, it gives a clear impression of the great variety of fallacious moves that can occur in the various stages of an argumentative discourse.

Since the end of the 1990s, for a better understanding of real-life argumentative discourse, the dimension of rhetorical effectiveness has been integrated into the pragma-dialectical theory in order to do justice to the arguers' dialectical and rhetorical aims that are intrinsic in every argumentative move and are pursued simultaneously by the arguers. According to van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2002), unlike it is suggested by others, in dealing with argumentation the perspectives of dialectical reasonableness and rhetorical

effectiveness are not necessarily incompatible and they can even be complementary in many ways. From a critical point of view, rhetorical effectiveness is only worthwhile to be studied if it is viewed within the boundaries of dialectical reasonableness; and pointing out dialectical reasonableness is only significant from a practical point of view if the rhetorical effectiveness of argumentative moves is also considered (van Eemeren et al. 2014, p. 553). Therefore, for any normative argumentation theory, Pragma-Dialectics included, it is necessary to incorporate both the dialectical and the rhetorical dimension of argumentation (van Eemeren 2010, pp. 87-92).

To bring about an integration of the dialectical and rhetorical perspectives on argumentative discourse, van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2002) introduce the theoretical notion of “strategic maneuvering”, which refers to the continual efforts made by arguers in all their argumentative moves to strike a balance between dialectical reasonableness and rhetorical effectiveness. Strategic maneuvering manifests itself in three different aspects: (1) selection from the topical potential, i.e., from the set of alternatives available at a certain point in the discourse; (2) adaptation to audience demand, i.e., to the frame of reference of the listeners or readers the arguer intends to reach; (3) exploitation of presentational devices, i.e., of the stylistic and other means of expression available to serve the purpose (van Eemeren 2010). All the three aspects come about in one and the same argumentative move and they manifest themselves simultaneously in the discourse, so that the distinction between them is an analytic one. In some cases, in practice one of the three aspects may be dominant, but even then, the other two still play a role as well.

Strategic maneuvers carried out by an arguer during a particular discussion stage combine into a fully-fledged “argumentative strategy” if they are designed to achieve their dialectical and rhetorical aims in mutual coordination (van Eemeren 2018, p. 116). That means that, next to general discussion strategies affecting the discourse as a whole, there may be specific “confrontational”, “opening”, “argumentational”, and “concluding” strategies (van Eemeren 2010, pp. 46-47). The coordination required in a strategy concerns both the way in which the desired result is aimed for in the consecutive ar-

gumentative moves and the selection from the potential, the adaptation to audience demand and the choice of presentational devices realized in each of these argumentative moves.

Strategic maneuvering takes place in communicative practices which are to some extent conventionalized and can be categorized into different “communicative activity types” (van Eemeren 2010, p.139). These communicative activity types may be formally conventionalized, as is exemplified in communicative activity types from the legal domain, but they may also be less formally conventionalized, as is in different degrees the case in communicative activity types from the political, the academic, and the media domains. In some cases, the conventionalization may not involve much more than following an established practice (e.g. the conventionalization of a personal chat or a love letter).

Because of their different institutional points, their argumentative dimension is in the various communicative activity types conventionalized in different ways. To characterize a communicative activity type in which argumentation plays a crucial role argumentatively, the ideal model of a critical discussion can be used as a “template”. By examining the empirical counterparts in real-life argumentative discourse of the four stages of a critical discussion it can become clear how in a particular communicative activity type the various stages of the resolution process are to be realized. The four empirical counterparts of the confrontation, the opening, the argumentation and the concluding stage are: the initial situation, the starting points, the argumentative means and criticisms, and the outcome. In certain kinds of communicative activity types the definition of the initial situation may be more open than in others to being shaped by the preferences of an individual party, and a similar variety may be observed regarding the choice of procedural and material starting points, the use of argumentative means and the advancement of criticism, and the possible outcomes of the argumentative exchange (van Eemeren 2010, p.152).

At every stage of an argumentative exchange, all the three aspects of strategic maneuvering, i.e., the selection from the topical potential, the adapta-

tion to audience demand and the choice of presentational devices, can be affected by the institutional preconditions imposed on the argumentative discourse by the communicative activity type in which the discourse takes place. These institutional preconditions can be derived from the way in which the communicative activity type is conventionalized, as it is described in its argumentative characterization. There may be such extrinsic constraints caused by the institutional context in which the argumentative discourse takes place on all three aspects of strategic maneuvering. In principle, these constraints are a limitation of the parties' possibilities for strategic maneuvering, but they can also create special opportunities for strategic maneuvering of one or both of the parties (van Eemeren 2010, p.152).

After the introduction of the theoretical notion of strategic maneuvering, which does justice to the arguers' combined pursuit of dialectical and rhetorical aims that is intrinsic in argumentation, the pragma-dialectical understanding of a fallacy is also amended and enriched. Viewed from the perspective of the extended pragma-dialectical theory, all the fallacies (known and yet unknown) are specimens of derailed strategic maneuvering in which a rule for critical discussion has been violated, and in principle each fallacy has its reasonable counterpart (van Eemeren 2010, p.198). Next to the sound use of a personal attack, for instance, there can be fallacious uses of this argument that can be characterized as an *argumentum ad hominem*; and parallel to the sound use of an argument from authority, to give another example, there can be fallacious uses of this argument that can be characterized as an *argumentum ad verecundiam*. Taking these observations into account, the potentially treacherous character of the fallacies can be acknowledged by describing a fallacy as a strategic maneuver that to some arguers may seem to comply with the rules for critical discussion but that does in fact not comply with these rules.

According to the extended theory of Pragma-Dialectics, the soundness criteria that pertain to a certain mode of strategic maneuvering may differ to some extent in different communicative activity types. Therefore, it is necessary to make a distinction between general soundness criteria for strategic maneuvering which always apply, because they are context-independent, and specific

soundness criteria which depend on the institutional macro-context in which a certain mode of strategic maneuvering is employed and may vary to some extent in particular communicative activity types (van Eemeren et al. 2014, pp. 565-566).

### 1.3 General aim and research questions

Viewed from the pragma-dialectical perspective on argumentative discourse sketched in Section 1.2, all the spokespersons' argumentative replies to the questions of journalists at China's MoFA's regular press conferences introduced in Section 1.1 can be viewed as attempts to convince their audience that their standpoints are acceptable. To this end, the spokespersons have to make continual efforts to strike a balance in their argumentative replies between dialectical reasonableness and rhetorical effectiveness, i.e., to maneuver strategically through all four counterparts of the four stages of a critical discussion in the argumentative discourse. According to the views expounded in the extended theory of Pragma-Dialectics concerning the extrinsic constraints imposed upon argumentative discourse by the conventionalization of the argumentative practice in which the discourse takes place, the spokespersons need to maneuver strategically within the space allowed by the institutional context of China's MoFA's regular press conferences as a communicative activity type. The institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences not only limit the spokesperson's possibilities for strategic maneuvering, but also create particular opportunities for strategic maneuvering they could exploit (van Eemeren 2010, p.152).

In order to provide a complete overview of the spokespersons' efforts to keep a balance between reasonableness and effectiveness in their argumentative replies to the questions of journalists, a fully-fledged analysis should be carried out of all the modes of strategic maneuvering that they use in all the empirical counterparts of the four discussion stages, i.e., the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation stage and the concluding stage. This study represents the first part of such a comprehensive research

of the strategic maneuvering adopted by the spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. As a project that develops the theoretical and analytical basis for the more-encompassing research this dissertation will concentrate on the strategic maneuvering of the spokespersons in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage. The confrontation stage as reflected in the way in which the initial situation is defined creates the point of departure for the argumentative conduct in the various exchanges. Making clear how this stage is managed by the spokespersons therefore sets the stage for the research concerning the other three stages that is to follow. Starting from this perspective, the general aim of this research is *to make clear how the spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences maneuver strategically in the confrontation stage of their argumentative exchanges with the journalists in responding to the journalists' questions and how their confrontational maneuvering can be instrumental in convincing the intended audience.*

To realize the general research aim of this study several questions need to be answered, which together constitute the research questions we focus on in this dissertation. First of all, we have to know what exactly the communicative activity type of China's MoFA's regular press conference involves and more in particular which extrinsic constraints are in this communicative activity type explicitly or implicitly imposed on the argumentative exchanges between the spokespersons and journalists by the institutional preconditions resulting from its conventionalization. This is why the first research question we are going to tackle reads as follows:

*(1) What are the institutional preconditions applying to China's MoFA's regular press conferences as a communicative activity type that serve as extrinsic constraints for the strategic maneuvering of the spokespersons in responding to the questions of the journalists?*

After the extrinsic constraints inherent in China's MoFA's regular press conferences as a communicative activity type have been explicated, we have to figure out how the spokespersons go about in replying argumentatively to

the questions asked by the journalists, in particular how they manage to define the differences of opinion involved in the confrontation stage of their exchanges and the standpoints at issue. Since this management can take place in different ways, it will be necessary to distinguish between various modes of confrontational maneuvering. In view of the general aim of this study it is vital to find out what modes of confrontational maneuvering are prototypically adopted by the spokespersons in trying to convince their audience while meeting the relevant institutional preconditions identified in answering the first question. This is why the second research question we are going to answer is the following:

*(2) What modes of confrontational maneuvering are prototypically adopted by the spokespersons in responding to the questions of the journalists in the argumentative context concerned and complying with the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences?*

The strategic maneuvering taking place at China's MoFA's regular press conferences is aimed at being convincing to the intended audience and the modes of strategic maneuvering that are chosen in the confrontation stage will be designed to achieve this purpose. Since the strategic maneuvering can take place in various modes, in view of the general aim of this study, it will be necessary to detect in which different ways the spokespersons try to achieve their dialectical and rhetorical aims in their confrontational modes of strategic maneuvering in responding to the journalists' questions. The final question we need to answer therefore concerns how the modes of confrontational maneuvering adopted by the spokespersons are used in ways designed to be instrumental in convincing the intended audience. This is why the third of our interrelated research questions is the following:

*(3) How are these modes of confrontational maneuvering designed to contribute to making a convincing case for the audience the spokespersons would like to reach?*

## 1.4 Research method

The first research question addresses the extrinsic constraints that are explicitly or implicitly imposed on the argumentative exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists by the institutional preconditions resulting from the conventionalization of China's MoFA's regular press conferences. To answer this question, we will first analyze the conventions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences, which are somewhat different from other diplomatic press conferences of a similar kind in other countries. Against the background of the specific conventions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences, the exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists taking place in this communicative activity type will be characterized argumentatively. For the purpose of this characterization, the ideal model of a critical discussion introduced in Section 1.2 will be used as a "template". That is to say, the institutional arrangement of the four empirical counterparts of the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation stage and the concluding stage will be described as: the initial situation, the starting points, the argumentative means and criticisms, and the outcome. Besides analytical considerations based on the institutional preconditions, empirical observations will also be taken into account in characterizing the exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists. The argumentative characterization thus achieved will make it clear how the indispensable stages of the resolution process, including the confrontation stage which is the focus of this research, are realized in the spokespersons' argumentative discourse. In addition, the argumentative characterization makes it clear what specific extrinsic constraints are imposed on the argumentative exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists in the various stages of the resolution process.

In answering the second question concerning the different modes of confrontational maneuvering prototypically adopted by the spokespersons the research concentrates on the ways in which the spokespersons maneuver strategically in order to achieve their dialectical and rhetorical aims

while meeting the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences. As introduced in Section 1.3, the institutional preconditions involved in China's MoFA's regular press conferences not only limit the spokesperson's possibilities for strategic maneuvering, but they also create particular opportunities for the strategic maneuvering that could be adopted by the spokespersons. In the case of the confrontational maneuvering that the spokespersons may employ to adapt the differences of opinion and their standpoints to their own interests, it can be imagined that the institutional preconditions of the press conferences concerning the way in which the differences of opinion could be defined, the way in which the differences of opinion could be expressed, and the kind of audience for whom the standpoints and supporting arguments could be intended leaves room for a vast range of modes of confrontational maneuvering that could be adopted by the spokespersons. In view of this predicament, it is instrumental to consider in this research first analytically which modes of confrontational maneuvering could possibly be used to facilitate the spokespersons' argumentative replies, and then determine by means of empirical observation in qualitative research which specific modes of confrontational maneuvering are actually employed by the spokespersons.

The third question is intended to lead to an explanation of how the modes of confrontational maneuvering that are actually adopted by the spokespersons could help to make a convincing case in the specific contexts concerned. In answering this question, the research will focus on how the different modes of confrontational maneuvering are performed through the selection made from the topical potential, the adaptation to the audience's demand, and the choice of presentational devices. In discussing the exploitation of each of the three aspects of strategic maneuvering by the spokespersons, the various institutional preconditions will be taken into account that apply to China's MoFA's regular press conferences, because these preconditions constitute vital constraints on the spokespersons' choice of topical potential and their selection of presentational devices in adapting to their audience's demand.

The answers to the second and the third research question will be largely

based on empirical observation and analysis of the discourse data of China's MoFA's regular press conferences. The discourse data to be analyzed in this research are taken from official transcripts (in both Chinese and English) of China's MoFA's regular press conferences held between November 3, 2011 and December 31, 2018. These data can be easily obtained from the official website of China's MoFA. Generally, this research deals with the English version of the data; the Chinese version is taken into account only when the two versions do not correspond with each other and clarification is required.

Not all responses by the spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences are argumentative. It is no exception that spokespersons respond to the journalists with just a simple statement, without using any explicit or implicit argument. These statements that are completely non-argumentative will not be analyzed in this research, though some of them may be used as secondary data that provide useful background knowledge. In some cases relevant discourses from other channels, such as the mass media, governmental documents, public debates, and academic publications will also be used as secondary data.

## 1.5 Organization of the study

This study is composed of 8 chapters. Chapter 1, the current chapter, is an introduction in which we provide the rationale of this research and introduce the theoretical perspective and research method that are adopted in the research.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the state of art in the research on spokespersons' replies at press conferences. In this chapter, we focus on three strands or topics of relevant research that has been carried out earlier, i.e., research concerning "linguistic style" chosen by spokespersons at press conferences, research concerning "pragmatic strategies" adopted by spokespersons, and research concerning "rhetorical tropes" selected by spokespersons. On the basis of a concise introduction of the research on these three topics, we make clear what inspiration these research projects can offer to our research and what contributions the research we are conducting can make to the field.

Chapter 3 is intended to answer the first research question regarding the extrinsic constraints imposed on the argumentative exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. In line with the research method described in Section 1.4 for dealing with this research question, this chapter will start with a discussion of the institutional point and conventions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences and then proceed to characterize argumentatively the exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists. Based on the discussion of the institutional point and conventions, this chapter will go on to analyze the institutional preconditions for the confrontational maneuvering that could be adopted by the spokespersons in their argumentative replies. In the last section of this chapter we will analyze the modes of confrontational maneuvering that the spokespersons could employ within the space for strategic maneuvering allowed to them in this stage by the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences.

Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 are intended to answer the second and the third question. In Chapter 4 to 6 we will analyze three predominant and prototypical modes of confrontational maneuvering in the spokespersons' argumentative replies, i.e., confrontational maneuvering by dissociation, confrontational maneuvering by personal attack, and confrontational maneuvering by declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable. In chapter 7, we will analyze two less prominent but still prototypical modes of confrontational maneuvering adopted by the spokespersons, namely, changing the topic and putting pressure on the other party. In the same chapter we will also probe into how the spokespersons combine different modes of confrontational maneuvering strategically in their replies.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the analysis of how the spokespersons use dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering. In this chapter, we will first introduce and compare the different theoretical perspectives on dissociation with a focus on the pragma-dialectical understanding of dissociation as a mode of strategic maneuvering. Starting from this pragma-dialectical view of dissociation, we will distinguish and explain the different subtypes

of dissociation that can be identified empirically in the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. Next, taking a prototypical case as an example, we will analyze how in the strategic design of their uses of dissociation the spokespersons exploit the topical potential, adapt to audience demand and make use of presentational devices in order to make a convincing case.

Chapter 5 discusses the prototypical use of personal attack in the spokespersons' argumentative replies. After reviewing the state of art of relevant research on personal attack from different theoretical perspectives, this chapter will elaborate on the pragma-dialectical view on personal attack. Based on the pragma-dialectical conceptualization, we will describe and analyze different subtypes and variants of personal attacks adopted by the spokespersons in the empirical data collected for this research. At the end of this chapter, taking into consideration the description of the institutional preconditions in chapter 3, we will explain by means of an analysis of a prototypical case how the spokespersons in launching a personal attack maneuver strategically with topical potential and presentational devices in order to adapt to the demand of the audience.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to the analysis and explanation of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable as a mode of strategic maneuvering adopted by the spokespersons in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of a critical discussion. First of all, we will discuss the concept of "declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable" from a pragma-dialectical perspective. Starting from this conceptualization, we will distinguish and explain the different subtypes and variants of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable that can be identified empirically in the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's press conferences. Finally, by analyzing an exemplary case, we will analyze how the strategic design of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable can be realized through maneuvering strategically with the topical potential, with audience demand and with presentational devices.

In chapter 7, we will first focus on confrontational maneuvering by chang-

ing the topic of discussion and on confrontational maneuvering by putting pressure on the other party. To begin with, we will conceptualize the notion of "changing the topic of discussion" from a pragma-dialectical perspective and then describe how the spokespersons sometimes change the topic the questioning journalists intend to be discussed at China's MoFA's press conferences. Based on this description and the relevant analysis, we will continue to explain how the spokespersons try to change the topic of discussion in such a strategic way that it is instrumental in making a convincing case for their audience. Next, based on the pragma-dialectical conceptualization of "putting pressure on the other party", we will describe how the spokespersons sometimes utilize this argumentative move in their replies to the journalist's question. The instrumentality of this mode of confrontational maneuvering in making a convincing case will also be discussed. At the end of this chapter, we will also pay attention to how the spokespersons maneuver strategically in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage by combining several modes of confrontational maneuvering. We will first describe how such a strategic combination is realized empirically and then analyze how in this way the spokespersons intend to contribute to the convincingness of their replies to the audience.

In concluding this dissertation, Chapter 8 will concentrate on the main findings of the research and the theoretical and practical implications of these results. In reviewing the main findings, it will be made clear in what way exactly the three research questions formulated in Chapter 1 can be answered, thus explaining to what extent the general aim of our research has been achieved. In discussing the theoretical implications of the research attention will be paid to what inspiration this research could offer to contextualized studies in the field of Pragma-Dialectics as well as to studies of spokespersons' replies in general. In discussing the practical implications of the research attention will be paid to what inspiration spokespersons could draw from it in trying to strike a balance between dialectical reasonableness and rhetorical effectiveness in their replies to questioning journalists. In addition, some suggestions will be offered for further research.

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# Chapter 2

## **RESEARCH ON SPOKESPERSONS' REPLIES AT PRESS CONFERENCES**

## 2.1 Introduction

As has been made clear in Section 1.1, so far there has been little research on political press conferences, let alone on the spokespersons' replies to questions of journalists at such press conferences. The few existing studies on political press conferences either focus on theoretical issues such as the relationship between press conferences and public relations, the communication process at political press conferences, and the role that press conferences play in political campaigning, or they concentrate on the actual language use in political press conferences, particularly on the discursive strategies brought to bear by spokespersons.

In recent years a series of studies have been published specifically dealing with spokespersons' replies at press conferences. For the most part these studies have been carried out by Chinese scholars and they pertain particularly to Chinese political press conferences. The studies have concentrated mainly on the "language style" chosen by spokespersons, the "pragmatic strategies" adopted by spokespersons, and the "rhetorical tropes" selected by spokespersons. In this chapter we will give a general overview of the studies on press conferences belonging to these three categories that are relevant from our perspective. Our use of quotation marks around language style, pragmatic strategies and rhetorical tropes already indicates that we do not think that these labels are fully appropriate to describe these research traditions. In this chapter we will not only characterize these three strands of research, but also make clear that they actually overlap each other to some extent.

After having pointed out in Section 2.2, Section 2.3 and Section 2.4 what the three research traditions involve, we will discuss in Section 2.5 what the main shortcomings of the research projects concerned are but also what inspiration they can offer to our research. In Section 2.5 we will also indicate what contribution the research we are conducting in this study can make to the field in view of the current state of the affairs.

## 2.2 "Language style" chosen by spokespersons

The focus of the type of research covered by the label *language style* is on what specific ways of expression the spokespersons choose in accounting for the position of their government in the context of press conferences. Relevant research that fits into this strand is conducted in Zhang (2009), Zhang (2011), Zhang (2012a), Zhang (2012b), and Gong (2011). In this research, "language style" always refers to the general way a spokesperson uses language in responding to questions: his/her use of syntax, choice of words, use of figures of speech, etc. (Zhang 2009). The general purpose of this research is practical: it offers instructions for spokespersons, particularly novices. The research is motivated by the belief that it is important for a "mature" spokesperson to develop a language style, still better a person-specific language style, because this can make the message he/she conveys more attractive to the intended audience (Zhang 2011).

In her pioneering research belonging to this strand, Zhang (2009) explains the "objective" and "subjective" reasons that could possibly account for the language style chosen by spokespersons. According to her, "objective" reasons, such as the influence of social background and institutional duties of the spokespersons and the institutional features of press conferences, and "subjective" factors, such as the spokespersons' personality, width of knowledge and accomplishment, can influence the language style of spokespersons. In the same article, Zhang also discusses several linguistic properties that could in coordination define a certain language style, i.e., phonetics (such as speed of speaking, tone, pitch and duration of the linguistic signs produced), vocabulary (such as the use of colloquial speech, formal words, numerical figures and idioms), grammar, figures of speech, and "body language".

In her later research, Zhang (2012a) adds that different ways of arranging the ordering of sentences can also influence the characteristics of the spokespersons' language style. For instance, the spokespersons may make use of series of long sentences in announcing statements in order to make them appear more logical and precise, and they may use short sentences in an-

swering questions from journalists in order to make their answers “more approachable and acceptable”. Sometimes, in answering questions the spokespersons may make use of figures of speech, such as rhetorical questions, with an aim to let their answers have a more forceful impact.

In still later work, Zhang (2012b) also discusses how to create a specific personal language style. She argues that the spokespersons’ personality, if such a personality can be distinguished, can be represented both by “what they say” and “how they say it”. Although what spokespersons can say is already framed by the government, they can still decide in what ways what they have to say could be fitted into this predetermined frame. Zhang holds that a skillful spokesperson ought to be good at expressing the government’s standpoints and arguments in a way that would interest and persuade the audience. This involves a way of speaking, i.e., a language style, that is ideally “approachable”, “sincere”, and “acceptable”. To this end, a spokesperson should, according to Zhang, adopt a specific personal language style in which he/she complies with the following guidelines: first, he/she is to be honest in answering questions; second, he/she is to be brave in choosing an innovative way of speaking; third, he/she is to be cooperative in answering questions; fourth, he/she is to avoid political clichés where possible.

In his research on the spokespersons’ replies at China’s MoFA’s press conferences, Gong (2011) argues that these replies should be coherent and reasonable. In order to make their replies coherent and reasonable, the spokespersons’ language should conform to the four basic principles of being concise, frank, down-to-earth and exact. According to Gong, these principles are decisive for what the spokespersons’ language style amounts to. Interestingly, however, Gong finds that the actual replies given by spokespersons at China’s MoFA’s conferences possess the linguistic features of fuzziness, cooperativeness, politeness, and evasiveness, but he does not explain how these linguistic features could be related to the four basic and decisive principles he stipulates for the spokespersons’ language.

Compared with Zhang’s primarily theoretical or hypothetical research, Gong’s research is more empirical. However, both types of research lack a

proper theoretical foundation: neither of the two authors explicates what specific theoretical framework the research is based on, which makes their research less solid and less convincing. For instance, since Zhang does not explain what linguistic theory she draws upon, it is hard to understand why the linguistic properties that could define a certain language style include only phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, figures of speech, and “body language”. It is also unclear why “body language” should be deemed one of the linguistic properties. Likewise, in Gong’s research it is not so clear why the spokespersons’ language should conform to the four basic principles of being concise, frank, down-to-earth and exact. Besides, neither Zhang’s nor Gong’s research provides a serious introduction of the research method that is adopted, which makes it even harder to accept the results of their research. What is worse, while both Zhang and Gong mention that the ultimate goal of the spokespersons’ replies is to “persuade” (or “convince”) the audience, neither of them states clearly why and in what way the language style of the spokespersons is related to the persuasiveness (or convincingness) of their replies.

### 2.3 “Pragmatic strategies” adopted by spokespersons

This strand of research focuses on the “pragmatic strategies” used in spokespersons’ replies, particularly the pragmatic strategies of evasion, refusal, negation, and vagueness. Relevant research that can be reckoned to belong to this category is conducted in Bhatia (2006), Dou and Zhang (2008), Yang and Tian (2010), Guan (2010), Hong and Chen (2011), Xiong (2013), and Lan and Hu (2014). The label “pragmatic strategies” that is assigned to this research refers to the discursive strategies that spokespersons adopt to realize their communicative purposes. The general aim of this research is, next to identifying such discursive strategies, to offer instructions to spokespersons, particularly to novices.

Bhatia (2006, p.180) is the first in the list of contributors to this type of research. She analyzes how Jiang Zemin, the former President of China, and George W. Bush, the former American President, as “spokespersons” of two

countries, use evasions pragmatically to hedge or avoid responses to questions from journalists about sensitive issues. She points out that in the communicative activity type of a press conference the use of evasive language is inevitable, since spokespersons always need to manage and control the type and extent of the information that is to be divulged by the media. In her findings, the evasions of Jiang and Bush are intended to achieve the following four purposes: “to prioritize and lessen the crisis-element of certain events; to minimize negative reactions (i.e., to keep them to a minimum); to deflect moral and political blame; and to assert control over laymen and journalists”.

Dou and Zhang (2008) conduct an empirical and comparative study on the evasions brought to bear by Chinese and American governmental spokespersons. They first differentiate two types of evasions: “overt” evasion and “covert” evasion. In overt evasions, spokespersons state directly (by means of expressions like *no comment*, *nothing further to add*) that they will not answer the questions from journalists; in covert evasions, spokespersons express their unwillingness to answer certain questions by offering empty answers. Dou and Zhang observe that Chinese spokespersons use more covert than overt evasions, whereas American spokespersons use more overt than covert evasions. They interpret this difference from a cultural perspective: Chinese spokespersons choose more covert evasions simply because cooperation and harmony is highly valued in Chinese culture, in which indirect speech acts are more frequently used; American spokespersons are more prone to use overt evasions because directness is very characteristic of American culture, in which individualism is highly dominant. Dou and Zhang interpret this difference also from the perspective of “face” theory. They believe that both Chinese spokespersons and American spokespersons intend to save “face” in replying to the journalists, the difference being that what Chinese spokespersons intend to save is “positive face” (the positive consistent self-image that people have and want to be appreciated and approved of by other people) while American spokespersons intend to save “negative face” (the rights to territories, freedom of action and freedom from imposition).

Yang and Tian (2010) explore the ways in which spokespersons utilize eva-

sion, and analyze its informative and interpersonal functions. The informative function involves hiding information and transmitting information, and the interpersonal function involves saving the journalists’ or other relevant parties’ face, sustaining a good relationship with the journalists or the other relevant parties. Drawing upon the Gricean Cooperative Principle and upon Relevance Theory, Lan and Hu (2014) analyze the phenomenon of evasive answers in spokespersons’ replies at China’s MoFA’s press conferences.

Yang and Tian (2010) observe that the evasive answers used by the spokespersons can be classified into three types: evasions of facts, evasions of stances, and evasions of both facts and stances. In the ways in which these three types of evasive answers are advanced, they identify and analyze 9 strategies of evasion. Surprisingly, they argue that evasive answers by the spokespersons at China’s MoFA’s press conferences could be the reasonable/better choices when the interactive purpose of the spokespersons conflicts with that of the journalists. Then the spokespersons would not like to impart more information while the journalists are eager to know more on a certain topic and evasion prevents the problem of reconciling the simultaneous pursuit of these conflicting aims from coming into the open. The explanation is that, on the one hand, the evasive answers could have a large variety of contextual meanings (since they could be interpreted in different ways) and, on the other hand, they help the journalists to reduce the effort involved in processing the spokespersons’ replies (because they know that the spokespersons do not want to answer their questions).

Hong and Chen (2011) as well as Xiong (2013) conduct contrastive research on the refusal strategies employed by Chinese and American spokespersons. They first divide refusal strategies into two variants: “direct” refusal strategies and “indirect” refusal strategies. Using the research method of Conversation Analysis, they observe that both the Chinese and the American spokespersons adopt in most cases indirect refusal strategies when refusing to answer questions from journalists. Compared with Chinese spokespersons, they also observe, American spokespersons use considerably more direct refusal strategies and many more refusal strategies in general. Xiong (2013) concludes on

the basis of his empirical research that the refusal strategies used by spokespersons from China and the United States differ substantially in number, type, and distribution.

Factors such as culture, political position, and context (particularly the personal character of a spokesperson) are the main attributes causing the differences. First, the meaning of the notions of “politeness” and “face”, which is closely related to the way in which spokespersons use refusal strategies, varies from culture to culture. What is considered polite in China could possibly be impolite in western/ American culture. This difference could therefore manifest itself in different ways when Chinese and American spokespersons refuse to answer questions from journalists. Second, their different political positions may prevent spokespersons of China or the United States from answering questions on certain sensitive topics. For instance, as Xiong rightly observes, Chinese spokespersons might adopt more refusal strategies in answering questions concerning the “Diaoyu Dao Islands” issue or the “Tibet issue”. Third, the personal character of a spokesperson may also influence his/her use of refusal strategies. For instance, as Xiong observed, the Chinese spokesperson Hong Lei displays a far richer use of refusal strategies than his colleague Liu Weimin.

Pragmatic vagueness is another common linguistic phenomenon that is noted as being used as a pragmatic strategy in spokespersons’ replies to questions of journalists. Based on the theoretical framework of Pragmatic Vagueness (He 2000) and Adaptation Theory developed by Verschueren (2000), Guan (2010) examines and compares the specific pragmatic vagueness strategies utilized by Chinese and by American spokespersons at their diplomatic press conferences. He distinguishes the use of indirect deictic words (vague references to certain places, figures, dates and time), the use of hedges, the use of understatements, and the use of indirect speech acts. According to Guan’s (2010) research findings, Chinese and American spokespersons make use of a similar number of hedges, but Chinese spokespersons use more indirect deictic words. Guan holds that this difference is a consequence of the fact that in Chinese culture diplomatic politeness is much more valued.

The research on the “pragmatic strategies” adopted by spokespersons reported about in this section is not without merits. Compared with the research on the “language style” chosen by spokespersons introduced in Section 2.2, the research on “pragmatic strategies” has a more solid theoretical foundation, albeit that it is not specified in a satisfactory way which theories have been adopted. A fatal defect in almost all research in this strand is that the term *strategy* is used in arbitrary, sometimes even contradictory, ways. As we see it, when in the research of this strand the term *strategy* is used in “pragmatic strategy”, it refers to a fully-fledged coordination of a variety of pragmatic or discursive devices aimed at fulfilling certain communicative purposes. What then are the communicative purposes that spokespersons attempt to realize in replying to journalists? Justifying their stances before the journalists could in our view be the primary purpose. Unfortunately, none of the research conducted in this strand of research actually notices this vital purpose. What the researchers care about is viewed from a rather superficial perspective and involves how spokespersons attempt to evade questions, refuse answering questions, and make their answers vague. The researchers never try to go further into the matter of how these so-called “pragmatic strategies” work in convincing the intended audience. Besides, the research does not really make clear how the various pragmatic or discursive devices discussed are coordinated in constructing a certain “pragmatic strategy”.

## 2.4 “Rhetorical devices” selected by spokespersons

In this third strand of research scholars concentrate on the description and explanation of various rhetorical devices selected by spokespersons in their replies. In most of the research in this strand, the term *rhetorical device* refers to any particular technique of using language effectively in the sense of persuasively. A great deal of the contributions to this strand of research focus particularly on how to improve the spokespersons’ rhetoric in practice. Relevant research that can be reckoned to belong to this category is conducted

in Du (2005), Yang (2005), Li and Sun (2007), Tu and Gong (2009), Guan (2013) and Yang (2015).

In *Theory and practice for spokesperson*, edited by Du (2005), and *Theory and practice for spokesperson*, edited by Yang (2005), a set of practical language skills that could be viewed as rhetorical devices is discussed. Du (2005) lists 12 “useful” skills, detailing the actions the spokesperson should consider. 3 of these skills are deemed rhetorical skills: being clear, being accurate, and being modest. However, Du lists in fact just the rhetorical effects that could be realized through the use of certain rhetorical devices, without mentioning in any detailed way what these rhetorical devices are. The same problem occurs in the work by Yang (2005), in which four “rhetorical skills” are listed: being honest to the audience; being accurate and clear; being flexible; and displaying personal charm. Another practice-oriented research project is conducted by Li and Sun (2007). They introduce five rhetorical devices commonly used by spokespersons, viz. exemplifying, listing numbers, using metaphors, and making comparisons.

Tu and Gong (2009) present a contrastive rhetorical analysis of Chinese and American official press releases issued on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Democratic Reforms in Tibet. The research framework built for this contrastive rhetorical analysis is composed of three vital theoretical concepts: “metaphor”, “logic”, and “culture”. According to Tu and Gong, “rhetorical analysis” of the “metaphors”, analysis of the “logical inference structure” adopted by the spokespersons, and interpretation of the “cultural context” make it clear how spokespersons try to persuade their intended audiences. They find considerable differences between the two countries’ governmental press conferences, ranging from the way the Anniversary is named, and the application of different metaphors, to the frame in which the political discourse is constructed (“ME-OTHERS”). Compared with the rhetorical meaning of the expression “economic development”, they argue, the rhetorical meaning of the expressions “freedom”, “belief”, and “exile” may have deeper cultural foundations. In addition, the Chinese character for “serf” (Tibetan Slaves who had existed since long before 1959) does not have the same meaning as serf has in western usage, in which “Tibetan serf” hardly occurs.

Based on the idea that western New Rhetoric (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969) as a means for understanding and improving interpersonal relationships provides a new theoretical perspective for the construction of press spokespersons’ discourse, Guan (2013) observes that a “rhetoric-guided discourse model” might be helpful in improving spokespersons’ replies. This “novel” model entails optimally utilizing the rhetoric of identification, argumentation models (particularly Toulmin’s), and traditional rhetorical appeals to achieve identification between spokespersons and the audience. Guan believes that his rhetoric-guided discourse model will facilitate spokespersons’ rhetorical interaction with their intended audience and thus contribute to a sound development of the discussion.

Adopting Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm and Lloyd Bitzer’s theory of the rhetorical situation as a theoretical framework, Yang (2015) analyzes the rhetorical narrative in the discourse on the News Conference of the Sino-Japanese Collision Incident in 2010.<sup>1</sup> The analytic units adopted by Yang in her rhetorical analysis are settings (where the Collision took place), actors (participants in this Collision), events (what has happened from the beginning), chronological sequencing order of the different events in this Collision, causality (causal relationship between different events), audience (who are paying attention to the Collision), and topics (of the events in this Collision). She finds that the rhetorical narrative employed by the spokesperson at this particular press conference plays a vital role in justifying China’s stances on social stability and safeguarding national sovereignty, and helps to establish a sound image of China in the international community.

It can be observed that most of the research on the “rhetorical devices” selected by spokespersons is lacking a solid theoretical foundation. Similar deficiencies have already been noticed in the research on the “language style” chosen by spokespersons reported in Section 2.2.

1 In 2010 a Chinese fishing ship collided with two Japanese cruising ships near the Diaoyu Dao Islands, whose sovereignty is claimed by China as well as Japan. Both the Chinese government and the Japanese government were protesting against each other’s “illegal attack”.

The lack of a well-considered theoretical foundation makes it difficult to understand what the exact meaning is of such terms as *rhetoric*, *rhetorical use of language* and *rhetorical devices* that are adopted in the research. This is in particular a problem since the understandings of rhetoric in the Chinese and the western academia diverge. The Chinese rhetorician Ju (2007) systematically compares Chinese rhetoric with western rhetoric. She concludes that there are at least two major differences: Chinese rhetoric accentuates how a rhetor's intentions are (to be) conveyed, while western rhetoric focuses on how to persuade the audience; in addition, noting that the definitions of reasonableness diverge, in Chinese rhetoric reasonableness (in the western sense) is hardly deemed a vital criterion for evaluating argumentation, while in western rhetoric reasonableness is considered to be a vital criterion. From our perspective, another distinction between Chinese rhetoric and western rhetoric is that Chinese rhetoric treats all types of discourse genres, including narrative, prose and poem, as its research objects, while argumentative discourse has always been the primary (if not the only) research focus of western rhetoric.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Section 2.2 to Section 2.4 of this chapter report what relevant research has been done so far on spokespersons' replies at political press conferences. In this section, we will first summarize the general deficiencies of these research projects already indicated in Sections 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4. Next, we will discuss what inspiration our own research can draw from these research projects. Finally, we will indicate what contribution our research can make to the field in view of the current state of the affairs.

To begin with, as indicated in Sections 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4, one of the conspicuous defects of the previous research reported about, especially the research devoted to language style and rhetorical devices, is that it lacks a well-considered theoretical foundation. As a consequence of this shortcoming, several crucial theoretical concepts that should have been defined accurately, in-

cluding "language style", "pragmatic strategy" and "rhetorical device", are not properly defined and explained in the research projects. Generally speaking, most of the "language styles", "pragmatic strategies" and "rhetorical devices" that are discussed in the various research projects discussed above actually overlap to a large extent, while the researchers might not be fully aware of this.

Viewed theoretically, "language style", whatever it denotes exactly, entails stylistic designs which inevitably involve "pragmatic strategies" and "rhetorical devices": in opting for a certain language style "pragmatic strategies" cannot be realized without the use of "rhetorical devices", and vice versa. One can also easily observe that most of what has been discussed in the research projects reported about essentially overlaps. For instance, "using short sentences in answering questions from journalists", discussed in Section 2 about "language styles", could also be considered to be part of a "pragmatic strategy" or a "rhetorical device". In addition, "using evasive answers", discussed in Section 2.3 about "pragmatic strategies", which refers to a verbal move that undoubtedly belongs to the category of "rhetorical devices" (Section 2.4), could just as well be considered part of using a certain "language style" (Section 2.2). "Using metaphors", discussed in Section 2.4 as a "rhetorical device", can also be part of a "pragmatic strategy" (Section 2.3) and could just as well be reckoned to be part of a certain "language style" (Section 2.2).

Furthermore, and essential in view of the research we are carrying out in this project, in previous research projects few attention has been paid to the role that "language styles", "pragmatic strategies" and "rhetorical devices" could play in justifying spokespersons' stances. This deficiency is the more striking because justifying these stances before the audience is one of the major communicative purposes of spokespersons in replying to questions at press conferences. Because of this undue neglect, various factors that might influence the effect that spokespersons' justificatory argumentation will have are more or less ignored as well. Among them are the institutional contexts of the press conferences at which this argumentation is advanced (and the institutional constraints associated with it), the different audiences that are

to be reached (particularly the intended audience), and the kind of topics that are dealt with in the replies. In short, in the research projects that have been carried out no serious attention has been given to whether and how spokespersons could (or do) justify their stances in a reasonable and effective way. There are in fact some recent publications in which the argumentative dimension of the spokespersons' replies is investigated (Wu & Zhu 2015; Wu 2017, 2019a, 2019b), but since these articles are actually earlier versions of chapters of this dissertation written by the present author, we chose not to include them in this overview.

Despite their obvious demerits, previous research projects in this field still offer valuable inspiration for our current research. First, they remind us that spokespersons' replies to questions of journalists are an important and well-recognized topic of research in the field of press conference studies. It is worthwhile to note however that so far this research has concentrated mainly on theoretical issues such as the relationship between press conferences and public relations, the communication process at political press conferences, and the role press conferences play in political campaigning. Second, in discussing such an abundance of "language styles", "pragmatic strategies" and "rhetorical strategies" as they do, these studies as it were stipulate that we should think more thoroughly about the various argumentative strategies that spokespersons have adopted or could adopt in order to reach satisfactory taxonomies.

In view of the current state of affairs, our research is to make up for at least some of the deficiencies in the extant research of spokespersons' replies at press conferences. It is supposed to do so in a theoretical sense by: (a) offering an argumentative perspective on (diplomatic) press conferences, in actual fact the perspective made possible by the pragma-dialectical approach; (b) revealing the conventionalization of (China's) diplomatic press conferences and the relevant institutional constraints on the spokespersons' argumentative discourse; (c) identifying the prototypical modes of strategic maneuvering that are used in the spokespersons' responses; and (d) enriching in the process the pragma-dialectical study of contextual argumentation

in the political domain. In a practical sense, our research is supposed to add to the existing studies by: (a) helping western (and other) audiences to better understand China's specific way of conducting argumentation at diplomatic press conferences; (b) presenting insights about reasonable and effective argumentative discourse that could potentially be useful to spokespersons at China's (and other countries') diplomatic press conferences.

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# Chapter 3

**EXCHANGES BETWEEN JOURNALISTS  
AND SPOKESPERSONS AT  
CHINA'S MOFA'S REGULAR  
PRESS CONFERENCES AS A  
COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITY TYPE**

### 3.1 Introduction

As has been indicated in Section 1.4, strategic maneuvering in argumentative discourse takes place in communicative practices which are to some extent conventionalized in communicative activity types. Viewed from the theoretical perspective of Pragma-Dialectics, the conventions applying to the various communicative practices create a set of institutional preconditions for strategic maneuvering. That means that at every stage of an argumentative exchange, i.e., in all empirical counterparts of the four stages of a critical discussion, all three aspects of strategic maneuvering, i.e., the selection from the topical potential, the adaptation to audience demand and the choice of presentational devices, are affected by the institutional preconditions imposed on the argumentative discourse by the communicative activity type.

Before investigating (in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6) the specific modes of confrontational strategic maneuvering that spokespersons employ in their argumentative replies, this chapter is going to analyze the extrinsic constraints imposed by the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences on the argumentative exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists. To begin with, we will introduce the general features of China's MoFA's press conferences, including the official positions of the spokespersons, the general characteristics of the journalists presenting the questions and the different phases that can be distinguished in the proceedings of these conferences. Then, we will discuss the institutional point and conventions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences and proceed to characterizing the exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists argumentatively.

Based on the discussion of the institutional point and the argumentative characterization of the conventions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences, this chapter will go on to concentrate on analyzing the institutional preconditions applying to the confrontational strategic maneuvering of the spokespersons in their argumentative replies to questions of journalists. In the final section of this chapter we will discuss the modes of confrontational

strategic maneuvering that the spokespersons could possibly employ in complying with the need to remain within the space for strategic maneuvering allowed to them in this stage because of the institutional preconditions for China's MoFA's regular press conferences.

### 3.2 General features of China's MoFA's regular press conferences

China's MoFA's regular press conferences started to be held in 1983. From 1983 to 1995, the spokespersons at these conferences were commissioned to inform the press serving a worldwide audience of China's stances on important issues. From 1995 to 2011, this format was maintained but then China's MoFA held its press conferences every Tuesday and Thursday, except for a summer break of about 45 days every year. Since August 2011 up to now, China's MoFA's regular press conferences have been organized by the Information Department of China's MoFA.

According to the mission description offered on its official webpage, the Information Department of China's MoFA is "responsible for releasing information on China's major diplomatic events and stating China's foreign policy. It manages press coverage on major diplomatic events. It guides China's overseas diplomatic missions on information work and provides service to permanent offices of foreign media organizations and foreign journalists in China. It also covers public diplomacy and information collection and processing".<sup>2</sup>

Nowadays the press conferences take place every week from Monday to Friday at 3.00 pm, with a summer break from mid-July to the end of August, but in that period spokespersons can be approached for telephone interviews. As a rule, a press conference lasts no longer than 20 minutes.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjlb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xws\\_665282/](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjlb_663304/zzjg_663340/xws_665282/).

Normally, the spokespersons are the Director-General of the Information Department and 3 or 4 Deputy Director-Generals. Since the first press conference in 1983, altogether 30 Director-Generals and Deputy Director-Generals have been nominated as spokespersons at these conferences. Currently (October, 2019), the spokespersons are HUA Chunying (the Director-General), GENG Shuang (Deputy Director-General), Yu Dunhai (Deputy Director-General) and Zhao Lijian (Deputy Director-General)

As stated on the webpage of the Information Department of China's MoFA, all "Beijing-based resident foreign journalists must present [their] Press Card (R) to be admitted to the press conferences".<sup>3</sup> Going by this concise statement, it can be assumed that there are only two conditions foreign journalists have to fulfil for attending these conferences. First, they must be Beijing-based resident foreign journalists. According to another legal regulation, i.e., 'Regulations of the People's Republic of China on News Coverage by Permanent Offices of Foreign Media Organizations and Foreign Journalists', the term *resident foreign journalists* means "career journalists who are dispatched by foreign media organizations to be stationed in China for a period of not less than six months for news coverage and reporting".<sup>4</sup> Second, the journalists have to present their Press Card of the R type (there are various types of the Press Cards for different kinds of reporting) before they will be allowed to enter the conference room. Looking back through the history of China's MoFA's press conferences, we find that most journalists attending these conferences come from China, the US, Russia, the EU, Canada and Japan, though journalists from other countries are sometimes also present.

Typically, a regular press conference of China's MoFA consists of two phases, which are passed through chronologically. In the first phase, the spokespersons release information on major diplomatic events China is involved in and make statements about China's foreign policy. In the second phase, the spokespersons answer questions from journalists on various diplomatic issues.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://ipc.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wgjzzhzn/t716855.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://ipc.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wgjzzhzn/t716835.htm>.

According to Zou (2011, pp. 24-25), who is a Counselor in the Information Department of China's MoFA, every working day a group of assistants (mainly from the Sector of News Release of the Information Department) helps spokespersons analyze the media reports coming in from all over the world on important issues, predict what questions could be asked by journalists, and prepare official answers to these questions. This preparatory working mechanism largely explains why more often than not the spokespersons are able to answer the questions from the journalists immediately and without hesitation.

Generally speaking, the questions from the journalists can be divided into two general categories: "informative questions" and "critical questions". By means of informative questions (such as the questions asked in Example 1), journalists want to invite the spokesperson to clarify, confirm or simply announce something. By means of critical questions (such as the questions asked in Example 2), journalists want to invite the spokesperson to justify China's stances on certain issues. There are in fact no clear-cut boundaries between these two types of questions. More often than not, in practice the two types of questions are mixed.

#### Example 1

*The China Secretariat for Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) was officially set up today. Can you give us more details on that? A successful LMC leaders' meeting was held in Sanya in March last year, setting in motion the LMC mechanism. What progress has been made so far?*

(March 30, 2017)

#### Example 2

*Cruise ships that had been taking Chinese tourists to call at various ports in the ROK [Republic of Korea] will be visiting Japan instead. Is this not an example of China taking discriminatory measures to punish ROK companies because of THAAD [Terminal High Altitude Area Defense]? Are these measures intentionally against the ROK?*

(March 30, 2017)

When China's MoFA's regular press conferences started in 1983, translating service (from Chinese to English) was offered by the Information Department. However, on September 1, 1996, the Information Department announced for reasons not explicitly mentioned that the translating service was canceled. At the same time, this cancellation was praised by the Chinese media because it "may help to promote Chinese language and culture" (Zou 2011, p. 40). However, some foreign journalists protested against the cancellation. One of them even requested the spokesperson at a MoFA's press conference to explain why the translating service was canceled. In response, the spokesperson gave a very vague answer, indicating that the cancellation was in accordance with China's reform and opening-up policy and that it was high time that foreigners knew more about the Chinese language and culture. Soon after that, China's MoFA restarted to offer interpreting service to journalists who cannot understand Chinese. According to Zou (2011, p.41), the Chinese MoFA decided to offer this interpreting service simply because they observed that after they had cancelled the translating service fewer journalists attended the conferences and much less information released by the spokespersons was reported worldwide.

### 3.3 Institutional point and preconditions

The institutional point of a communicative practice, conventionalized in a certain communicative activity type, is the institutional rationale that this communicative practice is intended to realize (van Eemeren 2010, p.129). Diplomatic press conferences like China's MoFA's regular press conferences can be viewed as a communicative practice taking place in a zone overlapping the political domain and the media domain. Therefore, a political-media perspective should be adopted to elucidate the institutional point of China's MoFA's regular press conferences.

According to van Eemeren (2010, p. 140), the general institutional point of all communicative activity types in the (Western) political domain is to preserve a democratic political culture. Such a political culture is in his view

maintained by means of the discourse genre of deliberation, which aims at opinion formation or decision making. The general institutional point of all journalistic communicative activity types in the media domain is to provide the intended audience newsworthy information and influence its opinions or attitudes. Taking the institutional backgrounds of both political communicative activity types and journalistic media communicative activity types into account, the institutional point of China's MoFA's press conferences can be described by summarizing its rationale as explicating and promoting the Chinese government's stances and policies by deliberating on them before the international general audience. On a more concrete level, two major institutional goals can be recognized, each of which is instrumental in contributing in a certain way to realizing this institutional point. The first institutional goal is to clarify and explain the Chinese government's stances and policies; the second institutional goal is to refute criticisms on the Chinese government's stances and policies.

In realizing the institutional point and reaching the more specific institutional goals, argumentative discourse in a certain communicative activity type is constrained by a set of institutional preconditions. These institutional preconditions are extrinsic constraints on the argumentative discourse taking place in the communicative activity type and they are associated with its conventionalization. Van Eemeren (2010, p. 152) distinguishes between *primary preconditions* and *secondary preconditions*. Primary preconditions are as a rule official, usually formal and often procedural, while secondary preconditions are as a rule unofficial, usually informal and often substantial.

In the *Workbook for governmental press conferences* published by The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2015) a set of rules is listed that guide and regulate the governmental spokespersons' replies, including those of China's MoFA's spokespersons. These more or less official rules, which are imposed upon China's MoFA's regular press conferences, constitute the primary institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's spokespersons' argumentative replies:

1. *The spokesperson has the right of refusing to answer questions from journalists. When challenged with politically sensitive questions or questions a spokesperson is not in a position to answer, the spokesperson is debarred from having to provide relevant information or comments.*
2. *The way the spokesperson expresses himself/herself should not go to extremes. That means radical or harsh expressions should not be used unless they are unavoidable.*
3. *The spokesperson has the responsibility to tell the truth to the public and should therefore be honest and sincere.*
4. *The spokesperson should firmly stick to the stances taken by China's government.*
5. *The spokesperson should keep his/her emotions in control; he/she should not give a personal or emotional response.*
6. *The spokesperson should not slander others, nor accuse others when lacking evidence for it.*
7. *The spokesperson should not infringe on the personal reputation of others if this can be avoided. Any information or comment regarding someone's personal life which may unnecessarily harm his/her personal fame should not be mentioned at a governmental press conference.*

*(The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2015, pp. 37-64)*

These primary institutional preconditions pertain to two important aspects of a spokesperson's replies: the propositional content that is expressed in the reply and the manner in which it is expressed. As for the propositional content of a reply: spokespersons are not supposed to slander or infringe on the personal reputations of their opponents (rule 6 and rule 7). In addition, their reply should be fully in agreement with the position of the Chinese government (rule 4). As for the manner in which a reply is expressed: spokespersons are supposed to reply in a controlled, sincere and businesslike way (rule 2, rule 3 and rule 5). With the exception of rule 1, which has a different function, these rules constitute contextual constraints imposed on the spokesperson's possi-

bilities for strategic maneuvering at China's MoFA's regular press conferences.

Apart from these more procedural preconditions, it is worth noting that in the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences, in dealing with international affairs the spokespersons often refer explicitly or implicitly to the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence"<sup>5</sup> held by China. These five principles are: 1. mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; 2. mutual non-aggression; 3. mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; 4. equality and cooperation for mutual benefit; and 5. peaceful co-existence<sup>6</sup>. These principles are also part of the primary institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's press conferences that constrain the spokespersons' argumentative replies.

As for the secondary institutional preconditions pertaining to the spokespersons' argumentative replies, three substantial conventions should in any case be taken into account:

First, in their argumentative replies the spokespersons need to address both a "primary" and a "secondary" audience. According to van Eemeren (2010: 109), the term *primary audience* refers to the people the arguer considers the more important audience to reach, and the *secondary audience* consists of the person or persons that are instrumental for the arguer in reaching the primary audience. Since the role that the journalists asking the questions play at the press conferences is like that of an intermediary expressing doubts on behalf of the international general public, they are a secondary audience to the spokespersons.

<sup>5</sup> The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence were first put forward by China's former Premier Zhou Enlai in December 1953 at a meeting with the Indian delegation for negotiations on bilateral relations in China's Tibet region. These principles were later incorporated in the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse Between the Tibet Region of China and India released on April 29, 1954. The Five Principles have also been incorporated in a series of major international documents, including declarations adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. These principles were reaffirmed in documents on China's establishment of diplomatic relations and in treaties as well as communiques China has signed with other countries. For background information about the Five Principles, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five\\_Principles\\_of\\_Peaceful\\_Coexistence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Principles_of_Peaceful_Coexistence) and [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-04/20/content\\_435930.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-04/20/content_435930.htm).

<sup>6</sup> For the official explanation of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, see [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zwjg\\_665342/zwbd\\_665378/t1179045.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t1179045.shtml).

The immediate opponents the spokespersons sometimes argue with in their replies (such as the Japanese government and the Dalai Lama) can be seen as another kind of secondary audience, which is invoked in the questions of the journalists but is, again, not the audience the spokespersons are out to convince.

Since the institutional point of China's MoFA's regular press conferences is to explicate and promote the Chinese government's stances and policies by deliberating before the international general audience, the primary audience of the spokespersons' replies consists of the general public worldwide. This is a third party that may read the journalists' media and it is for the spokespersons the audience intended to judge the acceptability of their argumentative discourse. In their efforts to (give the impression to) act reasonably in order to convince the primary audience, the spokespersons conduct, via an exchange with the secondary audience consisting of the journalist asking the questions, a critical discussion with the immediate opponents that constitute a secondary audience invoked by the journalist. In most (if not all) cases this means that, although the spokespersons' argumentative replies seem to be directed at their immediate opponents, they will in fact be aimed at convincing the international general public via the journalists of the incredibility of their opponents' standpoints.

Second, in order to avoid any premature accusation of being partisan, the spokespersons are as a rule bound to use euphemistic expressions in replying to questions concerning issues that are very sensitive or controversial. It is particularly noticeable, for instance, that in their responses the spokespersons avoid mentioning the names of foreign state leaders they disagree with, even when these names are mentioned explicitly in the journalist's question. Example 3 is a case in point.

#### *Example 3*

*Q: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reportedly said at a Diet hearing on March 12 that the ruling of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) was made by those who won the Second World War. He also said*

*that history should be assessed by historians and government's involvement in the study of historical issues and expression of opinions may lead to diplomatic disputes. What is China's comment?*

*A: [...].There is always a force in Japan that is unwilling to accept its defeat in the Second World War and attempts to challenge the postwar international order [...].*

*(March 13, 2013)*

In certain cases, however, particularly when China's government intends to lay its cards plainly on the table regarding a certain issue, the spokespersons state directly and clearly their attitudes towards the relevant political figures by mentioning explicitly and emphatically the names of the foreign politicians or international leaders involved. See, for instance, Example 4.

#### *Example 4*

*Q: It is reported that Dalai addressed an audience of 140 Japanese parliamentarians in the Upper House members' office building on the morning of November 13. Participants announced the establishment of a "pro-Tibet Diet members' alliance". What is China's comment?*

*A: Tibet is an inalienable part of China. Under the cloak of religion, Dalai is a political exile who has long been engaged in activities aimed at splitting China on the international stage. We are firmly opposed to the provision of support by any country or any person to Dalai in any form for his anti-China separatist activities.....*

*(November 13, 2012)*

Third, another secondary institutional precondition is that certain principles and standpoints are to be deemed "indisputable" or even "sacrosanct". A conspicuous example is the "One-China policy" when Taiwan-related issues are discussed. Another, equally conspicuous, example is the principle of "Non-in-

tervention in internal affairs” when Xinjiang-related issues<sup>7</sup>, Tibet-related issues or China’s human rights issues are discussed. In view of this secondary institutional precondition it can easily be imagined that any attempt from the journalists to discuss any of these sensitive issues will be rejected immediately by the spokespersons, directly or indirectly. See Example 5.

#### Example 5

*Q: The US State Department released its Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016 on March 3, criticizing once again China’s human rights condition in the China-related part. What is your comment on that?*

*A: [...] We always maintain that countries should conduct dialogue and exchanges on human rights on the basis of equality and mutual respect for the purpose of mutual learning and joint progress. We urge the US to be objective and unbiased about China’s human rights condition and stop interfering in China’s domestic affairs using human rights as an excuse.*

*(March 6, 2017)*

### 3.4 Argumentative characterization of the exchanges between spokespersons and their audience

As mentioned in Section 1.2, to characterize a communicative activity type in which argumentation plays a crucial role argumentatively, in Pragma-Dialectics the ideal model of a critical discussion is used as a “template”. By using the model, in the argumentative characterization it is made clear how in a particular communicative activity type the various stages of the process of resolving a difference of opinion on the merits are realized. The empirical counterparts of the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation

<sup>7</sup> Since 1949, certain forces in Xinjiang province, particularly Uyghur extremists, have tried by every means to overthrow the local government with the intention to separate Xinjiang from China. Though during the past sixty years China’s central government has adopted different kinds of policies in Xinjiang Province, the general attitude towards the extremists and separatists has always remained the same, i.e., fighting any attempt to separate Xinjiang from China. In response to the criticisms from the international community, China’s central government always says that, just like the Tibet problem, the Xinjiang problem is a domestic issue of China and outsiders should not interfere.

stage and the concluding stage are, respectively, the initial situation, the starting points, the argumentative means and criticisms, and the outcome. In this section, we will give an argumentative characterization of the initial situation, the starting points, the argumentative means and criticisms, and the outcome of the argumentative exchanges taking place between the spokespersons and their audience at the MoFA’s regular press conferences.

When analyzing the initial situation of the argumentative exchanges between the spokesperson and his/her audience (as is actually also the case in analyzing all the other empirical counterparts of the four stages of a critical discussion), an important factor that is mentioned in explaining the institutional preconditions in Section 3.3 should be given its due, that the spokesperson is first of all out to reach the primary audience, i.e., the international general public. Since the international general public constitutes the primary audience that the spokesperson actually intends to convince, the international general public is the “rational judge” projected by the spokesperson in his/her effort to get to a conclusion as to whether the difference of opinion between him/her and his/her immediate opponents has been resolved to his/her advantage.

Depending on the case concerned, the differences of opinion between the spokesperson and his/her secondary audiences consisting of his/her immediate opponents can be either mixed or non-mixed<sup>8</sup>, but generally they will be mixed since criticisms of the spokesperson’s standpoints may be expected from his/her immediate opponents. However, the spokesperson may always assume his/her differences of opinions with his/her primary audience, the international general public, to be non-mixed: the spokesperson will be prone to presume that the international general audience will only be doubtful about his/her standpoints, and not object to them.

<sup>8</sup> In Pragma-Dialectics, differences of opinion between the protagonist and the antagonist can be mixed or non-mixed. If only a (positive or negative) standpoint is adopted with regard to a proposition and the other party does not have a contradictory standpoint, the difference of opinion is non-mixed; if both a positive and a negative standpoint are adopted with regard to the same proposition, the difference of opinion is mixed (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, pp.119-120).

Therefore, in giving his/her argumentative replies the spokesperson will focus on resolving the assumed “non-mixed” difference of opinion with the international general public.

A conspicuous procedural starting point for the argumentative exchanges at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences is that normally the spokesperson should limit the time available for a single reply to no more than 2 minutes. Another noteworthy procedural starting point is that normally the journalists are not allowed to raise follow-up questions, even if they are not satisfied with the replies from the spokesperson. It can be imagined that this second starting point allows the spokesperson considerable room for strategic maneuvering in his/her argumentative replies.

The material starting points of the argumentative exchanges at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences are always to a large extent case-dependent. Seemingly, in their argumentative replies the spokespersons can decide about the material starting points by themselves. In actual fact however, they have to consider to what extent their primary audience (and perhaps even their secondary audience) will (or would) agree with the material starting points they have explicitly or implicitly stated. Otherwise the arguments they advance that are based on the material starting points can hardly be expected to be acceptable to their audience(s). In addition, the principles and standpoints deemed “indisputable” or “sacrosanct” by China’s government, such as the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence” mentioned above, also constitute crucial starting points for the argumentative exchanges at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences.

When in argumentative reality it comes to the empirical counterpart of the argumentation stage, protagonists will advance a series of arguments to defend their standpoints while the antagonists cast doubts or express objections. In the actual reality of the argumentative exchanges at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences however, on the one hand, the spokespersons acting as protagonists have to take into consideration the doubts or objections from their immediate opponents as they have been quoted by the journalists; on the other hand, they have to take into account the possible doubts from

their primary audience, the international general public. It is worth noting that in most cases, in spite of them not being their primary audience, spokespersons have to take the doubts or objections of their immediate opponents seriously - or at least seemingly. This is because, as is required by the 3<sup>rd</sup> institutional precondition introduced in Section 3.3, the spokespersons have to display their honesty and sincerity before the international general public.

In the empirical counterpart of the concluding stage, i.e., the outcome, in the exchanges between the journalists and the spokespersons more often than not no explicit conclusions will be drawn as to whether the difference of opinion has been resolved. This is because the spokespersons always assume that the positive outcome will be inferred by the audience itself: the spokespersons have resolved the difference of opinion to their advantage and no doubts or objections to their standpoints can be maintained.

Table 1 provides an overview of the argumentative characterization of the communicative activity type of exchanges between spokespersons at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences and their audience.

**Table 1 Argumentative characterization of the exchanges between spokespersons and their audiences**

<b>Genre</b>	Approximation of political deliberation
<b>Initial situation</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evaluative or prescriptive standpoint – non-mixed difference of opinion between the spokesperson and the international general public (primary audience) with the journalist as an intermediary (secondary audience);</li> <li>2. Evaluative or prescriptive standpoint – mixed (or sometimes non-mixed) difference of opinion between the spokesperson and his/her immediate opponents with the journalist as an intermediary (secondary audience).</li> </ol>
<b>Starting points</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Procedural starting points: the spokesperson should normally limit the time for a single reply to no more than 2 minutes; the journalist is normally not allowed to raise follow-up questions, even if he/she is not satisfied with the spokesperson's replies.</li> <li>2. Material starting points: generally case-dependent; the spokesperson has to consider to what extent his/her primary audience (and perhaps even their secondary audience) will agree with the material starting points he/she has explicitly or implicitly stated; principles and standpoints that are deemed “indisputable” or “sacrosanct” by China's government are crucial starting points.</li> </ol>
<b>Argumentative means</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The spokesperson acting as a protagonist take on the one hand into consideration the doubts or objections of his/her immediate opponents as quoted by the journalist; on the other hand, he/she takes into account the possible doubts of his/her primary audience, the international general public;</li> <li>2. The spokesperson takes the doubts or objections of his/her immediate opponents seriously, or at least seemingly.</li> </ol>
<b>Outcome</b>	Implicit positive resolution of the difference unilaterally determined by the spokesperson.

### 3.5 Prototypical modes of confrontational maneuvering

The most prominent communicative task arguers have to accomplish in the confrontation stage of a critical discussion is to define the difference of opinion by explicating their positions. From the perspective of strategic maneuvering, at the empirical counterpart of this discussion stage the protagonist of a standpoint, which is in this research in principle the spokesperson, has to make an effort to reconcile in his/her confrontational maneuvering his/her dialectical and rhetorical aims. His/her dialectical aim at this stage is to contribute to defining the difference of opinion. According to Pragma-Dialectics, his/her rhetorical aim is to define the difference of opinion as much as possible to his/her own advantage, i.e., in line with the position he/she is out to defend.

In the endeavor of reconciling the pursuit of effectiveness with maintaining reasonableness in responding to the propositions involved in the questions advanced by the journalists in the initial situation that is in this specific communicative activity type of China's MoFA's regular press conferences the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of a critical discussion, the spokespersons generally have two different kinds of options for determining the difference of opinion they would like to resolve. Their first option is to agree to resolve the difference of opinion exactly as it is, according to the questioning journalist, posed or suggested by their opponents. In that case, the mode of strategic maneuvering they have selected in their response consists of a certain way of *expressing agreement*. Their second option consists of disagreeing to resolve the difference of opinion as it is posed or suggested by their opponents. In going for this second option, the spokespersons subsequently have, again, two options: the first sub-option is (a) redefining the difference of opinion in such a way that they can more easily resolve it; the second sub-option is (b) exempting the difference of opinion concerned from the need to resolve it.

### **(a) Redefining the difference of opinion to make it easier to resolve to the advantage of the spokesperson**

More often than not the questions asked by the journalists at China's MoFA's regular press conferences project in fact a difference of opinion between China (represented by the spokesperson) and certain third parties that can be seen as China's opponents (like in certain cases the Dalai Lama). In their responses the spokespersons can then, for instance, decide to redefine the difference of opinion between them and their opponents projected in the journalists' questions as either a mixed or a non-mixed difference. If they decide to do so in either of these two ways, they may be considered to concentrate their efforts of strategic maneuvering on *"redefining" the other party's position of doubt or opposition*. It can be imagined that, in most cases the spokespersons will be inclined to redefine the other party's position of opposition as consisting merely of doubt, because compared with a mixed position in a fully-fledged disagreement a non-mixed position that only involves doubt is generally easier for the spokesperson to deal with.

In their strategic maneuvering the spokespersons can also, and even at the same time, in various ways decide to change the subject matter at issue in a way that makes it easier for them to deal with it. If they do so, they may be considered to concentrate their efforts on *"redefining" the propositional content of the standpoint(s) at issue to their own advantage*. Two likely tools to achieve such a redefinition of the difference of opinion is making use of (some variant of) one of the subtypes of the mode of strategic maneuvering known as *dissociation*, and to *change the topic of discussion*.

### **(b) Exempting the difference of opinion concerned from the need to make an attempt to resolve it**

In principle, the spokespersons cannot exempt the difference of opinion at issue from making an attempt to resolve it without having a good reason to do so, since according to the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regu-

lar press conferences described in Section 3.3 they are supposed to respond in a fair ("honest and sincere") way to the journalists' questions and to keep their emotions in control. Therefore, in order to shake off the burden of having to resolve the difference of opinion in a (seemingly) "reasonable" way, the spokespersons need to opt in the initial stage of the exchange that is the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage for making argumentative moves involving a mode of confrontational maneuvering that boils down to *exempting the difference of opinion from critical discussion*.

One of the possible ways of acting the spokespersons could take refuge to in this endeavor consists of adopting a variant of one of the subtypes of the mode of strategic maneuvering known as *personal attack on the opponent*. In a case when the difference of opinion is for the spokesperson not so easy to resolve, he/she may, for instance, make an effort to relieve himself /herself from the burden of having to resolve the difference of opinion as posed by the opponent by making argumentative moves that amount to discrediting the opponent.

Another way in which the spokespersons could relieve themselves from the burden of resolving the difference of opinion imposed on them by their opponents consists of making clear that the opponent's standpoint that initiates the difference of opinion goes against the fundamental principles of China (as included in the secondary institutional preconditions mentioned in Section 3.3), so that the standpoint is *unallowed and is to be banned from any discussion*. In certain cases making the opposite strategic move may also be appropriate. It is then emphasized by the spokesperson that China's standpoint in the difference of opinion belongs to (or follows from) China's fundamental principles, so that the standpoint is as it were *indisputable* or *beyond discussion*. In the last two cases the modes of confrontational maneuvering that are adopted by the spokespersons boil down to utilizing two related subtypes of *exempting the standpoint at issue from criticism*.

The spokespersons could also relieve themselves from the burden of resolving the difference of opinion as posed by their opponents through putting pressure on the other party by *playing on their feelings of sympathy* or by

*pointing at a negative sanction*. In both cases they make an effort to prevent the opponent from acting unrestrainedly as a critical discussant. In the first case this may sometimes amount to influencing the second order conditions for having a critical discussion and in the second case to affecting a third order condition. Compared with playing on the other party's compassion, threatening them with sanctions is riskier for the spokesperson, since the latter might go against the primary institutional preconditions of the communicative activity type of China's MoFA's regular press conferences according to which the spokespersons are supposed to react in their responses in an "honest and sincere" way and may be perceived negatively.

As is mentioned in Section 1.2, all three aspects of strategic maneuvering, i.e., the selection from the topical potential, the adaptation to audience demand and the choice of presentational devices, can be affected by the institutional preconditions imposed on the argumentative discourse by the communicative activity type in which the argumentative discourse takes place. Starting from the theoretical assumption that this is indeed the case, each of the prototypical modes of strategic maneuvering mentioned above that are to be expected in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of China's MoFA's regular press conferences, i.e., strategic maneuvering *by agreeing to resolve the difference of opinion as posed by the other party*, strategic maneuvering *by "redefining" the other party's position from opposition into doubt* (or the other way around), strategic maneuvering *by redefining the difference of opinion by dissociation* or *by changing the topic of discussion* and strategic maneuvering *by exempting the difference of opinion from critical discussion*, are in all their three aspects subjected to the primary and secondary institutional preconditions discussed in Section 3.3.<sup>9</sup>

In the following chapters we will focus on the various modes of strategic maneuvering brought to bear in strategic maneuvering by redefining the difference of opinion and strategic maneuvering by exempting the difference of opinion from critical discussion.

<sup>9</sup> In Pragma-Dialectics, argumentative phenomena whose occurrence can be explained by the institutional preconditions prevailing in the communicative activity type in which they occur, are called *prototypical* (van Eemeren 2017, p.20).

For various reasons we have chosen not to discuss the other two modes of confrontational maneuvering separately: strategic maneuvering *by agreeing to resolve the difference of opinion as posed by the other party* involves only the move of showing agreement and strategic maneuvering *by "redefining" the other party's position of opposition into doubt* (or the other way around) is generally part of other modes of confrontational maneuvering, particularly of confrontational maneuvering by dissociation, confrontational maneuvering by changing the topic and confrontational maneuvering by exempting the difference of opinion from critical discussion. Therefore, it is in neither of these two cases practical or even feasible to discuss the maneuvering concerned as a separate mode of confrontational maneuvering. In examining confrontational maneuvering by redefining the difference of opinion and confrontational maneuvering by exempting the difference of opinion from critical discussion we will investigate whether the modes of confrontational maneuvering concerned can indeed be found in the empirical data of China's MoFA's regular press conferences and in what kind of (variants of) subtypes they prototypically manifest themselves. In addition, we will investigate how exactly the primary and secondary institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences influence in practice the spokespersons' design of the modes of confrontational maneuvering belonging to these two categories.

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# Chapter 4

## **CONFRONTATIONAL MANEUVERING BY DISSOCIATION**

## 4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Section 3.5, a likely way for the spokespersons to achieve a redefinition of the difference of opinion in the confrontation stage of the projected critical discussion with their opponents is making use of the mode of strategic maneuvering known as *dissociation*. However, whether they really do so and in what ways needs to be investigated by examining the empirical data, in this case the spokespersons' argumentative replies to the questions asked to them by the journalists collected by us for this research. Moreover, we also need to investigate to what extent and how the use of this mode of strategic maneuvering is influenced by the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences.

For the two purposes just mentioned, in Section 4.2 of this chapter we will first introduce and compare the different theoretical perspectives on dissociation. Among these perspectives the pragma-dialectical treatment of dissociation proposed by van Rees (2006, 2009) is the most prominent and most clearly articulated. Because we choose this perspective as the starting point of our study of confrontational strategic maneuvering by dissociation, we will discuss this approach by van Rees in a more detailed way.

In Section 4.3, we will distinguish and explain the different subtypes of dissociation as a mode of confrontational strategic maneuvering that can be identified empirically in the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. Based on the findings reported in Section 4.3, in Section 4.4 we will analyze how in the strategic design of their use of dissociation the spokespersons exploit the topical potential, adapt to audience demand and make use of presentational devices. In this section we will also pay attention to how the primary and secondary institutional preconditions discussed in Section 3.3 constrain, and at the same time provide room for, the spokespersons' use of dissociation. Section 4.5 summarizes by way of conclusion the whole chapter.

## 4.2 Different perspectives on dissociation

"Dissociation" was introduced as a theoretical concept in argumentation theory by Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca in their seminal work *The New Rhetoric* (1969). According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, adopting the argumentative technique of "dissociation" contrasts with making use of the argumentative technique of "association" by the exploitation of argument schemes. In resorting to dissociation, arguers attempt to split up a notion which is originally or habitually deemed as a whole by the audience into two new notions; one of the newly-distinguished notions is to be considered as "apparent" or "superficial", while the other one is to be considered "real" or "crucial".

In Example 4.1 an illustration is provided of the use of dissociation in the spokespersons' replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences.

### Example 4.1

*Q: US President-elect Trump one more time accused China of being responsible for almost half of the US trade deficit, saying that China is not a market economy and it's now time for China to start playing **by [the] rules**. What is your comment?*

*A: Many countries, China and the US included, all keep an eye on future policies to be adopted after Trump assumes office [...]. As for whether or not China plays **by [the] rules**, I can tell you that China acts in accordance with [the] rules of the world trade regime recognized by all. This regime and rules are all under the WTO framework. As the two largest economies and key members of the WTO, the US and China can resolve trade differences under the existing WTO framework.*

*(December 9, 2016)*

In Example 4.1, in responding to the question raised by the journalist concerning US President-elect Trump's comment that "it's now time for China to start playing by [the] rules", in expressing his standpoint the spokesperson

dissociates the “rules of the world trade regime recognized by all” from the “rules suggested by Trump”, whatever the latter might mean. That is to say, in this case the spokesperson actually splits the original notion of “rules” into two new notions: (1) the “rules” defined by Trump that China is not obliged to abide by, and (2) the “rules” of the world trade regime recognized by all that China always respects. Clearly, according to the spokesperson, the latter “rules” are the “real rules” that all the countries should observe while the “rules” defined by Trump do not deserve any serious attention.

The terms indicating the two notions that are differentiated in a dissociation are designated *Term I* and *Term II* by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 417). Term I refers to the notion that is deemed “apparent” or “superficial” and Term II refers to the new notion that is deemed “real” or “crucial”. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca hold that Term II agrees with a criterion of value that Term I does not satisfy. That is to say, Term II is considered to be more valuable or significant than Term I. As van Rees (2009, p. 5) rightly observes, Term II, which involves the real or the crucial, is considered to comprise the more important, central, essential aspects of the original notion.

Why would arguers dissociate? Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explain that arguers dissociate in order to “resolve an incompatibility, contradiction or paradox” (quoted from van Rees 2009, p. 4). In splitting the original notion into two separate notions and deliberately concentrating on the most “real” or “essential” one, the arguer intends to resolve the incompatibility, contradiction or paradox through “remodeling our conception of reality” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, p. 413).

The roles that the original notion indicated by a term can play in an argumentation after it is split up by dissociation may vary. According to van Rees (2009, p. 6), the original notion may: (1) play no part in the argumentation anymore if it is abandoned after the split-up and meanwhile two new notions are invented; (2) be maintained as one of the dissociated notions, while for the other notion a new term is introduced. In the latter case, the original term is redefined and could subsequently get the status of either Term I or, less likely, Term II.

Van Rees (2009, p. 8) correctly observes that from Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s definition of dissociation we may not take it for granted that the notion expressed by Term II is always positively valued in all respects. Instead, Term II could surely also express a notion that is negatively valued. The positive evaluation of Term II hinges only on the fact that it represents the aspects of a notion that are crucial, essential or real, in opposition to term I, which merely covers the peripheral, incidental, or apparent aspects.

Starting from Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s brief definition of dissociation, van Rees offers a more precise definition:

[...] dissociation is an argumentative technique in which, in order to resolve a contradiction or incompatibility, a unitary concept expressed by a single term is split up into two new concepts unequally valued, one subsumed under a new term, the other subsumed either under the original term, which is redefined to denote a concept reduced in content, or under another new term with its own definition, the original term being given up altogether (van Rees 2009, p. 9).

Van Eemeren (2018) holds a slightly different view on the definition of dissociation, particularly when it comes to the possible consequences of the dissociation for the original term. In his view, compared with its original meaning, the new meaning of the term could be reduced by means of a specification or precization (often by adding a qualifying expression to the original term, such as “real” or “true”) as suggested by van Rees, but it can also happen that the new meaning given to the term that is criticized is broader, more extensive or otherwise richer, so that the term refers to a more elaborate concept. To sum up, according to van Eemeren (2018), there could be at least two possibilities for the change in meaning of the original term after dissociation: it could either be decreased or be enriched in content.

In agreement with van Eemeren’s view of dissociation, we propose to slightly amend van Rees’s definition of dissociation in the following way when employing it as a working definition in this research:

Dissociation is an argumentative technique in which, in order to resolve a contradiction or incompatibility, a unitary concept expressed by a single term is replaced by two concepts unequally valued, one subsumed under a new term, the other subsumed either under the original term, which denotes a concept that is in its new use reduced or enriched in content, or under another new term with its own definition, the original term being given up altogether.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, pp. 436-439) discuss several linguistic indicators of dissociation in argumentative discourse. They hold that in argumentative discourse Term I is sometimes distinguished from Term II by means of “characteristic expressions”, such as the adjectives “apparent” (Term I) and “real” (Term II) or the adverbs “apparently” (Term I) and “really” (Term II). See Example 4.2.

*Example 4.2*

A: **Chinese scholars** always choose to stop researching after retirement.

B: Really? As far as I know, **the real Chinese scholars** would not stop researching until they die or become senile.

In Party B’s response, “the real Chinese scholars” (Term II) is distinguished from the “Chinese scholars” (Term I) mentioned by A.

In *Dissociation in argumentative discourse: A pragma-dialectical perspective*, van Rees (2009) not only presents her own pragma-dialectical views, but also offers a concise and insightful overview of contemporary studies on dissociation. According to van Rees, since the appearance of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s (1969) study actually no systematic theoretical treatments of dissociation as an argumentative technique have been published. There are only a number of case studies of the actual use of dissociation in communicative domains such as philosophy, law, politics, and science.

From a theoretical perspective, most, if not all, approaches to the study of dissociation in argumentative discourse can be divided into two categories:

rhetorical treatments and pragma-dialectical treatments. Rhetorical treatments of dissociation, mainly adopted by rhetoricians, generally deem dissociation as a rhetorical/linguistic device that could make the argumentative discourse more persuasive. The rhetoricians favoring this view are prone to investigate the use of dissociation in specific cases in such communicative domains as politics and the law and in philosophical discussions.

Edward Schiappa and David Zarefsky are among the authors who approach dissociation from a rhetorical perspective. Schiappa (1993, p. 408) deals with dissociation particularly in relation to the use of definition because he holds that in a discourse in which the definition of X is treated by means of dissociation “one definition is the real or true instance of X, whereas competing definitions point to an illusory appearance”. In Schiappa (1985, p. 74), dissociation is treated as a “powerful linguistic device” employed for the purpose of seeking adherence to a particular definition. Starting from this assumption, Schiappa (2003) analyzes and interprets the uses of dissociation in legal, political and scientific discursive practices.

Zarefsky (2004, p. 612) asserts from the perspective of rhetoric that dissociation “affects what counts as data for or against a proposal, highlights certain elements of the situation for use in arguments and obscures others, influences whether people will notice the situation and how they will handle it, describes causes and identifies remedies, and invites moral judgments about circumstances or individuals”. In this observation, the rhetorical functions of dissociation in discourse are made fairly clear. The observation is emphatically confirmed in Zarefsky et al.’s (1984, pp. 113-119) analysis of America’s former President Ronald Reagan’s speech of February 1981 that was intended to defend his proposed cuts in the Federal domestic budget. In his speech, Reagan claimed that the “truly needy” would not be affected by the budget cuts, though who were the “truly needy” and who were not “truly needy” but “apparently needy” was not specified. According to this analysis, Reagan dissociated “the truly needy” from “the apparently needy”, which not only enabled him to reassure his supporters by proclaiming that in dealing with the needy he was making a break from the past, but it also enabled him

to reassure people who had a stake in the programs of the past by reaffirming the government's historic commitment to help those in need.

The earliest treatments of dissociation by pragma-dialecticians can be found in van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Kruiger (1978), van Eemeren et al. (1996), Garssen (1997), and Grootendorst (1999). However, it was not until the 2000s that a systematic and fully-fledged pragma-dialectical treatment of dissociation as an argumentative technique was provided by van Rees (2009).

Within the framework of Pragma-Dialectics, van Rees (2009, pp. 55-87) argues that dissociation could be employed in all four stages of a critical discussion. In the confrontation stage, dissociation can be used in: (1) bringing forward a standpoint (by the protagonist); (2) bringing forward criticism against a standpoint (by the antagonist); and (3) maintaining or withdrawing a standpoint (by the protagonist). In the opening stage, dissociation can be used in: (1) proposing starting points; (2) attacking starting points; and (3) reacting to criticism brought forward against starting points. In the argumentation stage, dissociation can be used by the protagonist in responding to the critical questions that are or could be asked by the antagonist concerning the use of three types of argument schemes, i.e., causal argumentation, symptomatic argumentation and argumentation based on a comparison. In the concluding stage, the use of dissociation can enable the participants to give a more precise interpretation of a standpoint which according to the participants has or has not proved tenable in view of the criticism brought forward against it and the way in which this criticism has been met.

According to van Rees (2009), dissociation involves the performance of two speech acts: distinction and definition,<sup>10</sup> which belong both to the class of *usage declaratives* (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984, p. 65).

10 According to Gâță (2007), when the protagonist tries to dissociate a notion three moves can be analytically distinguished: 1. He/she makes a distinction among the various aspects of the notion; 2. He/she makes a concession with respect to some of the aspects by indicating their acceptance; 3. He/she negates some other aspects of the initial notion by indicating their non-acceptance. We do not agree with that in dissociating a notion the protagonist necessarily "makes a concession" regarding some of the aspects of the notion defined by his/her opponent. The protagonist may also completely negate the meaning attributed by his/her opponent to the notion by claiming, for instance, that the opponent "distorts" the "real" meaning of the notion.

Two kinds of requirements have to be satisfied for a sound use of dissociation in performing the speech acts of distinction and definition: procedural requirements and material requirements. The procedural requirements can only be met if the protagonist in making a dissociation follows the procedure for conducting a critical discussion by putting the change in starting point implied by the dissociation up for discussion. The material requirement can only be met if the antagonist does indeed agree with this dissociation (van Rees 2009, pp. 99-102).

Inspired by the extended theory of Pragma-Dialectics, van Rees (2006) emphasizes that dissociation is a mode of strategic maneuvering that reflects the arguer's effort to reconcile dialectical reasonableness and rhetorical effectiveness. In her view, dissociation could enhance the dialectical reasonableness of the function the dissociated notion fulfills in the discourse because usage declaratives that involve dissociation have in principle a clarifying function. They may help to give a more precise interpretation of statements and to draw in this way a finer line between what is and what is not considered to be the case according to the speaker or writer. On the other hand, dissociation could also enhance the effectiveness of argumentation by providing alternative interpretations of a term and make a distinction between central and peripheral aspects of a notion, which could help protagonists to turn to the standpoints and starting points that are most opportune. Dissociation also helps antagonists to do away as quickly and firmly as possible with unwelcome standpoints and arguments of the protagonist. Moreover, dissociation helps both parties to draw the conclusions that are in view of their own positions in the difference the most favorable as possible (van Rees 2006, p. 485).<sup>11</sup>

11 Another pragma-dialectical research on dissociation is carried out by Andone and Gâță (2011), who concentrate on the way in which politicians maneuver strategically with dissociations when an interviewer accuses them of an inconsistency. In analyzing an interview between John Sopel, a British TV presenter, and Yvette Cooper, a British Labour Party politician, they show how Cooper maneuvers strategically with dissociation to bring about a change in the starting points of the discussion, thus directing the audience's attention to this change rather than to central aspects of the issue.

Compared with other treatments, the pragma-dialectical treatment of dissociation provided by van Rees is probably the only one that is based on a solid argumentation theory, while other research is as a rule case-driven. In this sense, we believe that van Rees's treatment represents in fact the most advanced and elaborate approach of dissociation that is presently available and therefore also the most important one. As motivated in Chapter 1, our current study adopts in examining the confrontational maneuvering going on in the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences, just as van Rees does, the pragma-dialectical theoretical framework. Starting from our joint recognition of the adequacy, coherence and consistency of Pragma-Dialectics, we will take van Rees's approach as a general guideline in our investigation of the use of dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering.

### 4.3 Dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering

Following the extended theory of Pragma-Dialectics (van Eemeren 2010), the present research treats dissociation as a mode of strategic maneuvering that can be functional in the four different stages of a critical discussion. Inspired by the pragma-dialectical study of dissociation of van Rees (2009, pp. 55-62), we observe that in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences strategic maneuvering by dissociation could possibly be used in: 1. bringing forward a standpoint (by the protagonist); 2. bringing forward criticism against a standpoint (by the antagonist); and 3. maintaining or withdrawing a standpoint (by the protagonist). Since we are in this research in the first place interested in the positions taken in the argumentative replies by spokespersons acting as protagonists in a critical discussion with their primary audience (the international general public) and their secondary audience (their immediate opponents introduced in the questions of the journalists), we focus in our study of the spokespersons' argumentative discourse as protagonists of a standpoint only on the role that strategic maneuvering by dis-

sociation could play in the protagonist's argumentative discourse in bringing forward and maintaining a standpoint.

In order to remain fully in line with the Chinese government (in accordance with the 4<sup>th</sup> institutional precondition introduced in Chapter 3) and establish a reliable image before the international audience, the spokespersons are not likely to withdraw any standpoint or standpoints they are committed to defend. The truth of this assumption has been confirmed by the empirical observation that in the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences collected by us no case can be found in which the spokesperson shows any inclination to withdraw a standpoint that is held by China's government. Since at the press conferences the journalists hardly have a chance to ask follow-up questions, there is actually no need for the spokespersons to use dissociation in order to maintain a standpoint, although it could happen that they do maintain (or repeat) a standpoint or standpoints they have brought up earlier when this might increase the effectiveness of their response. When the spokespersons maintain (or repeat) a standpoint or standpoints they have brought up earlier in their replies, the role that dissociation could play and the way in which dissociation is used is quite the same as when they advance a standpoint. Therefore, in this research it is only necessary to pay attention to the different subtypes of dissociation that the spokespersons adopt in bringing forward a standpoint.

Van Rees (2009, pp. 55-57) points out that in advancing a standpoint the protagonist may employ dissociation to delineate a single or multiple standpoint in accordance with his/her own preferences against the background of other possible standpoints. In our exploration of the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences, four subtypes of dissociation have been found that play a role in bringing forward a single or multiple standpoint. These subtypes are differentiated according to the main rationale for distinguishing between Term I and Term II in the cases concerned.

## 1. “Distorted” Term I versus “authentic” Term II

In using this subtype of dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering, spokespersons dissociate Term II from Term I by explicating or implying that the meaning of Term I as used by the opponent “distorts” the meaning of the original Term and that the meaning of Term II as used by the spokesperson actually conveys the “authentic” meaning of the original Term. See, for instance, Example 4.3.

*Example 4.3*

*Q: After the East Asia Cooperation Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, some Japanese media reported that though still in parallel with China [having no chance to talk with China] on the South China Sea issue, Japan will continue to cooperate with **the international community** and urge China to abide by **international law** and accept the arbitration ruling. What is your comment?*

*A: Japan said it would cooperate with **the international community**. Maybe it needs to make sure, first and foremost, what the international community is and what position the international community holds on the South China Sea issue. So far, more than 80 countries and international and regional organizations have voiced their understanding of and support to China’s position in various way[s], despite two or three countries who are still repeating their monologue that the so-called ruling [China should accept the arbitration ruling made by the UNCLOS Arbitral Tribunal] is binding and complies with international law. For the sake of preserving the dignity and sanctity of international law, it is [to be] hoped that these two or three countries can give up their erroneous position and take up the just position held by the majority of the international community, instead of the contrary.*

*How could Japan ask China to follow **international law** and accept the ruling, since these two are contradictory. The so-called arbitration, illegal and invalid from day one, deviated so greatly from international law and common practice of arbitration. As far as we are concerned, we firmly safeguard **the true international law**, always have and always will. We hope that Japan can also tru-*

*ly respect international law and international order, instead of distorting and bending international rules at its own will.*

*(July 28, 2016)*

In Example 4.3, the journalist mentions the proposal made by “some Japanese media” that “Japan will continue to cooperate with the international community and urge China to abide by international law and accept the arbitration ruling”. Obviously, the difference of opinion that the journalist intends to solve is whether this proposal made by “some Japanese media” is reasonable or not. Seemingly, in the confrontational stage of his or her argumentative reply, the spokesperson accepts solving the difference of opinion intended by the journalist. However, the spokesperson actually redefines the difference of opinion by dissociating two crucial notions quoted by the journalist from the report of “some Japanese media”, i.e., “international community” and “international law”. The spokesperson does not try to refute the significance of the two notions. Instead, he/she first dissociates in his/her answer the “**international community**” (**Term I**) that consists of only “two or three countries” proposed by his/her immediate opponent, “some Japanese media”, from the “**international community**” (**Term II**) consisting of “more than 80 countries and international and regional organizations” whose support is claimed by himself/herself. Through this deliberate numerical comparison, the spokesperson emphasizes the “authenticity” and “acceptability” of the way in which Term II is used by himself/herself, because a company consisting of “more than 80 countries” may indeed lay claim to being a real international community, as well as the “distortedness” and “unacceptability” of Term I as it is used by his/her immediate opponent, “some Japanese media”, because a company consisting of no more than “only two or three countries” cannot be viewed as the real international community.

As for the other notion that is at issue in the spokesperson’s reply, “international law”: the spokesperson dissociates the “**true international law**” (**Term II**) that China “firmly safeguards” from the “**international law**” (**Term I**) as claimed by his/her immediate opponent, “some Japanese media”.

According to the spokesperson, the meaning given to the term *international law* by the opponent has been distorted and bended by Japan “at its own will”.

By means of these two dissociations in the confrontation stage, the spokesperson actually makes three moves at the same time: the first is acknowledging the significance of the notions of “international community” and “international law”, the second is denying the acceptability of the “distorted” meaning given to these two terms by his/her immediate opponent, consisting of “some Japanese media”, and the third is using the two terms in their “authentic” meanings in defining the difference of opinion.

## 2. “Ambiguous” Term I versus “Univocal” Term II

In using this variant of dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering, spokespersons dissociate Term II from Term I by explicating or implying that Term I as it is used by the opponents is deliberately endowed with an “ambiguous” meaning, and that Term II as it is used by the spokespersons actually has the “univocal” meaning of the original Term. This happens, for instance, in Example 4.4.

### Example 4.4

*Q: According to the White House officials, today US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter will visit the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis sailing in the South China Sea. Yesterday, Carter reiterated [in] the Philippines America’s desire to resolve disputes in the South China Sea peacefully and its value on freedom of navigation [and the value it attaches to freedom of navigation]. Countries that do not uphold those two principles will be isolated by themselves rather than by the US. What is your comment?*

*A: Regarding your second question on the safety and freedom of navigation, some US officials often replace concept in the argument [change the concept used in the argument]. Are they talking about the **safety and freedom of civil navigation for commercial purposes** or **that of military navigation**? If the answer is for [the purpose of] civil navigation, we have asked the US side many*

*times to name one example that the safety and freedom of civil navigation in this region has been affected since the South China Sea disputes emerged over 40 years ago. Yet the US has been unable to offer one single example up to now. Perhaps the US refers to the safety and freedom of military navigation. If so, countries in the region and many countries around the world all hope that international laws should be followed in this respect [in dealing with this issue].*  
(April 15, 2016)

In this example the journalist intends to get the spokesperson’s reply concerning the two principles suggested by the US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter in relation to China-Philippines dispute over the ownership of the Huangyan Islands: “to resolve disputes in the South China Sea peacefully” and “freedom of navigation”. It is clear that the spokesperson responds emphatically to the second principle claimed by Ashton Carter, i.e., “freedom of navigation”. The difference of opinion is defined by the spokesperson as whether the principle of “freedom of navigation” claimed by Ashton Carter is a reasonable demand or not. In his/her response, the spokesperson makes an effort to indicate that the meaning of the so-called “freedom of navigation” claimed by Ashton Carter is ambiguous and unclear because the notion “freedom of navigation” denotes both “freedom of civil navigation for commercial purposes” and “freedom of military navigation”. As suggested by the spokesperson, no one knows which of the two types of freedom of navigation Ashton Carter refers to. In his/her reply the spokesperson dissociates the notion of “freedom of navigation” into two terms: the first one is the **“freedom of navigation” (Term I)** with an ambiguous meaning **as used by Ashton Carter**, the second one is the **“freedom of navigation” (Term II)** whose meaning is very clear **as it is used by the spokesperson himself/herself**. In this way, the spokesperson is able to define the difference of opinion in such a way that it is only to be discussed whether “freedom of military navigation” should be guaranteed unconditionally. Thus he/she suggests to have brought the meaning of the term *freedom of navigation* back to its “univocal” meaning.

Similarly to what happened in Example 4.3, in this example, by means of

the dissociation in the confrontation stage, the spokesperson actually makes three moves at the same time: the first move involves showing in an implicit way respect to the notion of “freedom of navigation”, the second move is denying the acceptability of the “ambiguous” meaning given to this term by his/her immediate opponent, US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, and the third move is using this term in its “univocal” meaning in defining the difference of opinion.

### 3. “Broadened” Term I versus “exact” Term II

In using this variant of dissociation as a mode of confrontational strategic maneuvering, spokespersons dissociate Term II from Term I by explicating or implying that Term I as it is used by the opponent improperly broadens the meaning of the original Term and that Term II as it is used by the spokespersons actually has the exact meaning of the Term. This happens, for instance, in Example 4.5.

#### Example 4.5

*Q: It is reported that China has deployed surface-to-air missiles in Yongxing Dao. Why does China choose to place military facilities at this time? Some analysts believe that this runs counter to China’s commitment to non-militarization of the South China Sea. What is your comment?*

*A: I am not aware of the specific situation. But I want to point out that the Xisha Islands [that Yongxing Dao belongs to] are China’s inherent territory. China is entitled to deploy necessary defense facilities on its own territory and enhance national defense capabilities. It has nothing to do with **militarization**.*

*(February 17, 2016)*

In Example 4.5, the difference of opinion that the journalist intends to solve is whether the belief held by “some analysts” that the deployment of surface-to-air missiles in Yongxing Dao “runs counter to China’s commitment to non-militarization of the South China Sea” is reasonable. Unlike what hap-

pens in Example 4.3, in this example the spokesperson does not deal with the term *non-militarization* mentioned in the question by “some analysts”, but focuses on the meaning of the concept “militarization” and defines the difference of opinion as whether China’s deployment of surface-to-air missiles in Yongxing Dao (which is part of the Xisha Islands) could be counted as “militarization”. In his/her reply, the spokesperson actually dissociates two different meanings that are assigned to this term by “some analysts” quoted by the journalist on the one hand and by the spokesperson himself/herself on the other hand. According to the spokesperson, the meaning of “militarization” does not include launching “necessary defense facilities on its [China’s] own territory” aiming to “enhance national defense capabilities”. With this deliberate and specified distinction, the spokesperson suggests at the same time that the meaning of “militarization” intended by “some analysts” is improperly “broadened” to such an extent that it even includes launching “necessary defense facilities on its [China’s] own territory” aiming to “enhance national defense capabilities”. To sum up, in his/her reply the spokesperson divides the initial term *militarization* into two terms: **Term I, “militarization” as intended by “some analysts”** is endowed with a “broadened” meaning that improperly includes launching “necessary defense facilities on its [China’s] own territory” aiming to “enhance national defense capabilities”, while the meaning of **Term II, “militarization” as it is used in its “exact” meaning by the spokesperson** does not include launching “necessary defense facilities on its [China’s] own territory” aiming to “enhance national defense capabilities”.

### 4. “Narrowed” Term I versus “exact” Term II

In using this variant of dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering, spokespersons dissociate Term II from Term I by explicating or implying that in the way it is used by the opponents Term I improperly narrows the meaning of the original term and that term II as it is used by the spokespersons actually conveys the “exact” meaning of the Term. This happens, for instance, in Example 4.6.

*Example 4.6*

*Q: Spokesperson John Kirby of the US State Department issued a statement on the one-year anniversary of the so-called mass detention of **human rights** lawyers in China. What is your response?*

*A: The US has been creating headlines with the topic of the so-called human rights issue in China for many years. What it cares about is not the **human rights of 1.3 billion people in China, but those of a dozen or several dozen people under China's judicial investigation**. China is a law-based country. Our judicial authorities handle relevant cases in accordance with the law and guarantee the suspects' legal rights and interests pursuant to Chinese law. Whoever violates the law, regardless of who he is or what he does, will be punished by the law. Making irresponsible remarks on the normal handling of cases by China's judicial organs is in itself a violation of the spirit of the rule of law. More importantly, it is a blatant interference in China's domestic affairs and judicial sovereignty. For so many years, the US has been trying to disrupt China by interfering in China's domestic affairs using the so-called human rights issue, only to find these attempts futile.*  
(July 11, 2016)

In Example 4.6, what is the real or proper meaning of “human rights” is presented by the spokesperson as one of the key differences of opinion. Clearly, two meanings of the Term *human rights (in China)* are differentiated by the spokesperson: **Term I, “human rights (in China)” as used by the US**, which only refers to the “a dozen or several dozen people under China's judicial investigation”, and **Term II, “human rights (in China)” as viewed by the spokesperson himself/herself**, which refers to “the human rights of 1.3 billion people in China”. Through this deliberate differentiation the spokesperson suggests that the meaning endowed by the US to Term I is much narrower, exclusive or even biased compared with the “exact” meaning of Term II, which is broader, more inclusive and impartial.

To sum up, in bringing forward a single or a multiple standpoint, all four subtypes of dissociation that we have distinguished play a role in the spokes-

persons' argumentative replies. Though dissociation is thus used in quite different ways, in essence all the four subtypes actually serve the same purpose: to highlight the properness of the meaning of Term II proposed by the spokesperson and thus define the difference of opinions in their favor.

In Section 4.2, we have explicated that a slightly amended version of the definition of dissociation provided by van Rees (2009, p. 9) is taken as a working definition in our research. From the analysis above it can be seen that the first, second, and fourth subtype of dissociation adopted by the spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences are in agreement with van Rees's definition of dissociation. The third subtype however, i.e., “narrowed” Term I versus “exact” Term II, is not covered by this definition, since the meaning of Term I is broadened by the dissociation. In this subtype, Term II redefines the concept denoted by Term I as a concept with an “increased” content rather than a “reduced” content. Our amended version of the definition enables us to also do full justice to this subtype of dissociation.

#### **4.4 Confrontational maneuvering by dissociation in making a convincing case**

As we observed in Chapter 3, the primary audience that the spokespersons intend to reach by means of their strategic maneuvering is the international general public. Therefore, all subtypes of strategic maneuvering adopted by the spokespersons should actually be seen as efforts to convince the international general public rather than the secondary audience consisting of their immediate opponents of their standpoints. This observation applies particularly well to the spokespersons' strategic maneuvering by making a dissociation in the confrontation stage of the projected imaginary critical discussion between the spokespersons and their immediate opponents: most if not all of the argumentative moves they make which involve a dissociation are unlikely to convince the immediate opponents they are seemingly to be directed at.

If the international general public is indeed the primary audience that is to be convinced by the spokespersons, the question to be answered here

is: how can the strategic maneuvering by the various subtypes of dissociation made in the confrontation stage of the imagined exchanges between the spokespersons and their secondary audience be instrumental in convincing their primary audience? To answer this question, it must first be clear in what way the spokespersons are actually conducting two different critical discussions at the same time when making dissociations: one directed at a secondary audience and the other directed at the primary audience. In our view, the problem at issue can be dealt with in the following way.

In the projected imaginary critical discussion with the secondary audience, i.e., their immediate opponents as invoked in the questions of the journalists, the spokespersons use dissociation to negate these people's doubts or criticisms concerning China's standpoints. The dissociations involved can thus be seen as calculated argumentative moves made in the confrontation stage of an imagined critical discussion with their opponents instigated by the question of the journalist. In the critical discussion with their primary audience, i.e., the international general public, the spokespersons prove to exploit this dissociation of the notion as it is introduced by the party consisting of the people that are quoted or portrayed as "authoritative" by the journalist. In that way the spokespersons are using these dissociations as strategic moves to diminish or negate their opponents' authority in the eyes of the international general public when it comes to doubting or criticizing China's standpoints.

As we have argued earlier in this section, by means of a dissociation of a notion used by a third party evoked in the question asked by the journalist as a secondary audience acting as an antagonist of the spokesperson, the spokesperson is actually making an effort to convince the primary audience, the international general public. In explaining the strategic maneuvering taking place at China's MoFA's regular press conferences, it is therefore in our view worthwhile to carefully consider from this perspective the spokespersons' efforts to convince the international general public with a strategic move involving any of the four subtypes of dissociation. In doing so we have explained the strategic maneuvering involved in exploiting the four modes of

strategic maneuvering by dissociation as a way of adapting to the audience demand of the international general public. However, both of the other two indispensable aspects of strategic maneuvering should also be taken into account: the selection from the topical potential and the choice of presentational devices. In discussing the way in which the spokespersons give substance to each of the three aspects of strategic maneuvering the various (primary as well as secondary) institutional preconditions need to be considered that apply to China's MoFA's regular press conferences. When using any of the four subtypes of dissociation at these press conferences in adapting to the international general public audience's demand these institutional preconditions constitute in fact vital constraints on the spokespersons' choice from the topical potential and their selection of presentational devices.

To illustrate how spokespersons do make an effort to convince their primary audience by means of dissociation of a notion used by a third party evoked as an antagonist of the spokesperson in a question asked by the journalists, we will analyze Example 4.3 as an exemplary case, since the strategic design of dissociation adopted by the spokesperson in this example is prototypical of the strategic maneuvering by means of dissociation in the corpus we collected. In Example 4.3, the difference of opinion at issue is about whether it is proper for Japan to make the comment that "Japan will continue to cooperate with the international community and urge China to abide by international law and accept the arbitration ruling" - in other words, whether Japan has the authority to do so. In his/her response, the spokesperson casts doubt on Japan's authority in making such a comment by adopting a dissociation as discussed in section 4.3. The questions to be answered then are: (1) why does the spokesperson, among all the terms that are used, choose to make a dissociation specifically of the terms *international community* and *international law*? (2) how can the way in which he/she presents the dissociation of these terms contribute to the convincingness of his/her case for the primary audience? The first question concerns the selection that is made from the topical potential consisting of all the terms that could be concentrated on by the spokesperson and the second question concerns primarily the presenta-

tional devices that the spokesperson utilizes in maneuvering strategically in adapting to the audience.

As for the topical potential, the most likely answer is: in discussing an international dispute like the South China Sea issue the spokesperson can hardly avoid using the terms *international community* and *international law*. As is generally known, the South China Sea dispute has been an eye-catching international problem since the 1960s, and particularly since the 1970s. Up until now, China and its neighboring countries, especially the Philippines, Japan and Vietnam, have been arguing with each other based on various historical and legal evidences to justify their sovereignty of the islands in the South China Sea. As far as historical evidence is concerned, all the countries involved tend to claim that their sovereignty over these islands has already for a long time been acknowledged by the international community. As for legal evidence, all of them claim that their sovereignty over these islands is protected by relevant international laws and regulations, in spite of the fact that different countries resort to different articles of a certain law or even to different laws.

Almost all countries involved in the South China Sea conflict dispute with each other what the “international community” thinks of this problem and what is actually stipulated in “international law”. The Japanese media, for example, do so in cleverly adopting these two terms, which can be easily adapted to the demands or expectations of the international general public. Constrained as he/she is by the institutional precondition that a spokesperson should respond “honestly and sincerely”, the Chinese spokesperson could in this case not refuse to try to resolve the difference of opinion suggested by the journalist in a way that involves respecting international community and observing international law as its necessary requirements. If resorting to these two terms cannot be avoided, then the best way for the spokesperson to proceed is to redefine each of them in his/her own favor by means of a dissociation. And this is in fact what actually happens.

In presenting his/her dissociation of “international community”, the spokesperson chooses not to claim bluntly that his/her own view of the “in-

ternational community” is authentic and the one held by the Japanese media is distorted. Instead, the spokesperson takes refuge to a numerical comparison: in the view of the Japanese media the “international community” (Term I) consists of only “two or three countries” while the “international community” as respected by China (Term II) consists of “more than 80 countries and international and regional organizations”. Through this skillful comparison, which can be seen as a presentational device, it should be automatically clear to the international public which “international community” is to be the preferred one, since a company consisting of no more than “only two or three countries” cannot be viewed as the real international community. Besides, it is noteworthy that in making this dissociation, the spokesperson, constrained by the institutional precondition that “The spokesperson should not slander others, nor accuse others when lacking evidence for it”, refrains from specifying what these “two or three countries” consist of. Taking into consideration the context of the South China Sea dispute and the co-text of the question and reply at the press conference, most if not all members of the primary audience are supposed to understand what the phrase “two or three countries” refers to, i.e., Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines. Yet, not bluntly mentioning the names of these countries could avoid being considered guilty of any possible slander or wrong accusation. This way of proceeding can be seen as a skillful exploitation of another presentational device.

After having thus given an exemplary explanation of the strategic maneuvering by dissociation that is taking place in Example 4.3, which is rather typical of what happens in the corpus we collected, we can now try to answer the general question regarding the instrumentality of such strategic dissociations that was raised at the beginning of this section. Generally speaking, the strategic maneuvering with regard to the immediate opponents mentioned by the journalists that serve as the secondary audience, which is carried out by the spokespersons by making use of the various types of dissociation, can only be instrumental in convincing the primary audience (the international general public) of the spokespersons’ standpoints when these dissociations effectively undermine or unmask the authority of the secondary audience

that is attacked and remain within the boundaries of reasonableness as constrained by the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences. We have shown in our analysis that to this end, in making use of dissociations in trying to adapt to the international general public's audience's demand, the spokespersons also make strategic choices from the available topical potential and the available presentational devices. As we have shown, the institutional preconditions pertaining to China's MoFA's regular press conferences play an important role in determining this strategic maneuvering, since these preconditions impose vital constraints on the spokespersons' choice from the topical potential and selection of presentational devices.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter describes the subtypes of dissociation realized by the spokespersons in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage in the argumentative exchanges at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. It explains the strategic function of these dissociations in convincing the spokespersons' primary audience. As has been made clear in Section 4.3, the spokespersons adopt four subtypes of dissociation to cut down their opponents' credibility in criticizing China. According to the pertinent rationale for distinguishing between Term II and Term I, these subtypes can be differentiated as: "distorted" Term I versus "authentic" Term II, "ambiguous" Term I versus "univocal" Term II, "broadened" Term I versus "exact" Term II, and "narrowed" Term I versus "exact" Term II.

As we have observed in Section 4.4, the strategic maneuvering by means of the various subtypes of dissociation carried out by the spokespersons in confronting their immediate opponents is in fact in the first place directed at their primary audience, i.e., the international general public. The spokespersons use these dissociations for the purpose of undermining their immediate opponents' authority/credibility in criticizing China and to convince the international general public by means of these dissociations of China's standpoints. That is to say, the various subtypes of dissociation made by the

spokespersons in reacting to their immediate opponents are actually used as a way of criticizing the authoritative source of the standpoint that has been implicitly advanced by the journalist, and this can be seen as a strategic move in the critical discussion between the spokespersons and their primary audience. To make their criticism of the presentation of the cited source as authoritative convincing, in all four subtypes of dissociation the spokespersons maneuver strategically by adapting to the international general public's audience's demand concerning the issues that are discussed and making simultaneously appropriate strategic choices from the available topical potential and the available presentational devices. In doing so, the spokespersons make sure that they observe the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences relevant to the kind of dissociation that they make in this endeavor.

According to the pragma-dialectical view taken by van Rees (2009, p. 102), which is also held by us in this research, making and acting upon a dissociation in argumentative discourse that is not accepted by the other party would amount to committing a fallacy because by one-sidedly redefining the differences of opinion through a change of interpretation of the presumed point of departure it violates the Commandment regarding the Starting Point (Rule 6) of the code of conduct for reasonable discussants. This Commandment stipulates that "Discussants may not falsely present something as an accepted starting point or falsely deny that something is an accepted starting point" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 193).

Because of the conflicting interests, by acting in this way the spokespersons can hardly be expected to gain consent from their immediate opponents with regard to the dissociations they make in the projected imaginary argumentative exchange with these opponents. For this reason, when using dissociation in this way in the projected critical discussion with their opponents the spokespersons will easily commit a fallacy (in most cases the straw man fallacy combined with the ambiguity fallacy). However, when it comes to the argumentative exchange between the spokespersons and their primary audience - the international general public - these argumentative moves are not

necessarily seen as fallacious, in particular not when the dissociations concerned are used as a way of criticizing in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of their critical discussion with the international general public the authoritative source of the standpoint that has been implicitly advanced by the journalist.

The soundness of such a criticism is mainly dependent on whether the criticism involved really reveals deficiencies in the quoted standpoint that is presented as authoritative by the journalist. That means that assessing the reasonableness of the dissociating moves made in criticizing the authoritative source of the standpoint implicitly advanced by the journalist, we have to judge whether in view of the authoritative claims concerned these moves can indeed be regarded as reasonable ways of undermining the authority of the spokespersons' immediate opponents in expressing certain comments on China.

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# Chapter 5

## **CONFRONTATIONAL MANEUVERING BY PERSONAL ATTACK**

## 5.1 Introduction

In Section 3.5 we have argued that there are for spokespersons two strategic ways in which they can disagree to resolve the difference of opinion suggested by the questioning journalist. The first one is to redefine the difference of opinion in such a way that it becomes easier for them to resolve. The second one is to exempt the difference of opinion from the need to make an attempt to resolve it. The first way of responding has been discussed in Chapter 4, where it is explained how the spokespersons use in their responses to the questioning journalists dissociation as a mode of strategic maneuvering to redefine the difference of opinion. In the current chapter we are going to discuss the second strategic way of disagreeing to resolve the difference of opinion at issue by focusing on the spokesperson's strategic use of personal attack as a prototypical mode of confrontational maneuvering in making an attempt to exempt the difference of opinion suggested by the journalist from critical discussion.

In Section 5.2 of this chapter, we introduce various perspectives from which personal (or *ad hominem*) attacks have been studied in the literature. This brief literature review concentrates in particular on the pragma-dialectical view of personal attack as a mode of strategic maneuvering, which is the approach adopted in this research. In Section 5.3 we will analyze different subtypes and variants of personal attack that are prototypically adopted by the spokespersons in their argumentative replies. In Section 5.4 it is explained, based on the description of the institutional preconditions provided in Section 3.3, how personal attack can be a mode of confrontational maneuvering that is instrumental for the spokespersons in achieving their central aim: to convince their primary audience, the international general public. Section 5.5 provides a conclusion in which some reflections on the results of the research conducted in this study will be presented.

## 5.2 Personal attack/*ad hominem* viewed from different theoretical perspectives

The notion of personal attack in argumentative discourse is closely related to the notorious fallacy of (*argumentum*) *ad hominem*. In this chapter we will not elaborate on the intricacies of the differences between the two. Following the differentiation between personal attack and *ad hominem* made by van Eemeren (2010, p. 196), we simply consider the term *personal attack* as referring to the general category and the neutral counterpart of the fallacy of (*argumentum*) *ad hominem*. While *ad hominem* denotes a certain type of fallacy, personal attack can either be reasonable or fallacious.

Relevant research on *ad hominem*, the fallacious personal attack, has been conducted from the perspectives of informal and formal logic, rhetoric, and dialectic. It has concentrated mainly on the definition and variants of *ad hominem* and the methods that can be used to analyze and evaluate them (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1993).

In *An essay concerning human understanding, dating from 1690*, Locke (1960) introduced the term *ad hominem*, without discussing any possible fallaciousness. After him, Whately (1848) placed *ad hominem* in the subcategory of the informal logical fallacies. Whately (1848, pp. 190-191) emphasized that not all *ad hominem* arguments are necessarily irrelevant, and that in certain situations *ad hominem* can be used reasonably. However, in the numerous introductory textbooks on logic that appeared between 1950 and 1972, *ad hominem* is regarded as a fallacy (e.g. Copi 1953/1972). Although some scholars (e.g. Rescher 1964; Hamblin 1970; Copi 1953/1972; Kahane 1973; Woods & Walton 1989, pp. 65-67) argue that there are exceptions when *ad hominem* is not fallacious, these authors also add that it is unclear when using it is reasonable and why. Some scholars sub-divide (with some differences between the various authors) the category of *ad hominem* arguments into *ad hominem* of the “direct/abusive” subtype, *ad hominem* of the “indirect/circumstantial” subtype, and *ad hominem* of the “You Too / *tu quoque*” subtype (Rescher 1964; Copi 1953/1972; Kahane 1973).

Brinton (1985, 1995) regards *ad hominem* as a rhetorical rather than a logical phenomenon. According to him, the abusive subtype can be analyzed using the concept of “ethotic argument” derived from Aristotle’s rhetorical concept of ethos. In *The New Rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation*, the “new rhetoricians” Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) state that *ad hominem* is in fact not an error, but a necessary condition for any successful argumentation. They clearly have a different understanding of this term though than the logicians. Minot (1981) holds, from a rhetorical perspective, that *ad hominem* may be used either validly or invalidly, depending on the context, and that its validity is better judged from a rhetorical perspective than by purely logical criteria.

The two main dialectical approaches to describing, analyzing and evaluating *ad hominem* arguments are the formal dialectical approach and the pragma-dialectical approach. Barth and Martens (1977), promoting a formal-dialectical theory of fallacies, do not treat *ad hominem* as a fallacy, but as an *ex concessis* argument. They utilize dialogical logic as proposed by the German logician Lorenzen in the 1960s, to describe the subtypes of *ad hominem*.

Unlike in the formal dialectical approach, in pragma-dialectics *ad hominem* is characterized as being directed not at the person instead of the intrinsic merits of a standpoint or doubt (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, p. 203). By attacking the opponent at the beginning of the argumentative discourse, i.e., at the confrontation stage, as stupid, unreliable, biased, or inconsistent, one may be able to silence this opponent effectively, and eliminate him/her as a serious discussion partner. Thus, using an *ad hominem* obviously limits the opponent’s freedom of action, and therefore conflicts with the 1<sup>st</sup> rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse: “Discussants may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into question” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 190). Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, p. 111) divide *ad hominem* into three subtypes: the direct/abusive subtype, the indirect/circumstantial subtype, and the You Too / *tu quoque* subtype. This division is similar to the classification presented by Copi (1953/1972), Kahane (1973), and Rescher (1964).

From the perspective of the extended pragma-dialectical theory, all the fallacies (known and unknown) are specimens of derailed strategic maneuvering and each fallacy has its reasonable counterpart. In the case of *ad hominem*, enlightened by the conceptual framework of strategic maneuvering, two points are worth explicating. First, that both an *ad hominem* and its reasonable counterpart are possible results of a mode of strategic maneuvering by arguers that can be called strategic maneuvering by direct (possibly abusive), indirect (possibly circumstantial), You Too (possibly *tu quoque*) personal attack. Second, that in evaluating the soundness of strategic maneuvering by personal attack, the communicative activity type in which a personal attack takes place and its institutional preconditions should duly be taken into consideration.

As this brief overview shows, the study of personal attack/*ad hominem* has progressed in a remarkable way. The traditional belief associated with the logical perspective that all personal attacks are fallacies of relevance connected with reasoning has been transcended. Nevertheless, the circumstances in which a personal attack is utilized correctly, i.e., without going against the principle of reasonableness, have not yet studied extensively and the contextual soundness conditions for making such an argumentative move have not yet been identified. In addition, systematic studies on the strategy involved in using personal attacks in actual discourse have not been conducted, let alone studies on the use of personal attack as an argumentative strategy in spokespersons’ replies at press conferences.

### 5.3 Personal attacks in spokespersons’ replies

As we have observed, personal attacks in the spokespersons’ argumentative replies can be categorized into three subtypes as direct, indirect, and You too personal attacks. Each subtype can be further divided into different variants. By discussing a series of examples taken from the spokespersons’ replies at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences, this section elaborates on the representation of the various subtypes and variants in the research data.

### 5.3.1 Direct personal attacks

Direct personal attack refers to denigrating one's opponent by casting doubt on his/her expertise, intelligence, character, or good faith (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, p. 111).

#### 1. *Attacking the person by accusation of bad character*

When attacking an opponent's character, the spokespersons use negative words to reduce his/her credibility. They portray the opponent as a hypocritical, arrogant, mean, or irresponsible person. Example 5.1 is a case in point of an attack by accusing someone of having an "irresponsible" character.

#### Example 5.1

*Q: Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara recently said that the Tokyo Municipal Government planned to buy a group of islets of the Diaoyu Islands from private owners. How does China comment?*

*A: [...] some irresponsible words and deeds of some Japanese politicians not only infringe upon China's sovereignty, but also undermine China-Japan relations. (April 18, 2012)*

As is shown in Example 5.1, the proposition conveyed by the journalist's question is that the Tokyo municipal government planned to purchase a group of islets of the Diaoyu Islands from private owners. The reconstruction of the spokesperson's reply reveals that he redefines the difference of opinion in his own way, which is not in accordance with the journalist's proposition. The difference of opinion concerns whether the Diaoyu Islands and the affiliated islets belong to China. It is a single mixed difference of opinion between the spokesperson and the projected secondary audience, but a single non-mixed difference between the spokesperson and the primary audience. The spokesperson recognizes the difference of opinion and establishes the position of China's government that the Diaoyu Islands and the affiliated islets belong

to China. In addition, before establishing the difference of opinion and confirming the chosen perspective, the spokesperson condemns the Japanese politicians (particularly Shintaro Ishihara in this case) for their "irresponsible" words and actions, which do not only violate China's sovereignty but also undermine Sino-Japanese relations. He/she is thus not addressing the intrinsic merits of the standpoint at issue, but targets the Japanese politicians themselves. This appeals to the common belief that a person who is not responsible for his/her behavior cannot be reliable. By attacking the supposedly poor character of a number of Japanese politicians the spokesperson is undermining their credibility, attempting to repudiate them at the beginning of the exchange. Thus, the analysis of this example makes clear that the spokesperson uses a direct personal attack involving an accusation of bad character.

#### 2. *Attacking the person by accusation of bad faith*

When attacking an opponent's faith to lower his/her credibility the spokespersons sometimes use tough words which indicate that the opponent is not to be trusted. They describe the opponent for instance as a separatist, a political exile or a provocateur. In Example 5.2, the Dalai Lama is attacked for being a political exile.

#### Example 5.2

*Q: It is reported that Dalai addressed an audience of 140 Japanese parliamentarians in the Upper House members' office building on the morning of November 13. Participants announced the establishment of a "pro-Tibet Diet members' alliance". What is China's comment?*

*A: Tibet is an inalienable part of China. Under the cloak of religion, Dalai is a political exile who has long been engaged in activities aimed at splitting China on the international stage. We are firmly opposed to the provision of support by any country or any person to Dalai in any form for his anti-China separatist activities.....*

*(November 13, 2012)*

The journalist's question in this example contains the proposition that the Dalai Lama addressed an audience of 140 Japanese parliamentarians and the proposition that the participants announced the establishment of a pro-Tibetan Diet members' alliance. The spokesperson defines the difference of opinion in his own way, without any reference to the statements of the journalist. The difference of opinion then concerns whether the Beijing government should oppose the Tokyo government in supporting the Dalai Lama in any way in his anti-China separatist activities. The spokesperson casts doubt on the Dalai Lama's good faith. He blames him for being a political exile long engaged in anti-Chinese separatist activities on the international stage. Here, the spokesperson obviously avoids addressing the intrinsic merits of the Dalai Lama's standpoint, but attacks him personally. His/her unexpressed premise here could be "A person who is not loyal to an honorable country cannot be of good faith". The spokesperson attacks the bad faith of the Dalai Lama to lower his credibility, thus trying to eliminate him as a serious discussion partner at the beginning of the argumentative exchange.

### 3. Attacking the person by accusation of low intelligence

Negative words are also used by the spokespersons when they try to diminish an opponent's credibility by attacking the opponent's low intelligence. They then portray the opponent as a person who commits mistakes repeatedly, cannot distinguish right from wrong, and so on. Example 5.3 is a case in which a spokesperson is attacking a person who confuses right and wrong.

#### Example 5.3

Q: [...]. A Minister from the Japanese Embassy said that China unilaterally altered the status [quo] in the East China Sea. He claimed that if China accuses Japan's secret protection law of constituting militarism, then China is already a militarist nation. What is China's comment?

A: Facts of relevant issues concerning the East China Sea are clear. Japan's accusation against China **confuses right and wrong and is totally groundless**

[...]. It is **extremely erroneous and ridiculous** that the relevant Japanese **confounds the right with the wrong** and uses the opportunity to attack China [...].

(December 9, 2013)

In this example the journalist's question contains two propositions. First, that China unilaterally altered the status quo in the East China Sea. Second, that "if China accuses Japan's secret protection law of constituting militarism, then China is already a militarist nation". These two propositions actually initiate two differences of opinion concerning whether China's words and actions in the East China Sea are legal, and whether China is accusing the Japanese government of something that China itself is actually committed to.

In the confrontation stage, before presenting his standpoint on the first difference of opinion, the spokesperson casts doubt on the intelligence of the Japanese person in question. He condemns Japan's accusation against China by stating that it confuses right and wrong and that the accusation is completely baseless. In addition, the spokesperson portrays it as extremely erroneous and ridiculous that the Japanese person in question confounds right and wrong and then makes use of this confusion to attack China. An unexpressed premise here is that a person who is of low intelligence is bad and cannot be trustworthy.

In this example, instead of making comments directed at the intrinsic merits of the standpoints, the spokesperson launches a personal attack on the Japanese person in question. He attacks the intelligence of the minister concerned to lower his reliability, thus attempting to dismiss him from the discussion at the beginning of the argumentative exchange. It can be concluded that in Example 5.3 the spokesperson uses a direct personal attack involving an accusation of low intelligence.

### 4. Attacking the person for lacking expertise

The spokespersons also use abusive words to attack an opponent's expertise to lower his/her credibility. In various cases they cast doubt on the opponent's

professional skillset. Example 5.4 is a case of attacking a person's expertise by a spokesperson.

*Example 5.4*

*Q: In response to the opposition of an official of China's Ministry of Environmental Protection to foreign diplomatic missions publishing air quality data of Chinese cities, the spokesperson of [the] US State Department said that the move does not violate the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. What is China's comment? Secondly, the US said it would not oppose Chinese diplomatic missions publishing air quality data of US cities. Does China plan to do so?*

*A: Foreign embassies and consulates in China **do not have the legal qualifications** to monitor the environment and publish relevant data in China, **nor do they have the professional capabilities or qualifications** of environmental monitoring [...].*

*(June 6, 2012)*

In this example, the spokesperson responds to the journalist's first question, which involves two propositions. First, that China's Ministry of Environmental Protection opposes foreign diplomatic missions publishing air-quality data obtained from Chinese cities. Second, that foreign diplomatic missions' publication of air-quality data obtained from Chinese cities does not violate the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. A reconstruction of the spokesperson's replies reveals that the spokesperson redefines the difference of opinion in accordance with the journalist's second proposition. The difference of opinion then concerns whether it is legal for foreign embassies and consulates in China to monitor and release data on Chinese environmental quality. The spokesperson opposes the standpoint at issue in this difference of opinion. Before establishing the standpoint and the difference of opinion, the spokesperson casts doubt on the qualifications and professional capabilities of the foreign embassies and consulates in China. The spokesperson indicates that foreign embassies

and consulates in China do not have the legal qualifications to monitor the environment and publish relevant data, nor do they have the professional capabilities or qualifications to monitor the environment. Generally, a person who is not a professional will not easily be considered a reliable expert.

Again, the spokesperson does not direct his/her comments at the intrinsic merits of the standpoint but, instead, attacks the foreign embassies and consulates in China. He/she doubts the expertise of these foreign embassies and consulates to lower their credibility, thus attempting to dismiss them at empirical counterpart of confrontation stage in a critical discussion. We may therefore conclude that in this example the spokesperson makes a direct personal attack involving an accusation of a lack of professional capabilities and qualifications.

### 5.3.2 Indirect personal attacks

In this subtype of personal attack, the motives of the opponent for his/her standpoint or doubt are made to appear suspect: the opponent has an interest in the matter, and is thus biased (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, p. 111). Analysis of the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies collected for this current research reveals that the spokespersons use indirect personal attacks in two ways: by attacking the person by an accusation of suspicious motives and by attacking the person by an accusation of suspicious interests.

#### *1. Attacking the person by accusation of suspicious motives*

In attacking opponents by using the first way of indirect personal attack, the spokespersons point out the opponents' suspicious motives in the matter

concerned to undermine their credibility. They then attack the opponent, for instance, for being someone who is bound to challenge the postwar international order, denies having a history of aggression and is beatifying such a history, or has an ulterior political motive. Example 5.5 illustrates a case in which a person is attacked for attempting to challenge the postwar international order.

*Example 5.5*

*Q: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reportedly said at a Diet hearing on March 12 that the ruling of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) was made by those who won the Second World War. He also said that history should be assessed by historians and government's involvement in the study of historical issues and expression of opinions may lead to diplomatic disputes. What is China's comment?*

*A: [...]. There is always a force in Japan that **is unwilling to accept its defeat in the Second World War and attempts to challenge the postwar international order** [...].*

*(March 13, 2013)*

In this example, the journalist's question includes three propositions. First, those who won the Second World War determined the ruling of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE). Second, history (the ruling of IMTFE in this case) should be assessed by historians, not by the government. Third, the government's involvement in the study of historical issues and expression of opinions about historical issues (on the ruling of IMTFE in this case) may lead to diplomatic disputes. The reconstruction of the spokesperson's replies reveals that he/she redefines the difference of opinion concentrating on the journalist's second proposition. The difference of opinion concerns whether Japan respects and accepts the IMTFE ruling that Japan was defeated in the Second World War.

In the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of the exchange the spokesperson opposes this definition of the difference of opinion. This is

done by making Japan's motive seem suspect. The spokesperson launches an attack on the opponent by stating that certain Japanese people are never willing to accept defeat in the Second World War and still attempt to challenge the postwar international order. This is said before the difference of opinion and the standpoint at issue are established. Because of this presentation it may easily be thought that a person who has a bad or suspicious motive cannot be reliable, and that his/her argument is fallacious. A suspicious motive indicates that it may be to the opponent's advantage to view things in this particular way, so that bias regarding the issue is suggested. The other party cannot be trusted, and therefore their viewpoint or doubt cannot be credible.

In responding in this way, the spokesperson does not direct his/her attack at the intrinsic merits of the standpoint, but takes refuge to doubting the Japanese motives. To lower their credibility, the spokesperson attacks the bad motive ascribed to the Japanese, thus attempting to dismiss them from the beginning of the argumentative exchange.

*2. Attacking the person by ascribing suspicious interests*

In attacking the person by ascribing suspicious interests in an issue to this person, a spokesperson undermines their credibility. The opponent is then, for instance, attacked indirectly as someone who presents justifications for military expansion, unilaterally creates tension and confrontation, and so on. Example 5.6 is a case in which a person is attacked because of suspicious interests.

*Example 5.6*

*Q: Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida reportedly said in his speech to the UN that to increase the transparency of nuclear capabilities is the prerequisite to the reduction of nuclear stockpile, adding that countries like China that are engaged in nuclear capability building should be pinned down. What is China's comment?*

*A: [...]. Japan, on the contrary, has been **playing up the so-called "military***

**threat from China” and stirring up tension and confrontation**, which is to make excuses for its military build-up and adjustment to military policy. That is what really calls for high vigilance from the international community [...]. (September 27, 2013)

The journalist’s question in this example involves two propositions. First, that it is a prerequisite to the reduction of the nuclear stockpile that the transparency of nuclear capabilities is increased. Second, that countries such as China, which are engaged in building up their nuclear capability, should be restricted in doing so. The reconstruction of the spokesperson’s replies reveals that the spokesperson actually ignores the standpoints put forward by the journalists and redefines the difference of opinion. When attempting to deal with the difference of opinion, the spokesperson indirectly attacks Japan by stating that Japan has been exaggerating the so-called military threat from China and causes tension and confrontation. It is suggested that Japan’s purpose or motive is to expand their military interests – promoting “the military threat of China” can be a good justification for strengthening Japan’s military power.

In this example, the spokesperson does not direct his/her comments at the intrinsic merits of the standpoint at issue but attacks the integrity of Japan’s potential interest in this issue, thus attempting to dismiss this country at the beginning of the argumentative exchange by lowering their credibility.

### 5.3.3 You Too personal attacks

In the You Too subtype of a personal attack an attempt is made to undermine the opponent’s credibility by pointing at a contradiction in the opponent’s words or between his/her words and actions (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, p. 111). Analysis of the corpus collected for this research reveals that the spokespersons adopt the You Too subtype of personal attack in four variants: inconsistency between someone’s words and actions, inconsistency between someone’s previous and present actions, inconsistency between someone’s previous and present words, and just words but no actions.

#### 1. Inconsistency between someone’s words and actions

In some cases, the spokespersons indicate inconsistencies in the opponent’s words and actions. In this way they indirectly attack the opponent as someone whose words and actions do not agree with each other. Example 5.7 is such a case of attacking someone whose words and actions are considered inconsistent.

#### Example 5.7

Q: Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera said on November 29 that the ADIZ [Air Defense Identification Zone] China establishes includes the Diaoyu islands as China’s territory, which Japan will not recognize and accept as a prerequisite for dialogue and consultation. What is China’s comment on that?

A: [...]. Japan **keeps saying that its door for dialogue is always open but shuts it down when it truly comes to dialogue**. This has once again revealed **the hypocrisy of the Japanese side** who is making empty calls for dialogue [...].

(April 6, 2013)

In this example, the journalist’s question indicates two propositions involving potential standpoints. First, that Japan does not recognize the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) established by China, which includes the Diaoyu Islands as China’s territory. Second, that Japan rejects the prerequisite for dialogue and consultation that the Diaoyu Islands are China’s territory. A reconstruction of the spokesperson’s replies reveals that the spokesperson defines the difference of opinion concentrating on the first standpoint involved in the journalist’s question. This difference of opinion concerns whether China’s ADIZ in the East China Sea is justified to cover the Diaoyu Islands and their affiliated islets. In defining the difference of opinion, the spokesperson attacks the Japanese opponent as someone whose words and actions are incongruent, indicating that Japan continues declaring that it is open to dialogue, but reneges when it is time for dialogue. In this way the spokesperson intends to

reveal the hypocrisy of the Japanese discussion party, which amounts in the Chinese view to making empty calls for dialogue.

The spokesperson's attack is in this case not directed at the intrinsic merits of the standpoint. Instead, he/she attempts to indicate an inconsistency between the words of the Japanese and their actions. A person who is inconsistent can easily be seen as unreliable. By attacking a contradiction in Japan's behavior, an attempt is made to dismiss this party right at the beginning of the argumentative discourse through undermining their credibility. The analysis just given enables us to conclude that in this example the spokesperson uses the You Too variant of a personal attack by pointing at an inconsistency between Japan's words and its actions.

### *2. Inconsistency between someone's past and present actions*

The spokespersons also indicate inconsistencies in an opponent's past and present actions. They then indirectly attack the opponent as someone whose present position is inconsistent with his/her past position. Example 5.8 is a case in point.

#### *Example 5.8*

*Q: Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga reportedly refuted China by saying that there had never been such consensus between Japan and China as shelving the dispute over the Diaoyu Islands. What is China's comment?*

*A: During the negotiations on the normalization of China-Japan relations and the signing of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the then leaders of the two countries, bearing in mind the larger interest of China-Japan relations, reached important common understanding on leaving the issue of the Diaoyu Islands to be resolved later. These are historical facts. What Japan has done since last year **betrayed and violated the above understanding and consensus and led to the current tensions over the Diaoyu Islands** [...] (April 6, 2013)*

In this example, the journalist's question indicates the standpoint that a consensus between Japan and China regarding the shelving of the dispute over the Diaoyu Islands has never existed. The reconstruction of the spokesperson's replies reveals that he/she defines the difference of opinion in agreement with this standpoint. The difference of opinion concerns whether China and Japan should adhere to the view that the issue of the Diaoyu Islands can be resolved later. This is a single mixed difference between the spokesperson and the projected secondary audience and a single non-mixed difference of opinion with the primary audience.

Before establishing the difference of opinion and the standpoint at issue, the spokesperson attacks the Japanese as people whose past actions are inconsistent with their present acts. Japan's actions since last year have betrayed and violated the consensus regarding the postponement of the problematic issue of the Diaoyu Islands. This inconsistency between Japan's past and present actions has resulted in the current tensions over the Diaoyu Islands.

In this case the spokesperson does not concentrate his attacks on the intrinsic merits of the opponent's standpoint or expressed doubts, but attempts to point at an inconsistency between Japan's past and present actions. This maneuver hinges on the fact that someone who is inconsistent will not be considered reliable. The spokesperson thus exploits a contradiction in the Japanese behavior in an attempt to dismiss Japan as a serious discussion partner at the beginning of the argumentative exchange by undermining its credibility. This analysis enables us to conclude that in his/her strategic maneuvering the spokesperson uses the You Too variant of a personal attack.

### *3. Inconsistency between someone's previous and present words*

The spokespersons also mention contradictions in their opponent's past and present words. They thus indirectly attack the opponent as someone who said one thing in the past but says another thing later. Example 5.9 is a case in point.

*Example 5.9*

*Q: Philippine Foreign Secretary Del Rosario said that China wanted to be a rule-maker on the South China Sea issue and the Huangyan Island conflict showed that countries who wanted to maintain freedom of navigation and unimpeded commerce in the South China Sea would face threats. How does China comment?*

*A: [...]. The Philippine side also **used to say** that “the Huangyan Island is not within the scope of territorial sovereignty of the Philippines” [...]. Its claim of a “200 nautical miles of exclusive economic zones” has impaired China’s territorial claim, which is in itself against international law [...]. China has long exercised and maintained its territorial sovereignty over the Huangyan Island, which has never affected and is unlikely to affect the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea [...].*

*(April 24, 2012)*

The journalist’s question in this example involves two minor questions. We concentrate on the spokesperson’s replies to the first of them. The first question indicates two standpoints. First, that China wanted to be a rule-maker in the South China Sea dispute. Second, that the Huangyan Island conflict showed that countries that wanted to maintain freedom of navigation and engage in unimpeded commerce in the South China Sea would face threats.

The differences of opinion concern whether China has sovereignty over Huangyan Island, and whether China’s long-term exercise and maintenance of its territorial sovereignty over Huangyan Island has affected the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. These two differences either constitute together a difference of opinion with the primary audience that is multiple and non-mixed, or they can be regarded as two separate non-mixed single differences of opinion - with regard to the secondary audience the differences are in both cases mixed.

In the confrontation stage, the spokesperson confirms the first difference of opinion, and rejects the second. At this stage, before defining the first difference of opinion and the standpoint involved, in attacking the Philippines the spokesperson treats the Philippines as a country whose words on the issue in the past and the present are inconsistent. The Philippines used to claim that “Huang-

yan Island is not within the scope of [the] territorial sovereignty of the Philippines”. However, according to the spokesperson, the Philippines have recently begun to unilaterally misinterpret the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Philippines claim for themselves “200 nautical miles of exclusive economic zones”. This means that Huangyan Island belongs to the Philippines.

The Philippines’ change of position has impaired China’s territorial claims, which is to be regarded as a violation of international law. The spokesperson does not direct his/her attack at the intrinsic merits of the standpoint, but attempts to indicate an inconsistency between the Philippines’ past and present words. A person (or an organization or country) that is inconsistent can easily be seen as not reliable. The spokesperson attacks the contradiction in the Philippines’ behavior, thus attempting to dismiss the Philippines as a serious discussion partner at the beginning of the argumentative exchange by undermining their credibility. This analysis enables us to conclude that the spokesperson uses the You Too variant of a personal attack in which an inconsistency is pointed out between the opponent’s past words and present words.

#### *4. Just words but no actions*

When the spokespersons point out an inconsistency in the opponent’s behavior, they indirectly attack the opponent as someone whose words are not followed by action. Example 5.10 is a case in which this variant of the You Too subtype of personal attack is used.

*Example 5.10*

*Q: Japanese media reported that a former senior official of the Chinese government has offered to the Japanese to build a crisis management mechanism to avoid problems in the air. Can you confirm that? Is that China’s official position?*

*A: [...]. We hope that the Japanese side could stop **just paying lip service or making a show**, but make concrete efforts.*

*(November 29, 2013)*

In this example the journalist's question indicates the standpoint that a former senior official of the Chinese government has offered Japan to build a crisis management mechanism to avoid problems in the air. The reconstruction of the spokesperson's reply reveals that he/she defines the difference of opinion starting from the journalist's standpoint but interpreting it in accordance with what it should imply. The difference of opinion concerns whether the territorial disputes between China and Japan can be resolved with communication. It involves a single mixed difference of opinion with the secondary audience and a single non-mixed difference of opinion with the primary audience.

In his/her argumentation, the spokesperson takes the standpoint that China supports enhancing communication, dialogue, and negotiations to resolve the relevant issues, i.e., the issue of the overlapping ADIZ between China and Japan in the East China Sea as well as that of sovereignty over the Diaoyu Islands. In the confrontation stage, before establishing the difference of opinion and the standpoint at issue, the spokesperson attacks the Japanese as a party that "pays lip service or puts on a show", but takes no action and never makes concrete efforts. That is to say, the spokesperson does not direct his/her attack at the intrinsic merits of the standpoint, but attempts to indicate an inconsistency in the behavior of the Japanese and thus to dismiss the Japanese at the beginning of the argumentative exchange by undermining their credibility.

As has been explained in Section 5.2 when the concept was introduced, making a personal attack is a mode of strategic maneuvering an arguer can use in the confrontation stage to silence his/her opponents by eliminating them as serious discussion partners (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, p. 203). Whether this strategic aim can be achieved in a reasonable way depends on whether or not the personal attack violates any of the rules for critical discussion. When using any of the variants of personal attack, arguers therefore often try to maneuver in such a way between reasonableness and effectiveness that their argumentative discourse is seen as remaining within the code of conduct defining the boundaries of reasonableness (van Eemeren & Groot-

endorst 2004, pp. 187-196). This may also be assumed to be aimed for in the spokespersons' argumentative replies to questions at China's MoFA's regular press conferences.

### **5.4 Confrontational maneuvering by personal attack in making a convincing case**

As is observed in Section 3.3, the primary audience that the spokespersons intend to reach by means of their strategic maneuvering is the international general public. Therefore, all subtypes of strategic maneuvering adopted by the spokespersons should actually be seen as efforts to convince the international general public of their standpoint, rather than the secondary audience consisting of their immediate opponents. This observation applies particularly well to their strategic maneuvering by making personal attacks: most if not all of argumentative moves they make which involve a personal attack are unlikely to be aimed at convincing the immediate opponents they are directed at.

If the international general public is indeed the primary audience that is to be convinced by the spokespersons, the question to be answered here is: how can the strategic maneuvering by the various subtypes of personal attack made by the spokespersons on their secondary audience at China's MoFA's regular press conferences be instrumental in convincing the primary audience consisting of the international general public? To answer this question, it must first be clear in what way the spokespersons, when making the personal attacks, are actually conducting two different critical discussions at the same time, one directed at a secondary audience and the other directed at the primary audience.

In the critical discussion with the secondary audience, i.e., their immediate opponents, the spokespersons are cutting down these people's credibility by means of personal attacks. The personal attacks involved can be seen as argumentative moves made in the confrontation stage of an imaginary critical discussion with their opponents. In the critical discussion with their pri-

mary audience, i.e., the international general public, the spokespersons are using the personal attacks to doubt or negate their opponents' authority to justify the standpoints at issue. Making the personal attacks can then be seen as strategic moves in the argumentation stage. That is to say, in the critical discussion with the international general public the spokespersons do not make a personal attack on the party they try to convince, the international general public. Instead, by making a personal attack on a would-be party consisting of people mentioned as an authority by the journalist, they are simply criticizing an argumentative move in a projected discussion with certain opponents that is instigated by the question of the journalist.

As van Eemeren, Garssen and Meuffels (2012) observe, argumentative moves such as the personal attacks on people made in the spokespersons' replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences are generally fallacious personal attacks, and therefore *ad hominem*, if they are made in the confrontation stage of a critical discussion with these people. However, if they are used as a criticism of authority argumentation in the argumentation stage of a critical discussion, they are not necessarily fallacious and could also be convincing. In our view, in explaining the strategic maneuvering taking place at China's MoFA's regular press conferences it is worthwhile to consider the spokespersons' efforts to convince the international general public with a strategic move involving any of the three subtypes of personal attack from this perspective.

In explaining the strategic maneuvering involved in exploiting the three modes of strategic maneuvering by personal attack by adapting to audience demand of the international general public, both of the other two indispensable aspects of strategic maneuvering should be incorporated: selection from the topical potential and choice of presentational devices. In discussing the exploitation of each of the three aspects of strategic maneuvering by the spokespersons, the various institutional preconditions have to be taken into account that apply to China's MoFA's regular press conferences, because these preconditions constitute vital constraints on the spokespersons' choice of topical potential and selection of presentational devices when using the

three subtypes of personal attack in adapting to the international general public's demand at these regular press conferences.

For each of the three modes of strategic maneuvering by personal attack, we will now discuss how the spokespersons make an effort to convince their primary audience by means of a personal attack on a secondary audience. We will do so by analyzing for each mode of strategic maneuvering exploiting one of the three subtypes of personal attack an exemplary case taken from the examples introduced and discussed in Section 5.3. The analysis will start by concentrating on the direct personal attacks, taking Example 5.4 as a case in point. Next, we will give an analysis of the strategic use of indirect personal attacks at China's MoFA's regular press conferences, making use of Example 5.5. Finally, we will discuss the spokespersons' strategic use of You Too personal attacks, referring in this endeavor to Example 5.9.

In Example 5.4, the difference of opinion at issue concerns whether it is proper for foreign embassies and consulates in China, in this case particularly for the US embassy and consulates, to monitor and release data on Chinese environmental quality. To challenge the US government's argument justifying its standpoint that it is not improper to do so, the spokesperson casts doubt on the legal qualifications and professional capabilities of the US embassy and consulates in China to monitor and release data on Chinese environmental quality, thus making a direct personal attack. Since the US government is responsible for its embassy and consulates, the spokespersons' attack on the legal qualification and the professional capabilities of the US embassy and consulates in monitoring the Chinese environment and releasing relevant data is to be seen as an attack on the US government. In making this attack the spokesperson not only remains in line with the 3<sup>rd</sup> institutional precondition regarding telling the truth and the 4<sup>th</sup> institutional precondition of representing the position of the Chinese government, mentioned in Section 3.3, but also meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> institutional precondition, most pertinent to direct personal attacks, that forbid using radical and harsh expressions, and the 5<sup>th</sup> institutional precondition concerning giving an emotional and personal response.

In his/her argumentation advanced to convince the international general public, the spokesperson tries to undermine the authority of the US government (and the US embassy and consulates) with regard to monitoring and releasing data on Chinese environmental quality. This means that the following questions need to be answered: Why does the spokesperson attack “foreign embassies and consulates” in general, instead of concentrating his attack just on the “US embassy and consulates” mentioned in the journalist’s question? Why does the spokesperson doubt the “legal qualifications and professional capabilities” of the foreign embassies and consulates? How can these topical choices made in the spokesperson’s strategic maneuvering be of help in convincing the international general public? How can the presentation he/she has chosen contribute to the convincingness of the his/her case?

To answer the question relating to the topical choices, the meaning of “topical choice” in personal attacks must be clarified. As one of three indispensable aspects of strategic maneuvering, a choice from the topical potential generally refers to the “viewpoint, angle or perspective from which the arguer selects the argumentative move or moves he makes in strategic maneuvering, or at least in the piece of strategic maneuvering we are interested in” (van Eemeren 2010, p. 96). In the case of personal attacks, the selection from the topical potential pertains in the first place to the choice of *who* is accused by the arguer and *of what* that person is accused by the arguer.

In order to maintain the clarity normally required in daily communication, the spokesperson could have concentrated his attack just on the “US embassy and consulates”, since these are the institutions mentioned in the journalist’s question. However, at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences (and in carrying out other activities where diplomacy is required) spokespersons are committed to avoid making statements in which they are accusing their immediate opponents, since – as stipulated in the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> institutional precondition – in answering the journalists’ questions they have to prevent any possible slander or infringement on personal reputations. Therefore, in making accusations, they tend to direct these accusations at a seemingly undetermined group of people whose denomination is very vague.

Nevertheless, in such cases the context generally makes perfectly clear that the spokespersons are actually making a personal attack on their immediate opponents. In this case, for instance, it is obvious that, instead of being aimed at “foreign embassies and consulates” in general, the direct personal attack that is made is in reality directed at the US embassy and consulates. By making this topical choice of who is the one that is being accused, which could also be seen as a choice for the presentational device of objectivity, the spokesperson attacks his/her intended target but avoids, in agreement with 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> institutional precondition, being held responsible for any possible slander or infringement on personal reputations.

In Example 5.4, the choices of *who* is accused and *what* the accused is accused *of*, which together constitute the strategic selection that is made from the topical potential, are closely related. From all the options available in the topical potential as to what the accused is accused of, the spokesperson chooses the “legal qualifications” and “professional capabilities” of foreign embassies and consulates, not just the US embassy and consulates, in monitoring and releasing data on Chinese environmental quality. This topical choice could be effective since it is not so difficult to imagine that the international general public will acknowledge that, unlike the assessment of most political and social issues, the assessment of environmental issues unavoidably requires professional expertise in collecting and judging scientific data.<sup>12</sup> Assessments of the state of the environment are only trustworthy if they are given by professional institutions which are legally authorized to do so. The mentioning of “legal qualifications” involves actually again a choice of a presentational device that suggests objectivity, since it is a reminder that, as a rule, only certain legally authorized institutions are allowed to monitor and release environmental data to the public (Meteorology Law of the People’s Republic of China). It goes without saying that foreign embassies and consulates do not have such official authority.

<sup>12</sup> This is not to deny that in judging environmental issues political, social, economic, and legal factors may also play a role.

Actually, when taken together, the broadening of *who is accused* from the US embassy and consulates to all foreign embassies and consulates and the mentioning of a lack of “legal qualifications” constitute a presentational choice for objectivity that can contribute to making the two components of the topical choice made in the spokesperson’s answer effective in convincing the international general public.

To sum up, when trying to convince the international general public of China’s standpoint in Example 5.4, the spokesperson takes two interrelated strategic steps in making topical choices and choosing presentational devices in his/her direct personal attack. The first step consists of avoiding any possible infringement on the reputation of the US government that is not allowed by the institutional preconditions of the MoFA’s regular press conferences and choosing to accuse in an objective vein “foreign embassies and consulates” in general. The second step consists of choosing in the same objective fashion the lack of “legal qualifications” together with the lack of “professional capabilities” in specifying the accusation.

Example 5.5, analyzed in Section 5.3, can be used as an illustration of how indirect personal attacks are strategically used by the spokespersons to convince the international general public. To undermine the authority of Mr. Abe, the Japanese Prime Minister, in stating that “history should be assessed by historians and government’s involvement in the study of historical issues and expression of opinions may lead to diplomatic disputes”<sup>13</sup>, in Example 5.5 the spokesperson casts doubt on the purity of his motive by calling him “unwilling to accept its [Japan’s] defeat in the Second World War and [someone who] attempts to challenge the postwar international order”. It is noteworthy that, instead of indicating explicitly Mr. Abe’s suspected motive, in order to avoid being held responsible for any possible slander or infringement on personal reputation, as ordained by the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> institutional preconditions of the MoFA’s regular press conferences most pertinent to indirect personal attacks, the spokesperson again chooses to refer to a rather vaguely denominated “force in Japan”.

<sup>13</sup> Taking the context of Abe’s statement into account, we can infer that in this statement “history” refers to the ruling of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) that involved Japan admitting unconditionally that it was defeated.

In opting for this vague denomination, a similar strategic choice from the topical potential and presentational devices as to *who is accused* is made in the indirect personal attack as was made in the direct personal attack in Example 5.4.

As to the issue of *what the accused is accused of*, which is another component of the topical choice that is made in a personal attack, it is easy to see that in this case the spokesperson had a great many other options than doubting Shinzo Abe’s motive by calling him “unwilling to accept its [Japan’s] defeat in the Second World War and attempts to challenge the postwar international order”. To name just a few possibilities, if he would have liked to do so, the spokesperson could have accused Shinzo Abe, for instance, of having a bad character (*direct* personal attack), of being inconsistent in his words and actions in dealing with the China-Japan relationship (*You Too* personal attack), or – to mention an alternative *indirect* attack, of having, as the Chinese government often claimed he had, a close relationship with the right-wingers who overtly insist on restoring Japanese militarism. However, unlike the choices mentioned in summing up these other possibilities, mentioning challenging the postwar international order as Abe’s motive would possibly irritate the international general public. The international general public is unlikely to enjoy witnessing or experiencing a change in the postwar international order, particularly when the change is brought about in revenge by one of the nations defeated in the Second World War. In this sense, the strategic topical choice of *what the accused is accused of* in this example indeed adapts well to the audience’s demand and could therefore be convincing while remaining fully in line with 3<sup>rd</sup> institutional precondition that the spokesperson must tell the truth.

The spokespersons’ strategic use of *You Too* personal attacks to convince the international general public can be illustrated by means of Example 5.9. In Example 5.9, the spokesperson tries to unmask the Philippines’ authority in claiming sovereignty of Huangyan Island and some related issues (such as the threats by China to “countries who wanted to maintain freedom of navigation and unimpeded commerce in the South China Sea” mentioned in the

journalist's question) by indicating a flagrant inconsistency on the side of the Philippines between their previous acknowledgment that Huangyan Island is not within the scope of their territorial sovereignty and their current claim to sovereignty of Huangyan Island. Notably, unlike in Example 5.4 and Example 5.5 as explained above, in this example the spokesperson directs his attack explicitly to the secondary audience consisting of his/her immediate opponent, i.e., "the Philippine side", instead of making use of a vague denomination like "some/certain Eastern Asian countries". However, at the same time it can also be noticed that the spokesperson still refrains from attacking his/her most immediate opponent, the "Philippine Foreign Secretary Del Rosario", mentioned in the journalist's question. That is to say, even in this example, the constraints imposed on the spokesperson's reply by the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences remain operative to some extent.

In attacking the inconsistency on the Philippine side, the spokesperson reminds the international general public of the Philippines' previous pronouncement that "the Huangyan Island is not within the scope of territorial sovereignty of the Philippines", which gives emphatically presence to their earlier position and contradicts their current claim to sovereignty of Huangyan Island. Combined with the reminder of the Philippines' former standpoint, pointing at this contradiction could make the international general public doubtful about the trustworthiness of the Philippines, because it is hard to imagine that a trustworthy and responsible country would so easily deny what it has earlier acknowledged, particularly when there are no clear reasons for this denial and the sudden change of position that goes with it. Therefore, the topical choice of pointing at this "inconsistency" in this example could be effective in destroying the Philippines' authority in making pertinent statements regarding issues concerning the Huangyan Island. In addition, it should be noticed that in showing the inconsistency the spokesperson makes use of a direct quotation from the side of the Philippines. This presentational choice not only conforms very well to the 3<sup>rd</sup> institutional precondition relevant to You Too personal attacks that "the spokesperson has the

responsibility to tell the truth to the public and should therefore be honest and sincere" but it also enhances the reliability of the accusation involved in their attack.

After our exemplary explanations of the confrontational maneuvering by direct personal attack in Example 5.4, the indirect personal attack in Example 5.5, and the You Too personal attack in Example 5.9, we can answer the general question regarding their instrumentality raised at the beginning of this section. Generally speaking, the strategic maneuvering by the various types of personal attacks made by the spokespersons on their secondary audience (the immediate opponents mentioned by the journalists) can only be instrumental in convincing the primary audience (the international general public) of their standpoints when these personal attacks, while remaining within the boundaries of reasonableness as defined by the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences, effectively undermine or unmask the authority of the secondary audience that is attacked. As we have shown in our analyses, to this end, in launching the personal attacks, the spokespersons are making strategic choices from the available topical potential and presentational devices in trying to adapt to the international general public's demand. As we have also shown, the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences play an important role in the confrontational maneuvering, since these preconditions impose vital constraints on the spokespersons' choice from the topical potential and selection of presentational devices when using the various variants of the three subtypes of personal attack in responding to the journalists' questions at these regular press conferences.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The central aims of this chapter are to describe the various ways in which personal attacks are used by the spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences and to analyze the strategic function of these personal attacks in convincing the primary audience. To realize these aims, we have adopted the theoretical framework of Pragma-Dialectics and regard a personal attack

as a mode of confrontational maneuvering in which the spokespersons try to strike a balance between maintaining institutionally constrained dialectical reasonableness and achieving rhetorical effectiveness in convincing the international general public of their standpoints.

As the results of the analysis in Section 5.3 show, the spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences adopt three subtypes of personal attack to cut down the credibility of their opponents, i.e., the direct/abusive personal attack, the indirect/circumstantial personal attack, and the You Too / *tu quoque* personal attack. Each of these subtypes can be further divided into different variants: in the direct subtype, the variants of attacking the immediate opponents used by the spokespersons are accusing them of "bad character", "bad faith", "low intelligence", and "low expertise"; in the indirect subtype, the variants include the accusations of "suspicious motives" and "suspicious interests"; in the You Too subtype, the four variants typically found in the spokesperson's attacks are "inconsistency between words and actions", "inconsistency between past and present actions", "inconsistency between previous and present words", and "only words without actions".

The strategic maneuvering by the various variants of the three subtypes of personal attack carried out by the spokespersons in confronting their immediate opponents is in the first place directed at their primary audience, i.e., the international general public. The spokespersons are using these personal attacks for the purpose of undermining their immediate opponents' authority in stating certain standpoints at issue in their efforts to convince the international general public. That is to say, the various variants of the three subtypes of the personal attacks made by the spokespersons on their immediate opponents are actually used as a criticism of authority argumentation advanced implicitly by the journalists on behalf of the international general public in the argumentation stage of a critical discussion between the spokespersons and the international general public. To make their criticism of the authority argumentation convincing, the spokespersons can be seen to maneuver strategically in all three types of personal attack in choosing the topics they concentrate on and the presentational devices they use to adapt to

the international general public's demand concerning the issues that are discussed. In doing so, the spokespersons have to make sure that they observe the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences relevant to the kind of personal attack they make.

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# Chapter 6

**CONFRONTATIONAL MANEUVERING  
BY DECLARING A STANDPOINT  
UNALLOWED OR INDISPUTABLEK**

## 6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5 we have made clear how the spokespersons prototypically make use of personal attacks to exempt the difference of opinion from critical discussion. In this chapter, we will analyze another prototypical mode of strategic maneuvering that can be used by the spokespersons to exempt a difference of opinion from the need to make an attempt to resolve it, that is, by declaring the standpoint at issue unallowed or indisputable.

In Section 6.2 of this chapter we will first discuss from a pragma-dialectical perspective what “declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable” involves in general and next what it involves in the specific context of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences. In Section 6.3 we will distinguish and explain the different subtypes and variants of the mode of confrontational maneuvering of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable that can be identified empirically in the spokespersons’ argumentative replies at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences. In Section 6.4, based on the findings reported in Section 6.3, we will analyze how the strategic design of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable can be realized through maneuvering strategically with the topical potential, with audience demand and with presentational devices. The chapter is concluded in Section 6.5 with some reflections on the research results reported in Section 6.3 and Section 6.4.

## 6.2 A pragma-dialectical view of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable

The first rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, the Freedom Rule, stipulates that the parties in a critical discussion “may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into question” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 190). According to van Eemeren, Garssen and Meuffels (2009, p. 89), in actual argumentative exchanges the Freedom Rule can be violated by “imposing intrinsic restrictions on the nature of the standpoints” for the purpose of blocking

a free, open and critical discussion on a standpoint at issue. Imposing such restrictions could boil down to not allowing a standpoint to be externalized in the discourse because it would be “inappropriate to discuss it”; it could also boil down to excluding a standpoint at issue from further discussion because its acceptability is “beyond any doubt”. In the first case the standpoint supposed to be discussed is declared “unallowed”, while in the latter case it is declared “indisputable”.

A standpoint can be declared unallowed or indisputable based on legal or political considerations or because of ideological beliefs that are commonly shared (or assumed to be commonly shared) within a certain community. The standpoint “Fascism should be revived”, for instance, is unallowed almost all over the world, while the standpoint “Fascism should not be revived” will be regarded indisputable; among orthodox Christians the standpoint “Jesus is not the son of God” is unallowed, while the standpoint “Jesus is the son of God” is indisputable; the standpoint “We should have a multi-party system” is generally unallowed in countries with a one-party system, while in countries with such a system the standpoint “We should have a multi-party system” is generally indisputable.

From the examples just discussed we can see that declaring a standpoint unallowed in a discussion is the “reversal” of what happens in declaring a standpoint indisputable: in the unallowed declaration, the standpoint is excluded from discussion due to its overriding “negative nature”; in the indisputable declaration, the standpoint is excluded from discussion due to its overriding “positive nature”.<sup>14</sup> In spite of these differences, the consequences for the resolution process are ultimately in both cases exactly the same: the standpoint concerned is simply not to be discussed (van Eemeren et al. 2009, p. 89).

When declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable in real-life argumentative exchanges, it is not uncommon for arguers to imply or to mention what the rationale for the exclusion is by mentioning a set of reasons, beliefs or values for justifying this unallowed or indisputable declaration.

<sup>14</sup> The standpoint has an overriding “negative nature” when it is considered completely unacceptable by the arguer, and it has an overriding “positive nature” when its acceptability is considered a certainty by the arguer.

The rationale for the unallowed or indisputable declaration implied or mentioned by the arguers is supposed to be commonly shared by the arguers and their opponents or to be imposed upon them by the institutional preconditions of the communicative activity type in which the argumentative discourse takes place. By providing such a rationale the arguers probably intend to accentuate or strengthen the (appearance of) legitimacy of the unallowed or indisputable declaration. However, it could also be the case that the rationale implied or mentioned by the arguers is only assumed to be commonly shared by them and the antagonist, while in fact the antagonist does not agree with it.

As mentioned above, viewed from a pragma-dialectical perspective, declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable happens at the start of or during the initial phase of the argumentative discourse that is the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage. The question then is which stage the arguers are in when they provide a rationale that is supposed to justify the unallowed or indisputable declaration. Is the rationale put forward as part of the starting points, so that the arguers have entered the opening stage of the critical discussion? Or is the rationale put forward as part of the argumentation aimed at justifying the unallowed or indisputable declaration of the standpoint, so that the arguers have entered the argumentation stage?

The moment when an arguer declares a standpoint unallowed or indisputable in the confrontation stage the other three stages of a critical discussion that should follow the confrontation stage are blocked. According to this analysis, advancing a rationale for declaring a standpoint unallowed does neither take place in the opening stage nor in the argumentation stage of the same critical discussion. When the arguer provides a rationale for declaring a standpoint unallowed, he/she is actually engaged in the conduct of another critical discussion, which can be regarded as a “preliminary discussion” (Discussion 1 for short) that precedes the critical discussion (Discussion 2 for short) in which the unallowed declaration of the standpoint plays its excluding part. The fundamental purpose of Discussion 1 is to provide an argumentative motivation of the rationale for declaring the standpoint at issue un-

lowed in Discussion 2. That is to say, the reasons constituting the rationale are actually put forward in the argumentation stage of Discussion 1, and having such a motivated rationale is a prerequisite for the declaring the standpoint unallowed in Discussion 2. It should be noted that, just because the rationale for declaring the standpoint unallowed is provided by the arguer (or assumed to have been provided), in Discussion 2 there is in fact no standpoint discussed, so that Discussion 2 does not really come off the ground.

Declaring a standpoint indisputable is in our view in an important sense different in nature from declaring a standpoint unallowed. Unlike when a standpoint has been declared unallowed from the outset, the parties have in actual fact already entered the confrontation stage of the critical discussion in which the standpoint concerned is at issue when a party provides a rationale for declaring a standpoint that has already been advanced indisputable. Motivating why the standpoint is indisputable by providing a rationale is then part of a sub-discussion of the critical discussion about whether the standpoint is indeed indisputable. The ultimate purpose of this sub-discussion is to provide argumentation that warrants the justificatory force of the rationale for the indisputable declaration in the main discussion. That is to say, the reasons motivating the rationale are actually brought forward in the argumentation stage of a sub-discussion initiated by the arguer in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion about the standpoint at issue. By declaring the standpoint indisputable this critical discussion is brought prematurely to an end in the confrontation stage.

To sum up, the rationale provided by the arguer to justify the unallowed or indisputable declaration of a standpoint is different from any of the starting points that arguers accept in the opening stage of a critical discussion in the sense that in the case of the rationale its acceptance *precedes*, both in declaring a standpoint unallowed and in declaring a standpoint indisputable, any efforts to resolve the difference of opinion concerned by means of a critical discussion starting from the point of departure established in the opening stage. It differs from the arguments put forward in the argumentation stage in the same sense that both by declaring a standpoint unallowed and by declar-

ing a standpoint disputable the critical discussion is aborted in the confrontation stage, so that the argumentation stage will not be reached.

In our data of the spokesperson's argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences, the following example can be seen as a characteristic way for spokespersons to declare a standpoint unallowed:

*Example 6.1*

*Q: Ted Cruz won Iowa's Republican Caucus today, while the Democrats have no clear winner yet. Is the Chinese government paying attention to the selection? Does the Chinese government have any comment on the outcome today?*

*A: **That belongs to the domestic affairs of the US. We will not make comments on [any] other country's election as [it] is the consistent position of the Chinese government.** Whatever the final result of the 2016 US presidential election is, we hope that the president-elect will carry forward the policy of developing relations with China in a constructive way and make concerted efforts with the Chinese side to forge ahead with the new type of major-country relationship between China and the US for new progress in different areas.*  
(February 2, 2016)

In this example, the journalist expects the spokesperson to express the Chinese views about the results of the Republican and the Democratic Caucus in Iowa, particularly about Ted Cruz's success in the voting in the Republican Caucus. In the preliminary discussion preceding the critical discussion on the topic raised by the journalist that is started by the spokesperson, the spokesperson justifies why there is no need to make any comments on the results of the election and Ted Cruz's success in the voting with the rationale that "[it] is the consistent position of the Chinese government not to make comments on [any] other country's election". Obviously the spokesperson supposes this rationale to be familiar to the questioning journalist and the international general public. By excluding standpoints about other countries' domestic affairs in this way in a preliminary discussion as a topic of discussion, the spokesperson declares any standpoint concerning Ted Cruz's win in the selection process unallowed.

In our data of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences, Example 6.2 can be seen as a characteristic way for spokespersons to declare a standpoint indisputable.

*Example 6.2*

*Q: The Philippine military invited foreign journalists for a trip to Zhongye Dao by military plane on May 11. According to the Philippines side, this visit was to show that Zhongye Dao is part of the Philippines. How does China respond to this?*

*A: **China exercises indisputable sovereignty over the Nansha Islands including Zhongye Dao.** According to the international treaties which define the territory of the Philippines, Zhongye Dao and other maritime features in the Nansha Islands have never been part of the Philippines. The Chinese side is opposed to the Philippines' occupation of some maritime features of China's Nansha Islands by force, and stays resolute in safeguarding territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.*

*(May 12, 2015)*

In this example the journalist wants the spokesperson to express China's standpoint on the Philippines' intention to claim sovereignty over Zhongye Dao, which is, as the journalist reports, conveyed by the Philippine military's invitation to foreign journalists for a trip to that island. In the sub-discussion started by the spokesperson the spokesperson declares the standpoint that China exercises sovereignty over the Nansha Island, including Zhongye Dao, indisputable by calling it explicitly *indisputable*. In a brief sub-discussion the spokesperson justifies this standpoint by stating that "according to the international treaties which define the territory of the Philippines, Zhongye Dao and other maritime features in the Nansha Islands have never been part of the Philippines". By referring to the definition of the territory of the Philippines in international treaties the spokesperson makes clear that the Chinese sovereignty over the Nansha Islands, including Zhongye Dao, is indeed beyond any doubt and therefore "indisputable". It can be noticed that the spokesperson provides in this way in fact a two-tier rationale for the acceptability of the

standpoint at issue: the first tier is China's basic principle in dealing with disputes with neighboring countries over the Nansha Islands that China's sovereignty over the Nansha Islands, including Zhongye Dao, is "indisputable" and the second tier is the generally accepted fact that the international treaties which define the territory of the Philippines have never included Zhongye Dao and other maritime features in the Nansha Islands in the definition of the territory of the Philippines.

The examples and the relevant explanations above illustrate clearly that declaring a standpoint unallowed and declaring a standpoint indisputable are in terms of the consequence they have two sides of the same coin: whenever a standpoint is considered to be indisputable, negating this standpoint is almost automatically unallowed, and vice versa. For instance, in Example 1, when emphasizing that any standpoint dealing with other countries' domestic affairs, such as the US Republican Caucus selection, is unallowed, the spokesperson is in fact making the standpoint indisputable that other countries' domestic affairs, such as the US Republican Caucus selection, should not be a topic of discussion. Likewise, in Example 2, when trying to prevent anyone from casting doubt on the "indisputable" standpoint held by China that Zhongye Dao, which is part of the Nansha Islands, belongs to China, the spokesperson attempts to declare it unallowed to question that Zhongye Dao absolutely belongs to China.

Based on the observations above, in order to facilitate the discussion of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, we propose to use in this research the following working definition of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable:

*Declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable is an argumentative move made by the arguer with the intention to prevent having a discussion on this particular standpoint. In declaring a standpoint unallowed, the arguer forbids the standpoint from being externalized in the argumentative discourse due to its "negative nature"; in declaring a standpoint indisputable, the arguer excludes the standpoint from further discussion due to its "positive nature".*

From a pragma-dialectical perspective declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable are argumentative moves that are always, like all argumentative moves made in the various stages of a critical discussion, modes of strategic maneuvering which involve a deliberate choice regarding the three aspects of making a selection from the topical potential, adapting to audience demand and making a choice of presentational devices. When declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, the strategic selection from the topical potential may manifest itself in what kind of standpoint or which particular standpoint is declared unallowed or indisputable; the adaptation to audience demand may manifest itself in an effort not to offend the primary audience but to connect with its general beliefs and values; the strategic selection of presentational devices may be manifested in the use of expressions that makes declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable seem more reasonable, such as mentioning immediately and explicitly the rationale for why a certain standpoint should be deemed unallowed or indisputable, as is shown in Example 6.1 and Example 6.2.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, in principle, declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable would theoretically be a fallacy, because such an argumentative move violates the Freedom Rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, p. 208; 2004, p. 190). Yet, in real-life argumentative discourse declaring a standpoint at issue unallowed or indisputable can also be acceptable if the institutional context in which the argumentative discourse about the standpoint concerned takes place allows for it. This is, for instance, the case when the chair of a meeting does not give room to one of the participants to discuss his standpoint because the issue concerned is not on the agreed-upon agenda. Therefore, in evaluating the soundness of argumentative moves in which a standpoint is declared unallowed or indisputable, institutional preconditions should also be taken into consideration. Following the differentiation between sound strategic maneuvering and derailed strategic maneuvering made by van Eemeren (2010, pp. 196-199), we simply consider the term *declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable* as

referring to the general category and neutral counterpart of the fallacy of *declaring a standpoint taboo or sacrosanct* (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, p. 209; van Eemeren et al. 2009, p. 89). Along these lines, “declaring a standpoint taboo or sacrosanct” denotes a certain type of fallacy while “declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable” can either be a reasonable or a fallacious argumentative move.

### 6.3 Different subtypes of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable

As we have shown in our analyses of Example 6.1 and Example 6.2, in these cases, when declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable the spokespersons provide, explicitly or implicitly, the rationale for why the standpoint concerned is deemed unallowed or indisputable. It can be observed in our corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences that this phenomenon can be observed very often in the cases where a standpoint is declared unallowed or indisputable. A likely reason could be that, by doing so, the spokespersons intend to make their declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable seem more reasonable to their primary audience, i.e., the international general public. Starting from this assumption, it can be understood why the various rationales that spokespersons provide to explain why a standpoint at issue is unallowed or indisputable can play a crucial role in convincing their target audience. Therefore, the different subtypes of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable can be most suitably characterized according to the different rationales the spokespersons presuppose to be understood and acceptable to the questioning journalists as well as the international general public. In the discourse these rationales can be mentioned explicitly by the spokespersons but they may also remain implicit. They can even be presupposed by the institutional context of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences.

In our corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences, three subtypes of declaring a standpoint

unallowed or indisputable can be differentiated according to the underlying rationales. The first subtype is declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable based on the rationale of necessity (“Necessity Rationale” for short). In this subtype, the spokespersons declare a standpoint unallowed because it is unnecessary to discuss it or they declare a standpoint indisputable because it is necessary to stick to this standpoint. The second subtype is declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable based on the rationale of desirability (“Desirability Rationale” for short). In this subtype, the spokespersons declare a standpoint unallowed because it is not desirable to discuss it or they declare a standpoint indisputable because it is desirable to stick to this standpoint. The third subtype is declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable based on the rationale of feasibility (“Feasibility Rationale” for short). In using this subtype, the spokespersons declare a standpoint unallowed because it is not feasible to discuss it or they declare a standpoint indisputable because only having this standpoint is feasible. In what follows, we will examine how these three different subtypes are represented in actual argumentative replies of the spokespersons.

#### 6.3.1 Necessity Rationale

In describing the Necessity Rationale two different questions are pertinent in the two sub-modes of excluding a standpoint from discussion. The first one is: in what kind of cases would it according to the spokespersons be unnecessary to discuss the standpoint at issue (unallowed)? The second is: in what kind of cases would it be necessary to stick to a certain standpoint at issue without being prepared to justify it (indisputable)? Empirical observation of the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences makes clear that the “necessity” issue is as a rule largely decided by the ideological beliefs or attitudes of China’s central government. Discussion of a standpoint is “unnecessary” if this standpoint would go against the ideological beliefs or attitudes of the central government and it is “necessary” to stick to a standpoint without being prepared to

justify it if this standpoint is part of the ideological beliefs or attitudes of the central government. It can be observed from the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies collected for the current research that Principle 1 and Principle 3 of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence" in particular are prototypically used as the basis of the Necessity Rationale for declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable.

In the earlier discussed Example 6.2, for instance, in response to the question regarding sovereignty over Zhongye Dao, the spokesperson applies the principle of "mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty" (Principle 1) as a Necessity Rationale in declaring China's standpoint indisputable. As is shown in the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies collected for the current research, this variant of the Necessity Rationale is frequently adopted by the spokespersons in declaring their standpoints concerning territory disputes indisputable, for instance in the case of territorial disputes concerning the Diaoyu Islands, South China Sea, Taiwan, and border areas between China and India. In a few cases the spokespersons use the same variant of the Necessity Rationale also in declaring standpoints unallowed. See, for instance, Example 6.3.

#### Example 6.3

**Q:** *The US State Department said last week that it is recalling its top diplomats from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama. This follows each of these countries' decision[s] to establish diplomatic ties with China. They previously had them with Taiwan. What is your response to this move?*

**A:** *The One-China principle is a consensus shared by the international community. It is based on this principle that China established diplomatic ties with the relevant countries in accordance with international law and basic norms governing international relations, as well as the fundamental interests of the people not only in China but also in these countries. This is a well-justified decision in response to the call of the times. A sovereign country can choose with whom it wishes to develop diplomatic ties, because it has the sovereign right to do so. Such right should be respected, and other countries are in no*

**position to make irresponsible and indiscreet remarks**<sup>15</sup>[...].

(September 10, 2018)

In this example the journalist suggests a causal relationship between two sequential events. The first event is that the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama decided to establish diplomatic ties with China and broke off diplomatic ties with Taiwan. The second event is that the US State Department said that it is recalling its top diplomats from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama. The causal relationship between these sequential events demonstrates, as the journalist implies, that the US State Department holds a negative attitude on this diplomatic move made by the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama. In the question, the journalist conveys the hope that the spokesperson will clarify whether China agrees or disagrees with the US State Department's negative attitude on the diplomatic move made by the US in retaliation of the earlier moves by the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama.

By claiming at the end of the reply that "other countries are in no position to make irresponsible and indiscreet remarks", the spokesperson declares any other country's standpoint regarding the diplomatic move made by the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama unallowed, in this case more in particular the US State Department's standpoint.

<sup>15</sup> The original Chinese transcript of the expression "other countries are in no position to make irresponsible and indiscreet remarks" is "别国无权说三道四、指手画脚"(bie guo wu quan shuo san dao si, zhi shou hua jiao). The official translation of this expression, which can be found on the official website of China's MoFA, is "other countries are in no position to say otherwise". This official translation deviates from the actual statement of the spokesperson. Different translations lead to different understandings of which subtypes of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable are used by the spokesperson. If a translation as "other countries are in no position to say otherwise" is used, the spokesperson declares the standpoint that it is a well-justified decision for China and these countries indisputable; if a translation as "other countries are in no position to make irresponsible or indiscreet remarks" is used, the spokesperson declares any standpoint held by the US State Department on the diplomatic move that China and these countries have made unallowed. In this chapter we choose to use the latter translation, which is in line with the original Chinese transcript, and hold that in this example the spokesperson uses the sub-mode of declaring a standpoint unallowed. For the official Chinese transcript of this reply, see [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fyrbt\\_673021/jzhsl\\_673025/t1593694.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/fyrbt_673021/jzhsl_673025/t1593694.shtml). For the official English translation of this reply, see <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceegy/eng/fyrth/t1593756.htm>.

To provide a rationale for declaring such a standpoint unallowed, the spokesperson starts a preliminary discussion in which he/she gives two reasons motivating this rationale. The first reason is that the “One-China principle”, which is claimed to be “a consensus shared by the international community”, should be observed. In the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China the One-China principle refers to the principle that there is only one sovereign state under the name *The People’s Republic of China* and that Taiwan is part of The People’s Republic of China.<sup>16</sup> Based on this principle, The People’s Republic of China has always insisted that any other country or region in the world that establishes diplomatic relationships with Taiwan or treats Taiwan in practice as a sovereign state seriously violates China’s sovereignty rights. The second reason used to motivate the rationale is: “A sovereign country can choose with whom it wishes to develop diplomatic ties, because it has the sovereign right to do so”. In other words, according to the spokesperson, any country or organization representing a country, in particular in this case the US State Department, that doubts or criticizes another country’s decision to establish or finish diplomatic relationships with other countries (such as in this case the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama) violates these countries’ sovereign rights. It should be noticed that both of the reasons just discussed have roots in the First Principle of “mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty”, which is supposed to be acknowledged and maintained by the international community.

In Example 6.1 the principle of “mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs” (Principle 3) is used by the spokesperson as the Necessity Rationale for refusing to state China’s standpoint on Ted Cruz’s win in the Caucus selection. It can be noted that the spokespersons use this variant of the Necessity Rationale predominantly in dealing with a standpoint concerning China’s “internal affairs”, such as issues regarding Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and human rights situation in China. It is presupposed by the spokespersons that these issues belong to China’s “internal affairs” and therefore need not be discussed at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences.

<sup>16</sup> See <http://en.people.cn/constitution/constitution.html>.

In the same vein, the spokespersons may also declare at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences that China’s official stances on these issues are indisputable because it is supposed that they belong to China’s “internal affairs”. This happens, for instance, in Example 6.4.

#### Example 6.4

*Q: Media reports say that the Dalai Lama would attend the National Prayers Breakfast in the US on February 5. Does China have anything to say on this?*

*A: Tibet-related issues bear on the core interests and national feelings of China. **We are against the interference in China’s domestic affairs by any country using Tibet related issues as an excuse, and are opposed to the meeting with the Dalai Lama in any form by any foreign leader.** We hope that the US side can act on its commitment on Tibet-related issues and properly deal with relevant issues in the larger interest of bilateral relations.*

*(February 2, 2015)*

By asking the question “Does China have anything to say on this?” the journalist intends to elicit from the spokesperson China’s standpoint on the US invitation to the Dalai Lama to attend the National Prayers Breakfast. In the sub-discussion initiated by the spokesperson he/she includes Tibet-related issues in “China’s domestic affairs” by stating that “We are against the interference in China’s domestic affairs by any country using Tibet related issues as an excuse” and reminds the potential audience of the rationale for excluding any standpoint about such issues from further discussion that no other country should interfere in “China’s internal affairs”. According to the Necessity Rationale, which is in line with the principle of “mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs” (Principle 3), there is no need to discuss any standpoint that implies an interference with China’s domestic affairs. In accordance with this principle the spokesperson declares in the sub-discussion the standpoint that China is “opposed to the meeting with the Dalai Lama in any form by any foreign leader” indisputable. As a consequence, the critical discussion on the acceptability of this standpoint projected by the journalist is brought prematurely to an end in the confrontation stage.

Upon closer inspection it can be observed that there is actually no clear-cut boundary between the first and the third of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, because “non-interference in each other’s internal affairs” can in practice also be understood as “respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty” (see Section 3.3). This explains why the spokespersons at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences sometimes use the two variants of the Necessity Rationale at the same time when backing up their unallowed or indisputable declaration of a standpoint. See, for instance, Example 6.5.

#### Example 6.5

*Q: Yesterday, the German and US embassies criticized China over the handling of [the] right activists’ case. What is China’s response?*

*A: China is a country with rule of law, and the Chinese judicial authorities handle cases in accordance with [the] law. The individual countries you mentioned, by making such irresponsible remarks on our judicial authorities’ normal handling of cases, blatantly interfered in China’s internal affairs and judicial sovereignty. Their actions per se have violated the spirit of [the] rule of law. China firmly opposes and will in no way accept that.*

**These two foreign embassies in China, as diplomatic missions, have no right to point fingers at China’s internal affairs and judicial sovereignty.**

*We hope the relevant embassies could accurately position themselves as regards their functions and do more to promote mutual understanding, mutual trust and cooperation, instead of the opposite.*

*(December 28, 2017)*

In this example the “right activists’ case” mentioned by the journalist refers to Wu Gan (a Chinese blogger better known by his online name of Super Vulgar Butcher) and his Chinese lawyer, being convicted of “subverting state power” by the Tianjin No. 2 People’s Court in 2018. The Court as well as the Chinese government believes that Wu Gan attacked the state power and the social system established by the Constitution by spreading a great deal of dangerous information. After introducing the German and US embassies’ negative

comments on China’s handling of Wu Gan and his lawyer, the journalist requires the spokesperson to express China’s official standpoint on the German and US embassies’ negative comments.

In the reply, by stating that “The individual countries you mentioned, by making such irresponsible remarks on our judicial authorities’ normal handling of cases, blatantly interfered in China’s internal affairs and judicial sovereignty”, the spokesperson presupposes that the Wu Gan case indisputably belongs to “China’s internal affairs” and that China exercised its “judicial sovereignty” in handling this case. By claiming that “These two foreign embassies in China [the German embassy and the US embassy], as diplomatic missions, have no right to point fingers at China’s internal affairs and judicial sovereignty”, the spokesperson declares in the latter part of the example any standpoint from the German and US embassies on the Wu Gan case unallowed. Judging from the use of the terms *internal affairs* and *judicial sovereignty* in the reply, it can be inferred that declaring these standpoints unallowed is backed up by a Necessity Rationale motivated by the First Principle of “mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty” as well as the Third Principle of “mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs” because they make clear why it is unnecessary to discuss them.

### 6.3.2 Desirability Rationale

As has been explained at the beginning of this section, in declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, apart from the Necessity Rationale, the spokespersons can also use the “Desirability Rationale” to back up such a declaration. In this subsection, we will first describe how the Desirability Rationale is used in declaring a standpoint at issue unallowed and then discuss how it is used in declaring a standpoint at issue indisputable.

Empirical observations of the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences show that, when the spokespersons declare a standpoint unallowed and justify this unallowed declaration by the “Desirability Rationale”, the “desirability” issue is always

connected with the procedural requirements of the institutional context of China's MoFA's regular press conferences. This applies in particular to the types of questions that can or cannot be discussed at these press conferences. The spokespersons assume that all journalists present at the press conferences may be expected to know about such procedural requirements. See, for instance, Example 6.6.

*Example 6.6*

*Q: An Italian fashion designer of Dolce & Gabbana caused a protest in China for some insulting comments online, and he claimed it was because his social media account was hacked. What is your comment on the episode?*

*A: **This is not a diplomatic question in essence, nor do we hope it will escalate into a diplomatic one.** So I believe it's better for you to ask the Chinese people instead of the Spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry for how the incident is viewed in China.*

*(November 20, 2018)*

In Example 6.6 the journalist's question concerns a controversy between the fashion company Dolce & Gabbana and China. This controversy originated from an advertisement posted by Dolce & Gabbana on the Chinese social media in which they give a preview of their giant yearly fashion show in Shanghai. A Chinese "cyber citizen" accused the company of presenting an advertisement with a content that humiliates Chinese culture. The records of the chatting between this cyber citizen and Stefano Gabbana were later made public. In these records, Gabbana expressed his discriminatory attitude towards China explicitly. The suspicious advertisement together with Stefano Gabbana's discriminatory words ignited a tremendous protest in China against Dolce & Gabbana.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> For more information, see <https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/16855/dolce-gabbana-vs-china-here-is-what-happened>.

In a preliminary discussion preceding the critical discussion on the controversy between Dolce & Gabbana and China the spokesperson justifies why it is undesirable for him/her to make any comments on this issue with the rationale "This is not a diplomatic question in essence, nor do we hope it will escalate into a diplomatic one". Obviously the spokesperson supposes this rationale to be shared by the questioning journalist and the international general public. In this way, by excluding such standpoints in the preliminary discussion as a topic of discussion, the spokesperson declares any standpoint concerning the controversy between Dolce & Gabbana and China unallowed at this press conference.

It is worth noting that in Example 6 the spokesperson suggests that the questioning journalists should consult another party on the question they intend to discuss: "the Chinese people". As we see it, this argumentative move is actually made for the purpose of highlighting or accentuating more clearly the rationale for the spokespersons' unwillingness to discuss the issue concerned, that is, that for China's MoFA this issue is out of bounds.

In a few cases the Desirability Rationale used by the spokespersons to declare a standpoint unallowed has little, if not almost nothing, to do with the procedural prerequisites of the institutional context of China's MoFA's regular press conferences but relates to background information concerning the issues that are discussed by the journalists and the situational context referred to in the questions of the journalists. More often than not, when dealing with very sensitive and tricky issues, like the Korean Peninsula issue and the Middle East problems, the spokespersons tend to refrain from expressing any standpoint about these issues that may lead to undesirable criticisms or undesirable conclusions about China's position. See, for instance, Example 6.7.

*Example 6.7*

*Q: The US recently said that it believes the DPRK [North Korea] is not yet capable of launching nuclear missiles. What is China's comment?*

*A: **I have no comment on whether the DPRK is capable of launching nuclear missiles.** China's position on the Korean Peninsula issue is clear, resolute*

*and consistent. China stands for denuclearization, peace and stability of the Peninsula and settlement of the issue through dialogue and negotiation.*

*(April 18, 2013)*

The question put forward by the journalist in Example 6.7 concerns the North Korea nuclear issue, which has bothered countries such as South Korea, China, the US and Japan already since the 1990s. Up to the present China has always been cautious in stating its standpoint on this sensitive and complicated issue, because other countries, particularly the US, have persistently maintained that China should take much more responsibility than other countries for preventing North Korea from developing nuclear weapons. A more neutral and cautious standpoint therefore frequently expressed by China is that China advocates settling the Korean Peninsula issue via peaceful dialogues and bilateral negotiations. This is in fact a position which is in full agreement with what the spokesperson states in this example.

On February 12, 2013, North Korea all of a sudden announced that it had succeeded in completing an underground nuclear missile experiment. This unexpected announcement was strongly condemned by almost all other countries involved, and also by the United Nations. Against this background it can be explained that China became even much more cautious in stating its standpoint on the North Korea nuclear issue.

In the question the journalist quotes the US' judgment that the DPRK "is not yet capable of launching nuclear missiles" and asks the spokesperson to comment on this judgment. Upon closer inspection it can be observed that the journalist's question concerning the DPRK's capability of launching nuclear missiles in Example 6.7 is very tricky because both the affirmative standpoint and its denial by the spokesperson could make other countries suspect China of knowing the ropes of this experiment.

To avoid any unjustified suspicions or criticisms from the international society, the spokesperson replies that "I have no comment on whether the DPRK is capable of launching nuclear missiles". By doing so, the spokesperson declares in fact that no standpoint on the DPRK's capability of launching

nuclear missiles can be expected from him/her. In other words, the topic of the DPRK's capability of launching nuclear missiles is declared unallowed. In the latter part of the reply, the spokesperson adds that "China's position on the Korean Peninsula issue is clear, resolute and consistent. China stands for denuclearization, peace and stability of the Peninsula and settlement of the issue through dialogue and negotiation." This addition suggests in an implicit way that any other standpoint on the North Korea nuclear issue than this "clear, resolute and consistent" standpoint that China "stands for denuclearization, peace and stability of the Peninsula and settlement of the issue through dialogue and negotiation" should not be expected from China. By making in this way clear that expressing any standpoint on the DPRK's capability of launching nuclear missiles is not desirable, the spokesperson declares any other standpoint on the North Korea nuclear issue than this "clear, resolute and consistent" standpoint unallowed.

In this case the spokesperson appears not to mention any rationale to warrant his/her unallowed declaration. However, taking into consideration the fact that China had never been willing to express a clear-cut standpoint on the North Korea nuclear issue, it can be inferred that when making this unallowed declaration, the spokesperson actually may be regarded to deem this "unwillingness to express a clear-cut standpoint on the North Korea nuclear issue" a rationale and presupposes that the international general public is already familiar with it.

Though the Desirability Rationale is in most cases used by the spokespersons to back up the unallowed declaration of a standpoint, there are also a few cases in the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences in which this kind of rationale is adopted by the spokesperson for the purpose of declaring a standpoint indisputable. In these cases, the Desirability Rationale mainly stems from case-specific or issue-specific values or ideologies. Example 6.8 is a characteristic case of this type.

*Example 6.8*

*Q: Yesterday, the Chinese side unveiled a memorial for Ahn Jung-geun in Harbin. The Japanese side has lodged protest with China. What is China's comment?*

*A: Ahn Jung-geun is a famous righteous man who fought against Japan's aggression. He is also respected by the Chinese people. **It is completely reasonable and justified for China to set up memorials in accordance with relevant domestic regulations.** We do not accept the so-called "protest" from Japan. The recent perverse actions of the Japanese leader on the historical issue have given rise to high vigilance and strong opposition of Japan's Asian neighbors and the international community. We require the Japanese side to face up to and reflect on history, adopt a correct attitude, correct mistakes and take concrete actions to win the trust of its Asian neighbors and the international community. (January 20, 2014)*

In this example the journalist introduces the protest launched by the Japanese government against China's unveiling of a memorial in Harbin for Ahn Jung-geun, who killed in 1909 the former Prime Minister of Japan, Itō Hirobumi, to cry out against Japan's secret intention to merge Korea.<sup>18</sup> In response to the Japanese protest mentioned by the journalist, the spokesperson declares the standpoint indisputable that "it is completely reasonable and justified for China to set up memorials in accordance with relevant domestic regulations". The rationale the spokesperson provides in a sub-discussion for justifying this indisputable declaration is "Ahn Jung-geun is a famous righteous man who fought against Japan's aggression. He is also respected by the Chinese people".

<sup>18</sup> After the signing of the Eulsa Treaty, according to which Korea was on the verge of being annexed by Japan, on October 26, 1909, Ahn Jung-geun assassinated Itō Hirobumi, then Prime Minister of Japan, who was also the former Resident-General of Korea. This assassination took the international society by surprise. Since then Ahn Jung-geun has been acknowledged as a righteous man by China as well as Korea (later also by both North Korea and South Korea), but the Japanese government considers him a terrorist. In June 2013, the former South Korean President Park Geun-Hye, while meeting with the Chinese President Xi Jinping during a visit to China, raised the idea of erecting a monument for An. Later, on 19 January 2014, a memorial hall honoring An Jung-Geun was opened in Harbin, where An murdered Itō Hirobumi. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An\\_Jung-geun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Jung-geun).

This rationale, which is no secret to any of the parties involved in the Ahn Jung-geun issue (Japan, South Korea, North Korea and China), reflects the Chinese people's desire to show due respect and appreciation to anyone or any organization that fought against the Japanese aggression from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So it is in fact a Desirability Rationale.

### 6.3.3 Feasibility Rationale

The unallowed or indisputable declaration of a standpoint in the spokespersons' replies can also be justified by the Feasibility Rationale. As explained at the beginning of this section, in using this subtype spokespersons declare a standpoint unallowed because "it is not feasible to discuss it", or they declare a standpoint indisputable because "only having this standpoint is feasible". In this subsection, we will first describe how the Feasibility Rationale is used in declaring a standpoint at issue unallowed and then discuss how it is used in declaring a standpoint at issue indisputable.

Empirical observations of the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences show that, when the spokespersons declare a standpoint unallowed and justify this unallowed declaration by the Feasibility Rationale, the "feasibility" issue is always connected with the non-fulfillment of certain preconditions required for seriously discussing a standpoint at issue. This applies in particular to standpoints which are claimed to be "unknown" or "unclear" by the spokespersons. See, for instance, Example 6.9.

*Example 6.9*

*Q: Can you comment on the recent Iranian media reports that [the] China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is taking over Total's stake in [the] South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran? Does this mean that [the] CNPC has secured an exemption from the US sanctions?*

*A: **I am not aware of the specific situation you mentioned.** What I can tell*

*you is that China and Iran maintain normal cooperation in various areas and that the cooperation is open, transparent, legitimate and legal.*

*(November 27, 2018)*

In Example 6.9, the journalist mentions a report by the Iranian media that the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is taking over Total's stake<sup>19</sup> in the South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran. At the time when this press conference was held, this was a sensitive and controversial topic because the US had threatened to sanction all corporations that continued to do any business with Iran, including this large gas project. Against this background China had refused to express any standpoint about this take-over issue. Assuming that the questioning journalist surely has this background information (particularly concerning the US' resolute attitude of sanctioning any corporation that would do business with Iran), we can take it that the journalist's question "Does this mean that [the] CNPC has secured an exemption from the US sanctions?" will not only be intended to get to know China's current attitude towards this issue, but also to remind China of the bad consequences this take-over may incur, i.e., to be sanctioned by the US.

By claiming not being "aware of the specific situation" mentioned by the journalist, the spokesperson actually declares in the reply that from him/her no standpoint can be expected on the CNPC's take-over from Total. It appears that the spokesperson does not mention any rationale to warrant this unallowed declaration. Yet, as we see it, when the spokesperson claims that "I am not aware of the specific case you mentioned", he/she not only declares in a clear way that no standpoint on this issue should be expected from China, but also provides in an indirect way the rationale for this unallowed declaration: we are not able to provide any comment on a specific case that we are unaware of.

<sup>19</sup> Under pressure from the United States, Total, which is France's largest energy company, announced in August 2018 that they were pulling out of the South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran. This withdrawal was sparked by a reinstatement of US sanctions which cover foreign firms doing business with Iran. For more information about this incident, see <https://www.businessinsider.nl/total-pulls-out-of-48-billion-iranian-oil-project-under-us-pressure-2018-8?international=true&r=US>.

This variant of the Feasibility Rationale is motivated by a reason that the spokesperson assumes to be understood and acknowledged by the audience: if the spokesperson is not aware of the specific situation of this take-over, the spokesperson lacks the background information that makes it feasible for him/her to express any standpoint on this issue. After this Feasibility Rationale for declaring the standpoint unallowed is thus implicitly provided in the preliminary discussion, the main discussion of the issue raised by the journalist concerning the CNPC's take-over of Total's stake in the South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran does not really come off the ground.

It is interesting to note that in Example 6.9 the spokesperson leaves in the latter part of his/her reply ample room for explaining or justifying possible future actions and changes in attitudes or policies. Immediately after the unallowed declaration, the spokesperson adds: "what I can tell you is that China and Iran maintain normal cooperation in various areas and that the cooperation is open, transparent, legitimate and legal". It can be imagined that this addition could well be used to justify any type of cooperation between China and Iran, including the CNPC's takeover of Total's stake in the South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran.

In a few cases the spokespersons declare that it is not feasible to discuss certain issues or standpoints and support their use of the Feasibility Rationale by observing that these issues or standpoints have not been officially confirmed, so that it would be premature to have a serious discussion on these issues or standpoints. See, for instance, Example 6.10.

#### *Example 6.10*

*Q: Sources said that the Trump administration is considering an executive order that would probably come in January 2019 to declare a national security emergency that bars US companies from using telecommunications equipment made by Huawei and ZTE. Does China have any response to it?*

**A: What you mentioned has not been confirmed. I do not want to officially comment on [the] news that has not been confirmed [...].**

*(December 27, 2018)*

The topic the journalist intends to discuss with the spokesperson in Example 6.10 concerns the Trump administration's declaration of barring US companies from using telecommunications equipment made by Huawei and ZTE, two giant Chinese corporations specializing in communication technology. In a discussion preliminary to the main discussion of this issue the spokesperson announces that the things mentioned by the questioning journalist have not been confirmed and then states: "I do not want to officially comment on [the] news that has not been confirmed". By means of this statement the spokesperson not only declares in a clear way that no standpoint on this issue should be expected from China, but also provides in an indirect way a rationale for this unallowed declaration: China is not able to provide any official comment on news that has not been confirmed. The reason that motivates the use of this variant of the Feasibility Rationale, which the spokesperson supposes to be understood and acknowledged by the audience, is: if a piece of news has not been authenticated and its trustworthiness has not been confirmed, you cannot expect an official spokesperson of MoFA, to make any comments on it.

In the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences the Feasibility Rationale is in a few cases also adopted by the spokespersons for the purpose of declaring a standpoint indisputable. In the corpus we collected the Feasibility Rationale used for declaring a standpoint indisputable always has roots in some of the ideological doctrines (or principles) the Chinese government adheres to in dealing with international affairs, particularly in the doctrine "alleviation rather than tension, dialogue rather than confrontation, and peace rather than warfare".<sup>20</sup> This doctrine for dealing with international affairs, especially with international conflicts, was first put forward in 2013 by the former Chinese President Hu Jintao, when he exchanged by phone views on the Korean Peninsula issue and the China-US conflicts with the former American President Obama.

<sup>20</sup>For background information concerning this doctrine (or principle), see <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1024/13410653.html>.

Later, spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences have referred to this doctrine (or principle) as the most feasible way of tackling international disputes. See, for instance, Example 6.11.

*Example 6.11*

*Q: It is reported that the US and the EU are discussing sanctions against Russia.*

*Does China support that?*

*A: It is China's long-standing position to oppose the use of threat or sanctions at every turn in international relations. **Under the current circumstances, we hope relevant parties will refrain from taking actions that will further escalate tension, work together to seek a political resolution to the crisis.** This is the fundamental way out.*

*(March 7, 2014)*

The interaction between the journalist and the spokesperson in Example 6.11 concerns the Russo-Ukrainian war that started in 2014.<sup>21</sup> After implying that the US and the EU may decide to sanction Russia, the journalist asks the spokesperson to make clear what China's standpoint is on this matter, specifically whether China agrees or disagrees with the move that will possibly be made by the US and the EU. By stating that "It is China's long-standing position to oppose the use of threat or sanctions at every turn in international relations", the spokesperson makes clear that the Chinese standpoint is that China opposes any form of sanctions against Russia and declares this standpoint indisputable in the confrontation stage of this critical discussion. To justify this indisputable declaration, the spokesperson initiates a sub-discussion in the confrontation stage of the main critical discussion. In this sub-discussion the spokesperson warrants his/her indisputable declaration of the

<sup>21</sup> In February 2014, Russia occupied Crimea, where 70% of the residents are ethnically Russian. After the Euromaidan protests and the fall of the Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich the Russians took control of the infrastructure and strategic positions within the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Russia then annexed Crimea after a referendum in which, according to the Russian report of the official results, a majority of the Crimeans voted for joining the Russian Federation. For more information about the Russo-Ukrainian war, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_military\\_intervention\\_in\\_Ukraine\\_\(2014–present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_military_intervention_in_Ukraine_(2014–present)).

standpoint that China opposes any form of sanctions against Russia with the rationale that it is “the fundamental way out” that “relevant parties will refrain from taking actions that will further escalate tension, [and that they will] work together to seek a political resolution to the crisis”. In other words, according to the spokesperson, it is from the Chinese ideological perspective not feasible to sanction Russia, because this will only “further escalate tension”. This Feasibility Rationale has roots in the doctrine of “alleviation rather than tension, dialogue rather than confrontation, and peace rather than warfare” that China has always claimed to be the most feasible way of tackling international disputes.

#### **6.4 Confrontational maneuvering by declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable in making a convincing case**

In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, we have explained that when maneuvering strategically with dissociations and personal attacks in their argumentative replies to the journalists’ questions at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences the spokespersons are simultaneously conducting two critical discussions: in one critical discussion they address the secondary audience, i.e., the journalists and their immediate opponents invoked in the journalists’ questions; the other critical discussion is directed at the primary audience, the international general public that the spokesperson wants to convince. In the projected imaginary critical discussion with the secondary audience consisting of China’s opponents the spokespersons use dissociations and personal attacks to negate these people’s doubts or criticisms concerning China’s standpoints. At the same time, they use these dissociations and personal attacks as strategic moves in the critical discussion with the international general public to undermine in the perception of their primary audience their opponents’ authority in doubting or criticizing China’s standpoints. The spokespersons’ ultimate purpose in conducting the critical discussion with the immediate opponents is only to create an adequate starting point for convincing the international general public of the unreasonableness of the criticisms or doubts cast on China by these opponents.

In a similar way as in their use of dissociation and personal attack, the spokespersons conduct at the same time two parallel critical discussions when they declare a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, one with their immediate opponents and the other with the international general public. However, there seems to be a difference: in declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable the spokespersons do not intend to convince the international general public by undermining their immediate opponents’ authority or credibility in doubting or criticizing China’s standpoints. Instead, in the critical discussion with their immediate opponents as well as in the critical discussion with the international general public the spokesperson is in this case out to declare a certain standpoint unallowed or indisputable in the confrontation stage, so that the critical discussion will not get off the ground.

A crucial difference between the two critical discussions lies in the amount of effort the spokesperson invests in convincing the audience that the standpoint at issue is unallowed or indisputable. However sincere the spokesperson may seem to be, in the critical discussion with the immediate opponent he/she does probably not make a real effort to convince the immediate opponent of the fact that the standpoint is unallowed or indisputable. Spokespersons may not only not be expected to make such an effort because the immediate opponent is not their primary audience, but also, and more importantly, because, due to the conflicting interests involved, it is highly unlikely that the immediate opponent can be convinced. By contrast, in the critical discussion with the international general public the spokespersons will go all out to justify the unallowed or indisputable declaration of the standpoint at issue, even though in some cases such a declaration might be fallacious. The question that is to be answered in this section is: in what way does the spokesperson try to convince their primary audience of the fact that the standpoint at issue is unallowed or indisputable? From the perspective of strategic maneuvering this question can be formulated more precisely as: how does the spokesperson maneuver strategically in trying to convince the international general public by making use of one of the subtypes of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable?

As has been shown in our analysis of strategic maneuvering by dissociation (see Chapter 4) and personal attack (see Chapter 5), in answering this question it is advisable to focus on how in the spokespersons' responses the selection from the topical potential and the choice of presentational devices are strategically designed in such a way that the international general public's demand can be optimally adapted to. In discussing the way in which the spokespersons give substance to each of these three aspects of strategic maneuvering, the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences discussed in Section 3.3 need to be considered, the primary as well as the secondary ones, because these preconditions constitute vital constraints on the choices the spokespersons can make in designing their strategic maneuvering.

To illustrate how the spokespersons make an effort to convince the international general public by means of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, we will give an exemplary analysis of Example 6.3. This example is a case in point since the strategic design adopted by the spokesperson is characteristic of the strategic maneuvering by means of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable that the spokespersons carry out in our corpus.

As we have shown in the analysis of Example 6.3 in the previous section the topic the questioning journalist intends the spokesperson to discuss is the US State Department's negative attitude towards the decision of the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama to break off diplomatic relationships with Taiwan and to establish a diplomatic relationship with the People's Republic of China. In the spokesperson's critical discussion with the immediate opponent (the US State Department) and in his/her critical discussion with the primary audience (the international general public) he/she declares any stand taken by another country regarding the diplomatic move made by the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama unallowed. To justify this declaring a standpoint unallowed, the spokesperson provides a Necessity Rationale that is motivated by two reasons: (1) the One-China principle is a consensus shared by the international community, and (2) a sovereign country

has the sovereign right to choose with whom it wishes to develop diplomatic ties. Both of these reasons have their roots in the First Principle of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence": "mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty".

The questions to be answered now are: (a) why does the spokesperson declare this particular standpoint unallowed rather than other standpoints regarding this topic? (b) why does the spokesperson select these two reasons to motivate the rationale for declaring this standpoint unallowed to the audience instead of other possible reasons? (c) how can the way in which the spokesperson declares the standpoint unallowed contribute to the convincingness of his/her case for the primary audience? Question (a) and question (b) concern the choice that is made in selecting in agreement with audience demand from the topical potential consisting of all the standpoints on this topic that could be declared unallowed. Question (c) concerns the presentational devices that the spokesperson uses in adapting to the audience in his/her strategic maneuvering when declaring the standpoint unallowed. We shall deal with these questions one by one.

In response to the seemingly open-ended question "what is your response to this move?" raised by the journalist, the spokesperson could in Example 6.3, instead of declaring a standpoint on this issue unallowed, have chosen for a more or less elaborate way of motivating why it is reasonable for the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama to break off diplomatic ties with Taiwan and establish diplomatic ties with China. In this way, the spokesperson would have started a real and fully-fledged critical discussion with the US State Department and also with the international general public, which was probably what the questioning journalist had wished to happen. However, when the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama had made their decisions to establish diplomatic ties with China and break off diplomatic ties with Taiwan, all kinds of suspicions and criticisms emerged in the international media. People wondered in particular why these three countries decided all of a sudden to call off their diplomatic ties with Taiwan after decades of cooperation and what kind of "secret deal" between China and these coun-

tries could have led to such a dramatic change. Taking this background information into consideration, it can be imagined that in a real and fully-fledged critical discussion about the three countries' diplomatic move the international general public would expect the spokesperson to address all purportedly relevant criticisms seriously and to some of them China could possibly not respond by giving a satisfactory explanation (in particular not to the issue of the alleged secret deal between China and these countries that may have led to the dramatic change in attitude). Declaring standpoints or criticisms regarding this diplomatic move unallowed would be less complicated since the spokesperson can be expected to provide an acceptable rationale for this unallowed declaration that will be understood and accepted by the international general public. That is to say, provided that it is properly explained, declaring the standpoint unallowed would have a better chance to be convincing to the international general public.

As to the unallowed declaration, there are generally three major options the spokesperson could choose from when it comes to deciding what standpoint is to be declared unallowed. The first option is declaring that from him/her *no standpoint on this topic* should be expected; the second option is declaring that *any standpoint from the US State Department* on the diplomatic move of the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama is unallowed; and the third option is declaring, as the spokesperson actually does, *any other country's standpoint* regarding the diplomatic move made by the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama unallowed.

At first sight, the first option appears to be the easiest choice for the spokesperson. In cases like the ones in Example 6.1, Example 6.6 and Example 6.7 the spokespersons do indeed declare that no standpoints could be expected from them on the topic suggested by the journalist. In these cases, however, the spokesperson could more easily justify their unallowed declaration by referring to absolute institutional procedural constraints (in particular that only "diplomatic issues" can be addressed) or absolute material constraints (in particular that "other countries' internal affairs" cannot be addressed). It goes without saying that the spokespersons can only make use of the first

option in the way they do in Example 6.1, Example 6.6 and Example 6.7 if the institutional preconditions allow them or even encourage them to do so. Otherwise, the corpus also shows, this option can hardly be the spokespersons' first choice, because it would be detrimental to their "reasonable" image that is supposed to impress the international general public if they refused to put forward any standpoint. Besides, the third primary institutional precondition of China's MoFA's regular press conferences, "The spokesperson has the responsibility to tell the truth to the public and should therefore be *honest and sincere*" (see Section 3.3), also discourages the spokespersons to refuse putting forward any standpoint on a topic that is introduced by the journalist.

Since the issue raised by the journalist in Example 6.3, i.e., the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama broke off their diplomatic relationship with Taiwan and established a diplomatic relationship with the People's Republic of China, belongs indisputably to the category of "diplomatic issues" and does not concern other countries' "internal affairs", there is no clear institutional precondition the spokesperson could rely on in declaring that no standpoint on this topic should be expected from him/her. If, as we just discussed, the first option can hardly be effective in adapting to audience demand and is therefore not chosen by the spokesperson, we still need to explain why the spokesperson selected the third option (declaring *only the standpoint from the US State Department* unallowed) instead of the second one (declaring *any standpoint from any other country* unallowed).

The most likely explanation is that the second option would be more offensive to the US (State Department) than necessary and would therefore be detrimental to the "reasonable" and "self-restrained" behavior the international general public in principle expects from a diplomatic spokesperson. This "self-restrained" behavior is also required by the 5<sup>th</sup> institutional precondition of China's MoFA's regular press conferences, which stipulates that "The spokesperson should keep his/her emotions in control; he or she should not give a personal or emotional response" (see Section 3.3). What is more, the journalist implies in the question only that the US State Department holds a negative attitude on this diplomatic move made by the Dominican Republic,

El Salvador and Panama and does not mention explicitly any criticism from the US State Department on these countries' diplomatic move. Any statement from the spokesperson in accordance with the second option that is specifically targeted at the US State Department could in this case be considered "emotional" and "irresponsible" by the international general public and would go against the requirement formulated in the 5<sup>th</sup> institutional precondition of China's MoFA's regular press conferences (see Section 3.3). Last but not least, it can be imagined that the US was at that time not the only country or region that criticized the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama's decision to break off diplomatic ties with Taiwan and establish diplomatic ties with China. Against this background, an unallowed declaration that is broadened such as when the third option is chosen may, if adequately justified, also be instrumental in preventing the international general public from becoming convinced by any criticism on the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama's diplomatic move from any other country or region.

When it comes to answering question (b) regarding the two reasons the spokesperson used to motivate the rationale for his/her unallowed declaration, it should be considered how each of these two reasons could adapt to the audience demand of the international general public. The first reason offered by the spokesperson is the "One-China principle". As discussed above, according to this principle there is only one sovereign state under the name the People's Republic of China, and Taiwan is an inseparable part of that state. Accepting this principle is one of the prerequisites for establishing diplomatic ties with China and, as China announced, up to March 2019, 178 countries out of the 198 sovereign countries in the world had officially agreed with it.<sup>22</sup> In this sense this principle has become an internationally acknowledged view with which the international general public can hardly disagree. More important, as may also be recognized by the international general public, the US was, in spite of their criticisms of the Dominican Republic's, El Salvador's and Panama's decision to break off diplomatic ties with Taiwan and to establish diplomatic ties with China, one of the first countries in the world that ac-

<sup>22</sup> See [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao\\_674904/2193\\_674977/](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/2193_674977/).

knowledge this "One-China principle" and never officially challenged it. By mentioning this "One-China principle" as one of the reasons motivating the rationale for the unallowed declaration, the spokesperson actually reminds the international general public of the inconsistency between what the US claims to accept and how they actually behave.

In what sense could the second reason, "A sovereign country can choose with whom it wishes to develop diplomatic ties, because it has the sovereign right to do so", adapt to the demand of the international general public? A simple answer to this question is: the international community will indeed acknowledge that it is an inalienable right of any sovereign country to establish or break off diplomatic ties with other countries. By invoking this commonly accepted view as a reason for declaring the standpoint at issue unallowed, a quite different perspective is actually offered to the international audience for looking at the diplomatic move that is discussed: while criticisms from other countries or regions, in particular from the US and Taiwan, mainly focus on whether it is "inappropriate" or even "perfidious" for the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama to break off diplomatic ties with Taiwan and to establish diplomatic ties with China, advancing this reason of every country's freedom to determine its own diplomatic links will cause the international general public to think in a different way about whether the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama do indeed have the "right" to decide which country or region they wish to establish diplomatic ties with. Compared with the perspective of "inappropriateness" or "perfidiousness" that are dominant in the criticisms, the perspective of "sovereign rights" taken by the spokesperson will seem to be more fundamental and entitled to be decisive.

As for question (c) regarding how the way in which the spokesperson declares the standpoint unallowed can contribute to the convincingness of his/her case for the primary audience, attention needs to be paid first to the identity of a neutral "bystander" that the spokesperson attempts to adopt in front of the international general public. Judging from the question raised by the journalist, the US State Department concentrates its fury only on the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama, while China, the other party involved

in this controversial diplomatic move, is not mentioned at all. It seems as if China has been excluded from this dispute by the US State Department. Throughout the whole process of dealing with this dispute, never does the US officially criticize China for “agreeing” to the establishment of diplomatic ties with the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama. Against this background, the spokesperson was actually faced with a dilemma: on the one hand, he/she needs to justify the diplomatic move made by the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama since it concerns China’s “core interest”<sup>23</sup>; on the other hand, the spokesperson would not like to be considered over-reacting by the international general public. Probably because of this dilemma, in declaring the standpoint at issue unallowed, the spokesperson uses such indefinite noun phrases as “a sovereign country”, “it” and “other countries”, instead of mentioning any particular country involved in the dispute by name. By doing so, he/she attempts to adopt the identity of a bystander, thus maintaining a subtle distance from this dispute. In this way, the spokesperson can not only express in a quasi-neutral way the negative attitude that China holds towards the US State Department’s criticism of the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama’s diplomatic move, but also make a more “objective” and “self-restrained” impression on the international general public.

In addition, there is still another interesting presentational design worth noticing in the spokesperson’s unallowed declaration that “other countries are in no position to make irresponsible and indiscreet remarks”. The expression “irresponsible and indiscreet remarks” in this unallowed declaration is ambiguous, because it is unclear what kind of remarks (standpoints) stated by whom are deemed “irresponsible and indiscreet”. Could it mean that only the standpoints stated by other countries that are not in favor of the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama’s decision are “irresponsible and indiscreet”? Or does it mean that all standpoints stated by other countries, even those in favor of the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama’s decision, are “irresponsible and indiscreet”?

<sup>23</sup> China has always claimed that the “One-China Principle” relates to China’s core interest.

Or perhaps that all standpoints on this issue other than China’s are “irresponsible and indiscreet”? As we see it, viewed in the context of this dispute the spokesperson indeed intends to declare all standpoints on this matter stated by other countries than the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama unallowed, because they are all “irresponsible and indiscreet”. Meanwhile, however, the use of the deliberately ambiguous expression “irresponsible and indiscreet” leaves the spokesperson ample room to explain why China’s standpoint on this issue is allowed while all standpoints from other countries are declared unallowed by the spokesperson – because the spokesperson assumes that in this case only China’s standpoint is “responsible” and “discreet”.

The explanation of the strategic maneuvering in declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable that takes place in Example 6.3 is exemplary, because it is typical of what happens in the data we collected for the current research. Based on the explanation we have provided, we can now answer the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> question raised at the beginning of this section regarding the ways in which the spokespersons maneuver strategically in declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable and explain the instrumentality of such a mode of confrontational maneuvering. In declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable the spokesperson generally goes all out in concentrating on convincing the international general public, rather than the immediate opponents, of the “acceptability” of this declaration. As our analysis shows, to this end the spokesperson makes an effort to construct the unallowed or indisputable declaration in such a way that it is optimally adapted to the international general public’s demand. In doing so, he/she makes the appropriate strategic choices from the available topical potential and the available presentational devices. In giving shape to this strategic maneuvering, the institutional preconditions pertaining to China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences play an important role, since they impose vital constraints on the choice from the topical potential and selection of presentational devices available to the spokesperson.

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to pragma-dialectical theorizing “declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable”. We have indicated that the consequences of both declaring a standpoint unallowed and declaring a standpoint indisputable are ultimately the same: the standpoint at issue is excluded from discussion. Based on an analysis of our corpus, we have distinguished three subtypes and some variants of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable that are prototypically adopted by the spokespersons in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage in the argumentative exchanges at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences. According to the various rationales the spokespersons presuppose to be understood as well as acceptable to (the questioning journalists and) the international general public, we have differentiated three subtypes of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable: standpoints that are unallowed or indisputable based on the “Necessity Rationale”, standpoints that are unallowed or indisputable based on the “Desirability Rationale”, and standpoints that are unallowed or indisputable based on the “Feasibility Rationale”.

By analyzing Example 6.3 as a case in point, we have in Section 6.4 elaborated on the strategic design of the spokesperson’s unallowed or indisputable declaration of a standpoint in trying to make a convincing case to the primary audience. As explained in that section, the strategic maneuvering by means of an unallowed or indisputable declaration of the standpoint at issue carried out by the spokesperson in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of the argumentative exchange is in fact directed both at the secondary audience consisting of the immediate opponents and the primary audience consisting of the international general public. It is the international general public however that the spokesperson primarily intends to convince. To convince the international general public, the spokesperson makes in all three subtypes of the unallowed or indisputable declaration an effort to adapt to his/her primary audience’s demand by making strategic choices from the available topical potential and the available presentational devices. In doing

so, he/she tries to make sure that the institutional preconditions of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences have been observed.

Unless this argumentative move is made in a specific context in which it is legitimized by mutually accepted starting-points, declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable is a fallacy, because by carrying out this argumentative move the arguer attempts to prevent the other party from casting doubt on the standpoint at issue or putting forward a counter-standpoint. This way of proceeding involves a violation of the Freedom Rule, one of the Ten Commandments of Pragma-Dialectics for conducting reasonable argumentative discourse (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, p. 208; 2004, p. 190). However, as discussed in Section 6.2, in real-life argumentative discourse declaring a standpoint at issue unallowed or indisputable can be acceptable when the institutional context in which the argumentative discourse about the standpoint concerned takes place allows for it.

When it comes to the argumentative exchanges at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences, the soundness of an unallowed or indisputable declaration by the spokesperson is in the first place dependent on the institutional preconditions that apply to this communicative activity type. The moment they have become engaged in the critical discussion conducted in the argumentative discourse taking place at such a press conference, the questioning journalist, the spokesperson’s immediate opponents and the international general public are silently considered to have agreed to these institutional preconditions. When any of these institutional preconditions (e.g. “only diplomatic issues can be addressed at this press conference”) encourages or even entitles the spokesperson to declare a standpoint at issue unallowed or indisputable, such a declaration is supposed to be accepted by other participants.

Another vital factor that may be relevant to the soundness and also to the effectiveness of an unallowed or indisputable declaration of a standpoint by the spokesperson is the acceptability to the audience of the rationale provided by the spokesperson to justify such a declaration. In theorizing about the concept of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable in Section 6.2, we have pointed out that the arguer when providing a rationale for an

*unallowed* declaration is actually engaged in conducting a “preliminary discussion” and the reasons constituting the rationale are actually put forward in the argumentation stage of this preliminary discussion. When providing the rationale for declaring a standpoint *indisputable*, the arguer is actually conducting a sub-discussion within the confrontation stage of the critical discussion in which the indisputable declaration of the standpoint takes place and the reasons motivating the rationale are part of the argumentation stage of this sub-discussion. As shown in Section 6.4, such a rationale can be rooted in the institutional preconditions of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences; it can also be based on ideological presuppositions that are more or less independent of the institutional preconditions. It goes without saying that the spokesperson takes it for granted that any rationale that he/she uses to back up an unallowed or indisputable declaration will be acceptable to his/her audience. If the audience does indeed accept the rationale, the unallowed or indisputable declaration will not only be sound and probably also effective. Otherwise, it will be fallacious and most likely also ineffective.

# Chapter 7

## OTHER MODES OF CONFRONTATIONAL MANEUVERING AND COMBINED MODES

## 7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 to Chapter 6 we have discussed three prominent and also prototypical modes of confrontational maneuvering that the spokespersons adopt at China's MoFA's regular press conferences in disagreeing to resolve the difference of opinion at issue. These three modes of strategic maneuvering are dissociation (Chapter 4), personal attack (Chapter 5) and declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable (Chapter 6). By way of dissociation, the spokesperson tries to redefine the difference of opinion in favor of his/her own interests; by way of personal attack and by way of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, the spokesperson attempts in different ways to deny the need to make any attempt to resolve the difference of opinion at issue.

It can be observed from the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences that we collected for this research that, next to these three modes of strategic maneuvering, there are in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage in the argumentative exchanges at these press conferences still other prototypical modes of strategic maneuvering adopted by the spokespersons, but their use is less prominent in the sense that they occur only sporadically. These modes of confrontational maneuvering are changing the topic of discussion and putting pressure on the other party. Changing the topic of discussion boils down to making argumentative moves that attempt to change the difference of opinion; putting pressure on the other party involves making argumentative moves that attempt to exempt the difference of opinion from critical discussion. In addition, it can also be observed from the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies that in trying to make a convincing case they combine in some cases the use of several of these modes of strategic maneuvering.

To provide a more complete picture of how the spokespersons maneuver strategically in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of the argumentative exchanges at China's MoFA's regular press conferences, this chapter will focus on confrontational maneuvering by changing the topic of

discussion and on confrontational maneuvering by putting pressure on the other party, thus complementing the discussion of the modes of confrontational maneuvering in the spokespersons' argumentative replies addressed in Chapter 4, 5 and 6. Besides, we will also pay attention to how the spokespersons maneuver strategically in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage by combining several modes of confrontational maneuvering.

In Section 7.2, we will first conceptualize the notion of "changing the topic of discussion" from a pragma-dialectical perspective. Then we will describe how the spokespersons sometimes change the topic the questioning journalists intend to be discussed at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. In this section we will also explain how the spokespersons try to change the topic of discussion in such a strategic way that it is instrumental in making a convincing case for their primary audience. In Section 7.3 we will describe, starting from a pragma-dialectical conceptualization of "putting pressure on the other party", how the spokespersons sometimes utilize this argumentative move in their replies to the journalist's question. The instrumentality of this mode of confrontational maneuvering in making a convincing case will also be discussed in this section. Section 7.4 will be devoted to a discussion of how the spokespersons maneuver strategically in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage by combining various modes of confrontational maneuvering that we have discussed. In this section we will first describe how such a strategic combination is realized empirically and then analyze how the spokespersons intend in this way to contribute to the convincingness of their replies to the primary audience. Section 7.5 concludes with a description of the research results.

## 7.2 Changing the topic of discussion

The definition given to the term *topic of discussion* varies in different research fields. In the field of Conversation Analysis, in which an abundant amount of research has been carried out on topic and topic shift, "topic" is loosely defined as what the conversation is about (Brown & Yule 1983). According to

Goldberg (1983), by organizing information globally, a topic keeps the conversation together. To determine whether the speakers in a conversation stay on the topic, Tracy (1984) introduces from the perspective of Conversation Analysis two rules of thumb. The first rule requires that there is a *local connection* between the speakers' utterances. Any new utterance by a speaker is supposed to be part of a chain with the last or the two previous utterances of the speaker. The second rule requires that there is a *global connection* between the speakers' utterances. Any contribution by a speaker should respond to the thrust of what has been said before. When either of these two rules is violated, the discussion has been terminated or a shift of the topic of discussion has taken place. Although, as Wanphet (2016, p. 97) rightly states, these observations concerning topic shifts in conversations by Tracy are useful, they do not provide a practical guideline for researchers on "how to clearly locate the boundaries of topics or, therefore, topic shift and termination in talk".

In the field of Argumentation Theory topic is usually defined in a different way than in Conversation Analysis. Goodwin (2002, p. 86), for one, points out that a topic is "a more or less determined object of contention that is, under the circumstances, worth arguing about". It seems that by this definition the term *topic* relates to the "bone of contention" in the difference of opinion that the parties in a critical discussion are out to resolve. In his expose of the extended theory of Pragma-Dialectics, van Eemeren (2010, pp. 96-101) understands the notion of "topic" more broadly. In the way in which he uses the term *topic* it has to do with the "viewpoint, angle or perspective from which the arguer selects the argumentative move or moves he makes in strategic maneuvering" (p. 100). In his view, arguers make topical choices in the empirical counterparts of all four stages of a critical discussion that can be distinguished in a motivated reply, i.e., the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation stage and the concluding stage. According to van Eemeren, it is only in the confrontation stage that "topic" concerns primarily the *issue of discussion* (the "virtual standpoint"); in the other three stages, "topic" concerns in the first place what kind of starting points (opening stage), arguments and criticisms (argumentation stage) or conclusions (concluding stage) are selected by the arguers.

In her doctoral dissertation, *Getting an issue on the table*, Tonnard (2011, p. 33) differentiates the term *topic* from *subject of discussion*, and distinguishes *topical shifts* from *shifts of subject*, terms which are frequently used interchangeably in Conversation Analysis (or "Speech Analysis"). As she sees it, "subject" is broader and more general, and "topic" is more limited and more specific. In an argumentative discussion the topic may have been changed while the same subject is still on. In order to show the subtle difference between these two concepts, Tonnard provides an example of a remark by Thieme, leader of the Dutch Party for the Animals. Thieme's remark follows after a question-answer exchange between the leaders of other Dutch political parties on how to control national debt in times of economic recession. Her remark is included in Example 7.1.

#### Example 7.1

Thieme: "Everything is about money, money, and again, money [...]. I would like to turn things around: what do the Netherlands represent in terms of sustainability, biodiversity, the distribution of food and welfare for the world?"  
(*Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009*, 2, 2-79. Cited from Tonnard (2011, p. 30))

As explained by Tonnard (2011, p. 31), in this example Thieme actually changes the subject of discussion from "economic recession" to "environmental welfare"; when this happens the topic of discussion has also been changed. However, even if the subject "economic recession" would not really have been changed, the topic of this discussion would still be changed the moment Thieme had started to talk about "what causes this economic recession" rather than about "how to control the national debt in times of economic recession" that was initiated by her opponents. As a rule, a change of topic includes a slight change in the content of the subject of discussion, but not necessarily a real change of subject. In cases of topic shift, the subject of discussion can remain the same.

A change of topic leads as a matter of course always to a change in the difference of opinion at issue, but a change in the difference of opinion at issue

is not necessarily caused by a change of topic. The difference of opinion could still be changed even if the topic is left unchanged. As the results of the analysis of dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering in Chapter 4 show, the spokespersons change, for instance, in some cases the difference of opinion suggested by the questioning journalist by way of dissociation, while the topic is not really changed. Take as another example again the remark by Thieme discussed above. When Thieme changed the topic from “economic recession” to “environmental welfare”, the difference of opinion also changed from “how to control the national debt in times of economic recession” to “what do the Netherlands represent in terms of sustainability, biodiversity, the distribution of food and welfare for the world”. However, even if Thieme has not changed the topic (and it had remained “economic recession”), the difference of opinion would still be changed the moment Thieme started to define the term *economic recession* differently from the way in which it is defined by her opponents.

Starting from the pragma-dialectical understanding of “topic” (van Eemeren 2010, p. 100) and “change of topic” (Tonnard 2011, p. 31), in our current study the terms *topic* and *change of topic* in the confrontation stage of an argumentative exchange are used as follows:

*In the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of a critical discussion, topic refers to a specific issue arguers argue about when discussing a subject. A change of subject always includes a change of topic but a change of topic does not necessarily involve a change of subject. A change of topic always leads to a (minor or major) change of the difference of opinion of a critical discussion, while a change of difference of opinion may not necessarily be caused by a change of topic.*

In the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences it can be observed that when for some reason the specific topic of discussion is changed, in most cases the spokesperson adheres to the subject of discussion proposed by the questioning journalist.

Example 7.2 is a prototypical case of the spokesperson changing the topic of discussion while the subject remains the same.

#### Example 7.2

Q: A US Senator recently said that China could still step up pressure on the DPRK [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea] by using its influence over the country. What is China’s comment?

A: We have repeatedly pointed out that it is the shared responsibility of all relevant parties to safeguard peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia and push forward denuclearization of the Peninsula. **All parties concerned should truly shoulder their responsibilities.** As I said earlier, the international community is highly concerned over the current situation on the Peninsula and hopes for peace and stability on the Peninsula. We hope all parties concerned could meet the common aspiration of the international community and do more that is conducive to regional peace and stability, turn-around of the situation and improvement of relations between relevant parties, rather than the contrary.  
(April 10, 2013)

In Example 7.2 the question asked by the journalist concerns the DPRK’s nuclear missile experiment announced on February 12, 2013. As we already mentioned in the analysis of Example 6.7 in Section 6.3, this unexpected announcement was condemned by almost all other countries involved, and also by the United Nations. In the question the journalist quotes a US Senator’s judgment that “China could still step up pressure on the DPRK by using its influence over the country”. It can be inferred from the question that the subject of discussion suggested by the journalist is “the DPRK’s nuclear missile experiment”. Within this subject, the specific topic the journalist intends to be discussed is “China’s capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK”. By asking “What is China’s comment?” the journalist requests the spokesperson to resolve the difference of opinion on whether China is, as the US Senator asserts, still capable of stepping up pressure on the DPRK.

As we have explained in Section 6.3, the North Korea nuclear issue has bothered countries such as South Korea, China, America and Japan since the 1990s. Since then, China has always been requested by other relevant countries, particularly by the US, to take much more responsibility than other countries for preventing the DPRK from developing nuclear weapons. However, instead of accepting such a request, China has always insisted that the only way out consists in peaceful multilateral negotiations and not in any intensification of the existing situation. In addition, one of China's main policies has always been to avoid raising any suspicion in other countries that China is pulling the strings behind the DPRK. In view of this background, defining the difference of opinion as suggested by the journalist puts the spokesperson in a difficult dilemma.

In the reply to the question the spokesperson does not touch upon the difference of opinion concerning whether China agrees with the US Senator's judgment that China is still capable of stepping up pressure on the DPRK, as the journalist presupposes in asking the question. By stating that "all parties concerned should truly shoulder their responsibilities", the spokesperson re-defines the difference of opinion in the confrontation stage as pertaining to whether all the relevant parties should truly shoulder their responsibilities. In this way, the topic of discussion is eventually changed from "China's capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK" to "who are to take responsibilities in getting the DPRK back on track", while "the DPRK's nuclear missile experiment" is still maintained as the subject of discussion.

Despite the fact that, when changing the specific topic of discussion, the spokespersons virtually always prove to adhere to the subject of discussion proposed by the questioning journalist, in a very few cases included in our corpus a spokesperson does change the subject of discussion and in doing so also the specific topic that is discussed. Example 7.3 is a case in point.

#### Example 7.3

Q: U.S. Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said that it is easy to earn cheap applause by vilifying a former enemy, a statement showing America's un-

derstatement of the Japanese history of aggression. Do you have any comment on this?

A: I need to further check on the background and specifics of [the] relevant statement made by the US official. I have noticed that at the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UN and the end of the World Anti-Fascist War, the attitude taken by the Japanese leaders on the past history of militarist aggression and the message sent out have been much talked about by the international community and within Japan for quite a time. For example, Japanese former Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama said that Japan's colonial rule and aggression over China and the ROK [Republic of Korea] is undeniable.

Seven decades ago, the war of aggression launched by Japanese militarism plunged people from victimized countries of Asia including China into untold sufferings. Only by genuinely respecting the history and properly dealing with historical issues can Japan earn understanding and embrace the future. **We hope that Japanese leaders can heed the call for justice from the international community as well as [from] Japan, take a sensible attitude on relevant issues and send out a positive and right message [...].**

(March 2, 2015)

In Example 7.3 the journalist introduces Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman's criticism of China's and Korea's constant protests against Japan's "irresponsible attitude" towards its history of aggression and colonization of other Asian countries. When Wendy Sherman made this criticism, the whole world was celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UN and the end of the World Anti-Fascist War. Against this background it can be understood that all members of the international community, and in particular China and Korea, were shocked by this unexpected remark. It should be noticed that before the journalist raised the question, he/she could not help expressing his/her own standpoint concerning Wendy Sherman's statement: that this statement shows America's undervaluation of the Japanese history of aggression.

It is clear from the question that the journalist actually wants the spokes-

person to resolve two separate differences of opinion: the first one is about whether China agrees with Wendy Sherman's criticism and the second one is about whether China agrees with the journalist's standpoint on Wendy Sherman's criticism. In the first difference of opinion the topic of discussion is "China's attitude towards Wendy Sherman's criticism" and in the second difference of opinion the topic of discussion concerns "China's attitude towards the journalist's standpoint on Wendy Sherman's criticism". However, no matter which difference of opinion the spokesperson wants to see resolved, the subject of discussion is always "Wendy Sherman's criticism".

By declaring "I need to further check on the background and specifics of [the] relevant statement made by the US official", the spokesperson denies in the reply the feasibility of having a critical discussion on any of the two differences of opinion suggested by the journalist. From his /her statement "We hope that Japanese leaders can heed the call for justice from the international community as well as Japan, take a sensible attitude on relevant issues and send out a positive and right message" we can conclude that the spokesperson focuses the discussion on what attitude the Japanese leaders should take towards Japan's history of aggression and colonization of other Asian countries. In this way, the spokesperson in actual fact changes the subject of discussion, "Wendy Sherman's criticism", that was suggested by the questioning journalist - and as a consequence, the topic of discussion tackled by the spokesperson has automatically also been changed.

After describing how the spokespersons sometimes change the topic of discussion in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of their argumentative replies, we still need to explain how the argumentative moves involved can be instrumental in the spokesperson's convincing his/her primary audience. To this end, the three aspects of strategic maneuvering should be born in mind. From a pragma-dialectical perspective, changing the topic of discussion is a mode of confrontational maneuvering in which the spokesperson, in order to make a convincing case, implements a strategic design of making a selection from the topical potential, adapting to audience demand and making a choice of presentational devices. When changing the topic of

discussion, the specific strategic selection from the topical potential manifests itself in what kind of topic has been changed, what kind of new topic has been selected and whether the subject of discussion has been changed when the topic is changed. The adaptation to audience demand manifests itself in an effort to connect with the general beliefs or values of the primary audience, i.e., the international general public, rather than offending this audience. The selection of presentational devices is manifested in the use of expressions that make the topic change seem reasonable. In discussing the way in which a spokesperson gives substance to each of these three aspects of strategic maneuvering, the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences discussed in Chapter 3 should be considered, because these preconditions constitute vital constraints on the choices the spokesperson can make in giving shape to his/her strategic maneuvering.

To illustrate how spokespersons make an effort to convince the international general public by means of changing the topic, we will analyze how in the spokesperson's response in Example 7.2 the selection from the topical potential and the choice of presentational devices are strategically designed in such a way that they are optimally adapted to the demand of the international general public. Example 7.2 is chosen as our case in point because the strategic design adopted by the spokesperson in this example is characteristic of the strategic maneuvering by means of changing the topic carried out by the spokespersons in the corpus we collected.

As discussed earlier, the subject of discussion suggested by the journalist in Example 7.2 is "the DPRK's nuclear missile experiment" and the specific topic of discussion the journalist intends the spokesperson to discuss is "China's capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK". In what follows, we will first address why the spokesperson in his/her response accepts the subject of discussion proposed by the questioning journalist but changes the topic of discussion from "China's capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK" to "who are to take responsibilities in getting the DPRK back on track". Next, we will discuss how the spokesperson changes the topic to make his/her standpoint seem reasonable.

Generally speaking, unless the subject of discussion is too sensitive or not ready to be discussed, the spokesperson hardly ever changes the subject suggested by the questioning journalist in order to make a “reasonable” and “sincere” impression on the international general public, as is required by the 3<sup>rd</sup> institutional precondition of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences (see Section 3.3). The subject of “the DPRK’s nuclear missile experiment” in Example 7.2 is not really sensitive since this subject has in fact always been on the table in discussions among China, Korea, the US and Japan since the 1990s. All this time, China never hesitated to express its more or less “neutral” standpoint that “peaceful multilateral talks” are the only way out. More importantly, the press conference reported in Example 7.2 was held just after the DPRK announced its “successful” nuclear missile experiment and the international general public (in particular the public in South Korea and Japan) was still in panic and eager to know what measures the relevant countries would take to diminish this nuclear horror. Against this historical background, it can be imagined that the international general public should be very much concerned about China’s attitude regarding this subject. Therefore, it would be weird, and even raise suspicion, if the Chinese spokesperson refused to take on this subject.

For the spokesperson, accepting to discuss the subject does not necessarily mean that the specific topic suggested by the journalist needs to be discussed. As explained in the analysis of Example 6.7 in Section 6.3, since the 1990s China has always been cautious in stating its standpoint on the DPRK’s nuclear issue, because other countries, particularly the US and Japan, always maintained that China should take much more responsibility than other countries in preventing the DPRK from developing nuclear weapons, thus implying that China had been pulling the strings behind this nuclear issue. After the DPRK announced its nuclear experiment, China became even more cautious in stating its stance on this matter. Given this background, it can be understood that the spokesperson could hardly make a suitable comment on the specific topic of discussion suggested by the questioning journalist, “China’s capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK”, because he/

she can neither confirm China’s capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK nor negate China’s capability/willingness to do so. If he/she confirmed this capability/willingness, this would be equivalent to admitting that the accusation from the US and Japan of China pulling the strings behind this nuclear issue was correct; if he/she denied it, it would seem to the international general public that China has no sincere intention of dealing with the crisis that caused such an enormous international panic. If this topic is not a suitable choice for the spokesperson, then the question is: how does the new topic chosen by the spokesperson, i.e., “who are to take responsibilities in getting the DPRK back on track”, suit his/her own interests?

As we see it, the new topic offers in the first place a different perspective to the international general public: while the topic suggested by the journalist focuses on what China should/can do, the new topic chosen by the spokesperson should make the international general public think about who else should also shoulder the responsibilities. With this new topic, the spokesperson reminds the international general public that it is not only China, but also the US, Japan and South Korea that have been trying to negotiate with the DPRK on its development of nuclear weapons. In this way the spokesperson, as always, intends to shake off the accusation by the US and Japan of China pulling the strings behind this nuclear issue. In addition, since the difference of opinion on this new topic, i.e., “All parties concerned should truly shoulder their responsibilities”, as it has been redefined by the spokesperson, does not really spare China from taking certain responsibilities for this nuclear issue, this redefinition would also be helpful for the spokesperson to construct a “sincere” and “responsible” image of China in the eyes of the international general public. Last but not least, the redefined difference of opinion on the new topic is fully in line with China’s longstanding attitude towards the DPRK’s nuclear issue, viz. “peaceful multilateral talks” are the only way out. This “consistence” in standpoint is explicitly required by the 4<sup>th</sup> institutional precondition of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences: “the spokesperson should firmly stick to the stances taken by China’s government”.

As for the way in which the spokesperson makes use of presentational

devices in changing the topic, it is worthwhile to note how the spokesperson avoids bringing the original topic suggested by the questioning journalist to the foreground. Upon closer inspection, it can be observed that throughout the reply neither “the DPRK”, which is the central country in connection with this emergent issue, nor “the nuclear experiment”, which is the cause of the international panic, is mentioned by the spokesperson. Instead, he/she used two more general expressions: “Korean Peninsula” and “denuclearization of the Peninsula”. The use of these two expressions makes it clear to the international general public that the subject proposed by the journalist is still on, and the avoidance of mentioning “the DPRK” and “the nuclear experiment” is instrumental for the spokesperson in keeping a certain distance from the specific topic raised by the questioning journalist.

Just as happens when he/she declares a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, as discussed in Section 6.4, the spokesperson is simultaneously conducting two critical discussions when he/she changes the topic of discussion suggested by the journalist: one with the immediate opponent whose criticism is quoted in the journalist’s question and another one with the international general public. In both discussions the change of topic takes place in the confrontation stage. By changing the topic in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion with the immediate opponent, the spokesperson fabricates an imaginary standpoint of his/her immediate opponent that involves criticism of China whereas this standpoint has not been put forward by this opponent.

In this critical discussion the spokesperson’s change of topic could be a derailment of strategic maneuvering that amounts to the notorious “straw man” fallacy because it involves a violation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, “Attacks on standpoints may not bear on a standpoint that has not actually been put forward by the other party” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 191). However, it goes without saying that in determining whether a change of topic by the spokesperson is indeed a fallacy in the critical discussion with his/her immediate opponent, just as in the case of other modes of strategic maneuvering, the in-

stitutional preconditions of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences should also be taken into consideration. In the critical discussion he/she is conducting with the international general public, in principle the change of topic by the spokesperson does not necessarily involve a violation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, because the international general public is an imaginary audience that may have its doubts but is not supposed to already have a fixed standpoint of its own. It is the international general public’s doubts that the spokesperson is out to remove by means of a reasonable exchange.

### 7.3 Putting pressure on the other party

According to Webster’s *New Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1979, p. 1424), *pressure* refers to “a condition of distress; oppression; affliction” or “demands requiring immediate attention; urgency”. Pressure could be either physical or mental. It goes without saying that the pressure the one party exerts on the other party in a reasonableness-oriented argumentative exchange is as a rule mental pressure of an emotional kind. According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, p. 109), putting pressure on the other party is an argumentative move made in the confrontation stage intended to prevent the other party from casting doubt on a standpoint or advancing a standpoint of their own. Viewed in this way, putting pressure on the other party amounts to creating an obstacle to a free development of a critical discussion. A possible consequence of putting pressure on the other party is that the discussion gets stuck in the confrontation stage and is not continued.

An arguer exerts mental pressure on his/her opponent through the arousal of human feelings which are, according to Aristotle (1991, p.121), “the things on account of which the ones altered differ with respect to their judgments” and which are “accompanied by pleasure and pain: such as anger, pity, fear, and all similar emotions and their contraries”. From the perspective of rhetorical persuasion, O’Keefe (2002, p. 28) holds that such persuasion in which emotions are involved “has a common underlying idea, namely, that one av-

enue to persuasion involves the arousal of an emotional state, with the advocated action providing a means for the receiver to deal with those aroused feelings". In a rhetorical approach to argumentation that puts persuasion at the center, arousing certain emotions in the audience or putting pressure on the audience is deemed to be a legitimate (and in some rhetoricians' view also reasonable) way to win over the audience, because it is the effectiveness of argumentation that matters most. The focus of the relevant research in this approach is therefore always on what kind of emotions can be aroused and the ways in which what kind of persuasive effects can be realized. In recent years a psycho-cognitive perspective has been integrated into the rhetorical-persuasion approach in order to explain the psychological mechanism involved in persuading the audience by arousing certain emotions (see O'Keefe 2002; O'Keefe 2013; Simunich 2008; Griskevicius, Shiota & Neufeld 2010).

In traditional approaches in the field of logic (specifically the so-called "standard treatment of the fallacies") putting emotional pressure on the other party has always been deemed irrational, and not reasonable, because appealing to emotions is in most cases considered "irrelevant" to the defense of a standpoint. Hamble (2005, pp. 126-127), among others, explains the long-time "absence of emotions in [the logical approach to] argumentation theory" by observing that "our culture has inherited a persistent and bad idea, namely that rationality and emotionality are opposites. Arguing is identified with reason, which is held to be the opponent and discipline to passion". In informal logic, another strand of research in the logical field, exerting emotional pressure is sometimes viewed as a legitimate component of advancing argumentation. Gilbert (1997), for one, holds that the "emotional mode" of argument, which employs emotion as a reason for a conclusion or invokes emotions in expressing an argument, is one of the legitimate modes of argumentation. In the emotional mode of argument the strength of an argument depends on "such elements as degree of commitment, depth, and the extent of feeling, sincerity and the degree of resistance" (pp. 83-84). Carozza (2009, p. 133), inspired by the contemporary philosophical and psychological discussions about basic emotions such as anger, disgust, fear, joy (happiness),

sadness and surprise, holds that the list of human emotions might be expanded to include emotional states such as distress, guilt and shame. To explain how in argumentative discourse "emotive" meanings of terms are generated and manipulated by the arguers, Macagno and Walton (2019) analyze some pieces of speeches and messages of Donald Trump, the President of the US, in which emotional pressure is exerted on the audience. Their research results show that, the use of emotive words "triggers a set of inferences leading to a value judgment that can be the basis of an emotional response" (p. 250). The meaning of these emotive words can be represented and assessed by using argument schemes, and the manipulative risks of the misuse and redefinition of emotive words can be accounted for in terms of "presuppositions and implicit modifications of the interlocutors' commitments" (p. 221).

In the present research, which is conducted from the perspective of Pragma-Dialectics, we will consider putting pressure on the other party in an argumentation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering that might be employed by arguers (whether they are acting as a protagonist or as an antagonist) in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of a critical discussion. Since putting pressure on the other party in dealing with standpoints amounts to nipping a discussion in the bud, it is a violation of the 1<sup>st</sup> rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, "Discussants may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into question" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 190). In this sense, putting pressure on the other party can be a fallacy that hinders the resolution of a difference of opinion on the merits. However, in judging whether this argumentative move is indeed fallacious in argumentative discourse taking place within a certain institutional context, the institutional preconditions applying to the communicative activity type concerned should be taken into consideration.

Based on the discussions above, we can summarize the pragma-dialectical definition of putting pressure on the other party in a critical discussion as follows:

*Putting pressure on the other party is an argumentative move that a protagonist and an antagonist can adopt in the confrontation stage of a critical discussion. In making this argumentative move the arguers can resort to various emotions: pity, sympathy, anger, disgust, fear, joy (happiness), sadness, surprise, distress, guilt, shame, etc. As a mode of confrontational maneuvering, putting pressure on the other party is intended to prevent the other party from casting doubt on a standpoint or advancing a standpoint of their own, thus creating an obstacle to the development of the critical discussion. A possible consequence of putting pressure on the other party is that the discussion gets stuck in the confrontation stage.*

In the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences it can be observed that the way of putting pressure on the other party most frequently used involves pointing at negative sanctions. As indicated by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, p. 109), this kind of argumentative move always takes the form of "some suggestion of possible tiresome consequences for the opponent if he prevents the speaker from getting his way". In most cases the spokespersons tend to mention the consequences in a blunt way by saying things about their opponents like "they will face all the consequences" or "they will be responsible for all the consequences/troubles". Example 7.4 is a prototypical case in point.

#### Example 7.4

*Q: Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told the press on January 12 that if a foreign naval vessel transits Japanese waters for purposes other than "innocent passage", they will order a naval patrol to deal with it. Some Japanese media believe that this is a new policy by the Japanese government to cope with Chinese naval vessels sailing near Diaoyu Dao. What is your comment?*

*A: I have made our position clear yesterday. The Chinese side has the right to carry out normal navigation and patrol in [the] territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao. We advise the Japanese side not to take any provocative actions and ratchet up tension. **Otherwise, they will face all the consequences.***

*(January 13, 2016)*

The subject at issue in this example is the longstanding dispute between China and Japan over the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Dao Islands. In the question the journalist mentions the Japanese media's interpretation of the Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga's remark concerning the Diaoyu Dao Islands. As introduced by the questioning journalist, Yoshihide Suga expressed Japan's resolution to protect its sovereignty over the Diaoyu Dao Islands by ordering a naval patrol to "deal with" any foreign naval vessel that transits "Japanese waters" for purposes other than "innocent passage". According to the journalist, "some Japanese media" regard Yoshihide Suga's remarks as a signal of the Japanese government of how they intend "to cope with Chinese naval vessels sailing near Diaoyu Dao". Judging from the co-text of the question, it can be observed that the difference of opinion the questioning journalist wants the spokesperson to resolve concerns whether China agrees with the Japanese government's new policy "to cope with Chinese naval vessels sailing near the Diaoyu Dao".

By stating "We advise the Japanese side not to take any provocative actions and ratchet up tension" the spokesperson makes his/her negative standpoint in the difference of opinion suggested by the journalist clear in his/her reply: Japan should not take any provocative actions that ratchet up tension. In this statement, the spokesperson does not mention precisely the specific actions that the Japanese side is going to carry out as stated by Yoshihide Suga. Yet, taken into consideration the co-text of the question-reply between the journalist and the spokesperson as well as the context of this dispute between China and Japan, it can be inferred that "take any provocative actions and ratchet up tension" actually refers to the specific measures that the Japanese side is going to take. To prevent any disagreement with or criticism of his/her standpoint, the spokesperson, immediately after he/she has made clear what this standpoint is, puts pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative sanctions China has in store: "Otherwise, they [the Japanese side] will face all the consequences". By putting pressure on the other party in this way, the critical discussion is blocked at the confrontation stage.

It can be observed that the spokesperson, before he/she puts pressure on

the other party by pointing at the negative sanction, states that “The Chinese side has the right to carry out normal navigation and patrol in territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao”. This statement appears to be a reason that has been put forward to justify the spokesperson’s standpoint. If this were the case, we may not say that the critical discussion is actually stopped at the confrontation stage. However, on closer inspection we can observe that the spokesperson treats this statement in fact like common ground he/she presupposes the audience to have already agreed with before this discussion started. That means that the critical discussion is indeed stopped at the confrontation stage the moment the spokesperson puts pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative sanction: “Otherwise, they [the Japanese side] will face all the consequences”.

Only in a few cases the spokesperson mentions the negative sanction in a relatively indirect or weaker way by using expressions like that China “reserves the right to make further response”, has “serious concern”, feels “strong dissatisfaction”, “cannot leave this problem unattended”, or that the Chinese “are going to reconsider what stance we should take”, and that China “will see what will happen”, or expressions such as “if this can be tolerated, what cannot?” and “do not blame us for not having forewarned you”. Example 7.5 is a prototypical case in point.

#### Example 7.5

*Q: According to media reports, two shells fired from Myanmar fell in Zhenkang county, Lincang city of Yunnan Province last night and caused injuries. Please confirm this and give us more details. Has China lodged representations with Myanmar?*

*A: We have taken note of the relevant report and are checking on this. Conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar have lasted for over three months, during which multiple shells fired by the Myanmar side fell into China and put the life and property security of the Chinese people as well as [the] stability of the China-Myanmar border area in great danger. **The Chinese side expresses strong dissatisfaction over this**, and has solemnly required the Myanmar*

*side to take effective measures to preclude similar incidents. We urge relevant parties to cool down the situation and restore peace and stability to Northern Myanmar at an early date. **China reserves the right to make further response in light of the verification result.***

*(May 15, 2015)*

At issue in this example are the conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar and the bad influence these conflicts have on the bordering cities in China. In the question the journalist introduces briefly the recent injuries in Zhenkang county in China that were caused by two shells fired from Myanmar. The journalist wants the spokesperson to first confirm the truth of this incident and then intends the spokesperson to make clear what China’s standpoint on this incident is by asking “Has China lodged representations with Myanmar?”.

In the reply, the spokesperson more or less confirms the truth of this news as requested by the journalist and then defines two interrelated differences of opinion: the first one concerns the standpoint that China cannot tolerate incidents in which multiple shells fired by the Myanmar side fall into China; the second one concerns the standpoint that China expects the relevant parties involved in the conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar to do their share. As for the difference of opinion about the first standpoint, the spokesperson makes clear that China has always gone against such “incidents” as reported here and has requested the “Myanmar side to take effective measures to preclude similar incidents”. By stating that “The Chinese side expresses strong dissatisfaction over this” the spokesperson sends a euphemistic signal to the audience that sanctions will be considered if the Myanmar side does not accept the first standpoint. As for the difference of opinion about the second standpoint, the spokesperson makes clear that China hopes the “relevant parties to cool down the situation and restore peace and stability to Northern Myanmar at an early date”. By stating that “China reserves the right to make further response in light of the verification result” the spokesperson once more sends a euphemistic signal to the audience that serious sanctions will

be implemented if the relevant parties do not accept the second standpoint. That is to say, to prevent disagreement or criticism of his/her standpoints in the two differences of opinion he/she has defined him/herself, immediately after he/she makes clear what his/her standpoint is, the spokesperson puts pressure on the other party by pointing in an indirect but clear way at the negative sanction that will follow. In this way, the critical discussions taking place in this argumentative discourse are actually blocked at the confrontation stage.

It can be observed that before the spokesperson puts pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative consequences, the spokesperson actually mentions the “rationale” for this sanction: “Conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar have lasted for over three months, during which multiple shells fired by the Myanmar side fell into China and put the life and property security of the Chinese people as well as [the] stability of the China-Myanmar border area in great danger” and “The Chinese side [...] has solemnly required the Myanmar side to take effective measures to preclude similar incidents”. In the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences, a motivated rationale that the spokesperson assumes to be known by the audience is always provided to back up the necessity of pointing at the negative sanction. As we see it, when offering a rationale for pointing at the negative sanction the arguer is in actual fact conducting a sub-discussion in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion in which putting pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative sanction takes place. The ultimate purpose of this sub-discussion is to provide argumentation that warrants the justificatory force of the rationale for pointing at such a negative sanction in the main discussion.

The pressure that the spokesperson exerts on the other party could also consist of speculating on their sympathy, although in the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies collected for this research this only seldom occurs. When it occurs, it boils in most cases down to an attempt by the spokesperson to arouse his/her audience’s sympathy, particularly the international general public’s sympathy, by describing how much efforts China

has made, how difficult it has been to China, or how helpless China is with regard to the subject at issue. By doing so, the spokesperson hopes to make the other party agree with (or at least not cast doubt upon) China’s standpoint concerning the subject at issue. This mode of confrontational maneuvering can be named *putting pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy*. Example 7.6 is a case in point.

#### Example 7.6

*Q: Is China currently in formal negotiations with the US over trade issues? And how are such talks progressing?*

*A: [...] I am honest with you that in pursuing dialogue and consultation, **China is 100% sincere and has done enormous work. However, the US side has been missing one opportunity after another to properly resolve the relevant issue through talks.***

*We hope that the US side could have **a clear understanding of the current situation, remain level-headed, listen to its business community and general public, discard unilateralism and trade protectionism as soon as possible, and work with China to resolve trade disputes through dialogue and consultation.***

*Meanwhile, the consultations we are talking about here are ones based on international law and international trade rules, **not on some domestic law of the US side.** And parties to such consultations shall treat each other with respect and equality and demonstrate mutual understanding and willingness to compromise, instead of **one party condescendingly issuing threat and making unreasonable demands to the other.***

*(April 4, 2018)*

In Example 7.6 the subject at issue is the latest round of trade frictions between China and the US that started to manifest themselves around April, 2017. Up until now (September 2019), this round of Sino-American trade frictions has not really come to an end. By the time the press conference in Example 7.6 was held the US had announced and implemented several major punitive

measures against China, such as launching a series of trade investigations, raising tariffs on products imported from China, and forbidding Chinese corporations to purchase certain American products. As a counter-measure, China had announced and implemented several punitive tariff policies on products imported from the US. Up until the press conference was held, no real formal negotiations had taken place between China and the US. The two interrelated questions raised by the journalist, “Is China currently in formal negotiations with the US over trade issues?” and “how are such talks progressing?”, are actually informative questions. These informative questions give the spokesperson ample room for replying in his/her own way. He/she could simply update the questioning journalist with the latest developments in the Sino-American trade frictions, as requested by the journalist; he/she could also seize this opportunity to elaborate on China’s stance on this issue; he/she could even combine in his/her reply the update of the developments in the frictions between China and the US with an elaboration on China’s stance.

In the actual reply, instead of giving a simple answer to the informative questions asked by the journalist, the spokesperson first states how much efforts China has made to have a dialogue with the US: “I am honest with you that in pursuing dialogue and consultation, China is 100% sincere and has done enormous work”. Then, by stating “However, the US side has been missing one opportunity after another to properly resolve the relevant issue through talks”, the spokesperson to some extent describes what a “helpless” situation China was dealing with. By way of stating his/her “hope”, the spokesperson accuses the US side indirectly of the following “misbehaviors” to emphasize the “helplessness” of the situation: the US side does not “remain level-headed” nor “listen to its business community and general public”; the US side neither “discards unilateralism and trade protectionism” nor “works with China to resolve trade disputes through dialogue and consultation”; the US insists on carrying out consultations based on “some domestic law of the US side” rather than “international law and international trade rules”; and the US side “condescendingly issues threat” and “makes unreasonable demands” to China.

Why does the spokesperson make such a sharp contrast between “how

the US side makes dialogue impossible” and “how the Chinese side makes a sincere effort to pursue dialogue and consultation”? As we see it, by doing so, the spokesperson actually focuses, on the one hand, the difference of opinion on “can formal negotiations be held between China and the US” and expresses implicitly also his/her standpoint in this difference: “formal negotiations between China and the US cannot be held now”; on the other hand, similar to what we observed in the cases of putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction, the spokesperson provides a “rationale” for calling for sympathy. This rationale can be seen as a topic of discussion in a sub-discussion in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion in which putting pressure by appealing to sympathy takes place. The ultimate purpose of this sub-discussion is to provide argumentation that warrants the justificatory force of the rationale for calling for sympathy in the main discussion.

It can be observed that in his/her reply the spokesperson neither addresses any accusation launched by the US against China nor discusses seriously what prevents China from having formal negotiations with the US. This means that the spokesperson indicates that he/she does not really intend to have a serious critical discussion on this difference of opinion. Instead, to avoid eliciting any doubt on his/her standpoint, the spokesperson attempts to exert pressure on the other party by appealing to their sympathy for China’s “helplessness” in pursuing formal negotiations with the US.

How can exerting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction or appealing to sympathy be instrumental in convincing the primary audience – the international general public? In order to answer this question, first of all, we have to look into the two critical discussions the spokesperson carries out simultaneously when the argumentative move of exerting pressure is made, i.e., the critical discussion with his/her immediate opponent (the secondary audience), and the critical discussion with the international general public (the primary audience).

As we see it, the pressure exerted by the spokesperson on the other party by pointing at the sanction is mainly directed at the immediate opponent mentioned in the journalist’s question. The international audience cannot be

sanctioned or is not likely to be threatened by the sanction mentioned by the spokesperson. Viewed in this way, exerting pressure on the other party by pointing at the sanction takes place in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion between the spokesperson and his/her immediate opponent. By pointing at the sanction, the spokesperson intends to prevent the development of a serious discussion on his/her standpoint. Simultaneously, in the critical discussion with the international general public the exertion of pressure by pointing at the sanction is used by the spokesperson as a justification of the unavoidability of this sanction against the immediate opponent if the spokesperson's standpoint is not accepted. In the critical discussion with the international general public putting pressure by pointing at the sanction is then a strategic move in the argumentation stage of this discussion.

The other way around, the pressure exerted by the spokesperson in putting pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy is mainly directed at the international general public rather than the immediate opponent mentioned in the journalist's question, since the immediate opponent is not likely to agree with the sympathetic picture given by the spokesperson of the difficult situation China is in due to the immediate opponent. Viewed in this way, exerting pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy takes place in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion between the spokesperson and the international general public. By appealing to sympathy, the spokesperson intends to prevent a serious discussion on his/her standpoint from taking place. Simultaneously in the critical discussion with the immediate opponent, exerting pressure by appealing to sympathy is used by the spokesperson in justifying why his/her standpoint should be accepted (without really believing that it will be accepted). In this critical discussion putting pressure by appealing to sympathy can then be seen as a move in the argumentation stage of this discussion.

After explaining how the two different critical discussions taking place at the same time interact with each other when the spokesperson exerts pressure on the other party, it has become clear that the question "How can exerting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction be

instrumental for the spokesperson in convincing the international general public?" can be further specified as "How can pointing at a negative sanction be instrumental in justifying that this sanction against the immediate opponent would be unavoidable if the spokesperson's standpoint is not accepted". In addition, the question "How can exerting pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy be instrumental in convincing the international general public?" can be further specified as "How can appealing to sympathy be instrumental in preventing the development of a critical discussion on the spokesperson's standpoint?"

From the perspective of Pragma-Dialectics, answering the two specified questions mentioned above boils down to explaining how the spokesperson in exerting pressure on the other party creates a strategic design by making a selection from the topical potential as well as making a choice from the presentational devices in order to adapt to the international general public's demand. When putting pressure on the other party, whether by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to sympathy, the selection from the topical potential manifests itself in what kind of "pressure" is exerted (for instance, what kind of sanction or sympathy) and what kind of "rationale" is given for this "pressure". The adaptation to audience demand may boil down to making an effort to connect with the general beliefs or values of the international general public rather than offending this public. The selection of presentational devices may manifest itself in the use of expressions that make putting pressure on the other party seem reasonable.

To illustrate how the spokesperson tries to convince the international general public by exerting pressure on the other party, we will present an exemplary analysis of Example 7.5 which shows how in the spokesperson's response the selection from the topical potential and the choice of presentational devices are designed in such a way that they are optimally adapted to the demand of the international general public. As analyzed above, in Example 7.5 the pressure that the spokesperson exerts on the other party consists of pointing at the sanction "The Chinese side expresses strong dissatisfaction over this" and "China reserves the right to make further response in light of

the verification result". The rationale provided by the spokesperson to back up the necessity of this sanction is "Conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar have lasted for over three months, during which multiple shells fired by the Myanmar side fell into China and put the life and property security of the Chinese people as well as [the] stability of the China-Myanmar border area in great danger" and "The Chinese side [...] has solemnly required the Myanmar side to take effective measures to preclude similar incidents".

Why does the spokesperson adopt this rationale? How can this rationale be optimally adapted to the international general public's demand? In the rationale which is used to back up the necessity of a negative sanction the spokesperson is supposed to highlight how *urgent* the issue concerned is and how *necessary* the sanction. As a matter of course there are a great many urgent issues in the conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar the spokesperson could concentrate on. Yet, the greatly endangered "life and property security of the Chinese people" is undoubtedly deemed an urgent situation by the international general public, since it has always been one of the noble doctrines in wars and battles that no harm should be done to the innocent. To make the international general public understand the "necessity" of the sanction the spokesperson refers to the long duration of the problems ("over three months") and to what China has done before to avoid such problems ("The Chinese side [...] has solemnly required the Myanmar side to take effective measures to preclude similar incidents"). From these two "facts" the international general public should easily infer that the conflicts have lasted for quite a long time and that China's "solemn requirement" has been to no avail. Therefore, they should understand that in this case negative sanctioning seems to be China's only choice in protecting the "life and property security of the Chinese people". To sum up, the rationale chosen by the spokesperson to back up the necessity of the sanction is perhaps not the only way in which the urgency of the issue concerned and the necessity of the sanction could be effectively highlighted, but it fits very well into the international general public's recognition of the "urgent situation" and the "necessary sanction" that are focused upon here.

As for the presentational devices that may help to make exerting pressure

on the other party by pointing at the negative sanction seem to be reasonable, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the way in which the spokesperson attempts to make the negative sanctioning clear (otherwise the pressure cannot be really exerted) while avoiding seeming to be abusing power. Compared with other modes of confrontational maneuvering, exerting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction can be more easily seen as playing the bully by the international general public. To avoid making such a negative impression on the international general public, the spokesperson points in Example 7.5 in a very euphemistic way at the negative sanctioning. The two expressions used to refer to the negative sanctioning, i.e., "express strong dissatisfaction" and "reserve the right to make further response", are likely to seem rather self-restrained and diplomatically polite to the international general public, which is also required by the 2<sup>nd</sup> institutional precondition ("The expressions used by the spokesperson should not go to extremes") and the 5<sup>th</sup> institutional precondition ("The spokesperson should keep his/her emotions in control") of China's MoFA's regular press conferences. However, all the parties involved are supposedly familiar with diplomatic language use, and to them these two expressions will therefore be informative in an appropriate way, because it is well-known that in the field of diplomacy such kind of expressions always refer to negative sanctioning.

According to the 1<sup>st</sup> rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, "Discussants may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into question" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 190), the spokesperson's exertion of pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative sanction could easily be a fallacy of *ad baculum* in the imaginary critical discussion with the immediate opponent because it prevents the immediate opponent from calling this standpoint into question. In the discussion with the international general public, which takes place simultaneously, these moves need not necessarily be considered fallacious, since they do not hinder a smooth development of this critical discussion but are used to justify the unavoidability of taking this negative sanction against the immediate opponent if the spokesperson's

standpoint is not accepted. The soundness of such a justification mainly depends on whether the argumentation involved really support the unavoidability of this sanction without any flaws.

Likewise, according to the 1<sup>st</sup> rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, the spokesperson's exertion of pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy in the critical discussion with the international general public could easily be a fallacy of *ad misericordiam* because it discourages the international general public from calling the standpoint into question. In the imaginary critical discussion with the immediate opponent, which takes place simultaneously, these argumentative moves need not necessarily be considered fallacious since they are not intended to hinder a smooth development of this critical discussion, but are used to justify why the spokesperson's standpoint should be accepted. The soundness of such a justification depends on whether the argumentation involved really supports the acceptability of the spokesperson's standpoint without any flaws.

It goes without saying that in determining the soundness of the argumentative moves in all critical discussions conducted by the spokesperson, i.e., between the spokesperson and the immediate opponent and between the spokesperson and the international general public, in which pressure is exerted on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to sympathy, the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences should in all cases be taken into consideration.

## 7.4 Combining various modes of confrontational maneuvering

Up until this section we have discussed how the spokespersons use such modes of confrontational maneuvering as dissociation and changing the topic to redefine the difference of opinion suggested by the questioning journalist and we have looked into how the spokesperson uses such modes of

confrontational maneuvering as personal attack, declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable and putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction or appealing to sympathy to prevent a real critical discussion on the standpoint at issue. To make clear which role these modes of confrontational maneuvering play in the spokespersons' responses to the journalist, we discussed each of them separately. Yet, this does not mean that in argumentative practice these modes of strategic maneuvering are indeed always used separately by the spokesperson. On the contrary, in many cases these modes of strategic maneuvering are combined. This deliberate combination is either aimed at reinforcing the strategic function of the predominant mode of confrontational maneuvering we discussed or at reaching a more convincing effect than each single mode of maneuvering could reach by itself by a concerted effort consisting of an accumulation of several modes of strategic maneuvering.

To give an impression of how such a strategic combination is generally realized in our empirical material and how in this way the spokespersons intend to contribute to the convincingness of their responses to the international general public, we will return in this section to some cases we have already analyzed in the previous chapters and the previous sections of this chapter with a focus on a particular mode of confrontational maneuvering. In this section, we will make clear how in the cases concerned different modes of confrontational maneuvering are combined in a strategic way. Our "re-analysis" of these cases will start with Example 4.6.

### Example 4.6

Q: Spokesperson John Kirby of the US State Department issued a statement on the one-year anniversary of the so-called mass detention of **human rights** lawyers in China. What is your response?

A: The US has been creating headlines with the topic of the so-called human rights issue in China for many years. What it cares about is not the **human rights of 1.3 billion people in China, but those of a dozen or several dozen people under China's judicial investigation.** China is a law-based country.

*Our judicial authorities handle relevant cases in accordance with the law and guarantee the suspects' legal rights and interests pursuant to Chinese law. Whoever violates the law, regardless of who he is or what he does, will be punished by the law.*

Making irresponsible remarks on the normal handling of cases by China's judicial organs is in itself a violation of the spirit of the rule of law. More importantly, it is a blatant interference in China's domestic affairs and judicial sovereignty.

*For so many years, the US has been trying to disrupt China by interfering in China's domestic affairs using the so-called human rights issue, only to find these attempts futile.*

(July 11, 2016)

In Section 4.4 this example has been discussed as a prototypical case in which the spokesperson *dissociates* Term II from Term I by explicating or implying that Term I is used by the opponent in a way that narrows the meaning of the original term improperly and that the way in which term II is used by the spokespersons actually conveys the “exact” meaning of the Term. As explained in Section 4.4, in this example two meanings of the Term “human rights (in China)” are dissociated from each other by the spokesperson: Term I, “human rights (in China)” as used by the US, according to the spokesperson, refers to the “human rights of a dozen or several dozen people under China's judicial investigation”, and Term II, “human rights (in China)” as viewed by the spokesperson himself/herself, refers to “the human rights of 1.3 billion people in China”. Through this deliberate differentiation the spokesperson suggests that the meaning given to Term I by the US is much narrower or even biased compared with the “exact” meaning of Term II, which is broader, more inclusive and impartial. Upon closer inspection, apart from the **dissociation (indicated in bold lines)**, two other modes of confrontational maneuvering, i.e., declaring a standpoint *unallowed (indicated in italicized lines)* and personal attack (indicated in underlined lines), are used as well. In what follows we will provide a re-analysis of this case to make clear how these different modes are strategically combined.

The journalist's question in Example 4.6 concerns criticism by John Kirby, a spokesperson of the US State Department, of China's so-called mass detention of Chinese human rights lawyers. By asking “what is your response?” the journalist intends the Chinese spokesperson to focus the discussion on John Kirby's criticism. Among the options the spokesperson has in replying to John Kirby's criticism as quoted by the journalist are: he/she could deny John Kirby's criticism and justify this denial with reasons; he/she could simply clarify / justify China's standpoint on the so-called mass detention of Chinese human rights lawyers; he/she could change the topic of discussion suggested by the journalist. In giving the actual reply, the spokesperson makes the following three strategic moves.

The first strategic move consists of launching an indirect personal attack on the US by accusing the country of having “suspicious motives” and “suspicious interests” in criticizing China's dealing with human rights: “The US has been creating headlines with the topic of the so-called human rights issue in China for many years” and “For so many years, the US has been trying to disrupt China by interfering in China's domestic affairs using the so-called human rights issue, only to find these attempts futile”. As discussed in Chapter 5, by launching such an indirect personal attack the spokesperson attempts to cut down the credibility/authority of his / her immediate opponent, in this case the US side, in stating criticisms against China's human rights situation, thereby making the US' criticisms of “China's detention of Chinese human rights lawyers” seem less convincing or even unconvincing to the international general public.

The second strategic move consists of dissociating the “improperly narrowed or even biased” meaning given to the term “human rights (in China)” by the US spokesperson from the “exact” meaning of this term. As discussed in Chapter 4, this move aims, again, at undermining the authority / credibility of the immediate opponent (in this case the US) in criticizing China's human rights situation, thus trying to convincing the international general public of the lack of integrity of the US' criticisms of “China's detention of Chinese human rights lawyers”.

The third strategic move consists of declaring any standpoint on “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers”, particularly the standpoint of the US side, unallowed. This unallowed declaration is implicitly realized by claiming that “Making irresponsible remarks on the normal handling of cases by China’s judicial organs [detention of Chinese human rights lawyers] is in itself a violation of the spirit of the rule of law. More importantly, it is a blatant interference in China’s domestic affairs and judicial sovereignty”. By making this claim, the spokesperson also provides a “Necessity Rationale” for this unallowed declaration. This rationale is warranted by two reasons: any standpoint/remark from the US side relating to “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers” is “in itself a violation of the spirit of the rule of law” and it is “a blatant interference in China’s domestic affairs and judicial sovereignty”. These two reasons have their roots in the 1<sup>st</sup> Principle (mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Principle (mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs) of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence” that China refers to as the Necessity Rationale for declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable (see Sub-section 6.3.1). As discussed in Chapter 6, the fundamental purpose of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable is to exempt the standpoint at issue (in this case any standpoint/remark relating to “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers”) from a real critical discussion.

How do the three strategic argumentative moves just discussed interact with each other? As we see it, the third strategic move -- declaring any standpoint on “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers”, particularly the standpoint of the US side, unallowed -- is the dominant mode of confrontational maneuvering in the spokesperson’s reply, since it serves the fundamental purpose of this reply to deny directly the need to have a serious critical discussion on the criticism made by the US side (represented by its spokesperson John Kirby), and also prevents any similar criticism of China’s human rights situation by the international general public from being made.

The other two strategic moves, i.e., launching an indirect personal attack on the US and dissociating the two meanings of the term “human rights (in

China)”, constitute peripheral but nevertheless vital modes of confrontational maneuvering in the spokesperson’s reply. By cutting down the US’ credibility/authority in criticizing China’s human rights situation and thus making the American criticism of “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers” seem less convincing or unconvincing to the international general public, the first and the second argumentative move reinforce the strategic function of the first argumentative move: if the US side does not really have the “credibility / authority” required for criticizing China’s human rights situation, how can the country then criticize “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers”?

In his expose of the extended theory of Pragma-Dialectics, *Strategic maneuvering in argumentative discourse*, van Eemeren (2010, pp. 45-46; 2018, p. 116) points out that each instance of strategic maneuvering is actually part of a broader category of strategic maneuvering connected with one or more of the four stages of a critical discussion. If (and only if) the strategic maneuvers carried out in a particular stage hang together in such a way that they can be regarded as being systematically coordinated, can it be said that they are part of a specific argumentative strategy (confrontational strategy, opening strategy, argumentational strategy, concluding strategy, general discussion strategy). Viewed from this perspective, the three interrelated argumentative moves (strategic maneuvers) discussed above do constitute together a confrontational strategy that can be provisionally named *Silencing the other party*.<sup>24</sup>

Another confrontational strategy consisting of various strategic modes of strategic maneuvering shows up in cases in which spokespersons declare a standpoint unallowed. As can be observed in the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies collected for the current research, it happens frequently that the spokespersons, immediately after they make clear that no standpoint can be expected from them, change the topic of discussion suggested by the questioning journalist into another one. Take for instance, Example 6.9.

<sup>24</sup> In briefly discussing certain confrontational strategies in this chapter we refrain from specifying how exactly the two levels of coordination (the ordering of argumentative moves and the three aspects of strategic maneuvering) are represented in the various strategies (van Eemeren 2018, pp. 116-117), because this is not vital to what we want to demonstrate.

## Example 6.9

*Q: Can you comment on the recent Iranian media reports that [the] China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is taking over Total's stake in [the] South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran? Does this mean that [the] CNPC has secured an exemption from the US sanctions?*

*A: I am not aware of the specific situation you mentioned. What I can tell you is that China and Iran maintain normal cooperation in various areas and that the cooperation is open, transparent, legitimate and legal.*

*(November 27, 2018)*

As discussed in Section 6.4, by claiming not to be “aware of the specific situation” mentioned by the journalist, the spokesperson declares in the reply that from him or her no standpoint on the CNPC’s take-over from Total can be expected, thereby preventing the discussion of the issue raised by the journalist from coming off the ground. Taken into consideration that the context of this exchange that the US had threatened to sanction all corporations that continued to do any business with Iran, including this large gas project, it can be concluded that the spokesperson’s purpose in refusing to provide any clear standpoint on this particular topic most probably is to avoid unnecessary criticism from the US before the take-over is realized.

Immediately after this unallowed declaration, the spokesperson states a standpoint concerning the cooperation between China and Iran: “What I can tell you is that China and Iran maintain normal cooperation in various areas and that the cooperation is open, transparent, legitimate and legal”. In this way, the spokesperson changes the topic of discussion from “the CNPC’s take-over of Total’s stake in [the] South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran” to “the normal cooperation between China and Iran”. As discussed in Section 6.4, the primary purpose of this topic change is to leave ample room for explaining or justifying the possibility of future cooperation between China and Iran with regard to the CNPC’s takeover of Total’s stake in the South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran. The ambiguity of the expression “normal cooperation” plays an important role in helping the spokesperson to realize this purpose, since

it can be interpreted in different ways: “the CNPC’s take-over of Total’s stake in the South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran” could belong to the “normal cooperation” between the two countries, but it could also not be part of it. That is to say, no matter whether or not the CNPC takes over Total’s stake after this press conference, China can hardly be accused of inconsistent acting, since the expression “normal cooperation” allows for various interpretations.

In addition, the change of topic also makes it easier for the spokesperson to exempt the difference of opinion suggested by the questioning journalist from critical discussion: if there is another topic worthier to be discussed, why to discuss the old topic suggested by the journalist, which is not suitable to be discussed? Viewed in this way, the two strategic moves the spokesperson carries out in Example 6.9, i.e., declaring a standpoint unallowed and changing the topic of discussion, are actually complementary to each other. They constitute together a confrontational strategy that can be provisionally named *Distracting the other party*.

The last case we are going to re-analyze is the spokesperson’s reply in Example 7.4, which is in Section 7.3 discussed focusing on the spokesperson’s strategic use of putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction.

## Example 7.4

*Q: Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told the press on January 12 that if a foreign naval vessel transits Japanese waters for purposes other than “innocent passage”, they will order a naval patrol to deal with it. Some Japanese media believe that this is a new policy by the Japanese government to cope with Chinese naval vessels sailing near Diaoyu Dao. What is your comment?*

*A: I have made our position clear yesterday. The Chinese side has the right to carry out normal navigation and patrol in [the] territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao. We advise the Japanese side not to take any provocative actions and ratchet up tension. **Otherwise, they will face all the consequences.***

*(January 13, 2016)*

As discussed in Section 7.3, to prevent disagreement with or criticism of the standpoint that the Japanese side should “not take any provocative actions

and ratchet up tension”, the spokesperson puts pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative sanction that China has in store: “Otherwise, they [the Japanese side] will face all the consequences”. Apart from this strategic move, in the original analysis of this case we also pay attention to the statement that is made by the spokesperson before he/she points at the negative sanction: “The Chinese side has the right to carry out normal navigation and patrol in territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao”. We have made clear that the spokesperson treats this statement as common ground he/she presupposes the audience already to agree with before the discussion started. What role does this taken-for-granted statement play in this reply? As we see it, it serves as the “rationale” for the spokesperson declaring the standpoint that “the Japanese side should not take any provocative actions and ratchet up tension” indisputable. Given China’s longstanding standpoint that “China exercises full sovereignty over the Diaoyu Dao”, it is clear that, according to the spokesperson, this rationale is warranted by the 1<sup>st</sup> Principle (mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty) of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence” (see Section 3.3).

Our analysis shows that in preventing any disagreement with or criticism of his/her standpoint, the spokesperson makes two strategic moves successively: the first one consists of *declaring his/her standpoint indisputable* (backed up by the rationale that “the Chinese side has the right to carry out normal navigation and patrol in territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao”) and the second one is putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction: “Otherwise, they [the Japanese side] will face all the consequences”. Together these strategic moves constitute a confrontational strategy that can be provisionally named *Pressurizing the other party*.

When more than one mode of confrontational maneuvering is adopted by the spokesperson in his/her reply, the assessment of the argumentative soundness of this reply will be more complicated. First of all, we have to differentiate the two critical discussions that the spokesperson carries out simultaneously in the argumentative discourse, one with the immediate opponent and the other one with the international general public. Next we have

to check the soundness of each of the modes of strategic maneuvering that are in combination adopted by the spokesperson in each of the two critical discussions. In doing so, the relevant rules of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse in relation with the institutional preconditions of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences discussed in Chapter 3 should be taken into account.

## 7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, two modes of confrontational maneuvering used by the spokespersons have been discussed: changing the topic of discussion and putting pressure on the other party. In addition, an analysis is provided of how the spokespersons maneuver strategically at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences by combining in their response to the questioning journalists several modes of confrontational maneuvering that we have discussed in this chapter and in the previous chapters.

As we have shown, changing the topic of discussion by the spokesperson is a mode of confrontational maneuvering aimed at redefining the difference of opinion posed or suggested by the opponent in order to make it easier to resolve it in the spokesperson’s favor. When the spokesperson changes the topic of discussion, he/she may or may not change the subject at issue. However, constrained by the 3<sup>rd</sup> institutional precondition of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences, the spokesperson will try to make a “reasonable” and “sincere” impression on the international general public by sticking to the subject at issue suggested by the questioning journalist unless he/she considers the subject of discussion too sensitive or not yet ready to be discussed.

As is shown in the exemplary analysis of the case reported in Example 7.2, both in the discussion between the spokesperson and the immediate opponent and in the discussion between the spokesperson and the international general public the change of topic takes place in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage. Changing the topic in the critical discussion between the spokesperson and the immediate opponent could be a derailment of stra-

tegic maneuvering that amounts to the notorious “straw man” fallacy, because it involves a violation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse (the “Standpoint Rule”). However, in the critical discussion the spokesperson is conducting with the international general public in response to the questioning journalist, the change of topic does not necessarily involve a violation of the code of conduct, because the international general public is an audience that can be imagined to have its doubts but it is not supposed to have already a fixed standpoint of its own.

As the analyses of the cases reported in Example 7.3, Example 7.4 and Example 7.5 have shown, the spokesperson sometimes puts pressure on the other party either by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to its sympathy to exempt the standpoint at issue from a serious critical discussion. In putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction, the spokesperson often mentions the negative consequences in a blunt way, but in a few cases these consequences are only hinted at in an indirect way. The pressure exerted by the spokesperson on the other party, in particular on the international general public, can also consist of trying to arouse its sympathy. In doing so, he/she appeals to the international general public’s understanding by describing how much efforts China has made, how difficult it has been to China or how helpless China is with regard to the subject at issue.

In the case of pointing out a negative sanction and in the case of appealing to sympathy the spokesperson handles the two critical discussions (one with the immediate opponent, the other with the international general public) in a different way: in pointing out a negative sanction, the sanction is directed at the immediate opponent and the spokesperson thus intends to deny the need to have a serious discussion of the standpoint at issue. In the critical discussion with the international general public which takes place simultaneously, the spokesperson exerts pressure by pointing at a sanction to convince the international general public that taking this sanction against the immediate opponent is unavoidable if his/her standpoint is not accepted. In appealing to sympathy, the spokesperson’s pressure is directed at the international general public to prevent the development of a serious discussion of his/her

standpoint by exempting it from the need to do so. In the simultaneous critical discussion with the immediate opponent, the spokesperson is exerting pressure by appealing to sympathy to justify why his/her standpoint should be accepted (without really believing that this appeal will really work).

In the argumentative practice of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences all modes of confrontational maneuvering we have discussed in this study are strategically combined by the spokespersons. Such deliberate combinations are either aimed at reinforcing the strategic function of the predominant mode of confrontational maneuvering or at reaching a more convincing effect by using in a concerted effort several modes of strategic maneuvering than each single mode could achieve by itself. When they are used together in this way, the various combined uses of these modes of confrontational maneuvering constitute different types of confrontational strategies. Which type of confrontational strategy is used depends on which common purpose is served by the combined use of the various modes of strategic maneuvering that are employed.

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# Chapter 8

## CONCLUSION

Our research concerning the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences was to a large extent motivated by the limitations of the research recently carried out concerning China's political press conferences and the lack of research concentrating on the argumentative dimension of the discourses conducted at such press conferences. Adopting the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, we intended to provide a fully-fledged analysis of a crucial phase in the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences, i.e., the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage in the spokespersons' argumentative exchanges with the questioning journalists. The central aim of our research was to make clear how the spokespersons maneuver strategically in responding to the journalists' questions and how their confrontational maneuvering can be instrumental in convincing the intended audience.

In line with the pragma-dialectical approach, we first needed to concentrate on the extrinsic constraints imposed on the argumentative exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists by the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's press conferences. In addition, we had to explain how these extrinsic constraints influence the strategic design of the spokespersons' confrontational maneuvering. Based on the empirical data, we needed to identify the prototypical modes of confrontational maneuvering that the spokespersons employ in their replies to the journalists. Last but not least, we had to explain how these prototypical modes of confrontational maneuvering can be instrumental in convincing the spokespersons' primary audience by analyzing the different ways in which the spokespersons try to achieve their dialectical and rhetorical aims in using these modes of confrontational maneuvering in responding to the journalists' questions.

The research questions that were to be answered in dealing with the various tasks described above are the following:

*(1) What are the institutional preconditions applying to China's MoFA's regular press conferences as a communicative activity type that serve as extrinsic constraints for the strategic maneuvering of the spokespersons in responding to the*

*questions of the journalists?*

*(2) What modes of confrontational maneuvering are prototypically adopted by the spokespersons in responding to the questions of the journalists in the argumentative context concerned and complying with the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences?*

*(3) How are these modes of confrontational maneuvering designed to contribute to making a convincing case for the audience the spokespersons would like to reach?*

In Section 8.1 we will provide the answers to these three research questions that are instrumental in achieving the central aim of our research. In Section 8.2 we will make clear what the theoretical and practical implications are of the results of our research. In Section 8.3 we will make some suggestions for further research inspired by the results of our research.

## 8.1 Main findings

In answering the first research question regarding the institutional preconditions applying to China's MoFA's regular press conferences we made clear that the argumentative exchanges between the spokesperson and the journalist at these press conferences can be viewed as a communicative practice taking place in a zone overlapping the political domain and the media domain. The general institutional point of this communicative activity type can be described as explicating and promoting the Chinese government's stances and policies by deliberating about them before an audience consisting of the international general public. This institutional point can be further specified into two major institutional goals: the first goal is to clarify and explain the Chinese government's stances and policies; the second goal is to refute criticisms of the Chinese government's stances and policies.

In reaching the institutional goals and thereby realizing the general institutional point, a set of primary institutional preconditions and secondary institutional preconditions constrains the spokesperson's confrontational

maneuvering in his/her argumentative replies that are determined by the institutional context of China's MoFA's regular press conferences. As discussed in Section 3.3, the most pertinent primary institutional preconditions are partly prescribed in the *Workbook for governmental press conferences* published by The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. These preconditions, which are represented as seven basic rules, stipulate what the spokesperson could do (Rule 1 "refuse to answer 'inappropriate' questions if necessary"), what the spokesperson should do (Rule 3 "tell the truth to the public and therefore be honest and sincere"; Rule 4 "firmly stick to the stances taken by China's government"), and what the spokesperson should not do (Rule 2 "the way the spokesperson expresses himself/herself should not go to extremes"; Rule 5 "not give a personal or emotional response"; Rule 6 "not slander others, nor accuse others when lacking evidence for it"; Rule 7 "not infringe on the personal reputation of others if this can be avoided"). It should be noted that, apart from these more procedural institutional preconditions, in dealing with international affairs the spokespersons often refer explicitly or implicitly to the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence", which constitute another pertinent part of the primary institutional preconditions.

As for the secondary institutional preconditions, three points require special attention: the first one is that in his/her argumentative reply the spokesperson has to deal with both the primary audience and the secondary audience. Taking into account the institutional point and institutional goals of the exchanges between the spokesperson and the journalist, the "primary audience" of the spokesperson consists of the international general public, a third party to whom the spokesperson leaves the judgment concerning the acceptability of his/her argumentative discourse. The secondary audience consists of the journalist and the spokesperson's immediate opponents invoked in the questions of the journalists. The questioning journalist is not the spokesperson's primary audience but just an intermediary asking questions and expressing doubts on behalf of the international general public. Neither could the immediate opponents, usually consisting of foreign political leaders, be the spokesperson's primary audience because it is obvious that they

can hardly be convinced because of conflicting interests between them and the spokesperson.

The second secondary institutional precondition is that the spokesperson is to use euphemistic expressions in replying to questions concerning very sensitive or controversial issues in order to avoid any premature accusation of being partisan.

The third secondary institutional precondition is that certain principles and standpoints are deemed "indisputable" or even "sacrosanct" by the spokesperson. More important, the spokesperson in most cases presupposes that the audience has already agreed upon these principles and standpoints.

In answering the second research question regarding the various modes (and variants) of confrontational maneuvering prototypically adopted by the spokespersons in their argumentative replies, we first considered what strategic ways the spokesperson could possibly use in responding to the journalists' questions in the communicative activity type of China's MoFA's regular press conferences.

As discussed in Section 3.4, given the room left by (and also constrained by) the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences, two options can be expected to be considered by the spokespersons in responding to the journalists' questions. The first option is to agree to resolve the difference of opinion exactly as it is, according to the questioning journalist, posed or suggested by their opponents. In that case, the mode of strategic maneuvering they have selected in their response consists of a certain way of expressing agreement. The second option consists of disagreeing to resolve the difference of opinion as it is posed or suggested by their opponents. In going for this second option, the spokespersons have, again, two options: (a) redefining the difference of opinion in such a way that they can more easily resolve it; (b) exempting the difference of opinion concerned from the need to resolve it.

To redefine the difference of opinion in such a way that they can more easily resolve it, there are three modes of confrontational maneuvering that are most likely used by the spokespersons: confrontational maneuvering by

“redefining” the other party’s position from opposition into doubt (or the other way around); confrontational maneuvering by redefining the difference of opinion by dissociation; confrontational maneuvering by changing the topic of discussion. To exempt the difference of opinion concerned from the need to resolve it, in their confrontational maneuvering the spokespersons could take refuge to three possible ways of acting: making a personal attack on the opponent; declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable; putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to sympathy.

Since strategic maneuvering by agreeing to resolve the difference of opinion as posed by the other party involves only the move of showing agreement and strategic maneuvering by “redefining” the other party’s position of opposition into doubt (or the other way around) is generally part of other modes of confrontational maneuvering, it is not practical or even feasible to discuss them as separate modes of confrontational maneuvering. Therefore, the second research question can be specified as follows:

*(2') Are modes of confrontational maneuvering such as dissociation, changing the topic of discussion, personal attack, declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable and putting pressure on the other party indeed adopted by the spokespersons in their replies to the questioning journalists at China's MoFA's regular press conferences? If so, in what ways are these modes of confrontational maneuvering used by the spokespersons?*

To answer question (2'), we collected all the official transcripts (in both Chinese and English) of China's MoFA's regular press conferences held between November 3, 2011, and December 31, 2018, from its official website. According to our empirical observations of the spokespersons' argumentative replies in the corpus of these official transcripts, all the modes of confrontational maneuvering mentioned above are indeed employed by the spokespersons. While dissociation, personal attack and declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable are prominently used, changing the topic of discussion and

putting pressure on the other party (by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to sympathy) are less prominently used. In addition, it can also be observed from the corpus that these modes of confrontational maneuvering are in some cases used in a combined way.

In the cases where the spokespersons use dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering, four subtypes of dissociation have been found that play a role in bringing forward a single or multiple standpoint. According to the main rationale for distinguishing between Term I (used by the spokesperson's opponent) and Term II (used by the spokesperson himself/herself) in the cases concerned, these subtypes can be differentiated as: “distorted” Term I versus “authentic” Term II, “ambiguous” Term I versus “univocal” Term II, “broadened” Term I versus “exact” Term II, and “narrowed” Term I versus “exact” Term II.

As can also be observed in the empirical data of the spokespersons' argumentative replies, three subtypes of personal attack, viz. the direct/abusive personal attack, the indirect/circumstantial personal attack, and the You Too / *tu quoque* personal attack, are typically used by the spokespersons. Each of these subtypes can be further divided into different variants: in the direct subtype, the variants of attacking the immediate opponents used by the spokespersons are accusing them of “bad character”, “bad faith”, “low intelligence”, and “low expertise”; in the indirect subtype, the variants include the accusations of “suspicious motives” and “suspicious interests”; in the You Too subtype, four variants that are typically found are “inconsistency between words and actions”, “inconsistency between past and present actions”, “inconsistency between previous and present words”, and “only words without actions”.

According to the various rationales the spokespersons presuppose to be understood as well as acceptable to (the questioning journalists and) the international general public, we have differentiated three subtypes of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable that are prototypically used by the spokespersons. The first subtype is declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable based on the rationale of necessity (“Necessity Rationale” for short). The second subtype is declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputa-

ble based on the rationale of desirability (“Desirability Rationale” for short). The third subtype is declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable based on the rationale of feasibility (“Feasibility Rationale” for short).

When changing the topic of discussion suggested or posed by the questioning journalists, as observed from the empirical data of the spokespersons argumentative replies, the spokesperson may or may not change the subject at issue. However, constrained by the 3<sup>rd</sup> institutional precondition of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences (“The spokesperson has the responsibility to tell the truth to the public and should therefore be honest and sincere”), the spokesperson will try to make a “reasonable” and “sincere” impression on the international general public by sticking to the subject at issue suggested by the questioning journalist unless he/she considers the subject of discussion too sensitive or not yet ready to be discussed.

To exempt the standpoint at issue from a serious discussion, the spokesperson sometimes puts pressure on the other party. The pressure can be exerted on the other party either by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to its sympathy. In putting pressure by pointing at a negative sanction, the spokesperson often mentions the negative consequences in a blunt way, but in a few cases these consequences are only hinted at indirectly. In putting pressure on the other party, in particular on the international general public by appealing to its sympathy, the spokesperson relies on the other party’s understanding by describing how much efforts China has made, how difficult it has been to China or how helpless China is with regard to the subject at issue.

It is observed from the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies that all modes of confrontational maneuvering discussed in this study can be strategically combined by the spokespersons. Such combinations are either aimed at reinforcing the strategic function of the predominant mode of confrontational maneuvering or at reaching a more convincing effect than each single mode could achieve by itself by using in a concerted effort several modes of strategic maneuvering. When they are used together in this way, the various combined uses of modes of confrontational maneuvering constitute different types of confrontational strategies.

After it has been made clear which modes of confrontational maneuvering are prototypically used by the spokespersons in the empirical data, it becomes feasible to answer the third research question. This question concerns the instrumentality of these modes of confrontational maneuvering in convincing the spokespersons’ primary audience (the international general public).

To answer the third question, first of all we have to differentiate between two critical discussions that the spokesperson carries out simultaneously when utilizing any of the modes of confrontational maneuvering: one of them takes place with his/her immediate opponents (secondary audience), the other one with the international general public (primary audience). The first critical discussion manifests itself more clearly since the spokesperson responds in his/her reply explicitly to criticisms or doubts about China’s policies of its immediate opponents. Compared with the first critical discussion, the second critical discussion between the spokesperson and the international general public is not so clearly visible, since the international general public is hardly ever mentioned as the antagonist in the spokesperson’s reply. Yet, because it is the international general public that he/she is out to convince, it is likely that the spokesperson is much more concerned with the second critical discussion than with the first one. However, the critical discussion between the spokesperson and the immediate opponents cannot be ignored, because it may be instrumental to the spokesperson in convincing the international general public in the other critical discussion. For this reason, in answering the third research question, we should not only consider how the spokesperson uses the various modes of confrontational maneuvering to convince the international general public in the one critical discussion, but also what role the other critical discussion with his/her immediate opponents may play in facilitating his/her critical discussion with the international general public.

When the spokesperson uses a dissociation or a personal attack as a mode of confrontational maneuvering, this use can be seen as a calculated argumentative move in the confrontation stage of an imagined critical discussion

with his/her immediate opponents that is instigated by the question of the journalist. The purpose of using a dissociation or a personal attack in this critical discussion is to negate the immediate opponents' doubts or criticisms concerning China's standpoints. In the case of dissociation, the spokesperson tries to realize this purpose by pointing out that a certain crucial term mentioned in the difference of opinion at issue is "misused" by the immediate opponents. In the case of a personal attack, the spokesperson attempts to realize this purpose by negating his/her immediate opponents' credibility or authority in criticizing or doubting China.

In the critical discussion with the international general public, dissociations and personal attacks are exploited by the spokespersons as strategic moves to diminish or undermine their immediate opponents' authority/credibility in justifying the standpoints at issue. Dissociating or attacking the person personally can then be seen as strategic moves in the argumentation stage of this critical discussion. Viewed in this way, the spokespersons' ultimate goal in conducting the critical discussion with the immediate opponents is only to create an adequate starting point for convincing the international general public of the unreasonableness of these opponents' criticisms or doubts regarding China.

When they declare a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, the spokespersons conduct in a similar way as in their use of dissociation and personal attack two parallel critical discussions at the same time. However, there seems to be a difference: in declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable the spokespersons do not intend to convince the international general public by undermining their immediate opponents' authority/credibility in doubting or criticizing China's standpoints. Instead, in the critical discussion with their immediate opponents as well as in the critical discussion with the international general public the spokespersons are in this case out to declare a certain standpoint unallowed or indisputable in the confrontation stage, so that the critical discussion will not come off the ground.

A crucial difference between the two critical discussions lies in the amount of effort the spokespersons invest in convincing their audience that

the standpoint at issue is unallowed or indisputable. However sincere the spokespersons may seem to be, in the critical discussion with the immediate opponents they do not make a real effort to convince them that the standpoint is unallowed or indisputable. By contrast, in the critical discussion with the international general public the spokespersons will go all out to justify the unallowed or indisputable declaration of the standpoint at issue, even though in some cases such a declaration might be fallacious.

Just as happens when the spokespersons declare a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, in both of the two discussions changing the topic of discussion takes place in the confrontation stage. By changing the topic in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion with the immediate opponent, the spokesperson fabricates an imaginary standpoint of his/her immediate opponents that involves criticism of China whereas this standpoint has not been put forward by these opponents.

When it comes to putting pressure on the other party, the two critical discussions interact with each other in a relatively complicated way: exerting pressure on the other party by pointing at a sanction takes place in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion between the spokesperson and his/her immediate opponents. By pointing at a sanction, the spokesperson intends to prevent the development of a serious discussion on his/her standpoint. Simultaneously, he/she uses the exertion of pressure by pointing at a sanction in the critical discussion with the international general public as a justification of the unavoidability of this sanction against the immediate opponents if the spokesperson's standpoint is not accepted; putting pressure by pointing at the sanction is then a strategic move in the argumentation stage of this discussion. The pressure exerted by the spokesperson in putting pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy, on the other hand, is directed at the international general public rather than the immediate opponents mentioned in the journalist's question. Exerting pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy then takes place in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion between the spokesperson and the international general public. By appealing to sympathy, the spokesperson intends to prevent a se-

rious discussion on his/her standpoint from taking place. Simultaneously in the critical discussion with the immediate opponents, exerting pressure by appealing to sympathy is used by the spokesperson in justifying why his/her standpoint should be accepted (without really believing that it will be accepted). In this critical discussion putting pressure by appealing to sympathy can then be seen as a move in the argumentation stage of the discussion.

If, as discussed above, the international general public is actually the primary audience the spokesperson intends to reach and the critical discussion with the immediate opponents is to facilitate the convincing of the international general public, it is worthwhile in answering the third research question to concentrate on the discussion about how the spokespersons make an effort to convince the international general public with the various modes of confrontational maneuvering discussed above. From the perspective of Pragma-Dialectics, this discussion boils down to explaining how the spokespersons create a strategic design by making a selection from the topical potential as well as making a choice from the presentational devices in order to adapt to the international general public's demand. The adaptation to audience demand manifests itself mainly in an effort to connect with the beliefs or values of the international general public, rather than offending this audience. As shown in our analysis, in discussing the exploitation of each of the three aspects of strategic maneuvering by the spokespersons, the various institutional preconditions have to be taken into account that apply to China's MoFA's regular press conferences, because these preconditions constitute vital constraints on the spokespersons' choice from topical potential and selection of presentational devices when using the various modes of confrontational maneuvering at these regular press conferences in adapting to the international general public's demand.

As shown in Section 4.4, in maneuvering strategically with dissociation to adapt to the primary audience's demand, making a strategic choice from the topical potential manifests itself in deciding which notion in the standpoint at issue is dissociated and which different meanings are attributed to this notion. Making a selection from the presentational devices is mainly manifested

in the strategic way in which the spokespersons present a dissociation such as using a numerical comparison to give the international general public the impression that the meaning of Term I as used by the opponent "distorts" the meaning of the original Term and that the meaning of Term II as used by the spokesperson actually conveys the "authentic" meaning of the original Term.

In the case of personal attacks, the selection from the topical potential concerns in the first place the choice of *who* is accused by the arguer and of *what* that person is accused. The choice of presentational devices pertains predominantly to the ways in which the spokespersons try to mitigate the "hostility" of the personal attacks, to accentuate the "objectivity" of the personal attacks or to avoid unnecessary accusations of "personal slander", as required by the institutional preconditions.

As is shown in Section 6.4, when declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable the strategic selection from the topical potential manifests itself in what kind of standpoint or which particular standpoint is declared unallowed or indisputable. The strategic selection of presentational devices may be manifested in the use of expressions that make declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable seem more reasonable, such as mentioning immediately and explicitly the rationale for why a certain standpoint should be deemed unallowed or indisputable.

When changing the topic of discussion, as is shown in Section 7.2, the strategic selection from the topical potential manifests itself in what kind of topic has been changed, what kind of new topic has been selected and whether the subject of discussion has been changed when the topic is changed. The selection of presentational devices is manifested in the use of expressions that make the topic change seem reasonable.

When putting pressure on the other party, whether this happens by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to sympathy, the selection from the topical potential manifests itself in what kind of "pressure" is exerted (for instance, what kind of sanction or sympathy) and what kind of "rationale" is given for this "pressure". The selection of presentational devices manifests itself in the use of expressions that make putting pressure on the other party seem reasonable.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the argumentative moves that constitute the modes of confrontational maneuvering prototypically used by the spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences could derail into fallacious ones. To assess these modes of confrontational maneuvering, first of all we have to make clear of which critical discussion (the one between the spokesperson and the immediate opponent or the one between the spokesperson and the international general public) the moves concerned should be considered part of when they are evaluated. This clarification is crucial because these moves play a different role in the two critical discussions. As shown in the analysis of dissociation (Chapter 4), personal attack (Chapter 5), and putting pressure on the other party (Section 7.3), the moves that are judged fallacious in the one critical discussion may not necessarily be deemed fallacious in the other critical discussion.

After it has been made clear to which critical discussion the argumentative moves that constitute a certain mode of confrontational maneuvering belong, the next step is to assess the soundness of these argumentative moves according to the pragma-dialectical rules for reasonable argumentative discourse. In doing so, it should be noted that the institutional preconditions that determine the boundaries of reasonableness in this communicative activity type involve certain amendments of the notion of reasonableness as defined in the pragma-dialectical rules for reasonable argumentative discourse. These amendments affect the implementation of the rules that are pertinent to the cases we are examining.

## 8.2 Implications of this study

In *Strategic maneuvering in argumentative discourse*, which contains a systematic exposition of the extended theory of Pragma-Dialectics, van Eemeren (2010, pp. 263-274) proposes a research agenda for future pragma-dialectical research that has seven orientations. According to van Eemeren, pragma-dialecticians should "focus on communicative activity types representing institutionally conventionalized argumentative practices that serve a broad vari-

ety of institutional goals and reflect different degrees of conventionalization" (p. 273). Our research project responds to this "call" by exploring systematically the argumentative exchanges between spokespersons and journalists at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. Although these exchanges are not without "China-specific characteristics" (some of the institutional preconditions are part of Chinese ideology), because the institutional point and the institutional goals are the same, the argumentative characterization of this communicative activity type applies generally to all similar diplomatic press conferences.

The argumentative characterization of the exchanges at diplomatic press conferences is different from the argumentative characterization of any other communicative activity type in the political domain and the media domain, because this communicative activity type involves a more complicated appeal to a multiple audience than, for instance, a parliamentary debate or a news commentary. A conspicuous and vital difference is that at diplomatic press conferences the spokesperson has to deal with two simultaneous critical discussions, a critical discussion with the immediate opponents as invoked by the questioning journalists and a critical discussion with the international general public, and in the second critical discussion the spokesperson's primary audience is to be convinced via argumentative moves that are in the first critical discussion addressed to a secondary audience that does not really take part in the discussion.

As explained in Section 8.1, the spokesperson will be much more concerned with the second critical discussion than with the first one; in general the first critical discussion only serves to facilitate the spokesperson's convincing of the international general public in the second critical discussion. Our systematic exploration of this unique but complex communicative activity type, particularly our analysis of the different ways in which the two critical discussions interact with each other, enriches the pragma-dialectical study of communicative activity types representing institutionally conventionalized argumentative practices. In addition, it offers inspiration for similar research concerning the argumentative exchanges in diplomatic press conferences

taking place in other countries than China.

Another orientation included in the research agenda proposed by van Eemeren (2010, pp. 267-271) is “Describing modes of strategic maneuvering and their effects empirically”. Other pragma-dialecticians have already carried out some research projects along these lines (see for example Lewinski 2010; Tonnard 2011; Andone 2013; van Poppel 2013; Pilgram 2015; Wierda 2015; Mohammed 2018; Omar 2019). So far, however, no attention has been paid to the exchanges at diplomatic and political press conferences, let alone that the various modes of strategic maneuvering brought to bear in this communicative activity type have been explored. Neither has there been any research concentrating on a fully-fledged analysis of the various types and subtypes of confrontational maneuvering adopted by the arguer in the empirical counterpart of a particular stage of a critical discussion. By investigating systematically the various modes of confrontational maneuvering used by the spokespersons at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences, our research is a contribution to filling up this gap.

Some of the modes of confrontational maneuvering discussed in our research (such as dissociation, personal attack, changing the topic of discussion, and putting pressure on the other party) have received some attentions from pragma-dialecticians, but no systematic empirical study has been conducted regarding the various ways in which these modes are used in a specific institutional context. Our research has made a start with this kind of research and has, for instance, for the first time studied declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable as a mode of confrontational maneuvering.

In analyzing each of the modes of confrontational maneuvering adopted by the spokespersons at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences, we have explained which institutional preconditions constrained the sound use of each mode of confrontational maneuvering and should be taken into account in evaluating the argumentative moves that are made in carrying out the confrontational maneuvering. Our efforts in doing so are a starting point of the more comprehensive research of “general criteria for judging the soundness of the various modes [...] of strategic maneuvering, and the specific criteria

applying to specific communicative contexts” that is called for (van Eemeren 2010, p. 268).

Another implication of our study for the pragma-dialectical research of argumentative discourse follows from our observations concerning the combined use of confrontational strategies that takes place in the spokespersons’ argumentative replies. As reported in Section 7.4, the confrontational strategies used by the spokespersons at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences can be provisionally named “silencing the other party”, “distracting the other party”, and “pressurizing the other party”. Each of these confrontational strategies consists of the combined use of different modes of confrontational maneuvering and it is an implication of our study that continuing the research along these lines more confrontational strategies can be found.

Largely influenced by the descriptive-analytic tradition of discourse studies introduced in Chapter 2, earlier research on political spokespersons’ discourse, and more particularly on the Chinese political/diplomatic spokespersons’ discourse, concentrates as a rule on the various “discursive strategies” that are used or can be used by the spokespersons. When discussing the persuasiveness or convincingness of these discursive strategies, the researchers overwhelmingly adopt a rhetorical perspective, largely neglecting the dialectical boundaries of the use of these strategies. Our research shows that, taking into consideration the institutional point and the institutional goals of the political/diplomatic press conferences, ideally, any argumentative strategy to be used by the spokespersons should not only be rhetorically effective, but also dialectically reasonable. A fully-fledged explanatory analysis of the spokespersons’ argumentative discourse should therefore be solidly based on a theory of argumentation that combines the dialectical and the rhetorical perspective. This means that Pragma-Dialectics is the advisable choice.

Since the central aim of our research was to clarify how the spokespersons maneuver strategically in responding to the journalists’ questions at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences and how their confrontational maneuvering can be instrumental in convincing the primary audience, we did not really discuss how the spokespersons *should* respond to the journalists’ questions.

However, this does not mean that the spokespersons at these and other diplomatic/political press conferences could not benefit from the results of our research. An important practical implication of our research for the spokespersons is that they should be aware of the international general public's role in critically scrutinizing their argumentative replies. This means that in using any mode of strategic maneuvering in their argumentative replies they always have to try to keep a balance between rhetorical effectiveness and dialectical reasonableness. In this endeavor, they should not only bear in mind the (primary and secondary) institutional preconditions of the press conference at which they are operating, but also the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse.

### 8.3 Suggestions for further research

In the present research we have focused on the various modes of confrontational maneuvering used by the spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. As explained in Chapter 3, these modes may be deemed "prototypical" because their occurrence can be explained by the institutional preconditions prevailing in the communicative activity type concerned. Based on the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies collected for this research, we have in Chapter 4 to Chapter 7 analyzed in a qualitative way how the spokespersons actually used these prototypical modes of confrontational maneuvering in their replies to the journalists' questions to convince their primary audience, the international general public. It would be worthwhile to undertake in the next phase of the research program a quantitative study, based on the same corpus, to investigate to what extent these modes of confrontational maneuvering are also "stereotypical". In addition, it would be desirable to identify the prototypical argumentative patterns and sub-patterns that come into being in the discourse as a result of the use of these modes of confrontational maneuvering.

In Section 7.4 we discussed several argumentative strategies involving the combined uses of different modes of strategic maneuvering. Since the various modes of confrontational maneuvering we have discussed in this research

could also be combined in other ways, it is highly possible that in the spokespersons' confrontational maneuvering still more confrontational strategies can be found. The identification of these strategies and the explanation of their occurrence in the institutional macro-context concerned should be an important part of future research.

Along the lines of our research dealing with the various modes of confrontational maneuvering, we need to proceed with the analysis of prototypical (and stereotypical) modes of opening maneuvering, argumentational maneuvering, and concluding maneuvering used by the spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. Based on the analyses of these modes of strategic maneuvering, we can further investigate what kind of opening strategies, argumentational strategies and concluding strategies they are part of. By analyzing the most prominent confrontational strategies, opening strategies, argumentational strategies and concluding strategies, we can also try to identify the general "discussion strategies" (van Eemeren 2010, p. 46) that are used in the spokespersons' argumentative discourse as a whole.

Another issue worth exploring in the next phase of the research program is the kind of influence the institutional preconditions have on the judgment of the reasonableness of the use of the various modes of confrontational maneuvering in the institutional macro-context of China's MoFA's regular press conferences. As a matter of course, the institutional preconditions determining the boundaries of reasonableness in this communicative activity type lead to certain context-specific implementations of the notion of reasonableness. The way in which these implementations are motivated may affect the general definition of reasonableness underlying the pragma-dialectical rules for having a critical discussion. In order to assess the rationale of the constraints imposed on the conduct of argumentative discourse by the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences, a meta-theoretical analysis and evaluation is to be carried out of the instrumentality of this rationale in resolving the difference of opinion on the merits. In this way more insight can be gained in the deeper meaning and consequences of the macro-contextual implementation of the rules for critical discussion

stipulated in Pragma-Dialectics in this communicative activity type.

In addition to, and in relation with, the previous issue, in a future research project a series of comparative studies is to be carried out in which the institutional preconditions are compared that constrain the strategic maneuvering in the argumentative replies by the Chinese MoFA's spokespersons and those of diplomatic spokespersons in other countries, say in America or Europe. In this research, the reasons behind different ways of strategic maneuvering used by the spokespersons in their argumentative replies to the questioning journalists are to be explained. Attention should also be paid to the different argumentative strategies and general discussion strategies that are employed in the speech events compared. It is also interesting to explain how in this speech event the same mode of strategic maneuvering can be used in different ways in argumentative strategies and discussion strategies. In this endeavor, it may also be possible to identify and account for the different "argumentative styles" (van Eemeren 2019) that characterize the spokespersons' argumentative discourses.

In the present research we have concentrated on the spokespersons' argumentative replies to the journalists' questions, without focusing more particularly on the various ways in which these questions are asked. We refrained from providing a detailed analysis of the journalists' questions in this study because, according to our preliminary observations, the spokespersons' replies are generally not significantly influenced by the way the questions are asked. The spokespersons seem to pay more attention to what is asked than to how it is asked. Another, more important, reason is that a systematic analysis of the journalists' questions involves several complicated issues that make it necessary to carry out a separate research project. It would be important to concentrate in this research project more specifically on the intermediary role of the journalists and the ways in which their questions influence the strategic design of the argumentative discourses of the spokespersons.

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# Summary

## “What’s China’s comment?”

### Confrontational maneuvering in spokespersons’ argumentative replies at the regular press conferences of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Adopting the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, this research intends to provide a fully-fledged analysis of a crucial phase in the spokespersons’ argumentative replies at the regular press conferences of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (China’s MoFA for short). This phase is the empirical counterpart in the spokespersons’ argumentative exchanges with the questioning journalists of the confrontation stage in the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion. The central aim of this research is to make clear how the spokespersons maneuver strategically in responding to the journalists’ questions and how their “confrontational maneuvering” can be instrumental in convincing the intended audience. In realizing this central aim, three main research questions are to be answered:

- (1) *What are the institutional preconditions applying to China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences as a communicative activity type that serve as extrinsic (contextually determined) constraints for the strategic maneuvering of the spokespersons in responding to the questions of the journalists?*
- (2) *What modes of confrontational maneuvering are prototypically adopted by the spokespersons in complying with the institutional preconditions of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences in responding to the questions of the journalists?*
- (3) *How are these modes of confrontational maneuvering designed to contribute to making a convincing case for the audience the spokespersons would like to reach?*

To answer the first question, in this research the conventions of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences are identified and the exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists are characterized argumentatively as a

communicative activity type. The argumentative characterization thus achieved makes clear what specific macro-contextual constraints are imposed on the argumentative exchanges between the spokespersons and the journalists in the various stages of the resolution process. In answering the second question, it is first considered analytically which modes of confrontational maneuvering the spokespersons could use to facilitate their argumentative replies while taking account of the institutional preconditions. Next it is determined in qualitative empirical research by means of observation which specific modes of confrontational maneuvering the spokespersons actually employ. In answering the third question, the research focuses on how the different modes of confrontational maneuvering are performed through selection from the topical potential, adaptation to audience demand, and choosing presentational devices. The answers to the second and the third research question are largely based on empirical and qualitative analysis of the empirical data from the official transcripts of the exchanges at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences between November 3, 2011, and December 31, 2018.

The answer to the first question is presented in Chapter 3. It is made clear that the general institutional point of the communicative activity type is explicating and promoting the Chinese government’s stances and policies by deliberating about them with the international general public as the audience. This institutional rationale can be specified into two major institutional goals: to clarify and explain the Chinese government’s stances and policies, and to refute criticisms of the Chinese government’s stances and policies. In reaching the institutional goals and thereby realizing the general institutional point, a set of primary and secondary institutional preconditions constrains the spokespersons’ confrontational maneuvering in their argumentative replies; these preconditions are determined by the institutional context of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences. The seven basic rules constituting these preconditions stipulate what the spokesperson could do, should do, and should not do. In addition, the spokespersons often refer explicitly or implicitly to the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence”, which constitute another pertinent part of the primary institutional preconditions.

As for the secondary institutional preconditions, three of them require special attention. The first one is that in their argumentative reply the spokesperson have to deal at the same time with two audiences. First comes the “primary audience”, which consists of the international general public -- a third party whose judgment concerning the acceptability of the argumentative discourse is decisive to the spokespersons. The “secondary audience” consists of the journalist asking the questions and the spokesperson’s immediate opponents invoked in these questions. The second secondary institutional precondition is that, in order to avoid any accusation of being partisan, in replying to questions concerning very sensitive or controversial issues the spokespersons are to use euphemistic expressions. The third secondary institutional precondition is that certain principles and standpoints are to be considered “indisputable” or even “sacrosanct” by the spokesperson.

Chapter 4, 5, 6 and 7 are intended to answer the second and the third question. In chapter 4, 5 and 6 three predominant prototypical modes of confrontational maneuvering in the spokespersons’ argumentative replies are analyzed: confrontational maneuvering by dissociation, confrontational maneuvering by personal attack, and confrontational maneuvering by declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable. In Chapter 7 two less prominent but still prototypical modes of confrontational maneuvering adopted by the spokespersons are examined: changing the topic and putting pressure on the other party.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the analysis of how the spokespersons use dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering. In this chapter it is reported that when the spokespersons use dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering, four subtypes of dissociation play a role in bringing forward a standpoint. Depending on the rationale for distinguishing between Term I (used by the spokesperson’s opponent) and Term II (used by the spokesperson himself/herself) in the cases concerned, these subtypes can be differentiated as: “distorted” Term I versus “authentic” Term II, “ambiguous” Term I versus “univocal” Term II, “broadened” Term I versus “exact” Term II, and “narrowed” Term I versus “exact” Term II.

Chapter 5 reports how the spokespersons use personal attacks as a mode of confrontational maneuvering. As can be observed in the empirical data, the spokespersons typically use three subtypes of personal attack in their argumentative replies: direct/abusive personal attacks, indirect/circumstantial personal attacks, and You Too/*tu quoque* personal attacks. Each of these subtypes can be further divided into different variants: in the direct subtype, the variants of attacking the immediate opponents used by the spokespersons are accusing them of “bad character”, “bad faith”, “low intelligence”, and “lack of expertise”; in the indirect subtype, the variants include the accusations of “suspicious motives” and “being driven by their own interests”; in the You Too subtype, the four variants that are typically found are “inconsistency between words and actions”, “inconsistency between past and present actions”, “inconsistency between previous and present words”, and “only words without actions”.

As becomes clear from the analyses in Chapter 4 and 5, when the spokesperson uses a dissociation or a personal attack as a mode of confrontational maneuvering, this can be seen as a calculated argumentative move in the confrontation stage of an imagined critical discussion with his/her immediate opponents instigated by the question of the journalist. The purpose of using a dissociation or a personal attack in this critical discussion is to negate the immediate opponents’ doubts or criticisms concerning China’s standpoints. In the case of dissociation, the spokespersons try to realize this purpose by pointing out that a crucial term mentioned in defining the difference of opinion at issue is “misused” by the immediate opponents. In the case of a personal attack, the spokespersons attempt to realize this purpose by undermining their immediate opponents’ credibility or authority in criticizing China.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to the analysis of how spokespersons use declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable as a mode of confrontational maneuvering. According to the various rationales the spokespersons presuppose to be understood as well as acceptable to (the questioning journalists and) the international general public, three subtypes of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable are prototypically used in this endeavor. The first

subtype is declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable based on the rationale of necessity. The second subtype is declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable based on the rationale of desirability. The third subtype is declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable based on the rationale of feasibility.

In declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable the spokespersons do not intend to convince the international general public by undermining their immediate opponents' authority/credibility in doubting or criticizing China's standpoints. Instead, in the projected critical discussion with their immediate opponents as well as in the critical discussion with the international general public the spokespersons are out to declare a certain standpoint unallowed or indisputable in the confrontation stage, so that the critical discussion will not come off the ground. A crucial difference between the two critical discussions involved lies in the amount of effort the spokespersons invest in convincing their audience that the standpoint at issue is unallowed or indisputable. However sincere spokespersons may seem to be, in the critical discussion with the immediate opponents they do not make a real effort to convince them that the standpoint is unallowed or indisputable. By contrast, in the critical discussion with the international general public they will go all out to justify the unallowed or indisputable declaration of the standpoint at issue, even though such a declaration might in some cases be fallacious.

Chapter 7 focuses on confrontational maneuvering by changing the topic of discussion and confrontational maneuvering by putting pressure on the other party. Based on the conceptualization of the notions "changing the topic of discussion" and "putting pressure on the other party" from a pragma-dialectical perspective, this chapter explains how the spokespersons try to change the topic of discussion and put pressure on the other party in such a strategic way that it is instrumental in making a convincing case for their audience. As observed in the empirical data of the spokespersons argumentative replies, the spokesperson may or may not change the subject at issue when changing the topic of discussion suggested or posed by the questioning journalists. However, the spokesperson will try to make a "reasonable" and

"sincere" impression on the international general public by sticking to the subject suggested by the questioning journalist unless he/she considers it too sensitive or not yet ready to be discussed.

Pressure on the other party can be exerted by the spokespersons either by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to sympathy. In putting pressure on the audience by pointing at a negative sanction, the spokesperson often mentions the negative consequences in a blunt way, but in a few cases these consequences are only hinted at indirectly. In particular in putting pressure on the international general public by appealing to its sympathy, the spokespersons rely implicitly on the other party's understanding by describing how much efforts China has made, how difficult it has been to China or how helpless China is with regard to the subject at issue.

Just as happens when the spokespersons declare a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, in both of the two discussions changing the topic of discussion takes place in the confrontation stage. When it comes to putting pressure on the other party, the two critical discussions presumed to be conducted interact with each other in a relatively complicated way. Exerting pressure on the other party by pointing at a sanction takes place in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion between the spokesperson and his/her immediate opponents. By pointing at a sanction, the spokesperson intends to prevent the development of a serious discussion on his/her standpoint. Simultaneously, in the critical discussion with the international general public the spokesperson uses the exertion of pressure by pointing at a sanction as a justification of the unavoidability of this sanction against the immediate opponents if the spokesperson's standpoint is not accepted; putting pressure by pointing at the sanction is then a strategic move in the argumentation stage of this discussion. The pressure on the other party exerted by the spokesperson by appealing to sympathy, on the other hand, is directed at the international general public rather than the immediate opponents mentioned in the journalist's question. That exertion of pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy takes place in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion between the spokesperson and the international general public. By appealing

to sympathy, the spokesperson intends to prevent a serious discussion on his/her standpoint from taking place. Simultaneously, exerting pressure by appealing to sympathy in the critical discussion with the immediate opponents is used by the spokesperson in justifying why his/her standpoint should be accepted (without him/her really believing that it will be accepted). In this critical discussion putting pressure can thus be seen as a move in the argumentation stage of the discussion.

In Chapter 7 it is explained that in the argumentative practice of China's MoFA's regular press conferences the modes of confrontational maneuvering that have been analyzed in this study are more often than not strategically combined by the spokespersons. Such deliberate combinations are either aimed at reinforcing the strategic function of the predominant mode of confrontational maneuvering or at reaching a more convincing effect than each single mode could achieve by itself by using in a concerted effort several modes of strategic maneuvering. When they are used together in this way, the combined uses of these modes of confrontational maneuvering may constitute different types of confrontational strategies.

In Chapter 4, 5, 6, and 7, it has been made clear that, in order to make their argumentative replies convincing, in using the (sub)types of the modes of the confrontational maneuvering discussed above the spokespersons try their best to adapt to the international general public's audience's demand concerning the issues discussed and to make at the same time appropriate strategic choices from the available topical potential and the available presentational devices. In doing so, they try to make sure that they observe the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences.

As a matter of course, the argumentative moves that constitute the modes of confrontational maneuvering that are prototypically used by the spokespersons at China's MoFA's regular press conferences could derail into fallaciousness. To assess the soundness of the use of these modes of confrontational maneuvering, we first of all have to make clear of which presumed critical discussion (the one between the spokesperson and the immediate opponent or the one between the spokesperson and the international gen-

eral public) the argumentative moves concerned should be considered part of when they are evaluated. This clarification is crucial because in the two critical discussions these argumentative moves play a different role. As shown in the analysis of dissociation (Chapter 4), personal attack (Chapter 5), and putting pressure on the other party (Section 7.3), the argumentative moves judged fallacious in the one critical discussion may not necessarily be deemed fallacious in the other critical discussion.

After it has been made clear to which critical discussion the argumentative moves that constitute a certain mode of confrontational maneuvering belong, the next step is to assess the soundness of these argumentative moves according to the pragma-dialectical rules for reasonable argumentative discourse. In doing so, it should be noted that the institutional preconditions that determine the boundaries of reasonableness in the communicative activity type concerned may involve certain amendments of the notion of reasonableness as it is defined in the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, which is aimed at resolving a difference of opinion in accordance with the merits of the argumentative moves that have been made. This certainly applies to the argumentative practice examined in this research.

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# Samenvatting

## “What’s China’s comment?”

### Confrontational maneuvering in spokespersons’ argumentative replies at the regular press conferences of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs

In dit onderzoek wordt een analyse gegeven van een cruciale fase in de beantwoording door Chinese zegslieden van vragen van journalisten tijdens de persconferenties die regelmatig gegeven worden door China’s Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. Het gaat hierbij om de fase die het empirische equivalent vormt van de confrontatiefase in het pragma-dialectische model van een kritische discussie. Het centrale doel van het onderzoek is duidelijk te maken hoe de zegslieden strategisch manoeuvreren bij het beantwoorden van de vragen van de journalisten en hoe hun “confrontatief manoeuvreren” instrumenteel kan zijn in het overtuigen van het beoogde publiek. Bij het realiseren van deze doelstelling dienen de volgende drie hoofdvragen te worden beantwoord:

- (1) *Wat zijn de institutionele randvoorwaarden voor het strategisch manoeuvreren van zegslieden bij het beantwoorden van vragen van journalisten die contextueel bepaalde beperkingen vormen in het communicatieve activiteitstype van de persconferenties van het Chinese Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken?*
- (2) *Welke wijzen van confrontatief manoeuvreren worden door zegslieden die aan de institutionele randvoorwaarden van de persconferenties van het Chinese Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken moeten voldoen gebruikt bij het beantwoorden van vragen van journalisten?*
- (3) *Hoe kan de manier waarop deze wijzen van confrontatief manoeuvreren zijn ingericht bijdragen aan het overtuigen van het publiek dat de zegslieden wensen te bereiken?*

Om de eerste vraag te beantwoorden, zijn in dit onderzoek de conventies geïdentificeerd die voor de persconferenties van het Chinese Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken gelden en zijn vervolgens de uitwisselingen tussen de

zegslieden en de journalisten in dit communicatieve activiteitstype argumentatief gekarakteriseerd. Deze argumentatieve karakterisering maakt duidelijk welke specifieke contextuele beperkingen er op deze persconferenties in de verschillende fasen van het uitwisselingsproces aan de argumentatieve uitwisselingen tussen zegslieden en journalisten zijn opgelegd. Bij het beantwoorden van de tweede vraag is eerst analytisch nagegaan van welke wijzen van confrontatief manoeuvreren de zegslieden gebruik zouden kunnen maken om hun argumentatieve beantwoording te vergemakkelijken zonder de institutionele randvoorwaarden uit het oog te verliezen. Vervolgens is in kwalitatief onderzoek door middel van empirische observatie bepaald welke specifieke wijzen van confrontatief manoeuvreren de zegslieden daadwerkelijk gebruiken. Bij het beantwoorden van de derde vraag concentreert het onderzoek zich op de manieren waarop in de verschillende wijzen van confrontatief manoeuvreren de selectie uit het topisch potentieel, de aanpassing aan het publiek en de keuzes van presentatiemiddelen plaatsvinden. De antwoorden op de tweede en derde onderzoeksvraag zijn goeddeels gebaseerd op empirische observatie en analyse van de data uit de officiële transcripten van de uitwisselingen op de persconferenties van het Chinese Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken tussen 3 november 2011 en 31 december 2018.

Het antwoord op de eerste vraag wordt gegeven in hoofdstuk 3. Daarin wordt duidelijk gemaakt dat de algemene institutionele rationale van het communicatief activiteitstype bestaat uit het uitleggen en promoten van het beleid en de standpunten van de Chinese regering door ten overstaan van het internationale algemene publiek over deze zaken te overleggen. De institutionele rationale kan gespecificeerd worden in twee institutionele hoofddoelen: het verduidelijken en toelichten van het beleid en de standpunten van de Chinese regering en het ontkrachten van kritiek op het beleid en de standpunten van de Chinese regering. Bij het nastreven van de institutionele doelen en het daardoor vorm geven aan de algemene institutionele rationale wordt het confrontationele manoeuvreren in de argumentatieve reactie van de zegslieden beperkt door een serie primaire en secundaire institutionele randvoorwaarden die bepaald zijn door de institutionele context van de per-

sconferenties van het Chinese Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken. De zeven basisregels die de institutionele context constitueren stipuleren wat de zegslieden kunnen doen, moeten doen en niet moeten doen. Daarnaast verwijzen de zegslieden ook vaak expliciet of impliciet naar de “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence”, die een ander belangrijke component vormen van de primaire institutionele randvoorwaarden.

Van de secundaire institutionele randvoorwaarden vereisen er drie speciale aandacht. De eerste is dat zegslieden in hun argumentatieve reacties met twee partijen tegelijk rekening moeten houden. Allereerst is er het “primaire auditorium”, dat bestaat uit het internationale algemene publiek – een derde partij waarvan het oordeel over de aanvaardbaarheid van de argumentatieve uitwisseling voor de zegslieden doorslaggevend is. Het “secundaire auditorium” bestaat behalve uit de journalist die de vragen stelt uit de opponenten van de zegslieden die in deze vragen worden aangehaald. De tweede secundaire institutionele randvoorwaarde is dat de zegslieden zich bij het beantwoorden van vragen betreffende bijzonder gevoelige of controversiële zaken eufemistisch moeten uitdrukken om elke beschuldiging van partijdigheid te vermijden. De derde secundaire randvoorwaarde is dat bepaalde principes en standpunten vanuit Chinees perspectief als “onbetwistbaar” of als “niet ter discussie staand” dienen te worden beschouwd.

Hoofdstuk 4, 5, 6 en 7 zijn bedoeld als antwoord op de tweede en de derde onderzoeksvraag. In deze hoofdstukken worden drie prototypische wijzen van confrontatief manoeuvreren geanalyseerd die dominant zijn in de argumentatieve reacties van de zegslieden: confrontatief manoeuvreren door middel van dissociatie, confrontatief manoeuvreren door middel van een persoonlijke aanval en confrontatief manoeuvreren door een standpunt onbetwistbaar of niet ter discussie staand te verklaren. In hoofdstuk 7 worden twee minder prominente maar wel prototypische wijzen van confrontatief manoeuvreren onderzocht die eveneens door de zegslieden gebruikt worden: een verandering aanbrengen in het standpunt dat ter discussie staat en druk uitoefenen op de andere partij.

Hoofdstuk 4 is gewijd aan een analyse van hoe de zegslieden als een wijze

van confrontatief manoeuvreren gebruik maken van dissociaties. Er wordt geconstateerd dat er, in het gebruik van dissociatie door de zegslieden bij het strategisch manoeuvreren vier subtypen van dissociatie kunnen worden onderscheiden die een rol spelen bij het naar voren brengen van een standpunt. Afhankelijk van de rationale die in de verschillende gevallen ten grondslag ligt aan het maken van een onderscheid tussen Term I (die gebruikt wordt de opponent van de zegslieden) en Term II (die gebruikt wordt door de zegslieden zelf), kunnen deze subtypen aldus worden gedifferentieerd: “vervormde” Term I versus “authentieke” Term II, “ambigue” Term I versus “eenduidige” Term II, “verbrede” Term I versus “exacte” Term II, and “versmalde” Term I versus “exacte” Term II.

In hoofdstuk 5 wordt nagegaan hoe de zegslieden bij het confrontatief manoeuvreren gebruik maken van persoonlijke aanvallen. Zoals de empirische data laten zien, is het karakteristiek voor de argumentatieve reacties van de zegslieden dat hierin drie subtypen van de persoonlijke aanval voorkomen: directe/beledigende persoonlijke aanvallen, indirecte/naar bijkomende omstandigheden verwijzende persoonlijke aanvallen, en Jij Ook/*tu quoque* persoonlijke aanvallen. Elk van deze subtypen kan verder worden ingedeeld in varianten: in het directe subtype bestaan de varianten die door de zegslieden gebruikt worden om opponenten rechtstreeks aan te vallen eruit dat de opponent ervan beschuldigd wordt onbetrouwbaar te zijn, een slecht karakter te hebben of een geringe intelligentie of een gebrek aan deskundigheid. In het indirecte subtype omvatten de varianten beschuldigingen van verdachte motieven en geleid worden door eigenbelang. De vier varianten die karakteristiek zijn voor het gebruik dat de zegslieden van het Jij Ook subtype maken zijn “inconsistentie tussen woorden en daden”, “inconsistentie tussen eerdere en huidige daden”, “inconsistentie tussen eerdere en huidige woorden” and “alleen woorden maar geen daden”.

Zoals uit de analyses in hoofdstuk 4 en 5 blijkt, is het gebruik van een dissociatie of een persoonlijke aanval door de zegslieden een wijze van confrontatief strategisch manoeuvreren die gezien kan worden als een weloverwogen argumentatieve zet in de confrontatiefase van een denkbeeldige kri-

tische discussie met een opponent die geïnstigeerd is door de vraag van de journalist. Het gebruik van de dissociatie of de persoonlijke aanval in deze kritische discussie heft ten doel kritiek van de opponent aangaande China's standpunten uit de wereld te helpen. In het geval van een dissociatie trachten de zegsliden dit doel te bereiken door duidelijk te maken dat de opponent bij het definiëren van het verschil van mening een cruciale term "misbruikt" heeft. In het geval van een persoonlijke aanval proberen ze het te bereiken door de geloofwaardigheid of de autoriteit van de opponent in het kritiseren van China te ondermijnen.

Hoofdstuk 6 is gewijd aan de analyse van hoe zegsliden het onbetwistbaar of niet ter discussie staand verklaren gebruiken als een wijze van confrontatief manoeuvreren. Al naar gelang de rationales die de zegsliden als aanvaardbaar beschouwen voor (de ondervragende journalisten en) het internationale algemene publiek, worden er bij dit manoeuvreren prototypisch drie subtypen gebruikt van het onbetwistbaar of niet ter discussie staand verklaren van een standpunt. Het eerste subtype bestaat uit het onbetwistbaar of niet ter discussie staand verklaren van een standpunt op basis van de "noodzakelijkheidsrationale"; het tweede subtype bestaat uit het onbetwistbaar of niet ter discussie staand verklaren van een standpunt op basis van de "wenselijkheidsrationale" en het derde subtype uit het onbetwistbaar of niet ter discussie staand verklaren van een standpunt op basis van de "doenlijkheidsrationale".

Bij het onbetwistbaar of niet ter discussie staand verklaren van een standpunt hebben de zegsliden niet de intentie het internationale algemene publiek te overtuigen door de geloofwaardigheid/autoriteit van hun opponent in het kritiseren van China's standpunten te ondermijnen. In plaats daarvan zijn ze er zowel in de geprojecteerde kritische discussie met de opponent als in de kritische discussie met het internationale algemene publiek op uit om een bepaald standpunt al in de confrontatiefase onbetwistbaar of niet ter discussie staand te verklaren, zodat de kritische discussie niet van de grond zal komen. Een cruciaal verschil tussen de beide kritische discussies die hier een rol spelen schuilt in hoeveel de zegsliden metterdaad investeren in pogingen om het auditorium ervan te overtuigen dat het omstreden standpunt onbetwist-

baar is of niet ter discussie staat. Hoe oprecht zegsliden ook mogen lijken, ze doen in de kritische discussie met de opponent geen echte poging om die opponent ervan te overtuigen dat het standpunt onbetwistbaar is of niet ter discussie staat, terwijl ze er in de kritische discussie met het internationale algemene publiek juist alles aan doen om dat te rechtvaardigen, in sommige gevallen zelfs als dat drogredelijk mocht zijn.

Hoofdstuk 7 is gericht op confrontatief manoeuvreren door een verandering aan te brengen in het standpunt dat ter discussie staat en confrontatief manoeuvreren door druk uit te oefenen op de andere partij. Op basis van een pragma-dialectische conceptualisering van de begrippen "een verandering aanbrengen in het standpunt" en "druk uitoefenen op de andere partij", wordt in dit hoofdstuk uitgelegd hoe de zegsliden proberen om een standpunt op zo'n strategische manier te veranderen en op zo'n strategische manier druk uitoefenen dat dit instrumenteel is in het overtuigen van hun auditorium. Zoals duidelijk is geworden door observatie van de argumentatieve reacties van de zegsliden in de empirische data van het onderzoek, kan het wel of niet zo zijn dat de zegsliden met het veranderen van het standpunt ook het onderwerp van discussie veranderen dat aangereikt of gesuggereerd is door de ondervragende journalist. De zegsliden zullen echter een redelijke en oprechte indruk willen maken op het internationale algemene publiek door alleen van het door de journalist aangegeven discussieonderwerp af te wijken als dit naar hun oordeel te gevoelig is of nog niet rijp is voor discussie.

Zegsliden kunnen druk uitoefenen op de andere partij door een negatieve sanctie te noemen of door een beroep te doen op sympathie. Bij het uitoefenen van druk op het auditorium door een negatieve sanctie te wijzen noemen, worden de negatieve gevolgen door de zegsliden vaak zonder veel omhaal vermeld, maar in een paar gevallen wordt er alleen op een indirecte manier naar de negatieve gevolgen verwezen. In het bijzonder als de zegsliden druk uitoefenen op het internationale algemene publiek door een beroep te doen op hun sympathie, rekenen ze impliciet op begrip van de andere partij door te beschrijven hoeveel inspanningen China zich heeft getroost, hoe moeilijk het voor China is geweest of hoe hulpeloos China in het betreffende geval was.

Net zoals wanneer de zegslieden een standpunt onbetwistbaar of niet ter discussie verklaren, vindt het veranderingen aanbrengen in het standpunt dat ter discussie staat in beide discussies plaats in de confrontatiefase. Wanneer er druk op de andere partij wordt uitgeoefend is er sprake van een tamelijk ingewikkelde interactie tussen de twee kritische discussies die impliciet gevoerd worden. Druk uitoefenen op de andere partij door een sanctie te noemen gebeurt in de confrontatiefase van de kritische discussie tussen zegslieden opponenten. Door op een sanctie te wijzen, proberen de zegslieden de ontwikkeling van een serieuze discussie over hun standpunt te voorkomen. Tegelijkertijd gebruiken ze deze strategische zet in de argumentatiefase van de kritische discussie met het internationale algemene publiek om de onvermijdelijkheid van de sanctie tegen de opponent te rechtvaardigen als hun standpunt niet aanvaard wordt. De druk daarentegen die door de zegslieden op de andere partij wordt uitgeoefend door een beroep te doen op hun sympathie is op het internationale algemene publiek gericht in plaats van op de in de vraag van de journalist opgevoerde opponent. Dit druk uitoefenen op de andere partij door een beroep te doen op hun sympathie vindt plaats in de confrontatiefase van de kritische discussie tussen de zegslieden en het internationale algemene publiek. Door een beroep op sympathie te doen, proberen de zegslieden te verhinderen dat er een serieuze discussie plaatsvindt over hun standpunt. Tegelijkertijd wordt het uitoefenen van druk door een beroep te doen op sympathie door de zegslieden in de kritische discussie met de opponent gebruikt om te rechtvaardigen waarom hun standpunt zou moeten worden aanvaard (zonder dat ze echt geloven dat dit ook zal gebeuren). In die kritische discussie kan het uitoefenen van deze druk dus als een zet in de argumentatiefase worden beschouwd.

In hoofdstuk 7 wordt uitgelegd dat de wijzen van confrontatief manoeuvreren die in deze studie zijn geanalyseerd in de argumentatieve praktijk van de persconferenties van het Chinese Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken door de zegslieden vaak op strategische wijze worden gecombineerd. Zulke welbewuste combinaties zijn ofwel gericht op het versterken van de strategische functie van de dominante wijze van confrontatief manoeuvreren ofwel op

het door middel van een combinatie van verscheidene wijzen van strategisch manoeuvreren bereiken van een overtuigender effect dan met elk van de verschillende wijzen van strategisch manoeuvreren afzonderlijk zou worden bereikt. Als ze op een bepaalde manier met elkaar worden gecombineerd, kunnen de verschillende wijzen van strategisch manoeuvreren gezamenlijk specifieke typen confrontatieve strategieën constitueren.

In hoofdstuk 4, 5, 6 en 7 is duidelijk gemaakt dat de zegslieden om hun argumentatieve beantwoording overtuigend te maken bij het gebruik van de (sub)typen van strategisch manoeuvreren die hierboven zijn besproken hun best doen om tegemoet te komen aan het internationale algemene publiek en tegelijk passende strategische keuzes te maken uit het beschikbare topisch potentieel en de beschikbare presentatiemiddelen. Daarbij trachten ze te voldoen aan de institutionele randvoorwaarden van de persconferenties van het Chinese Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken.

Het spreekt vanzelf dat de argumentatieve zetten die de wijzen van confrontatief manoeuvreren constitueren die op de persconferenties van het Chinese Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken prototypisch door de zegslieden worden gebruikt ook kunnen ontsproten in drogredelijkheid. Om de deugdelijkheid van het gebruik van deze wijzen van confrontatief manoeuvreren te beoordelen, moet eerst worden vastgesteld van welke veronderstelde kritische discussie (die tussen de zegslieden en de opponent of die tussen de zegslieden en het internationale algemene publiek) de te beoordelen argumentatieve zetten geacht mogen worden deel uit te maken. Deze verheldering is cruciaal omdat de argumentatieve zetten in de twee kritische discussies een verschillende rol spelen. Zoals de analyses van dissociaties (hoofdstuk 4), persoonlijke aanvallen (hoofdstuk 5) en druk uitoefenen op de andere partij (paragraaf 7.3) duidelijk maken, hoeven argumentatieve zetten die in de ene kritische discussie als drogredelijk worden beoordeeld in de andere kritische discussie niet noodzakelijk drogredelijk te worden geacht.

Nadat is vastgesteld tot welke kritische discussie de argumentatieve zetten behoren die een bepaalde wijze van confrontatief manoeuvreren constitueren, bestaat de volgende stap dan ook uit het beoordelen van de deugdelijk-

heid van deze argumentatieve zetten volgens de pragma-dialectische regels voor een redelijke argumentatieve gedachtewisseling. Daarbij moet er rekening mee worden gehouden dat de institutionele randvoorwaarden die in het type communicatieve activiteit waarin de argumentatieve gedachtewisseling plaatsvindt de grenzen van de redelijkheid bepalen een bepaalde amendering met zich kunnen meebrengen van het begrip redelijkheid zoals dat gedefinieerd is in de pragma-dialectische gedragscode voor het houden van een discussie die erop gericht is een verschil van mening in overeenstemming met de merites van de gedane argumentatieve zetten op te lossen. Dit geldt zeker ook voor de argumentatieve praktijk die in dit onderzoek is onderzocht.

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# Curriculum Vitae

Peng Wu was born on November 5, 1983 in Suqian, China. He got a B.A. in English Studies from Jiangsu University in 2004. In the same year he was employed by Jiangsu University as a Teaching Assistant in English Language and Literature and received a three-year scholarship to continue his M.A. studies in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics in Jiangsu University. In 2008, one year after he got an M.A. degree from Jiangsu University, he obtained a full-time Ph.D. position in Zhenjiang University. After graduating from Zhejiang University in 2011 with a Ph.D. in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, he came back to Jiangsu University and worked there for two years as a Senior Lecturer in English Language and Literature. In 2013-2014, sponsored by China's Scholarship Council, he stayed at the Department of Speech Communication, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric of the University of Amsterdam as a guest researcher. In 2014 he was accepted as an external doctoral researcher at Leiden University, where he carried out his second doctoral research in the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics. Since 2015 until now, Wu Peng has been an Associate Professor in English Language and Literature in Jiangsu University. In 2016-2017 he was Deputy Chair of the Department of English Studies and then Chair of Department of College English Teaching at Jiangsu University. In 2017-2018 he was Assistant Dean of the School of Foreign Languages of Jiangsu University. Since December 2018 until now, he has been Deputy Dean of this School of Foreign Languages.