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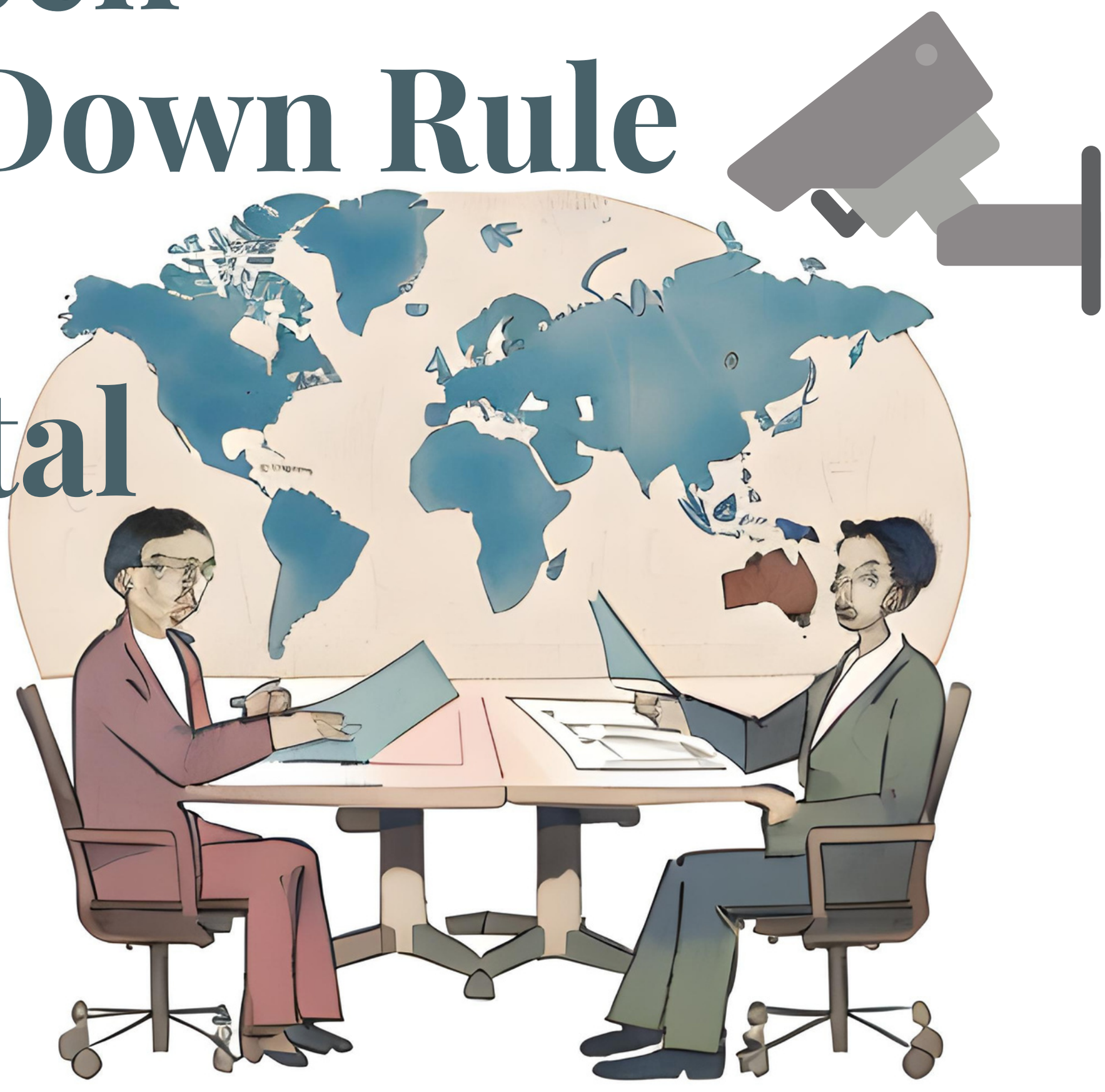

SABINE MOKRY

The construction of China's national interest: Between top-down rule and societal ideas

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Summaries

The construction of China's national interest: Between top-down rule and societal ideas

The return of strongmen politics exemplified by Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin has led many to question whether societal actors can influence the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, despite tightening authoritarian rule, there are vibrant societal debates about foreign policy in China. Scholars have identified societal actors capable of influencing China's foreign policy. Some have even uncovered channels through which these actors can exert influence. However, despite excellent work on foreign policy-making in China, we do not yet know under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence China's foreign policy. In this dissertation, I examine under what conditions experts at Chinese foreign policy think tanks and Chinese International Relations scholars, the most likely societal actors to shape China's foreign policy, influence the official construction of China's national interest. Drawing on frame analysis and quantitative content analysis, I analyzed about 100 official foreign policy statements, over 500 policy reports published by think tanks, and approx. 2000 articles published in Chinese academic journals. I found that there was no perfect transmission belt between official and societal constructions of China's national interest, which makes considering the intervening effect of domestic structures necessary. I argue that societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input facilitate and constrain societal actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest. Through close observation of changes in political institutions and state-society relations under Xi Jinping, I uncovered how the state's openness to societal input changed over time and in what ways it differed for think tanks and scholars. In addition, I developed a new measurement of think tanks' and scholars' proximity to the state. These insights allow us to reexamine societal actors' influence on the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes.

De constructie van China's nationaal belang: Tussen heerschappij van bovenaf en maatschappelijk debat

De terugkeer van de politiek van sterke mannen, zoals die van Xi Jinping en Vladimir Putin, heeft ertoe geleid dat velen zich afvragen of maatschappelijke actoren het buitenlands beleid van autoritaire regimes kunnen beïnvloeden. Ondanks het strenger wordende autoritaire bewind zijn er levendige maatschappelijke debatten over het buitenlands beleid in China. Wetenschappers hebben maatschappelijke actoren geïdentificeerd die het buitenlands beleid van China kunnen beïnvloeden. Sommigen hebben zelfs kanalen ontdekt waardoor deze actoren het buitenlands beleid kunnen beïnvloeden. Ondanks uitstekend werk over buitenlandse beleidsvorming in China, weten we echter nog niet onder welke voorwaarden Chinese maatschappelijke actoren het buitenlands beleid van China beïnvloeden. In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik onder welke voorwaarden experts van Chinese denktanks voor buitenlands beleid en Chinese wetenschappers in internationale betrekkingen, de meest waarschijnlijke maatschappelijke actoren die het buitenlands beleid van China vormgeven, de officiële constructie van China's nationale belang beïnvloeden. Ik analyseerde ongeveer 100 officiële verklaringen over buitenlands beleid, meer dan 500 beleidsrapporten gepubliceerd door denktanks, en ongeveer 2000 artikelen gepubliceerd in Chinese academische tijdschriften met frame-analyse en kwantitatieve inhoudsanalyse. Ik ontdekte dat er geen perfecte transmissieriem was tussen officiële en maatschappelijke constructies van het nationale belang van China. Dit maakt het noodzakelijk om rekening te houden met het interveniërende effect van

binnenlandse structuren. Ik argumenteer dat de nabijheid van maatschappelijke actoren tot de staat en de openheid van de staat voor maatschappelijke input de invloed van maatschappelijke actoren op de officiële constructie van het nationaal belang vergemakkelijken en beperken. Door veranderingen in politieke instellingen en relaties tussen de staat en de samenleving onder Xi Jinping van nabij te volgen, heb ik ontdekt hoe de openheid van de staat voor maatschappelijke inbreng in de loop der tijd veranderde en op welke manieren deze verschilde voor denktanks en wetenschappers. Daarnaast heb ik een nieuwe meting ontwikkeld van de nabijheid van denktanks en wetenschappers tot de staat. Dankzij deze inzichten kunnen we de invloed van maatschappelijke actoren op het buitenlands beleid van autoritaire regimes opnieuw onderzoeken.

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1 Introduction

The Chinese government refers to the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a "Near-Arctic State" (近北极国家). Appearing in almost all official statements describing China's role in the Arctic, the term reflects the Chinese government's ambitions to be recognized as a key player in this realm, even though the country is not geographically adjacent to the Arctic.[1] The term's genesis is a prime example of a Chinese scholar's influence on the official construction of China's national interest. According to Lu Junyuan[2] (2010), Zhang Xia, a researcher at the Polar Research Institute of China (中国极地研究中心),[3] first used the term "Near-Arctic State" in the early 2000s (2010, 339). Kossa (2020) and Wu Fuzuo (2022) show that the term first spread in Chinese academic circles and was then picked up by government officials (Kossa 2020; Fuzuo Wu 2022). In 2018, the Chinese government included the concept in a white paper outlining its Arctic policy. It claimed that "[g]eographically, China is a "Near-Arctic State", one of the continental states that are closest to the Arctic Circle" (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2018b).

1.1 Puzzle and research question

Against the backdrop of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s top-down rule, Chinese scholars' and other societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest appears puzzling. Having centralized political power even more than his predecessors, CCP General Secretary and PRC State President Xi Jinping conveys the impression that he alone determines China's foreign policy. This suggests that there is no room for domestic actors, let alone societal

[1] The shortest distance between the Arctic and Chinese territory is roughly 1500 kilometers (Fuzuo Wu 2022).
[2] Since many Chinese scholars I cite share the same surnames, I decided to include the full names of all Chinese scholars I mention.
[3] According to its website, the Polar Research Institute of China (PRIC) focuses on scientific research and logistic support for polar expeditions, through conducting research in this field and operating research stations. It was founded in 1989. As a think tank, it is supposed to provide advice for foreign policy decision-making related to the Polar Regions. Link to Website: https://www.cnarc.info/members/21-polar-research-institute-of-china [last accessed 18 January 2023, 9:15].

actors, to influence the official construction of China's national interest. Yet, theoretical approaches in International Relations (IR) focusing on the role of political leaders in foreign policy-making cannot account for changes in the official construction of China's national interest under Xi's rule. This might be because societal actors, especially experts, who continue to voice their expectations about China's foreign policy even in a highly centralized authoritarian regime like PRC, have at least some influence over how China's national interest is constructed. As a global power, the PRC is internationally engaged in various fields. Borrowing a key argument from the International Political Economy literature on domestic preferences and trade (Lake, 2009, p. 225), I expect that the more expansive China's international engagement becomes, the more societal actors develop diverging and potentially conflicting expectations about China's foreign policy. Thus, despite severe limits on their freedom of expression, societal actors, including experts, lobbyists, and members of the broader civil society, make their voices heard and try to influence the official construction of China's national interest. So far, researchers have identified societal actors capable of influencing China's foreign policy. Some have even worked out through which channels these actors can exert influence (Abb 2015; H. Feng, He, and Yan 2019). However, despite excellent work on foreign policy-making processes in China, we do not yet know when and how much Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. This dissertation seeks to fill this gap.

In this dissertation, I examine under what conditions societal actors influence the official constructions of the national interest in authoritarian states. In particular, I assess under what conditions Chinese scholars and think-tank experts influence the official construction of China's national interest. I focus on these two groups of societal actors because the existing literature on Chinese societal actors' influence on foreign policy suggests that out of all Chinese societal actors, foreign policy experts are most likely to influence the official construction of China's national interest (for details, see Chapter 2). Due to important differences between both groups, their influence on the official construction of China's national interest should be analyzed separately.

The most important difference between the two groups is that scholars put research before policy advice, while think-tank analysts prioritize offering advice to the government. In addition, the state might relate differently to scholars and think-tank experts.

In an authoritarian context like the PRC, societal actors are not independent of the state. Authoritarian rulers set clear limits on what societal actors can do and say. At the same time, the rulers are dependent on societal actors' input and therefore need to provide them with some leeway. Societal actors depend on the space authoritarian rulers provide them with but can also adopt different strategies for working with authoritarian governments. A concrete example is that societal actors reiterate political concepts put forward by the government to get their points across (Hildebrandt 2013). How distant or close societal actors are from the state is ultimately an empirical question that depends on formal ties to and interactions with party-state institutions.

I examine changes in the official construction of China's national interest after Xi Jinping took power in 2012/2013.[4] This leadership transition is widely seen as a "watershed moment" in Chinese politics: "marked by a political scandal", (…) [it] appeared "nasty and brutish", involving high-level struggle and instability, it initiated a new phase of Chinese politics" (Jaros and Pan 2018, 120). The transition almost brought down the CCP's rule. However, Xi Jinping managed to stabilize the party's rule and established himself as a leader with a strong hand. Many scholars agree that this has important implications for foreign policy: Since Xi Jinping took power, China's foreign policy has become more proactive (J. Zhang 2015) or even assertive (Chang-Liao 2018; Poh and Li 2017; J. Wang 2019). While such changes already surfaced under the previous administration (Doshi 2019), the changes became far more visible under Xi. Today nobody can know when (or how) Xi Jinping will leave office, which makes a complete examination of changes in the official construction of China's national interest during his rule impossible at this point. The time frame

[4] Since leadership generations play such an important role, it would be interesting to compare the current administration with the last and assess how foreign policy frames differ under Hu and Xi. There is, however, one practical and one conceptual concern linked to this exercise: First, I am not sure whether it would be feasible to conduct a detailed mapping of foreign policy frames over 15 years. Second, while foreign policy documents are easily available for the past 15 years, obtaining input from societal actors is more difficult, the data trail is likely to fade out. The problem then is that I will not be able to compare the role of societal actors' under the two administrations.

of the analysis in this dissertation ends in 2019, shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic, and its at the time of writing, still unfolding geopolitical consequences hit. Hence, the dissertation covers the first six years of Xi Jinping's tenure as CCP General Secretary and PRC State President. While the systematic examination of official foreign policy statements and societal actors' foreign policy debates ends in 2019, I contextualize the findings with ongoing changes in China's domestic structures beyond this time frame.

This chapter first details what makes this research project relevant, then demonstrates how it differs from prevailing understandings of what shapes the official construction of China's national interest. After presenting the dissertation's theoretical argument, the chapter outlines the analytical challenges to be overcome to apply it to the Chinese context and introduces the data and methods used in this dissertation.

1.2 Relevance

Under authoritarian rule, state-society relations are intricate, which has important consequences for the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes. Contrary to popular perceptions, societal actors exist and engage in foreign policy debate even under highly centralized authoritarian rule. In contrast to democratic settings, societal actors are not autonomous from the state in authoritarian regimes. Instead, links between the state and societal actors are multifaceted, formed through formal institutional ties and more informal interactions. The existence of societal debate and the multifaceted links between state and society influence the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes alongside international factors and interactions between state actors at the domestic level. How exactly societal influence affects the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes is an empirical question that needs to be examined on a case-by-case basis. Given the high degree of centralization of political power and the restrictions on research in the Chinese context, the PRC is a hard case for examining societal actors' influence on foreign policy.

Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012/2013, China's foreign policy has changed in important ways, but explanations that center on the role of the state derived from statist approaches fail to account for these changes. Smith (2021), for instance, examining the concept of "major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics" (中国特色大国外交), shows how changes in China's foreign policy discourse dramatically expanded "the boundaries of legitimate state action" (Smith 2021, 1). However, it has yet to be recognized that at different points in time during Xi's tenure, different elements relating to China's national interest, ranging from defending China's territory and citizens from external threats over expanding its external economic relations and promoting its values to its role in international and regional politics, dominated China's official foreign policy statements. Apart from that, there were subtle shifts in policy substance across various issues related to China's national interest. While much research examines how Xi Jinping's foreign policy differs from his predecessors (Hu 2019; Z. Lin 2019; F. Zhang 2016, 2019b; Yongjin Zhang 2016), changes in how China's national interest has been constructed under him have yet to be examined and explained.

Shifts in the official construction of the national interest matter because language plays a crucial role in international politics. Instead of dismissing official discourse as propaganda, one should consider it because it offers important clues about the Chinese leadership's intentions and ambitions (Poh and Li 2017, 86). According to Mattis (2019), "too often Beijing's intentions are assumed or deduced theoretically without reference to anything the CCP has said", even though there are documents, most importantly, the reports to the party congress, which could help understand Beijing's intentions and objectives (Mattis 2019). More broadly, language matters in foreign policy because "diplomacy places a premium on storytelling" (Robertson 2017, 29). Krebs (2015) further explains that language "neither competes with nor complements power politics: it is power politics" (2015, 2). In the context of this project, expressing a country's national interest matters for three reasons: 1) it signals intent, resolve, and capabilities to external audiences, 2) it binds governments, and 3) it predates policy behavior. The expression of a state's national interest

matters because it signals intent, resolve, and capabilities to external audiences. Only looking at the PRC as a sender of signals, in this dissertation, I understand the expression of China's national interest through foreign policy frames in official statements as a prerequisite of signaling. The concept of "peaceful rise" (和平崛起), introduced by Zheng Bijian, former executive vice president of the Central Committee's Central Party School, in 2006, was meant to assure an international audience that China was not a threat (Glaser and Medeiros 2007, 291). This example illustrates how China signaled intent ("peaceful") as well as resolve ("rise"). The argument of rhetorical commitment poses that once a government has put forward its national interests, it is bound by them. It works best in highly institutionalized contexts such as the European Union, where member states develop norms together and clear processes of holding each other accountable (Thomas 2009). While China is not part of such an institutionalized structure, the Chinese government sometimes makes public pledges that other actors refer to. For example, at multilateral meetings, Chinese government representatives frequently pledge that China will uphold free trade principles. Xi Jinping's speech at the World Economic Forum in 2017 is a prime example of such a public pledge (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2017a). Since then, other governments referred to Xi's speech when they called for reciprocity and equal access to the Chinese market for foreign companies trying to hold the Chinese government accountable for its public pledge. Expressing a state's national interest can predate foreign policy action because its foreign policy should be guided by national interest. Although predictions are difficult, carefully examining how a state expresses its national interest can hint at how the state will behave in the future. An example from China's foreign policy is the emergence of safeguarding "maritime rights and interests" (海洋权益). The emergence of the term, which implied that China no longer sees itself as a land-based power, but extends its reach into the maritime realm, predates China's more aggressive stance in the territorial conflicts in the South China Sea.

This dissertation challenges two conventional views of IR. It defies the notion that foreign policy rhetoric is unworthy of analysis by paying close attention to changes in the official

construction of China's national interest under Xi Jinping. For some IR scholars, expressing a state's national interest is merely discursive and has no repercussions in the material world. Realist IR scholars, in particular, discount communication as mere "cheap talk" and argue that communication only carries diplomatic signals, which are often unreliable, from one state to another (Mitchell 2011). However, the preceding section demonstrated that signaling intent, resolve, and capabilities, binding governments, and predating policy behavior are key reasons why it matters how a country expresses its national interest. By engaging with the idea that despite the shrinking space for societal debate and societal input to China's foreign policy, societal actors might still influence China's foreign policy, this dissertation challenges another conventional view in IR scholarship, that is, the claim that societal actors cannot influence the foreign policy of an authoritarian regime. For example, it is fairly common to describe China's foreign policy without even trying to peek into the black box of its authoritarian regime (Chang-Liao 2018; Friedberg 2018).

1.3 Prevailing understandings

Researchers spend much effort ascertaining what China's national interest entails. While some acknowledge the possibilities of change, a systematic assessment of how the expression of China's national interest changed under Xi Jinping is still lacking. Since the mid-1990s, Chinese scholars have proposed different conceptions of China's national interest. The recent shift to a more proactive foreign policy brought discussions about China's national interest to the forefront of debates about China's foreign policy. Existing scholarship offers ample accounts of what China's national interest could be. Some scholars acknowledge that China's national interest can change and has indeed changed in recent years. However, so far, it has not yet systematically been traced how China's national interest has changed. This is because the existing literature largely conceives China's national interest as static. As a result, existing accounts of China's national interest also miss how domestic actors construct China's national interest.

The literature describes Xi Jinping as having centralized political power even more than his predecessors (Lee 2017). For foreign-policy making, discussed implications of this top-down rule include that the General Secretary himself increased his control over foreign policy, for instance, through coordinating agencies, such as the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms and the Central National Security Commission, all chaired by Xi Jinping (Cabestan 2021). In addition, Central Work Conferences are an important tool for top-level design. The fact that Xi Jinping has already convened three such conferences on international issues signals that he wants to play a more direct role in foreign policy-making (K. Zhao and Gao 2016). Regarding institutions, upgrading the leading small group for foreign affairs into a commission that continues to be chaired by Xi Jinping is the most important example of the centralization of political power in foreign policy-making (Cabestan 2021).

Statist approaches to explaining changes in the official construction of China's national interest center around leaders' beliefs, ideological factors, bureaucratic actors, and geopolitics. Under highly centralized authoritarian rule, leaders can have an outsized impact on the official construction of their country's national interest, as has been demonstrated by recent scholarship on Xi's impact on the transformation of China's foreign policy (Hu 2019; Rudd 2022; F. Zhang 2016). Theoretical approaches focusing on ideological factors emphasize the increased importance that the CCP attaches to ideology and how this affects China's foreign policy rhetoric (K. G. Cai 2020; Cha 2017; Mayer 2018; W. Song 2020). The bureaucratic politics approach focuses on the foreign policy process and tries to explain how foreign policy decisions are made. It helps scholars not to treat China as a monolithic actor as it draws attention to different domestic actors involved (Lai and Kang 2014). Scholars focusing on geopolitics argue that maximizing security and power vis-à-vis other states is the most important foreign policy goal and should, therefore, dominate the official construction of China's national interest (K. G. Cai 2020; Xiaoting Li 2016).

In the existing literature, public opinion, NGOs, business interests, and experts appear as societal actors that could influence China's foreign policy. In the Chinese context, public opinion

about foreign policy issues is commonly examined through nationalist protests and public opinion surveys (Bell and Quek 2018; Weiss 2013, 2014, 2019). While it has been well established that public opinion plays at least some role in shaping China's foreign policy, the specific mechanisms are still largely unknown. The literature on how Chinese NGOs shape China's foreign policy reveals interesting insights into their influence on foreign policy in specific instances in narrowly defined issue areas (Gamso 2019; Su 2010). Similarly, business interests' influence is concentrated on specific policy fields or individual policies (Ghiselli 2021; Gong 2018). Of all the societal actors discussed, scholars and think tank analysts are the most likely group to influence China's foreign policy (Abb 2015; H. Feng, He, and Yan 2019; Glaser and Medeiros 2007; Hua 2017).

Existing scholarship offers varying interpretations of China's national interest. A systematic examination of how China's national interest changed under Xi Jinping is still lacking. Since existing accounts do not conceive of China's national interest as constructed, they miss how domestic actors can influence it even under top-down rule. While scholars and think tank experts emerge as the most likely group of societal actors to influence the official construction of China's national interest, under what conditions they can do so remains to be examined.

1.4 Argument

This study aims to explain the construction of China's national interest (dependent variable). The main argument is that it is shaped by societal constructions of the national interest (independent variable). The empirical analysis in the dissertation reveals that there is no perfect match between the official and societal constructions of China's national interest. Hence, there is no perfect transmission belt between societal ideas and the official construction of China's national interest. As a result, the dissertation's explanatory focus is on two domestic structural variables that condition the relationship between the official construction of the national interest and societal constructions of the national interest: namely, societal actors' proximity to the state, and the state's openness to societal input. How close a societal actor is to the state depends on the extent and

quality of formal ties and interactions with state institutions. How open the state is to societal input is conditioned by domestic structures that are determined by characteristics of the state and society, as well as links between state and society. Domestic structures change over time.

In this dissertation, I argue that various constellations of these two variables facilitate or constrain societal influence on the official construction of the national interest. When societal actors are close to the state, and the state is open to societal input, societal actors have the most influence on the official construction of the national interest. When societal actors are distant from the state and the state is not open to societal input, societal actors have the least influence on the official construction of the national interest. Finally, when societal actors are close to the state and when the state is not open to societal input, and when societal actors are distant from the state and the state is open to societal input, societal actors can somewhat influence the official construction of the national interest.

Domestic structures describe the nature of political institutions ("the state"), society's basic features, and the institutional and organizational arrangements that link the state and society and form the foundation for channeling societal demands into the political system (Risse-Kappen 1991, 484). The nature of political institutions mainly manifests itself in the degree of centralization of the political system, that is, how concentrated executive power is. Society's basic features relate to polarization, the strength of social organization, and the degree to which societal pressure can be mobilized. Lastly, links between the state and society can be either dominated by the state or society (ibid, p. 486).

Understanding how the national interest is constructed is difficult, especially in authoritarian regimes where (foreign) policy-making is often veiled in secrecy (Barros 2016). The dissertation's methodological innovation lies in combining a frequentist understanding of causal inference with carefully considering the context in which societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. Through assessing the fit between the official and societal constructions of China's national interest, this dissertation shows that there is no perfect

transmission belt between societal ideas and the official construction of China's national interest. The quantitative assessment of the effect of the two intervening structural variables is bolstered with an in-depth analysis of the instances in which societal actors influenced the official construction of China's national interest. Empirically, this dissertation shows that Chinese societal actors still influence the official construction of China's national interest despite the increasing centralization of political power. These insights allow us to reexamine societal actors' influence on China's foreign policy and its involvement in international politics.

1.5 Data and methods

To apply the theoretical argument outlined above to the Chinese context, five analytical challenges need to be overcome: how to map changes in the official construction of China's national interest, how to identify societal constructions of China's national interest, how to assess the fit between official and societal constructions of national interest, how to measure societal actors' proximity to the state and how to assess the state's openness to societal input. In this section, I show how frame analysis and quantitative content analysis were employed to address these challenges.

The Chinese government conveys the official construction of China's national interest through official foreign policy statements. To map changes in the official construction of China's national interest, I adapt frame analysis to study Chinese policy documents and analyze close to 100 documents. Frame analysis describes the systematic identification and examination of frames (see, for example Goffman 1974). A frame is a schema of interpretation that performs at least one of the following four functions: problem description, diagnosis of causes, moral interpretation, and suggestion of remedies (Entman 1993). After identifying frames in the material, I analyze them quantitatively and qualitatively. For the quantitative assessment, I cluster all identified frames into themes that relate to the different components of the official construction of China's national interest (see Chapter 3 for details). Then, I examine changes in the relative salience of these components. For the qualitative assessment, I examine how frames that appear at different points

in time differ, allowing me to trace incremental changes in the policy substance related to the official construction of China's national interest.

I consider academic articles and reports published by scholars and think-tank analysts as contributions to foreign policy debates to identify societal constructions of China's national interest. From the different strands of quantitative content analysis methods, dictionary methods are most suitable for this project. My analysis encompasses two steps: First, I ascertain how prominently the constructions of national interest identified in the official foreign policy statements feature in experts' contributions. For this, I examine how frequent the keywords defined in the frame analysis are in experts' contributions. This quantitative analysis provides a general impression of how aligned foreign policy debates and the official construction of the national interest are in China. Second, I trace the shifts in policy substance identified in official foreign policy statements in societal actors' contributions to foreign policy debates. I analyze around 500 policy reports and 2000 journal articles.

I must also assess the fit between official and societal constructions of China's national interest. This entails examining thematic overlaps, scrutinizing the temporal sequencing of policy shifts that appear both in official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions, and an in-depth examination of said policy shifts. Only if there are substantial overlaps between official and societal constructions of the national interest and only if policy shifts first appear in societal contributions and then in official foreign policy statements can societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest.

Many Chinese think tank experts and scholars contribute to Chinese foreign policy debates. I must carefully consider which institutions and individuals to include to avoid selection bias. Rather than simply choosing individuals from institutions commonly claimed to be influential, I develop a measurement that allows me to rank think-tankers and scholars based on their proximity to the state. For developing the measurement, I draw on the literature on Chinese experts' roles in China's political system and foreign policy-making.

Measuring the state's openness to societal input, the second intervening variable that conditions societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest, poses the fifth analytical challenge this project needs to overcome. Applying the political opportunity structures concept introduced in Chapter 3 allows us to identify three areas to consider for measuring the state's openness to societal input: rules and norms, resources, and the broader political environment.

1.6 Plan of the study

The dissertation's chapters 2–4 show how the existing literature can be invoked to determine under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. Reviewing prevailing understandings of changes in the official construction of China's national interest, conceptualizing and operationalizing the components of the theoretical argument provides the foundation for the study's original analyses. Chapters 5–7 then present the study's original findings on the conditions under which Chinese scholars and think tank analysts influence the official construction of China's national interest.

Chapter 2 demonstrates that current understandings of China's national interest cannot fully explain changes in the official construction of China's national interest under Xi Jinping. Since they do not conceive of China's national interest as constructed, they cannot fully capture changes in the official construction of China's national interest and fail to adequately capture the influence of societal actors.

Chapter 3 presents the study's theoretical argument. Drawing on the existing literature, it defines and conceptualizes the dissertation's dependent variable, the official construction of the national interest, its independent variable, societal constructions of the national interest, as well as the structural variables that condition societal actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest, societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input.

Chapter 4 describes the five analytical challenges that must be tackled to find out under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest, that is, how to map changes in the official construction of China's national interest, how to identify societal constructions of the national interest, how to assess the fit between the official and societal constructions of the national interest, how to measure societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input. In addition, it discusses potential problems with causal identification in this research and how to mitigate them.

Moving on to the presentation of the study's empirical results, Chapter 5 demonstrates that there is no perfect match between the official and societal constructions of China's national interest by detailing overlaps and differences in the relative salience of the components of the construction of the national interest and policy substance across official foreign policy documents and societal contributions to foreign policy debates. Building a bridge to Chapters 6 & 7, the chapter shows that due to the weak fit between official and societal constructions of the national interest, the intervening effect of domestic structures needs to be considered.

Chapters 6 & 7 present quantitative and qualitative evidence for the explanatory power of the theoretical argument for Chinese scholars and think tank analysts, respectively. Chapter 6 shows that when scholars were close to the state and when the state was open to their input, they influenced the official construction of China's national interest the most. In contrast, when they were distant from the state and when the state was not open to their input, they no longer influenced the official construction of the national interest. Chapter 7 also shows that the intervening variables, proximity to the state, and the state's openness to societal input influenced think tank analysts' ability to influence the official construction of the national interest, albeit to a more limited extent than for scholars.

Finally, Chapter 8 discusses the dissertation's key findings and main limitations. Its most important limitations are the sole focus on the rhetorical level, difficulties in assessing causality,

and potential challenges to its premises due to political change in China. The concluding chapter also discusses implications for future inquiries into China and other authoritarian regimes.

2 Current understandings of constructions of China's national interest

Right from the beginning of his tenure, CCP General Secretary and PRC State President Xi Jinping made it clear that he intended to change the broad contours of China's foreign policy and associated rhetoric. By introducing vague but attention-grabbing slogans such as "One Belt, One Road" (一带一路), later turned into "Belt and Road Initiative" or the ominous "community of shared destiny" (命运共同体), he signaled that under his leadership the PRC should leave a more pronounced mark on international politics. Many international observers try to infer implications for China's international posture from his statements. However, statements from various Chinese foreign policy actors differ considerably from each other; as I demonstrated elsewhere (Mokry Forthcoming), focusing only on the highest echelons of the Chinese leadership does not allow us to fully capture what is behind these slogans, how the official construction of China's national interest shifted since Xi took power, and what explains these shifts.

In this chapter, I discuss existing explanations for changes in the official construction of China's national interest. Since current understandings of China's national interest conceive of it as static, they cannot account fully for how the official construction of China's national interest changed under Xi Jinping. In addition, since many of the existing explanations are derived from statist approaches, they center on the state's role and fail to capture societal actors' influence adequately. I first review how China's national interest and changes in China's national interest are portrayed in the existing literature. Then, I present, discuss, and refute explanations for changes in the official construction of China's national interest derived from statist approaches. These statist approaches consider leaders' beliefs, ideology, bureaucratic politics, and geopolitics as explanatory factors. Lastly, I introduce and evaluate societal approaches to explain changes in the official construction of China's national interest. I thereby show why, of all possible societal actors, including public opinion, NGOs, business interests, and experts, the latter group, which covers scholars working at universities and analysts working at think tanks, are the most likely societal

actors to influence the official construction of China's national interest. Due to its highly centralized authoritarian rule, the PRC is a hard case for examining societal actors' influence on foreign policy. Therefore, to answer the question under what conditions societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest, it makes sense to focus on the societal actors most likely to exert influence.

2.1 Portrayals of China's national interest and its changes

Researchers spend much effort ascertaining what China's national interest entails. While some acknowledge the possibilities of change, a systematic assessment of how the expression of China's national interest changed under Xi Jinping is still lacking. In this section, I review existing scholarship on China's national interest. Chapter 3 then offers a detailed conceptualization of the construction of the national interest.

Many scholars follow the official definition of China's national interest (Moore 2016; Shih and Huang 2015; Shih and Yin 2013; Tsang 2020; D. Zhang 2017).[5] However, since the mid-1990s, Chinese scholars have put forward different conceptions of China's national interest (Shih and Yin 2013, 71). Yan Xuetong's (1996) foundational work distinguishes material interests covering security and development from what he calls "spiritual interests", that is, respect and recognition from the international community (1996). Wang Yizhou (2004) details development, sovereignty, and responsibility interests (2002). In his review of Chinese theorizing on national interests, Deng (1998) argues that "the Chinese definition of national interests is not a fixed and immutable attribute" (1998, 309). He instead describes the substantive content of the Chinese conception of

[5] Many scholars find the definition Dai Bingguo put forward in 2009 when he was State Councilor for foreign affairs most succinct (Tsang 2020). He defined China's national interest as 'foremost, preserving China's basic state system and state security; after this, national sovereignty and territorial integrity; and in third place, sustain stable development of the economy and society' (第一是维护基本制度和国家安全, 其次是国家主权和领土完整, 第三是经济社会的持续稳定发展) (Feng (巫峰) Wu 2009). In addition, scholars mention that the first official definition of China's national interest appeared in the 2002 Defense White Paper (Shih and Yin 2013). This definition listed territorial integrity, economic development, social stability, the socialist system, and regional order (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2002).

national interests as dynamic and contested (ibid, p. 329). Similarly, Gupta (2012) summarizes three characteristics of national interest that Chinese scholars identified: First, they see national interests as "being shaped by the collective national culture, historical experiences, and national identity". Second, they describe them as "relatively stable and deep principles that guide policies in the long term". Third, even though they "represent the collective interests and aspirations of the nation", there can be disagreement within various groups on the priority of these interests at any given time" (2012, 807).

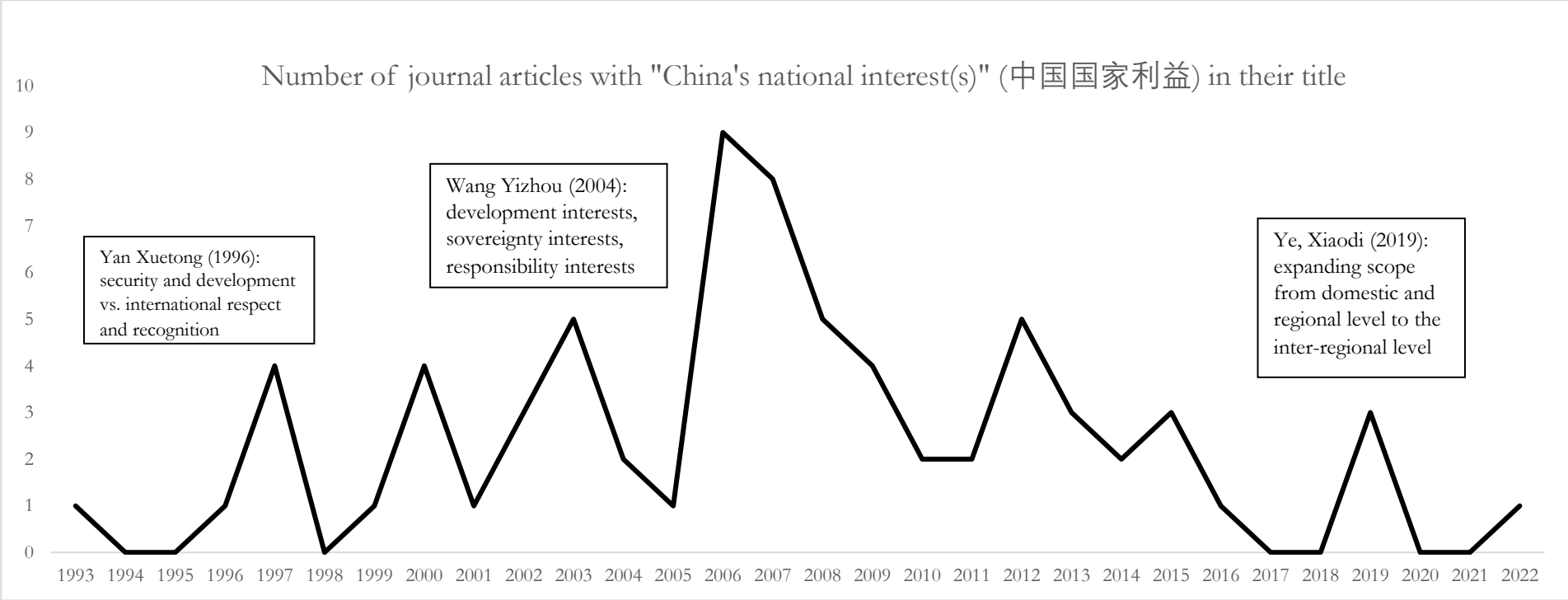
China's more proactive foreign policy brought discussions about China's national interest to the forefront of debates about China's foreign policy. Carefully distinguishing core interest from national interest, Ye Xiaodi (2019) observes an expansion of the concept's scope. He argues that China's rising power status, strategic choices, and responses from neighboring countries all determined the changing scope of China's national interest from the domestic and regional levels to the inter-regional one (2019, 78). In their review of debates among Chinese IR scholars about China's national interest, Chen Qi and Liu Lanyu (2020) point to five topics of discussion: the strategic goal of national interests, the Sino-US relationship as the key to safeguarding national interests, methods, and practices of safeguarding national interest as well as the scope of national interests (2020, 64). They identify two contending viewpoints among Chinese scholars: On the one hand, some scholars argue that China should focus on increasing its global political power; others argue that economic development is key to maintaining China's national interests (ibid).

Existing scholarship offers varying interpretations of China's national interest. Figure 2.1 illustrates Chinese scholars' debates about China's national interest by tracing the amount of attention Chinese scholars have attributed to China's national interest(s) since the 1990s. Since 1993, Chinese scholars have published 71 journal articles that had "China's national interest(s)" (中国国家利益) in their title.[6] There was a peak in interest between 2005 and 2008. Figure 2.1 further

[6] Figure 2.1 presents data collected through the CNKI academic journals database. Articles with 中国国家利益 in the article title were searched on 07 February 2023.

maps key substantive points of the debate as discussed above. Some scholars acknowledge that China's national interest can change and has changed in recent years. However, so far, it has not yet systematically been traced how China's national interest has changed under Xi Jinping. In addition, existing accounts of China's national interest miss how domestic actors construct China's national interest.

Figure 2.1: Chinese scholars' debates about China's national interest(s)



2.2 Statist explanations for changes in the official construction of China's national interest

Located at different levels of analysis, statist approaches to explain changes in the official construction of China's national interest center around leaders' beliefs, ideological factors, bureaucratic actors, and geopolitics. In the following section, I review the logic of these approaches and evaluate their strengths and limitations for explaining changes in the official construction of China's national interest. Table 2.1 provides a summary of these approaches and their explanatory potential.

Much research on the transformation of China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping starts by trying to discern how Xi sees the world. Most recently, Rudd (2022) describes China's foreign policy under Xi as "turbocharged by a Marxist-inspired belief that history is irreversibly on China's side and that a world anchored in Chinese power would produce a more just international order" (2022, 10). According to Zhang Feng (2016), Xi is convinced of China's historical destiny to play "a global role commensurate with its growing power and influence on the global stage" (2016, 120). Methodologically, the authors mostly describe Xi's personal background and extrapolate implications for China's foreign policy. Hu Weixing (2019), for example, ascribes a strong sense of historical responsibility because of his father's involvement in the Communist Revolution. He describes Xi as more courageous and risk-tolerant than his predecessors, possessing a clear vision for the nation and himself (Hu 2019, 8). In contrast, operational code analysis is a more systematic approach focusing on leaders. Drawing on official statements, Kai He and Feng Huiyun (2013) describe differences in the outlook of Chinese leadership generations (2013).

Drawing on leaders' beliefs to explain changes in the official construction of China's national comes with two limitations. First, establishing direct links between leaders' world views and the minutiae of how the national interest is constructed is difficult because leaders' world views primarily relate to broad foreign policy goals. Second, pinning down exactly what leaders' beliefs are is hard because getting access to China's top leadership is very difficult. Feng Huiyun and Kai

He (2016), for example, admit that because of the complexity of China's foreign policy-making process and the opacity of its political system, it "is difficult to gauge what political leaders really perceive" (2016, 694f.). Hence, any description of Xi's worldview comes, or should at least come, with an assessment of the degree of speculation involved. While these limitations should be acknowledged, under highly centralized authoritarian rule, leaders can undoubtedly have an outsized impact on the official construction of their country's national interest, as has been demonstrated by recent scholarship on Xi's impact on the transformation of China's foreign policy. Hence, changes in the official construction of China's national interest could be caused by changes in leaders' beliefs.

Many scholars try to assess how and how much ideology influences China's foreign policy rhetoric and behavior. Analyzing reports to the party congress between 1977 and 2012, Cha Chang Hoon (2017) finds that the Marxist-Leninist worldview has been replaced with China's new political ideology based on material interest (2017, 416). Mayer (2018) observes that the CCP tries to synthesize Marxism, folk traditions, Confucianism, and liberalism (2018, 1218). Scholars try to discern ideology's effect on foreign policy behavior. Kevin Cai (2020) argues that China's sustained attention to developing countries can be attributed to the lingering effects of Marxism (K. G. Cai 2020). Going beyond Marxism, Song Weiqing (2020) examines China's normative foreign policy more broadly. He argues that "China has a long tradition of promoting its favored norms in the international arena, both overtly and tacitly" (2020, 230). He sees that under Xi Jinping, "the normative agenda of Chinese foreign policy has been assertively upgraded and strongly implemented" (ibid, p. 245). In practice, this plays out in the Chinese government "implementing a grand strategy to reshape the regional order in Asia, and eventually the global order, with new ideas, norms, and rules for international relations and global governance" (ibid, p. 246).

The review of the literature has shown that the CCP's ideology, especially in its application to foreign policy, is a combination of many different ideological currents from Marxism to liberalism, which makes it difficult to trace ideological factors in the official construction of China's

national interest. However, given the renewed focus on ideology under Xi Jinping (Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova 2018; S. Zhao 2016), ideological factors should shape the official construction of China's national interest and hence, can be expected to hold substantial explanatory potential for changes in the official construction of China's national interest. Hence, CCP ideology could shape the construction of China's national interest.

The bureaucratic politics approach focuses on the foreign policy process and tries to explain how foreign policy decisions are made (Graham and Halperin 1972). Applying it to the study of Chinese foreign policy, Lai Hongyi and Su-Jeong Kang (2014) highlight three aspects scholars should pay attention to, the agencies involved, their respective responsibilities, and how inter-agency coordination takes place. They argue that in many areas, specifically trade, finance, economy, climate change, soft power, and military affairs, other ministries, and bureaucratic agencies than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) have come to exert significant and growing influence (Lai and Kang 2014, 294f.). Bureaucratic politics has been used extensively to explain China's position in the South China Sea maritime disputes. For example, Jones (2017) argues that the MFA and the military's parochial interests shaped domestic contestations over China's role in the South China Sea during the 1980s (2017, 362f.). Zhang Feng (2019) even points out that the rivalry between these two actors and the maritime law-enforcement agencies threatened the effectiveness of China's foreign strategy (2019a, 780).

The bureaucratic politics approach helps scholars not to treat China as a monolithic actor because it draws attention to different domestic actors involved. One might expect that the approach lost its explanatory potential in light of the ongoing centralization processes of (foreign) policy-making under Xi Jinping. However, Cabestan (2020), in his detailed assessment of China's foreign and security policy institutions and decision-making under Xi Jinping, argues that the "centralization and coordination effort" was unable to make the approach irrelevant because the fragmentation tendencies in China's polity continue. While Xi is no longer primus inter pares, he cannot ignore the Politburo and the Politburo Standing Committee. Apart from this, the new

coordination bodies he established do not meet frequently and rely on staff from different institutions tasked with foreign policy. Cabestan concludes that the tensions between diplomats and representatives of Chinese commercial interests and between diplomats and the military continue to dominate the institutional set-up of China's foreign policy-making (Cabestan 2021). The approach's explanatory focus is on foreign policy decisions which can make applying it to the longer-term evolution of China's national interest difficult. Yet, the approach suggests that various domestic actors could construct China's national interest.

Statist approaches do not only cover actors within the state but also developments in the state's external environment. Theoretical approaches focusing on geopolitics pose that the external environment shapes a country's foreign policy and that any state seeks to maximize its power relative to other states to guarantee its survival in an anarchic international system. Kevin Cai (2020) argues that this is particularly true for China because it finds itself in a "strategically vulnerable position with perceived threats from almost all directions and the possibility of being encircled by potential rivals" (2020, 357). Sources of Chinese power he lists are geographical size and location, population size, economic capacity, and military capabilities (ibid). Similarly, Li Xiaoting (2016) explains that offensive realism would expect states to "pay close attention to geography and the local power balance" (2016, 243).

Applying any of these realist approaches to foreign policy suggests that the official construction of China's national interest reflects the government's reaction to external developments. Hence, the state's main goal of maximizing its power compared to other states would be reflected in how it constructs its national interest.

Table 2.1: Statist explanations for changes in the official construction of China's national interest

Level of analysis	**Explanatory focus**	**Explanation for changes in the official construction of China's national interest**
Individual level	Leaders' beliefs	In the PRC's highly centralized authoritarian system, the leader alone determines the official construction of China's national interest.
State level	Ideological factors	The CCP's ideology determines the official construction of China's national interest.
State level	Interactions between bureaucratic actors	Various foreign policy actors shape the official construction of China's national interest.
International system	Geopolitics	The official construction of China's national interest reflects the Chinese government's reactions to external developments and attempts to maximize its relative power vis à vis other states.

2.3 Refutation of statist explanations for changes in the official construction of China's national interest

Leaders' beliefs, ideological factors, interactions between bureaucratic actors, or geopolitics could shape the official construction of China's national interest. In this section, I deduce hypotheses for each approach discussed above and present original empirical evidence to refute these explanations for changes in the official construction of China's national interest derived from statist approaches.

Building on the research on the role of leaders' beliefs in foreign policy change discussed above, the leader alone determines the official construction of China's national interest in the PRC's highly centralized system.

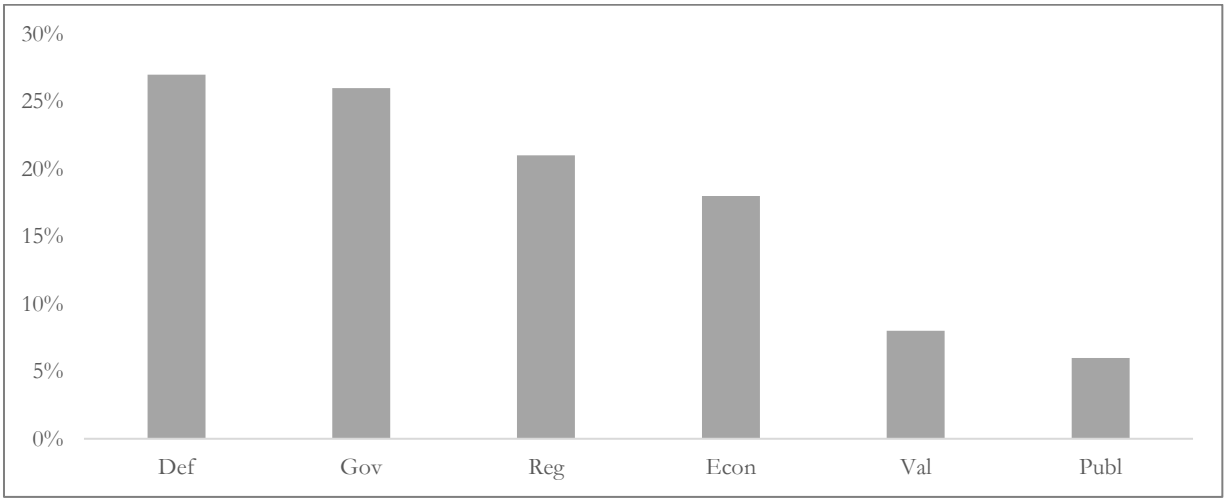
H Leaders' beliefs: *If Xi Jinping alone determined the official construction of China's national interest, other foreign policy actors' statements and societal actors' contributions to foreign policy debates would match his statements.*

To assess whether this hypothesis is confirmed or not, I compare the patterns of relative salience of the different components of the construction of the national interest in foreign policy statements issued by Xi Jinping to statements by other foreign policy actors in the Chinese system and the patterns of relative salience of components of constructions of the national interest in societal actors' contributions. I understand the substantive content of the official construction of

the national interest to consist of several components. To identify these components in the official construction of a country's national interest in official foreign policy statements, I link the basic needs Nuechterlein describes in his conception of the national interest to more recent empirical accounts of national interests in the IR literature in the conceptualization of the construction of China's national interest in Chapter 3. The six components I distinguish are *defend China's territory, political system, and citizens*, *expand China's external relations*, *lead global governance*, *promote China's values*, *control the region*, and *offer global public goods*.

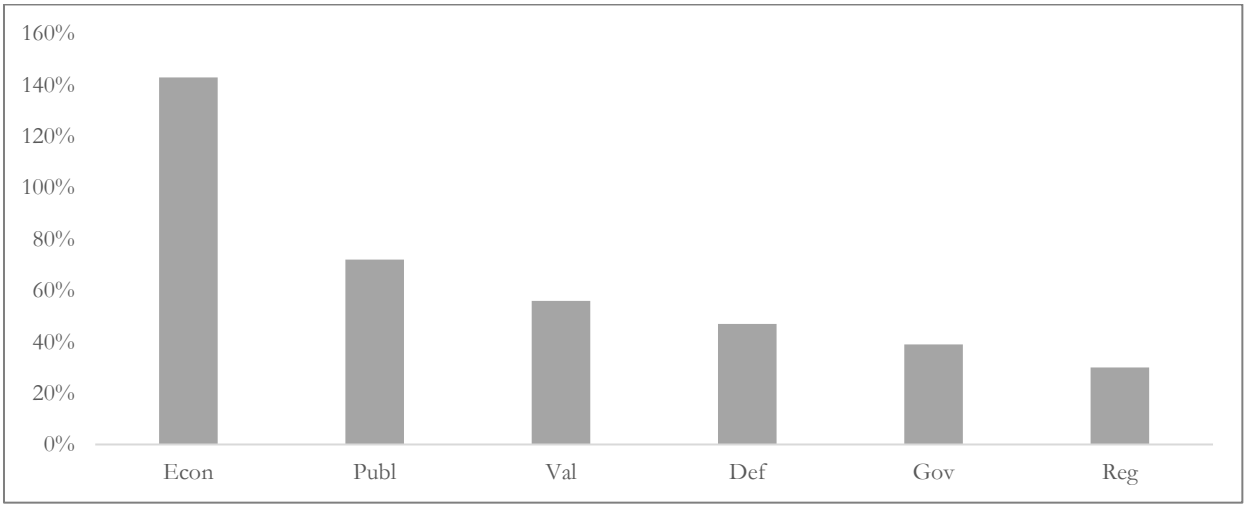
Over the analyzed time frame, important differences emerge in how salient the different components of the constructions of the national interest are in Xi Jinping's and other foreign policy actors' statements, including the Premier, the State Council Information Office, and the Foreign Minister. Figure 2.2 presents the aggregated differences in relative salience in Xi's statements compared to the other actors' statements for each of the six components of the official construction of the national interest that I distinguish. The biggest differences in relative salience appeared in the construction of national interest *defend China's territory, political system, and citizens* and in *lead global governance*. Differences in relative salience between Xi and other foreign policy actors were smallest for *promote China's values* and *offer global public goods*.

Figure 2.2: Aggregated differences in relative salience of components of the construction of China's national interest between Xi and other foreign policy actors



Differences between Xi Jinping and societal actors were even more pronounced, as Figure 2.3 demonstrates. Aggregated differences in the relative salience of the components of the constructions of the national interest between societal actors' contributions to foreign policy debates and Xi Jinping's statements were the biggest for *expand China's economic relations*. The closest match between how much attention Xi Jinping and societal actors attributed to certain components of the construction of the national interest was for *lead global governance* and *control the region*, but there were still important differences between societal actors and Xi Jinping.

Figure 2.3: Aggregated differences in relative salience of components of the construction of China's national interest between Xi and societal actors



To sum up, the claim that Xi Jinping alone determines the official construction of China's national interest is refuted because there are critical differences between his statements and those of other foreign policy actors as well as societal actors.

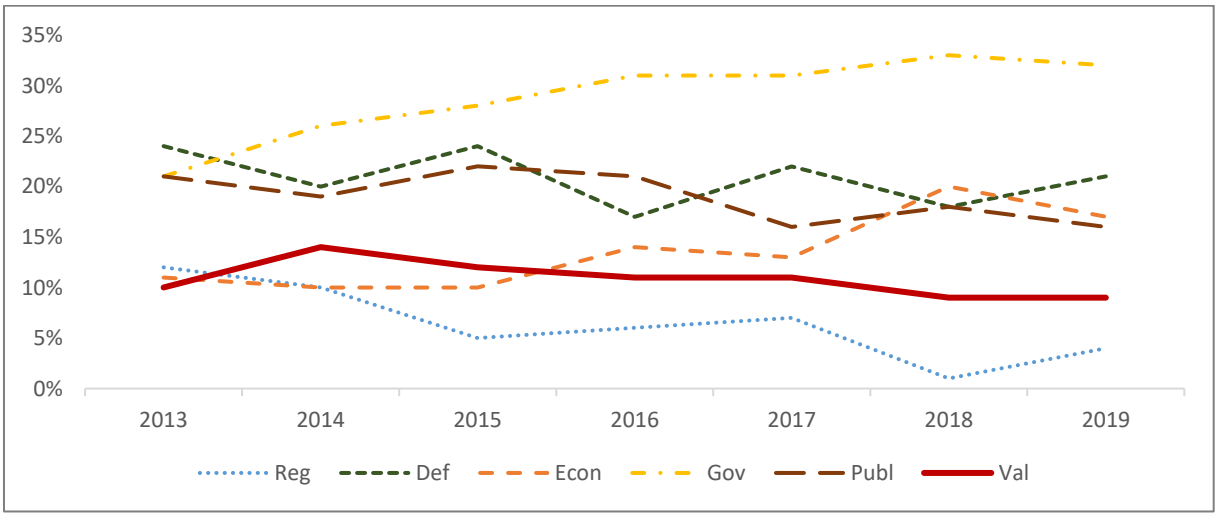
Given the renewed focus on ideology under Xi Jinping, one could expect that the CCP's ideology determines the official construction of China's national interest.

H Ideology: *If ideology shaped the official construction of China's national interest, the component of the construction of national interest, "promote China's values," would be the dominant component of the construction of China's national interest in official foreign policy statements throughout the time frame.*

To assess whether this is the case, I identify the component of the official construction of China's national interest with the strongest links to the CCP's ideology. Out of the six components of the official construction of China's national interest that I conceptualize in Chapter 3, *defend China's territory, political system, and citizens*, *expand China's external economic relations*, *lead global governance*, *promote China's values*, *control the region*, and *offer global public goods*, *promote China's values* is the component of the official construction of the national interest that best encapsulates the CCP's ideological ambitions. Hence, I compare the relative salience of *promote China's values* to the relative salience of other components of the official construction of China's national interest.

Figure 2.4 shows that the component of the construction of national interest *promote China's values* is not the most prominent component. In 2013, this component of the official construction of national interest was actually among the least salient. After briefly gaining in salience until 2014, it continually lost salience compared to the other components of the construction of China's national interest. In 2019, it was the second least prominent component of the official construction of the national interest. Hence, ideological factors did not shape the official construction of China's national interest.

Figure 2.4: Relative salience of components of the official construction of China's national interest over time

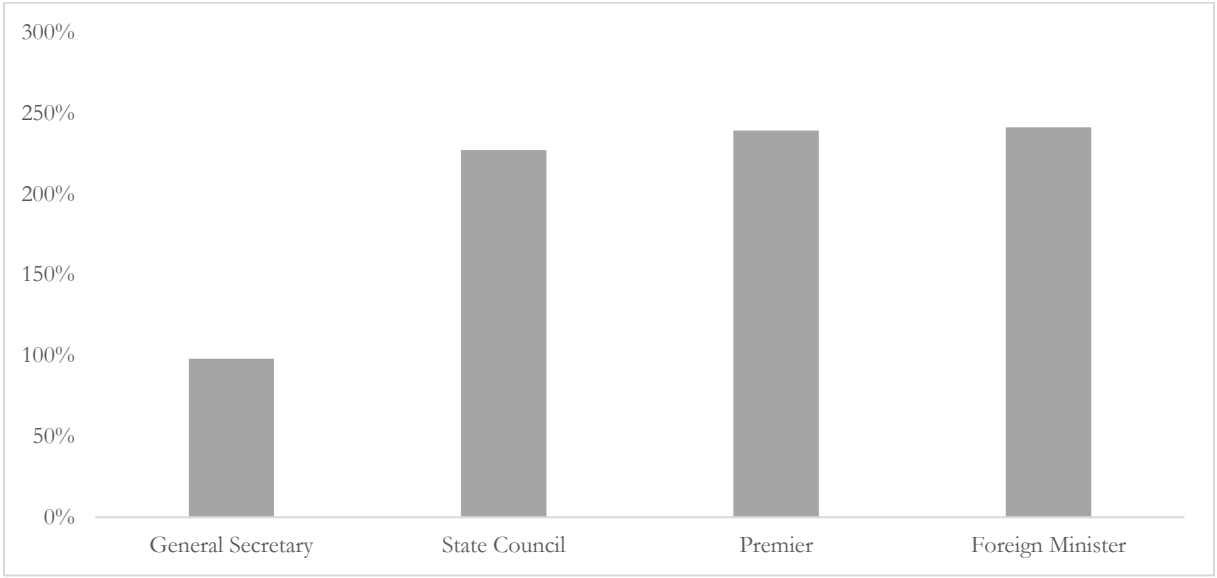


Applying the bureaucratic politics approach to explaining changes in the official construction of China's national interest, one would expect various foreign policy actors to shape the official construction of China's national interest.

H Bureaucratic actors: *If bureaucratic actors shape the official construction of China's national interest, how they reflect the construction of China's national interest would reflect the official construction of China's national interest.*

If this hypothesis applies, there are no differences between the relative salience of the different components of the national interest in the foreign policy statements of the different foreign policy actors and the official construction of China's national interest. However, as Figure 2.5 illustrates, there are considerable differences between how the State Council, the Premier, and the Foreign Minister individually construct China's national interest and the official construction of the national interest. In comparison, the differences between the General Secretary's construction of the national interest and the official construction of the national interest are a lot smaller.

Figure 2.5: Aggregated differences in relative salience of components of the construction of China's national interest between bureaucratic actors

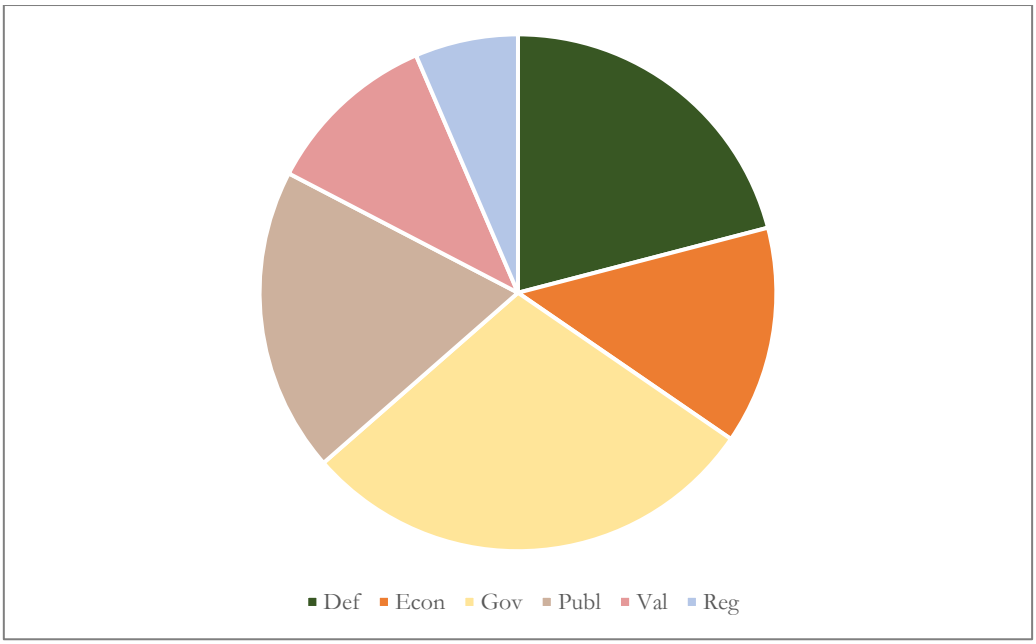


Lastly, system-level factors could explain changes in the official construction of China's national interest. Based on the discussion above, one could argue that the regime tries to maximize its relative power vis à vis other states by expressing its national interest.

H Geopolitics: *If the goal was maximizing relative power, then the components of the official construction of China's national interest, "defend China's territory, citizens, and political system" and "expand China's external economic relations" would consistently dominate the official construction of China's national interest.*

Figure 2.6 shows that neither the component *defend China's territory, political system, and citizens* nor *expand China's economic relations* dominated China's official foreign policy statements. Instead, *lead global governance* emerges as the most salient component of the official construction of the national interest. While *defend China's territory, political system, and citizens* plays an important role; it is equally important as *offer global public goods*.

Figure 2.6: Aggregated salience of components of the official construction of China's national interest



In this section, I showed that statist approaches fail to explain the observed changes in the official construction of China's national interest. Neither explanations centering on the role of leaders or bureaucratic actors nor reasonings that draw on ideological factors or system-level variables can account for how the official construction of China's national interest changed under

Xi Jinping. Hence, in the next section, I will present societal approaches to explain changes in the official construction of China's national interest.

2.4 Societal explanations for changes in the official construction of China's national interest

Based on a review of the existing literature, I show that even under highly centralized authoritarian rule, societal actors can influence the official construction of China's national interest. Assessing the potential influence of public opinion, NGOs, business interests, and experts, in the next section, I argue why it makes sense to focus on experts, more specifically university scholars and think tank analysts, to examine under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest.

In the Chinese foreign policy literature, public opinion is commonly examined through two sources: nationalist protests and public opinion surveys. The literature on links between protests and Chinese foreign policy mainly discusses how the Chinese government manages and uses nationalist or anti-foreign protests. Weiss (2013) argues that Chinese leaders use protests as "a costly signal by which they can credibly invoke the pressure of public opinion and reveal domestic constraints on foreign policy" (2013, 2). Hence, they use the management of nationalist protests to signal their diplomatic intentions (ibid, p. 30). Reilly (2014) describes how the state allows or even encourages protests which then can influence its "negotiating strategy, official rhetoric and even foreign policy decisions" (2014, 198). He further observes that as soon as these protests begin to threaten China's core interests, especially if they might undermine social stability at home, Chinese leaders resort to repression and persuasion to reign in the protests. Regarding the substance of Chinese public opinion, existing research focuses on the use of military force and nationalist views. Through a survey experiment, Bell and Quek (2018) find that the Chinese public is as reluctant to use force against democracies as the public in Western democracies (2018, 227). In contrast, Weiss (2019) finds that Chinese attitudes are generally hawkish. In surveys, for example, most

respondents endorse more reliance on military strength, support increased defense spending, and approve the sending of troops to disputed islands in the South and East China Sea (2019, 682). More generally, Zhao Suisheng (2013) observes that the Chinese government "has become increasingly reluctant to constrain the expression of popular nationalism" (2013, 536). While he sees that "the average Chinese found a growing number of ways to express their nationalist feelings and impose pressure upon foreign policy-makers to be firm in protecting China's national interests", he argues that the most important change is a "convergence of Chinese state nationalism and popular nationalism" (ibid).

Some scholars try to estimate in what ways and how much public opinion shapes China's foreign policy. Examining the intensification of China's on-water assertiveness in disputed areas of maritime East Asia, Chubb (2019) finds that "plausible examples of bottom-up sentiments driving on-water actions are much rarer than commonly assumed" (2019, 159). In contrast, Quek and Johnston (2017) find through a survey experiment that "Chinese leaders may have more agency in the face of public opinion during a crisis than they believe" (2017, 11). Examining the crisis with Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, they find that the Chinese leadership had several strategies available if they were willing to de-escalate in the early stages of the crisis (ibid). Hence, even research on similar issues comes to different conclusions regarding the impact of public opinion on China's foreign policy. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the state shapes public opinion. Frances Yaping Wang (2021), for example, argues that the state uses media campaigns to "align public opinion with their preferred foreign policy for purposes of both domestic regime survival and international security" (2021, 519). While it has been well established that the public plays at least some role in shaping China's foreign policy, the specific mechanisms are still largely unknown. This makes it difficult to examine under which conditions members of the public influence the official construction of China's national interest.

The literature contains general descriptions of how NGOs[7] influence China's foreign policy. For example, Su Changhe (2010) lists NGOs as one of the increasing numbers of actors that "have developed their roles in the Chinese diplomatic system" (2010, 314) but quickly acknowledges that "civil society's effect on China's diplomatic transformation is difficult to evaluate (ibid, p. 325). While they have to some extent, built transnational channels of exchange, shaped agendas, and promoted governance values, he sees them primarily as agents of public diplomacy (ibid). Similarly, Yang Yanling (2019) finds that non-state actors are increasingly important for disseminating soft power (2019, 42). Specific descriptions of NGOs' involvement in selected issue areas provide a more detailed picture of how Chinese NGOs can influence Chinese foreign policy in these narrowly defined issue areas. For example, Lin Peng (2021) focuses on humanitarian diplomacy and argues that "private foundations and civil NGOs have played active roles in the state-dominated cooperation in disaster management" (2021, 221). Based on their growing capacity and expertise, they are not only more involved in disaster management abroad but have also "begun to engage in lobbying and advocacy efforts to influence policy-making related to the regulation of NGO participation in crisis management at home and even abroad" (ibid, p. 231). In addition, scholars found that Chinese NGOs had some influence on the Chinese government's ban on ivory sales, an issue that is at least remotely related to foreign policy. Gamso (2019) shows that NGOs launched campaigns to educate the public and tried to mobilize popular opinion to make the Chinese government ban ivory sales (2019, 1392).

The literature on how Chinese NGOs shape China's foreign offers interesting insights into their influence on foreign policy in specific instances in narrowly defined issue areas. However, since in this dissertation, I focus on uncovering under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest, a fairly abstract concept covering

[7] As discussed in the Introduction, in the Chinese context, societal actors are never completely independent from the state. This makes it difficult to speak about "non-governmental" organizations. However, since this is a literature review, I decided to follow the scholars cited here and use this term as well.

different issue areas, Chinese NGOs are not a suitable focus because of the narrowly defined issue areas they focus on.

It has become fairly common to argue that business interests drive China's external behavior (Lai and Kang, 2012, p. 113, see, for example). Due to the global expansion of their operations, state-owned enterprises (SOEs), in particular, increasingly try to influence Chinese foreign policy. Arguing that "Chinese CSOEs [central-level SOEs] have become increasingly important actors in the formulation and execution of Beijing's policy in the South China Sea", Gong Xue (2018) distinguishes three approaches that describe the relationship between SOEs and government policy in this area. First, some SOEs try to influence policy and "proactively align their business interests with the country's maritime interests and present themselves as defenders of the national interest." Second, other SOEs respond to policy incentives that the central government provides. They engage in policy facilitation if their business interests match the policy environment. Third, SOEs can also be policy-takers who serve as political tools and undertake strategic tasks for the state (2018, 302). Frequently referred to substantial changes in China's foreign policy resulting from business lobbying include the Chinese government substantially increasing its efforts to protect Chinese citizens abroad (Ghiselli 2021) and its attempts to influence economic policies in other countries to protect the investments made by companies and ensure that loans offered by Chinese actors are being repaid. Less tangibly but equally important, business actors' growing involvement in foreign policy-making also changes domestic and international expectations. For example, loans offered by Chinese policy banks could provide Beijing with financial leverage over distressed borrowers that the Chinese government could then use to advance its interests. At the same time, global business activities by Chinese actors increase pressure from other actors in the international system to assume more international responsibilities (Downs 2011).

Based on the existing literature, two reasons indicate that business interests are not a suitable focus for uncovering under what conditions societal actors influence the official construction of the national interest. First, similar to the NGOs discussed above, their influence

tends to be concentrated on specific policy fields or even individual policies, whereas in this dissertation, I am interested in explaining broad changes in China's national interest. The second factor is of a more practical nature. Getting access, especially to state-owned enterprises, is difficult, making it hard to collect sufficient data to examine under what conditions business actors influenced the official construction of China's national interest.

Many scholars point to Chinese foreign policy experts as the group of societal actors that is most capable of influencing China's foreign policy. Focusing either on think tanks or scholars, researchers even worked out through which channels Chinese foreign policy experts can influence China's foreign policy (Abb 2015; K. He, Feng, and Yan 2019). However, despite excellent work on foreign policy-making processes in China, we do not know when and how much Chinese scholars and think tankers influence the official construction of China's national interest. This dissertation seeks to fill this gap. Chinese think tanks can influence Chinese foreign policy in direct and indirect ways. Hua Xin (2017) finds that "particularly the country's highly specialized foreign policy research institutes are now playing a very influential role in China's foreign policy-making" (2017, 133). Abb and Koellner (2015) argue that Chinese think-tankers mostly perform three activities: They provide policy advice to officials, enhance their academic clout, and supply expert analysis in the media (2015). In addition, Hua Xin (2017) argues that think tanks have long-term indirect influence through research projects they conduct for the government. Their indirect influence can be observed through participation in high-level forums and bilateral meetings with state officials (Hua 2017). Kai He and Feng Huiyun (2019) sketch four ways scholars and policy-makers are linked in the Chinese context: First, Chinese IR scholars can influence Chinese foreign policy because they belong to relevant epistemic communities. Second, scholars contribute to a "free market of ideas" from which the government can choose. Third, the Chinese government can draw upon scholars to test controversial ideas. Fourth, academic debates can "mirror the underlying transformations of Chinese foreign policy and domestic politics (2019, 4). While Feng, He, and their collaborators find empirical evidence for all four models, they claim that "the free

market model" is the most widespread. This means that Chinese scholars put out their ideas to be consumed by policy-makers (K. He, Feng, and Yan 2019, 196). Pu and Wang (2018) combine the mirror policy and signaling models. They observe that Chinese IR scholars can serve as "mirrors" to reflect the orientation of Chinese policy-makers (Pu and Wang 2018). More abstractly, Xu Jin (2016) finds that "(..) consistency of ideas between policy-makers and scholars has a significant impact on foreign policy-making (2016, 460). However, it is important to keep in mind that, as Glaser and Medeiros (2007) state, experts "can influence government policy – albeit at different times and to varying degrees" (2007, 309).

Out of all the societal actors discussed, scholars and think tank analysts are the most likely group to influence China's foreign policy. Hence, in this dissertation, I will focus on these actors to determine under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. Researchers generally agree that scholars and think-tankers can somewhat influence China's foreign policy. Most of the existing research on Chinese scholars' influence on foreign policy details ways of influence and refrains from offering a clear assessment of how much influence they have. In this dissertation, I fill this gap by examining the conditions under which societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. In addition, the dissertation will tease out possible differences between think tank analysts and scholars based at universities.

2.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I summarized current understandings of the official construction of China's national interest and explanations for its changes. I showed that such explanations can be derived from statist and societal approaches. Statist explanations centering on leaders' beliefs, bureaucratic politics, ideological factors, and geopolitics were refuted through empirical evidence on the patterns in changes in the official construction of China's national interest. The review of societal approaches demonstrated that out of the many different societal actors, including the general public,

NGOs, business interests, and experts at Chinese universities and think tanks, experts are the most likely group of societal actors to influence the official construction of China's national interest. Hence, it makes the most sense to focus on experts to uncover the conditions under which societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest.

The next chapter introduces the dissertation's theoretical argument that describes the conditions under which societal actors influence the official construction of the national interest. Drawing on the existing literature, I conceptualize the study's dependent and independent variables and describe the structural variables that condition societal actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest, that is, societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input.

3 Theoretical argument

Researchers have long drawn upon domestic factors to explain China's foreign policy. Tsang (2020) even argues that the "centrality of domestic politics" is a key feature of China's foreign policy and distinguishes China from other great powers (2020, 306). The literature contains long lists of domestic factors that could influence China's foreign policy. Zhang Jian (2014), for example, lists "increasing domestic stress" triggered by the unequal distribution of wealth, growing concerns about food safety, environmental pollution, corruption, and faltering economic growth (2014, 390ff.). Similarly, Nathan (2016) argues that threats to society's survival, regime survival, territorial integrity, and economic prosperity drive Chinese foreign policy (2016, 158). While the importance of these domestic factors for China's foreign policy is intuitive, knowledge about *how* domestic factors influence China's foreign policy remains sporadic. Focusing on structural variables that condition societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest, this dissertation narrows down the long list of domestic factors that can influence China's foreign policy to one specific group of domestic actors, societal actors. By examining the conditions of their influence, the dissertation offers a peak into how domestic factors influence China's foreign policy.

In this chapter, I construe the conditions under which societal actors influence the construction of China's national interest. Drawing on the existing literature, I define and conceptualize the dissertation's dependent variable, the official construction of the national interest, its independent variable, societal constructions of the national interest, and the structural variables that condition societal actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest, that is, societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input. In the chapter's last section, I illustrate the theoretical argument with a metaphor and deduce hypotheses from the argument that will guide the study's empirical analysis.

3.1 The dissertation's argument

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that statist approaches fail to adequately explain the changes in the official construction of China's national interest observed under Xi Jinping. Through an examination of the patterns of relative salience of the different components of the official construction of China's national interest in official foreign policy statements, I refuted explanations deduced from statist approaches. The existing literature suggests that societal approaches, especially those focusing on experts, could hold more explanatory power. However, my empirical analysis reveals that the official and societal constructions of China's national interest do not match perfectly. In some areas, they attribute the same overall weight to the different components of the construction of the national interest, in other areas, overlaps in policy shifts appear. Nevertheless, upon closer look, critical differences between official and societal constructions of China's national interest appear (see Chapter 5). Hence, there is no simple transmission belt between societal ideas and the official construction of the national interest. Instead, there are complex links between the two. Existing explanations do not capture under what conditions societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest because they overlook the importance of domestic structures that condition societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest.

To fill this gap, this dissertation draws attention to two domestic structural variables that condition the relationship between the official and societal constructions of the national interest, societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input. Both variables are affected by domestic structures. Domestic structures describe "the nature of the political institutions (the "state"), basic features of the society, and the institutional and organizational arrangements linking state and society and channeling societal demands into the political system" (Risse-Kappen 1991, 484). The nature of political institutions mainly manifests itself in the degree of centralization of the political system, that is, how concentrated executive power is. Society's basic features relate to polarization, the strength of social organization, and the degree to which

societal pressure can be mobilized. Lastly, according to Risse (1991), links between the state and society can be either dominated by the state or society (1991, 486).

In this dissertation, I argue that societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input facilitate and constrain societal actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest in authoritarian regimes. When societal actors are close to the state, and the state is open to societal input, societal actors will have the most influence on the official construction of the national interest. When societal actors are distant from the state and the state is not open to societal input, societal actors will have the least influence on the official construction of the national interest. Finally, when societal actors are close to the state and when the state is not open to societal input, and when societal actors are distant from the state and the state is open to societal input, societal actors will somewhat influence the official construction of the national interest.

Changes in domestic structures affect the state's openness to societal input. The state can be open or closed to societal input at different times. When the state is open to societal input, it encourages societal actors to provide evidence for policy-making, for instance. In contrast, when the state is not open to societal input, it might crack down on societal debate. Societal actors' proximity to the state is less prone to shift. A societal actor can be close to or distant from the state. Over time, an actor's positioning vis à vis the state can change. For example, scholars can become closer to the state throughout their careers. Similarly, a think tank could change its positioning vis à vis the state due to a change in leadership or its funding model. However, such changes unfold rather slowly. Hence, during this project's relatively short time frame, I assume societal actors' proximity to the state to be fixed.

3.1 sketches the four possible constellations of the two variables, the state's openness to societal input and societal actors' proximity to the state, and how they facilitate and constrain societal influence on the official construction of the national interest. Hence, Table 3.1 outlines the

conditions under which societal actors can influence the official construction of the national interest.

Table 3.1: Conditions under which societal actors influence the official construction of the national interest

		Societal actors' proximity to the state	
		close	distant
The state's openness to societal input	open	Most influence	Some influence
	closed	Some influence	Least influence

In the following two sections, I conceptualize the dissertation's dependent variable, the official construction of the national interest, and its independent variable, the societal constructions of the national interest.

3.2 The official construction of the national interest

While IR scholars disagree about how a state's national interest is formed, many emphasize its importance for explaining state action. Most realists would argue that all states share the same national interest, specifically increasing their power relative to other states. In contrast, constructivists understand the national interest to result from a process of interpretation (Garrison 2007). Building on the assumption that ideas construct identities and interests, constructivists hold that "national interests are intersubjective, rather than derived objectively from the distribution of material capabilities" (Klotz 1995, 454). The national interest is thus a social construction that emerges "out of situation descriptions and problem definitions through which state officials and others make sense of the world around them" (Weldes 1996, 280). Despite these disagreements regarding the formation of the national interest, many scholars are convinced that the national interest is key to explaining state action. Morin and Paquin (2018), for example, observe that national interest is "omnipresent in leaders' rhetoric around the world (…)" (2018, 23). In addition,

Weldes (1999) argues that policy-makers use the concept to grasp the goals pursued by a state's foreign policy. As a result, national interest forms the basis for state action in practice. She concludes that there is no way around national interest for IR scholars "simply because it is the language of state action" (1999, 3).

Understanding the national interest as constructed allows us to trace changes over time. Since constructions of the national interest can be identified in official foreign policy statements and in societal actors' contributions to foreign policy debates, understanding the national interest as constructed further allows me to uncover the conditions under which societal actors influence the official construction of the national interest. Constructivists agree that before a state can pursue its national interest, it needs to be defined but disagree about the level at which this happens. For Finnemore (1996), socialization occurs at the international level. She describes states as "embedded in dense networks of transnational and international social relations that shape their perceptions of the world and their role in the world" (1996, 2). As a result, the international system, specifically International Organizations, changes what states want. Internationally held norms about what is good and appropriate influence decision-makers' behavior and the mass publics who constrain them (Finnemore 1996, 2ff.). In contrast, Weldes (1999) holds that the national interest is constructed within the state. She argues that "before state officials can act for the state, they engage in the process of interpretation to understand both what situation the state faces and how they should respond to it" (1999, 4). Given the dissertation's explanatory focus, I side with Weldes' claim, in this project, at least, and examine how the national interest is constructed within the state. To back up this claim, I combine it with neo-classical realists' premise that domestic actors define it.[8]

Neo-classical realists show how groups within the state shape the national interest: Trubowitz (1998) argues that the national interest is "defined by those societal interests who have

[8] Liberalism, of course, also draws attention to different groups within the state and how their preferences affect the state's international posture (Moravcsik 1997). However, the fact that liberal approaches tend not to be concerned with the national interest, makes it more difficult to apply them to this project.

the power to work within the political system (…) to translate their preferences into policy" (1998, 4). Snyder (1991) finds that economic sectors and state bureaucracies "logrolled their various imperialist or military interests, using arguments about security through expansion to justify their self-serving policies in terms of broader interests in national survival" before politicians picked up these justification strategies and incorporated them into their statements (1991, 2). In this dissertation, I build on the idea that domestic actors shape the national interest and that official foreign policy statements, subsequently, reflect domestic actors' arguments. While research on the construction of the national interest by domestic actors has focused on liberal democracies (for an excellent example, see: Rathbun 2004), I show that similar processes also occur within highly centralized authoritarian states such as the PRC.

In many ways, my conceptualization of the official construction of the national interest draws from existing conceptualizations. I build on Morgenthau's thinking by understanding the national interest as dependent on the political and cultural context in which the state's foreign policy is formulated (Morgenthau 1960, 8f.). From Krasner's and Katzenstein's conceptualizations, I take the idea that the national interest is defined and can be inductively traced in policy-makers' statements. Krasner (1978) defines the national interest as "the goals that are sought by the state" (1978, 12). Since he conceives of the state as an autonomous actor, its interests are "separate and distinct from the interests of any particular societal group" (1978, 10) and can, hence be deduced from decision-makers' preferences if two criteria are met: Leaders' actions need to relate to general objectives instead of the preferences of particular groups, and there needs to be consistency in ordering preferences across time (1978, 35). Katzenstein (1978) introduces „policy objectives" to replace "the old concept of the national interest", which he criticizes as too normative for empirical research (1978, 298). Katzenstein suggests tracing these policy objectives "inductively by closely observing several areas of foreign economic policy" instead of postulating policy objectives deductively under broad categories such as "national security" or "national welfare" (ibid). Like constructivist scholars, I do not conceive of the national interest as "out there", waiting to be

discovered, but as constructed through discourse (Humphreys 2015). Paving the way for constructivist research, Kratochvil (1982) takes issue with "conventional attempts to define the true meaning of the national interest by delineating a common core of underlying phenomena" because doing so presumes that "the notion of interest functions as a descriptive term (label) within the political discourse" (1982, 3). In contrast, he argues that its use in specific contexts discloses the term's meaning.

In several ways, my conceptualization of the official construction of the national interest goes beyond existing conceptualizations. Morgenthau, for instance, does not specify how one can grasp the substantive content of national interest but merely equates it with "national security". The substantive content of national interest remains equally abstract in Krasner's conceptualization as he depicts it as "associated either with general material objectives or with ambitious ideological goals related to beliefs about how societies should be ordered" (Krasner 1978, 10). While these goals are easy to identify in official documents, establishing the correct ordering of preferences is more difficult because, from public documents, one can only get unranked objectives, according to him. To fill this gap, Nuechterlein's conception of the national interest allows for bringing in the substantive content of a state's national interest.

I understand the substantive content of the official construction of the national interest to consist of several components. Over time, there is variation in how prominent these components feature in the official construction of the national interest. Examining this variation allows us to capture changes in the official construction of a country's national interest. To identify these components of the official construction of a country's national interest in official foreign policy statements, I link the basic needs Nuechterlein describes in his conception of the national interest to more recent empirical accounts of national interests in the IR literature. First, it is in a country's interest to *defend its territory, political system, and citizens*. Nuechterlein (1976) describes defence interests as "the protection of the nation-state and its citizens against the threat of physical violence directed from another state and/or externally inspired threat to its system of government" (1976, 248).

Second, it is in a country's interest to *expand its external economic relations*. Nuechterlein (1976) describes economic interests as "the enhancement of the nation-state's well-being in relations with other states" (ibid). Economic interests feature prominently in the empirical literature on national interest: In the context of Great Britain's national interest, Roberts (2014) points to promoting trade (2014). Similarly, Kitaokao (2016) refers to the people's prosperity and identifies free trade as a precondition for upholding Japan's national interest (2016, 36). Third, it is in a state's interest to *lead global governance* (Gov). Under "world order", Nuechterlein (1976) discusses the "maintenance of a political and economic system in which the nation-state may feel secure and in which its citizens and commerce may operate peacefully outside its borders" (1976, 248). Fourth, it is in a country's interest to *promote its values*. For Nuechterlein, ideological interests refer to "the protection and furtherance of a set of values which the people of a nation-state share and believe to be universally good" (ibid). Reviews of the empirical literature on states' national interest suggest that Nuechterlein overlooks states' role in the region in which they are situated and the importance of providing global public goods. Hence, I identify two additional components of the official construction of the national interest: Fifth, it is in a country's interest to *control the region* it is situated in. Six, it is in a country's interest to *offer global public goods*. At first view, it is difficult to disentangle the *lead global governance* from *offer global public goods*. While there might be overlaps in practice, conceptually, I distinguish between expressed ambitions for global leadership in international politics, including international institutions, captured in *lead global governance* and the more tangible benefits offered to other countries, described as the provision of global public goods. For details on how I operationalize these six components of the official construction of the national interest, see Chapter 4.

3.3 Societal constructions of the national interest

Even in authoritarian regimes, there can be vibrant debates among societal actors on foreign policy issues (Barbashin and Graef 2019; Barras and Inkster 2018; H. Feng, He, and Yan 2019; Foot 2014;

Garrett 2001; Xu 2016; Zeng, Xiao, and Breslin 2015; Zheng 2016). In this dissertation, I understand societal actors as individuals, groups of individuals, or organizations operating under the jurisdiction of the country under study, contributing to the official construction of said country's national interest by participating in foreign policy debates. This definition builds on the conceptualization of social actors developed in research on European Union (EU) foreign policy. Kaiser and Meyer (2013), for instance, define societal actors as "groups of individuals or collective bodies representing certain collective preferences that can arise from their normative commitments and/or material or other interests" (2013, 4f). According to Aarstad (2015), this definition captures a wide range of actors outside the state apparatus that cooperate formally and informally with public bodies, for example, public opinion, news media, interest groups, businesses, think tanks, and intellectuals (2015). In authoritarian systems, societal actors are not entirely "outside the state apparatus." Instead, relations between the state and societal actors are multifaceted. Before detailing the complexity of state-society relations under authoritarian rule, it is worth establishing that under authoritarian rule, societal actors are not fully autonomous from the state but enjoy more autonomy than government actors.

Most authors working on state-society relations under authoritarian rule agree that state and society are interlinked. In his review of academic debates on state-society relations since World War II, Wang Yuhua (2021) distinguishes the society-centered perspective, which, according to him, conceives of the state as an arena in which different social groups compete for power from the state-centered perspective, which sees the state as completely independent and autonomous from society (2021, 175). However, today, most scholars agree that state and society are interlinked, especially under authoritarian rule. Wang Yuhua (2021), for example, brings in the "state-in-society" perspective, where the state is not autonomous from society but where state and society compete for dominance. Building on this literature, he introduces a new perspective, "state-in-society 2.0," drawing attention to linkages between the state and society. He argues that elite social networks shape the strength and form of the state (2021, 175ff.). Analyzing ideological struggles between the

state and civil society in Vietnam, Vu and Le (2022) call for understanding the "complexity of evolving state-society relations rather than simply continuing to push the cliched rhetoric that "civic space is shrinking" (2022, 2). Similarly, Sun Taiyin (2017) argues that a dynamic model is necessary for understanding state and society relations in China (Sun 2017). These conceptual and empirical insights show that one needs to examine how state and society are interlinked in a particular context. While these considerations inform the dissertation, the mere existence of societal actors does not suffice. Given its explanatory focus, there needs to be societal debate about foreign policy issues.

Despite limits in freedom of expression, public debates can unfold under authoritarian rule. Schlaufer et al. (2021) identify three commonalities of public debates in non-democracies: first, while space for debate is restricted, public policy debates exist. Second, in authoritarian regimes, governmental actors drive public debates by deciding which issues are debated. Third, the internet has become an increasingly important space for public debate (2021, 3). Autocrats' incentives to allow public debate depend on the degree to which the autocrat has delegated authority to government actors other than themselves. Recent examples of public debates under authoritarian regimes include debates about waste management, public transport, and housing in Russia (Schlaufer et al. 2021), discussions about the cultivation and use of genetically modified crops (Y. Jin et al. 2022) and coal (Jeffreys and Xu 2018). There are, however, clear limits to societal debate under authoritarian rule. As Stockmann, Luo, and Shen (2020) put it: "the boundaries of political expression are manipulated and controlled by the Chinese state" (2020:248). The Chinese government, in particular, established "an extensive system for internet manipulation and surveillance" (ibid). Some parts of the manipulation and control system limit how users can access the internet (Boas 2006), and other components limit what users can access, for example, through censorship (Gallagher and Miller 2021; King, Pan, and Roberts 2013, 2014) or through hiring online commentators to spread propaganda (Han 2015) and fabricating social media posts (King, Pan, and Roberts 2017).

3.4 Societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input

As demonstrated in the previous section, societal actors and the state are linked in various ways under authoritarian rule. Wischermann (2017), for example, argues that in authoritarian regimes, civil society and the state are not opposites but influence one another and depend on one another (2017, 350). Hence, interactions between the state and societal actors are frequent and important. Building on these insights, I argue that a societal actor's proximity to the state depends on the quantity and quality of formal ties and interactions with state institutions. Formal ties to state institutions provide the setting for institutionalized interactions between societal actors and the state. In addition, societal actors can interact with state institutions at different levels in less structured ways.

Formal ties between societal actors and state institutions manifest through administrative oversight, governmental recognition, research funding awarded by the government, and membership in advisory committees. Societal actors can be directly affiliated with state institutions or the ruling party. In addition, common practices that link societal actors to state institutes are the so-called revolving door, when people alternate between working for the government and working at a think tank, forming advisory councils, or the government commissioning research projects (Xue, Zhu, and Han 2018). Societal actors can also interact with state institutions more informally. Seminars and organizations that foster dialogue between policy-makers and experts create opportunities for interaction between societal actors and state institutions.

Autocrats' constant worry about political survival opens up inroads for societal actors' input. Threats to authoritarian rule can emerge from within the ruling elite or wider society (Frantz and Kendall-Taylor 2014; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). To counter the former, authoritarian rulers use narrow institutions such as consultative councils, juntas, and political bureaus as a "first institutional trench" (De Mesquita et al. 2004; Gallagher and Hanson 2015; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). To pre-empt threats from outside the inner circle, authoritarian rulers need to solicit input from societal actors. However, soliciting input from societal actors is difficult. Wintrobe (1998)

describes the dilemma dictators face: Opening up space for citizens to overcome their fear of repression and voice their true opinions can give way to social disorder, which could ultimately lead to authoritarian collapse (1998). Thus, authoritarian rulers must walk a fine line between allowing social space to emerge and controlling the resulting tensions (Stockmann 2013; Teets 2013). When autocrats succeed, input institutions such as the National People's Congress (Truex 2017) and local congresses (Manion 2008), village elections, the petitioning system, public deliberative meetings and legislative hearings, social organizations, and marketized media (Stockmann 2013, 6) allow authoritarian states to respond to societal forces in ways that facilitate the continuation of their rule (Nathan 2003).

The literature refers more commonly to the state's responsiveness to society than to the state's openness to societal input. While the two concepts overlap, the former is more expansive than the latter. In my understanding, the state's responsiveness captures not only the state's openness to societal input but also the capacity to act upon it. For instance, Chen, Pan, and Xu (2016) define responsiveness as "the extent to which officials in the regime adhere to the demands of societal actors" (2016, 384). For this project, however, the state's openness to societal input is sufficient because this affects the political opportunity structures (for details on this concept, see below) that societal actors face. While one could expect that societal actors would be even more encouraged to participate in foreign policy debates if they knew that the state would act upon their proposals, they do not need to be certain about this to voice their suggestions.

The state's openness to societal input is contingent upon the configuration of domestic structures. If one assumes state and society to be interlinked, as the discussion of state-society relations in authoritarian states above suggests, the state's openness to consider societal input is tied to societal actors' ability and willingness to provide such input. Political opportunity structures incentivize societal actors to participate in foreign policy debates and provide societal input that the state can consider. Developed in social movements and collective action research, political opportunity structures are "consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of

the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people's expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow 1998, 76f.). The concept focuses on the perceived nature of opportunities and primarily involves mobilizing resources external to the group (Tarrow 1998, 77). Dellmuth and Bloodgood (2019) point out that "opportunity structures refer to specific institutional arrangements, resource configuration, and policy environments" (2019, 260).

Changes in domestic structures affect the political opportunity structures that societal actors face. Political opportunity structures give societal actors incentives to contribute to foreign policy debates by affecting their expectations regarding the costs of political mobilization and the likelihood of influence. For instance, centralizing political power by the authoritarian ruler would likely diminish societal actors' expectations for influence, giving them fewer incentives to participate in foreign policy debates. As for society's basic features, limits on societal actors' abilities to express themselves and to come together would increase their costs of political mobilization, which would also provide them with fewer incentives for voicing suggestions. The establishment of new channels through which input from societal actors can reach authoritarian leaders, however, would tell societal actors that they are more likely to exert influence, giving them more incentives to participate in foreign policy debates. The concept of political opportunity structures points to areas where such changes could occur. As stated above, Dellmuth and Bloodgood draw attention to institutional arrangements, resource configurations, and policy environments. Applied to this project, institutional arrangements include rules, norms, and procedures that enable expert involvement in policy-making. Resource configurations refer to resources available to think-tankers and scholars to do their work. Changes in the government's funding for universities and think tanks could lead to changes in resource configurations, for example. Lastly, policy environments describe the overall atmosphere in which foreign policy debates unfold in the country, including signals regarding how the government envisions its relationship with societal actors. In the next chapter, I will operationalize these concepts and apply them to the Chinese context.

In this section, I conceptualized the two structural variables that condition societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. Societal actors' proximity to the state depends on formals ties and interactions with state institutions. The state's openness to societal input is contingent upon the configuration of domestic structures that are prone to change. In the next section, I will deduce hypotheses from the dissertation's theoretical argument that integrates these two structural variables.

3.5 Hypotheses

In this dissertation, I argue that societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input facilitate and constrain societal actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest in authoritarian regimes. When societal actors are close to the state, and the state is open to societal input, societal actors have the most influence on the official construction of the national interest. When societal actors are distant from the state and the state is not open to societal input, societal actors have the least influence on the official construction of the national interest. Finally, when societal actors are close to the state and when the state is not open to societal input, and when societal actors are distant from the state and the state is open to societal input, societal actors still somewhat influence the official construction of the national interest.

To illustrate the four conditions under which societal actors can influence the official construction of the national interest, introduced in section 3.1, I illustrate them by drawing on the metaphor of a family road trip. First, I describe how the different components of the theoretical argument are represented in the metaphor. Imagine a family of four embarking on a trip. In this metaphor, the national interest is the family road trip. The construction of the national interest equals the practices of driving the car and planning the route. The specific configuration of domestic structures is represented by the car. The state appears as the surroundings in which the road trip takes place. Most importantly, this covers the number of roads from which one can choose to get to the destination and the opportunities for taking a break along the way. The

metaphorical equivalent of societal actors' proximity to the state is the ability to operate the vehicle and decide where to go and when to stop. The ability to decide on where to go and when to stop depends on how familiar one is with the surroundings. The state's openness to societal input is represented in the metaphor as societal actors' abilities to make use of the surroundings during their trip, for example through using certain roads instead of others or stopping at certain rest stops and not others. During the road trip, four positions can be taken in the car: Family members can sit in the driver's seat, in the co-driver's seat, in the back seat, and the trunk.

I now demonstrate how the metaphor illustrates the conditions under which societal actors influence the official construction of the national interest. Each position in the metaphor relates to one of the conditions under which societal actors influence the official construction of the national interest. First, when the state is open to societal input and when the societal actor is close to the state, the societal actor has the most influence on the official construction of the national interest. The person in the driver's seat has an excellent view of the surroundings and is highly capable of acting upon it because they are operating the car and can just decide which roads to take or where to rest. As a result, the person in the driver's seat has the most influence over the family road trip. Second, when the state is not open to societal input and the societal actor is close to the state, the societal actor can somewhat influence the official construction of national interest. This applies to the person in the co-driver's seat. In our metaphor, the person next to the driver has a good view of the surroundings but has fewer opportunities to act upon it. Hence, the person in the co-driver's seat has only some influence over the road trip. Third, when the state is open to societal input and the societal actor is distant from the state, it can also somewhat influence the official construction of the national interest. In our metaphor, this would apply to the people in the back. From their seats, they do not see much of the surroundings. However, their ability to make their voices heard, for example, regarding when to take a break are high. Fourth, when the state is not open to societal input and the societal actor is distant from the state, the societal actor's influence on the official construction of the national interest is smallest. This would apply to someone in the car's trunk.

They do not see much and are not able to operate the vehicle or make suggestions on the route. Hence, they have only little influence over the road trip.

It is critical to remember that we are talking about positions or conditions. This means a societal actor can move from one condition to another like family members can switch seats during their trip. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the conditions under which societal actors can influence the official construction of national interest with illustrations of the metaphor.

Table 3.2: Illustration of conditions under which societal actors influence the official construction of the national interest

		Societal actors' proximity to the state	
		close	distant
The state's openness to societal input	open	*In the driver's seat* Most influence	*In the backseat* Some influence
	closed	*In the co-driver's seat* Some influence	*In the trunk* Least influence

From the theoretical argument that describes the conditions under which societal actors can influence the official construction of the national interest, I deduce four hypotheses to be applied to the Chinese context.

H1: When the state is open to societal input, and when the societal actors are close to the state, societal actors exert the most influence on the official construction of the national interest (*in the driver's seat*).

H2: When the state is open to societal input, and when the societal actors are distant from the state, the societal actors somewhat influence the official construction of the national interest (*in the back seat*).

H3: When the state is not open to societal input, and when the societal actors are close to the state, the societal actors somewhat influence the official construction of the national interest (*in the co-driver's seat*).

H4: When the state is not open to societal input, and when the societal actors are not close to the state, the societal actors exert the least influence on the official construction of the national interest (*in the trunk*).

In the remainder of this dissertation, I examine under what conditions Chinese university scholars and analysts at Chinese think tanks influence the official construction of China's national interest. In other words, I show in which positions university scholars and think tank analysts sit during the family road trip and discuss possible changes of positions. The hypotheses spelled out here will guide the empirical analysis.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter first introduced the dissertation's explanatory objective: under what conditions do societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest and the dissertation's theoretical argument. In the following three sections, I elaborated on the conceptualization of the argument's main components, that is, the official construction of the national interest (the study's dependent variable), societal constructions of the national interest (the study's independent variable), and the two structural variables that condition societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest, societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input based on the existing literature. In the last section, I deduced hypotheses describing the four conditions under which Chinese societal actors can influence the official construction of China's national interest from the theoretical argument and illustrated it with the family road trip metaphor. The hypotheses will guide the subsequent empirical analysis.

In the next chapter, I describe five analytical challenges that must be overcome to uncover the conditions under which Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's

national interest. These five analytical challenges are: figuring out how to map changes in the official construction of China's national interest, measuring societal actors' proximity to the state, identifying societal constructions of the national interest, assessing the fit between the official and societal constructions of the national interest, and measuring the state's openness to societal input. When detailing how I tackle these analytical challenges, I introduce the data this dissertation draws upon and describe how I analyze it.

4 Data and methods

Anecdotal evidence for instances in which societal actors, particularly scholars based at Chinese universities, influenced China's foreign policy abounds. Frequently cited examples include the concept of "creative involvement" by Peking University's Wang Yizhou and adaptations to China's non-interference policy (Zheng 2016) as well as Wang Jisi's, also at Peking University, proposal for a "moving West strategy" which is often described as having influenced the genesis of the Belt and Road Initiative (H. Feng and He 2020, 372). Yan Xuetong's (Qinghua University) "moral realism" is frequently referred to as an inspiration for the far-reaching changes in China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping (H. Feng, He, and Yan 2019, 11). While these claims sound plausible, it is critical to move beyond anecdotal evidence and develop a more systematic way to determine whether and how much Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest.

This chapter depicts the five analytical challenges that I had to overcome to determine under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. When describing how I mapped changes in the official construction of China's national interest, I introduce the different types of Chinese foreign policy statements I considered and how I analyzed them with frame analysis. In outlining how I measured societal actors' proximity to the state, I operationalize societal actors' formal ties and interactions with state institutions. In the description of identifying societal constructions of the national interest, I describe how I identified relevant societal actors, collected their contributions to societal debates, and analyzed these contributions. To demonstrate how I assessed the fit between the official and societal constructions of the national interest, I describe how I examined thematic overlaps, scrutinized temporal sequencing of policy shifts that appeared in official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions, and how I examined said policy shifts in detail. For measuring the state's openness to societal input, I demonstrate how I applied three areas deduced from the concept of political opportunity structures, that is, rules and norms, resources, and the broader political environment, to the relationship between the Chinese party-state and government actors.

In the chapter's last section, I discuss potential problems with causal identification in the project and how I addressed these problems by combining a frequentist understanding of causal inference inspired by preference attainment theory with careful considerations of the context in which societal actors influence the official construction of China's national.

4.1 Mapping changes in the official construction of China's national interest

For mapping changes in the official construction of China's national interest, I needed to identify relevant official foreign policy statements as data sources and examine how the national interest is constructed in these statements. Since there is no dataset of Chinese official foreign policy statements to draw upon, I identified relevant Chinese foreign policy actors and collected their statements. Examining how the national interest is constructed is even trickier because secrecy is a key feature of authoritarian rule. Since authoritarian rulers constantly operate under structural insecurity (for more details, see chapter 3), they try to hide their internal operations and actions. They can do so easily without institutional constraints forcing them to publicize their internal procedures (Barros 2016, 955), which makes the political processes of authoritarian regimes, such as the PRC, opaque. One consequence of this opacity is that the Chinese government uses vague jargon to describe its goals in policy documents. As a result, researchers cannot simply read the government's statements to grasp the official construction of the national interest. In the latter part of this section, I describe how I adapted frame analysis to overcome this issue.

Identifying foreign policy statements requires a clear-cut understanding of foreign policy. In the context of this project, I understand foreign policy as a program of an independent political authority designed to address some problem or pursue some goal that entails action toward entities outside policy-makers' political jurisdiction (Hermann 1990, 5; Morin and Paquin 2018, 3). "Program" suggests a focus on general guidelines rather than on single decisions. Instead of describing China's external relations, this definition points to purposeful action undertaken by the

Chinese government. The definition is broad enough to cover whatever the Chinese government incorporates into its foreign policy. This allows me to gain a comprehensive picture of how China's national interest is constructed. Statements about China's foreign policy can be found in leaders' speeches in front of domestic and international audiences, policy papers, statements at press conferences, and authoritative commentaries in party-state media (Gitter and Fang 2018, 3). Robertson's (2017) framework helps to identify and categorize possible sources. He distinguishes three levels of foreign policy statements: the strategic level, the contextual level, and the level of policy implementation (2017). The first two levels are relevant for analyzing the official construction of the national interest. According to Robertson, the strategic level is the most authoritative policy-making level. It describes broad, conceptual, and long-term directions. The contextual level, or what I call the policy-planning level, describes more focused communication that relates to an immediate context, for example, ministerial speeches.

In the PRC, the strategic level covers the CCP General Secretary's report to the party congress and his speeches in front of domestic and international audiences. The CCP General Secretary's political work report presented to the party congress held every five years is the most authoritative document in China's political system. Observers describe it as the most important document that outlines the party's strategy for the coming years in all policy sectors (Jakobson 2013; Miller 2017). As a synthetic document, it reflects the consensus of the broader party leadership across party organs and provides policy guidance (Cha 2017, 421). The CCP General Secretary's/State President's speeches are mainly in front of international audiences, at multilateral meetings such as BRICS or G20 summits, at meetings hosted by the Chinese government, for example, the Belt and Road Forum, or in front of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).[9]

[9] To my knowledge, there is no database containing all statements by Chinese officials. Hence, I collected their foreign policy statements myself. For collecting Chinese leaders' speeches in front of international audiences, I relied on the CCP's news agency and the Chinese MFA website and cross-checked the information with entries in the China Vitae database. The CCP's news agency (中国共产党新闻网) provides a "database of important speeches given by Xi Jinping" (习近平系列重要讲话数据库) on its website. I went through all speeches in the categories "national defense" (国防) and "diplomacy" (外交) listed there. On the MFA website, I went through all speeches listed on the English and Chinese versions of the website in the sections "policies and activities"/"外交动态/领导人活动"/"资料/重要讲话", "the minister"/"外交部长/重要讲话" and included all speeches by Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Wang Yi, and

Occasionally, the CCP General Secretary talks to a domestic audience about foreign policy, for instance, when he convenes a Central Work Conference on Foreign Affairs or speaks during a Politburo Collective Study Session that deals with an international issue.[10]

The policy planning level covers government work reports, five-year plans, policy papers, defense white papers, and statements by the State Councilor for Foreign Affairs and the Foreign Minister. The annual government work reports and the five-year plans focus on domestic matters but also contain a few passages related to foreign policy. Policy papers are published by the State Council Information Office and mostly outline China's regional foreign policy strategies, for example, China's approach to the African continent. Besides Xi Jinping, other Chinese leaders speak in front of international audiences. Most importantly, the Foreign Minister regularly addresses the UN GA. Domestically, the Foreign Minister summarizes China's foreign policy at an annual symposium speaking to diplomats and foreign policy experts. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the selected documents. The appendix contains a list of all analyzed foreign policy statements.

Yang Jiechi. I cross-checked this information with information from the China vitae database operated by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. It lists the appearances of approximately 500 leading Chinese officials both in China and abroad. I reviewed all entries on Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang, Wang Yi, and Yang Jiechi and identified the ones that describe foreign policy speeches.

[10] Identifying Xi Jinping's foreign policy speeches in front of domestic audiences is more difficult because these speeches do not appear on the MFA website or in the CCP news agency database. Background knowledge of China's foreign policy-making process is essential to collecting Xi Jinping's domestic speeches. First, it is important to know that Xi Jinping rarely speaks to a domestic audience on foreign policy. Central Work Conferences on Foreign Affairs (中央外事工作会) are the most important occasion. He convened one in November 2014 and one in June 2018. Shortly after assuming power, he convened a Central Work Conference on Neighborhood Diplomacy (周边外交工作座谈会) in November 2013. Next to these highly authoritative work conferences, politburo study sessions (中央政治局集体学习) play an important role in signaling the leadership's priorities. I went through all the politburo collective study sessions held since 2013 and selected the ones on foreign affairs.

Table 4.1: Analyzed official foreign policy statements[11]

Level	Document type	Issuing institution	Frequency	Primary audience	N
Strategic Level	CCP General Secretary's Political Work Report to Party Congress	Synthetic document reflecting the party leadership's consensus across party organs	Every five years	Domestic	2
	CCP General Secretary's international speeches	CCP General Secretary/State President	Regularly, no fixed schedule	International	46
	CCP General Secretary's domestic speeches	CCP General Secretary/State President	Regularly, no fixed schedule	Domestic	8
Policy Planning Level	Government Work Reports	Premier	Annually	Domestic	7
	Five-Year-Plan	CCP Central Committee, State Council Information Office	Every five years	Domestic	1
	Policy Papers	State Council Information Office	Regularly, no fixed schedule	International	14
	Other leaders' international speeches	Foreign Ministry	Regularly, no fixed schedule	International	12
	Foreign Minister's domestic speeches	Foreign Ministry	Annually	Domestic	7

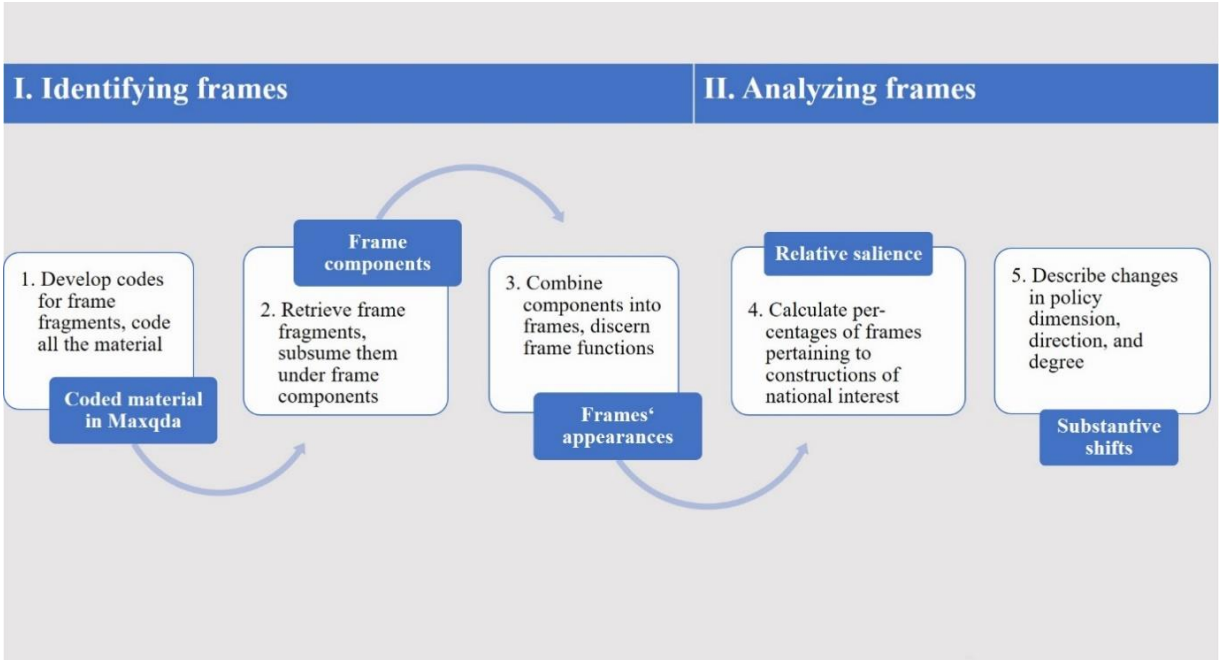
Since many of these documents and speeches only partially deal with foreign policy, I selected relevant passages that fit the above-introduced foreign policy definition. I refined this definition with Hermann's conception of the three levels across which foreign policy stretches: world view, goals, and means to achieve these goals (Hermann 1990, 5). I excluded passages relating to China's domestic affairs, for example, the state of its economy or descriptions of what individual domestic actors such as the PLA are supposed to do. I further left out policy prescriptions focusing on China's approach to individual countries or regions because I am interested in the official construction of China's national interest, which is a more abstract concept. To sum up, I included descriptions of the state of the world (world view), descriptions of China's role (foreign policy goals), and general proposals on how to engage with others (foreign policy means).

To map changes in the official construction of China's national interest in foreign policy statements, I adapted the frame analysis technique initially developed in communications research

[11] For most of these documents, the Chinese government publishes official English-language translations. Before examining the documents, I conducted systematic comparisons to detect differences between the original Chinese versions and the official English-language translation. I summarized my findings (Mokry 2022) and accounted for the identified differences in the presentation of empirical results in Chapter 5 to 7, where appropriate.

(Entman 1993; Goffman 1974; Jecker 2017; Matthes 2009; Matthes and Kohring 2008) to study Chinese policy documents (Mokry 2021). Frames that express China's national interest cannot be observed directly in the selected foreign policy statements because the Chinese government uses vague jargon to describe its work in policy documents. Frame analysis describes the systematic identification and examination of frames. A frame is a schema of interpretation that performs at least one of the following four functions: problem description, diagnosis of causes, moral interpretation, and suggestion of remedies (Entman 1993, 52). Frame analysis covers a wide spectrum, from fully automated coding to interpretative approaches. Automated variants of frame analysis are based on word frequencies and require large amounts of text to examine the use and omission of certain words. These automated approaches cannot capture infrequent frames, so they risk omitting more subtle arguments. On the other end of the spectrum, interpretive approaches are characterized by a high degree of subjectivity. The technique used in this project is based on manual but highly systematic coding and is located between automated large-n and interpretive approaches. Its main benefit lies in teasing out incremental changes in frames over time (Mokry 2023).

Figure 4.1: The frame analysis process (author's own illustration)



To identify frames in the material, I performed the following step, as Figure 4.1 illustrates. I first coded the frame fragments.[12] I developed codes that cover the frame fragments inductively on the material. In the end, there needs to be a code for every frame fragment, meaning codes need to be exhaustive, and every frame fragment needs to be coded with only one code, meaning the codes need to be exclusive. I reviewed the material several times to ensure all codes were exhaustive and exclusive (Neuendorf 2017, 131). The coded frame fragments were the building blocks for the frame components, which were later assembled into frames. For turning frame fragments into frame components, I first retrieved the coded frame fragments, then subsumed each frame fragment under one of the structural components that a frame consists of: actors, verbs, qualifiers, and objects. Frame actors describe who is doing something. Frame verbs express policy action and direction. The degree of policy action is described by qualifiers that modify frame verbs. Frame objects describe the policy dimensions. Frame components that appear within a sentence were then combined into frames.

Since frames result from framing processes, frames from different points in time differ. Comparing frames across time thus reveals policy shifts. For an initial grasp of how a frame changed, I categorized each frame into one of the following categories: stable, new, faded, or modified. *Stable frames* appear multiple times across the foreign policy statements in the same form. *Faded frames* have not appeared in a previously specified time frame, while *new frames* have only appeared once in the respective time frame. *Modified frames* change across the documents. Since each frame consists of a frame object and a frame verb, there are three possible *modification scenarios*: change in frame object, change in frame verbs, and change in both. First, a change in the frame object signals a change in the issue a frame describes. Second, changes in the frame verb describe changes in degree. Finally, changes in issue and degree can be detected if both the frame object and

[12] I came up with the terms "frame fragments" and "frame components" to better explain how I identified frames in the material. The frame analysis literature does not yet use these terms.

frame verb change. Since the frame verb determines the function a frame performs, a change in the verb can change the frame function.

Apart from tracing shifts in policy substance, I also uncovered shifts in emphasis. I examined how prominently the different components of the official construction of the national interest appeared in the analyzed foreign policy statements over time. For this, I grouped frames into themes that made up the different components of the construction of the national interest, and then, compared the percentages of frames that pertained to the different components as operationalized above with each other. Tables 4.2 – 4.7 present the themes into which the frames were clustered and that were used to identify the different components of the official construction of the national interest. To examine overall changes in prominence over time, I calculated the percentages of frames that pertain to each theme per year and compared the results.

Table 4.2: Categories for "defend China's territory, political system, and citizens" (Def)

Defense of China's territory	**Defense of China's political system**	**Protection of Chinese citizens**	**Threats and their sources**	**Ways to guarantee China's security**
- core/national interests - reunification - sovereignty - territorial integrity	- CCP - national rejuvenation/renewal - non-interference - political security	- citizens' rights and interests - consular protection - overseas interests - the safety of Chinese citizens	- arms - challenges - changes - competition - conflicts - crises - destabilizing factors - global issues - international situation - power politics - uncertainties	- balancing interests - common security - conflict resolution - counter-terrorism - military strength - new domains - security & development - stability

Table 4.3: Categories for "expand China's economic relations" (Econ)

China's economic development	World economic context
- economic growth - industrialization - investment - prosperity	- emerging markets/developing countries - global/world economy - global growth - globalization - opening up - protectionism - trade

Table 4.4: Categories for "lead global governance" (Gov)[13]

Disposition	Ideas	Actions	Issue areas	International context
- confidence	- approach - community of shared future - correct viewpoint - democracy in international relations - equality - equity - fairness - joint contributions - networks - new type - partnership - platform - proposals	- commitments - contributions - due role - great power diplomacy - independent foreign policy - initiative - obligations - participation - principles - responsibilities - wisdom	- climate change cooperation - global economic governance - global governance - international law - international order, system - internet governance - multilateralism - non-proliferation - norms - rules - sea lines of communication - standards - UN - WTO	- deficits - existing mechanisms - gaps - interdependence - international architecture - international environment - multipolarity

[13] *Offer global public goods* can be conceptually separated from *lead global governance* if one acknowledges that there are certain overlaps between the two. *Offer global public goods* focuses on tangible benefits. *Lead global governance* details ambitions.

Table 4.5: Categories for "offer global public goods" (Publ)

Means	Ends
- assistance/aid	- balanced, inclusive, sustainable development
- belt and road	- benefit(s)
- communication	- common development
- consultation	- connectivity
- cooperation	- global development
- coordination	- improved livelihoods
- dialogue	- maritime security
- exchange	- poverty reduction
- infrastructure	- progress
- North-South/South-South cooperation	- public goods
- opportunities	- security
- peaceful development	- sustainable development
- practical/results-oriented cooperation	- world peace

Table 4.6: Categories for "promote China's values" (Val)

Requirements	Implementation	Objectives
- civilization	- experience	- coexistence
- differences	- influence	- diversity
- socialism	- model	- mutual understanding
- systems	- path	- mutual benefits
	- philosophy	- solidarity
	- training	- no supremacy

Table 4.7: Categories for "control the region" (Reg)

Ways of cooperation	Regional context
- regional cooperation	- Asia
- regional integration	- Asia-Pacific
- regional security	- neighborhood
	- neighbors
	- region

4.2 Measuring societal actors' proximity to the state

To measure societal actors' proximity to the state, societal actors' multifaceted ties to the party-state and the different institutional factors that determine these ties need to be captured. While personal relationships, in the Chinese context, commonly referred to as guanxi between think tank

analysts, scholars, and representatives from the party-state certainly also matter, such relationships are difficult to observe. Therefore, I focused on institutional factors and examine them for think tanks and scholars.

Formal ties to the state include institutional links, membership in policy advisory groups, obtaining government-funded research projects, and governmental recognition. For think tanks' institutional links, I checked whether the institution was affiliated with a central-level ministry, the CCP Central Committee, or Central Military Commission. Such affiliations are usually mentioned the think tanks' self-descriptions. I looked for information in the secondary literature where this was not the case. To capture scholars' institutional links, I operationalized the "revolving door mechanism" described above as past work experience in state, party, or military institutions. This information is mentioned in the scholar's CV or profile on the university website. The Foreign Policy Advisory Group of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外交政策咨询委员会) is most relevant for membership in policy advisory groups. While the information on membership on the ministry's website[14] was outdated, scholars' and think tankers' profiles often mention that they are members of this group. The third institutional factor I considered was how successful scholars and think tank analysts were in obtaining grants from the NOPSS, the Chinese government's most important funding agency for social science research (for details, see Chapter 5), and in obtaining research projects commissioned by the Chinese government. The NOPSS provides funding data on its website. Information on government-commissioned research projects can be found on think tanks' websites and scholars' CVs. Lastly, I assessed the extent of governmental recognition a think tank or a scholar received. For think tanks, I checked whether the think tank was recently selected as a "high-level pilot think tank" (国家高端智库). The Chinese media publish this information. For scholars, I operationalize this institutional factor as having received awards from the government. Scholars' CVs list the awards they received.

[14] http://fpag.fmprc.gov.cn/ [last accessed 5 September 2022, 9:20]

Interactions with state institutions cover presentations for the CCP leadership and interactions with policy-makers. For presentations in front of the CCP leadership, I checked whether the expert had been invited to present in front of members of the Politburo. The list of topics of politburo study sessions and the presenters' names are public information. Besides, I searched for news reports from other high-level meetings through searches for names of politburo members tasked with foreign policy and experts' names. Finally, I looked into scholars' and think tankers' regular engagement with policy-makers, which I operationalized as seminars organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Party School, think tanks, or membership in organizations that foster dialogue between experts and policy-makers. For think tanks, I looked through the events they listed in the "news sections" of their website. For scholars, I look into whether they were part of organizations linking policy-makers and experts listed on the university website profiles. The appendix contains two tables documenting the measurements for all think tankers and scholars I considered.

4.3 Identifying societal constructions of China's national interest

The third analytical challenge to overcome for determining under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest is to identify societal constructions of China's national interest. This analytical challenge encompasses three aspects: First, to identify relevant societal actors; second, to collect their contributions to foreign policy debates; and third, to examine how China's national interest is constructed in societal actors' contributions to Chinese foreign policy debates. For identifying relevant societal actors, one needs to make sure to not only select scholars and think tanks that are claimed to have the most influence on China's foreign policy.

I selected scholars whose contributions to foreign policy debates I analyzed in a two-step process: First, I compiled a list of leading Chinese International Relations scholars. For this, I first

listed all full professors from the institutions Shambaugh mentions in his review of IR research in China (Shambaugh 2011). Published in 2011, his assessment remains the most comprehensive but is fairly dated. Because of this, I also considered the international rankings of Chinese universities in Political Science because IR was not listed as a separate discipline. I considered all Chinese universities listed in the QS World University Ranking from 2021[15] and the Academic Ranking of World Universities published by a Shanghai-based consultancy from 2020.[16] Finally, from the more expansive Times Higher Education World Universities Rankings,[17] I considered the 50 highest-ranked Chinese universities. Based on Shambaugh's assessments and my review of university rankings, I identified 168 Chinese scholars from 21 departments working on international politics.[18] Data was collected in late March/early April 2021. Second, I categorized these scholars based on the scores describing their proximity to the state into two groups: close to the state and distant from the state. A full list of scholars with assessments of their proximity to the state can be found in the appendix. From each group, I selected ten scholars whose contributions I analyzed. When

[15] QS World University Rankings, search parameters subject: politics, region: Asia, location: China (mainland), https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2021/politics [last accessed 06 April 2021, 20:48].

[16] Academic Ranking of World Universities, selected subject: Political Science, http://www.shanghairanking.com/Shanghairanking-Subject-Rankings/political-sciences.html [last accessed 06 April 2021, 21:08].

[17] Times Higher Education World Universities Ranking, selected subject: Politics & International Studies, narrowed down to China as country/region, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2021/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/locations/CN/subjects/3090/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats [last accessed 06 April 2021, 20:25].

[18] Peking University (Beijing): School of International Studies, Renmin University (Beijing): School of International Studies, Fudan University (Shanghai): School of International Relations & Public Affairs and Institute of International Studies, Tsinghua University (Beijing): Department of International Relations, Beijing Foreign Studies University (Beijing): School of International Relations and Diplomacy, Shanghai Foreign Studies University (Shanghai): School of International Relations & Public Affairs, Nankai University (Tianjin): Zhou Enlai School of Government, Department of International Relations, East China Normal University (Shandong): School of Advanced International and Area Studies, University of International Relations (Beijing): International Politics Department and Center for International Strategy and Security Studies, Jinan University (Jinan): School of International Studies, Zhongshan University (Guangzhou): School of International Relations, China Foreign Affairs University (Beijing): Department of Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs Management and Department of International Relations, Jiaotong University (Shanghai): School of International and Public Affairs, Nanjing University (Nanjing): School of International Relations, Beijing Normal University (Beijing): Institute for International Relations, Wuhan University (Wuhan): Institute for International Studies, Tongji University (Shanghai: School of Politics and International Relations, Xiamen University (Xiamen): School of International Relations, Jilin University (Jilin): Institute of International studies, Shandong University (Jinan): School of Political Science and Public Administration, Zhejiang University (Hangzhou): Department of Political Science.

selecting them, I ensured as much variance as possible in the type of university, location, and field of study.[19] Table 4.8 provides an overview of the selected scholars.

Table 4.8: Selected scholars

	Name	Affiliation	Type of university[20]	Location	Field of study
Categorized as close to the state	Feng Shaolei (冯绍雷)	East China Normal University	Second tier	Shanghai	Russia and Europe's political, historical, and social transformation; research on the history of relations between major powers; research on international political theory
	Liu Jiangyong (刘江永)	Tsinghua University	First tier	Beijing	International relations, international strategy, and national security, with a focus on Japan and East Asia,
	Men Honghua (门洪华)	Tongji University	Unspecified	Shanghai	Strategic theory, comparison of major power strategies, history of Chinese strategic thought, theory of international relations
	Xin Qiang (信强)	Fudan University	First tier	Shanghai	U.S. Politics and Diplomacy, Maritime Issues, Taiwan Issues, Sino-U.S. Relations
	Song Guoyou (宋国友)	Fudan University	First tier	Shanghai	China-U.S. Relations, China's Economic Diplomacy, International Political Economy
	Guo Shuyong (郭树勇)	Shanghai Foreign Studies University	Second tier	Shanghai	IR theories, international political sociology, Marxist IR thoughts, area studies, and theories on the National People's Congress
	Zhuang Guotu (庄国土)	Xiamen University	Unspecified	Xiamen	Asia-Pacific International Relations, Overseas Chinese
	Qin Yaqing (秦亚青)	China Foreign Affairs University	First tier	Beijing	Chinese diplomacy, IR theories
	Shen Dingli (沈丁立)	Fudan University	First tier	Shanghai	China-U.S. security relationship, nuclear arms control, and disarmament, nuclear weapons policy of the United States and China, regional non-proliferation issues concerning South Asia, Northeast Asia, and the Middle East, test ban, missile defense, export control, as well as China's foreign and defense policies
	Wang Yiwei (王义桅)	Renmin University	First tier	Beijing	European Integration and Sino-European Relations, Public diplomacy, Chinese diplomacy, NATO Research

[19] Age and gender are additional categories that could have considered. However, it quickly became apparent to me that there was limited variation across these categories. The overwhelming majority of the Chinese scholars listed were male and since they were all full professors, they were also all of similar ages. Since this information is often not provided on the scholars' website, figure out the age and gender of each individual would have been too time-consuming for the expected little variation.

[20] China's higher education system is very hierarchical. Shambaugh distinguishes clusters universities into different tiers with first-tier universities being more highly regarded than second-tier institutions.

Categorized as distant from the state	Yan Xuetong (阎学通)	Tsinghua University	First tier	Beijing	The rise of great powers, the development of the international situation, China's foreign policy, international relations theory, scientific research methods, and ancient Chinese political and diplomatic thought
	Zhu Feng (朱锋)	Nanjing University	Unspecified	Nanjing	Major power relations and maritime rights struggles, Sino-US-Japanese security, diplomacy, and strategic relations, and East Asian nuclear non-proliferation issues
	Huang He (黄河)	Fudan University	First tier	Shanghai	International Political Economy, multinational corporations and International Relations, overseas investment risks, regional public goods, global governance, international economic rules
	Han Zhaoying (韩召颖)	Nankai University	Second tier	Tianjin	U.S. Foreign Policy, Sino-U.S. Relations, International Security, International Relations Theory, Great Power Relations
	Liu Changming (刘昌明)	Shandong University	Unspecified	Jinan	East Asian Security and Regional Cooperation, Globalization, and Global Governance, U.S. Politics and Diplomacy, Chinese Foreign Policy and Foreign Relations
	Zhang Shengjun (张胜军)	Beijing Normal University	Unspecified	Beijing	International Relations
	Xia Liping (夏莉萍)	Beijing Foreign Affairs University	First tier	Beijing	Contemporary China's Diplomacy, Consular Affairs, and Overseas Chinese Affairs
	Panxing Ming (潘兴明)	East China Normal University	Second tier	Shanghai	History of Sino-Foreign Relations, Commonwealth Country Studies,
	Cai Cuihong (蔡翠红)	Fudan University	First tier	Shanghai	China-US relations, information security strategy, cyberspace governance, cyber politics, and international relations
	Wang Jisi (王缉思)	Beijing University	First	Beijing	U.S. diplomacy, Chinese diplomacy, Asia-Pacific security

As for scholars' contributions to foreign policy debates, I considered academic journal articles I accessed through the China academic journals database hosted by the China National Knowledge Infrastructure Project (CNKI).[21] To collect all articles the selected scholars published between 2010 and 2019, I searched for the scholars' names and affiliations. All publications of an author listed in the database were considered. For this dissertation, I examined 608 academic articles published by Chinese scholars. Almost 60 percent of these articles (363 articles) were

[21] I accessed the database through the CrossAsia platform hosted by the Berlin State Library.

published by scholars I categorized as close to the state. On average, the selected scholars published 30,4 articles in the time frame. With 36,3 compared to 24,5 articles per scholar, scholars close to the state published more than scholars distant from the state. Overall, Wang Yiwei published by far the most articles, 105 in total. The analyzed articles were published in 164 different Chinese-language journals. While almost 60 percent of these journals were only represented in the sample with one article, the ten journals that appeared most frequently published between 15 and 39 articles included in the sample. Most, that is 39 articles, appeared in the journal People's Tribune (人民论坛), published two times per month by Renmin Ribao Press (人民日报社), followed by 34 articles published in World Economics and Politics (世界经济与政治) issued by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.[22]

Based on the secondary literature, I first compiled a list of 26 Chinese foreign policy think tanks.[23] Like the scholars, I categorized them as close to and distant from the state. Then, I selected

[22] Since I am interested in finding out under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest, I focus my attention on Chinese-language debates about foreign policy among these actors. Some Chinese scholars publish in English-language journals as well. As my previous research has shown, there can be at times substantial differences between Chinese- and English-language IR scholarship (Mokry 2016). Since this dissertation focuses on the Chinese-side of the debate, it is no necessary to include Chinese scholars' English-language scholarship in the analyses.

[23] Center for American Studies, Fudan University (复旦大学美国研究所), Center for China and Globalization (全球化智库), Centre for Peace and Development Studies of the China Association for International Friendly Contact (和平与发展研究所), Charhar Institute (察哈尔学会), China Center International Economic Exchanges (中国国际经济交流中心), China Foundation for International Strategic Studies (中国国际战略基金会), China Institute for International Strategic Studies (中国国际战略学会), China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (中国现代国际关系研究所), China Institute of International Studies (中国国际问题研究所), China Institute, Fudan University (复旦大学中国研究院), Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies (中国人民大学重阳金融研究院), Development Research Center of the State Council of the PRC (国务院发展研究中心), Guangdong Institute for International Strategies (广东国际战略研究院), Institute for Contemporary China Studies, Tsinghua University (清华大学国情研究院), Institute for International Relations, China Foreign Affairs University (外交学院国际关系研究所), Institute for International Strategic Studies, Central Party School (中国共产党校国际战略院), Institute of International Relations, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (上海社会科学院国际问题研究所), Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (中国社会科学院世界经济与政治研究所), Intellisia Institute/Haiguo Tuzhi Research Institute (海国图智研究院), Knowfar Institute for Strategic and Defense Studies (知远战略与防务研究所/知远所), National Defense University (国防大学), National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (中国社会科学院国家全球战略智库), Outlook Institute, Xinhua News Agency (瞭望智库), PLA Academy of Military Sciences (中国人民解放军军事科学研究院), Shanghai Institute for International Studies (上海国际问题研究所), The Pangoal Institution (盘古智库).

four to five think tanks whose contributions I analyzed from each group. When selecting them, I ensured variance in location, type of think tank, and state institutions they were affiliated with. Table 4.9 provides an overview of the selected think tanks.

Table 4.9: Selected think tanks

Categorization	Name	Location	Type of think tank	Affiliated state institution
Categorized as close to the state	China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) (中国国际问题研究所)	Beijing	Research institute	MFA
	Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS-IWEP) (中国社会科学院世界经济与政治研究所)	Beijing	Academy	State Council and CCP Propaganda Department
	National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS-NIGS) (中国社会科学院国家全球战略智库)	Beijing	Academy	State Council and CCP Propaganda Department
	China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) (中国现代国际关系研究所)	Beijing	Research institute	CCP Central Committee
Categorized as distant from the state	Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) (上海国际问题研究所)	Shanghai	Research institute	Municipal government
	Center for China and Globalization (CCG) (全球化智库)	Beijing	Research institute	None
	Guangdong Institute for International Strategies (GIIS) (广东国际战略研究院)	Guangzhou	Research institute	Municipal government
	The Pangoal Institution (盘古智库)	Beijing	Research institute	None
	Intellisia Institute/Haiguo Tuzhi Research Institute (海国图智研究院)	Guangzhou	Research institute	None

As think tank contributions to foreign policy debates, I considered academic articles and policy reports published on think tank websites. Between 2010 and 2019, the selected think tanks published 508 reports on their websites. Their analysts published 1421 articles in Chinese academic

journals. With 236 and 124 reports, respectively, CIIS and the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences published the most reports. On the lower end of the spectrum, Intellisia published only seven reports between 2013 and 2019.[24] The number of reports published, or at least available, per year increased over time. The highest number of reports was published in 2019. CICIR's staff members published most (730) articles in academic journals, followed by IWEP staff (315) and CIIS staff (215). The highest number of articles were published in 2010 (185), and the lowest was published in 2015 (66).

For tracing constructions of the national interest in societal actors' contributions to foreign policy debates, I relied on quantitative content analysis and drew on dictionary methods. I first ascertained how prominent the six components of the official construction of China's national interest featured in experts' contributions. For this, I automatically coded the themes and verbs that made up the different components of the official construction of China's national interest in experts' contributions to foreign policy debates with Maxqda's dictionary function. To identify the constructions of national interest in experts' contributions, I identified instances where a theme and a verb related to a particular construction of national interest appeared alongside each other. As a result, I could quickly see which components of the constructions of the national interest appeared in articles or reports published by the selected experts. The appendix shows an overview of the themes and verbs used to identify the constructions of China's national interest.

4.4 Assessing fit between official and societal constructions of China's national interest

The fourth analytical challenge to determine under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest requires assessing the fit between official and societal constructions of China's national interest. Assessing the fit between official and societal constructions of China's national interest entails examining thematic overlaps,

[24] These reports were available when I collected data for this project in 2021.

scrutinizing the temporal sequencing of policy shifts that appeared both in official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions, and an in-depth examination of said policy shifts. Only if there are substantial overlaps between official and societal constructions of the national interest and only if policy shifts first appear in societal contributions and then in official foreign policy statements can societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest.

Thematic overlaps between official and societal constructions of the national interest refer to patterns in relative salience and shifts in policy substance. I measure the extent of overlap between the official construction of China's national interest and societal foreign policy debates through the degree of divergence in patterns describing the relative salience of components of constructions of the national interest between official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions to foreign policy debates. For the degree of divergence in patterns describing the relative salience of components of constructions of the national interest, I aggregated the differences in relative salience of the different components of the constructions of national interest per year. As a result, I can point to and compare shifts in the relative salience of the components of the constructions of the national interest in official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions. Besides, I can compare the aggregated differences in how salient the different components were in official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions over time. Thematic overlaps between official and societal constructions of the national interest also encompass shifts in policy substance that appear both in official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions to foreign policy debates.

To determine whether societal actors could have influenced the official construction of China's national interest, I examined whether the policy shift appeared first in societal actors' contributions and then in official statements. For each shift in policy substance that I identified in a contribution by a societal actor, I checked when the respective shift in policy substance appeared for the first time in an official foreign policy statement. In some instances, there were years between the first occurrence in a societal actor's contribution and an official statement. When the shift in

policy substance appeared in societal actors' contributions and official statements in the same year, I looked closely at when exactly the statement was issued and when the article or policy report in question was published to determine which was published first. The results to analyze in this step were the number of policy shifts that first appeared in societal actors' contributions compared to the number of policy shifts that appeared first in official statements at different times.

Finally, I zoomed in on all policy shifts that appeared first in societal actors' contributions and examine in detail whether and how they were linked to policy shifts in official statements. This in-depth assessment allows me to determine whether the societal actor influenced the policy shift. The fact that a shift in policy substance first appeared in a societal actor's contribution alone is not sufficient for the actor having influenced the official construction of China's national interest. Therefore, I examined in-depth all policy shifts that appeared first in societal actors' contributions to assess whether and how they were linked to policy shifts in official foreign policy statements. First, I checked where the shift in policy substance appeared in the societal actor's contribution; that is, did it appear in the article's abstract, title, main text, or simply in a footnote or a reference. Then, I examined the content of the respective text passage and interpreted it. Based on this information, I assessed whether or not the shift in the official construction of China's national interest was influenced by the societal actor's contribution. I will illustrate my process through a positive and a negative example. The positive example relates to the policy shift that the world has increasingly been described as facing uncertainties and destabilizing factors, which first appeared in Premier Li Keqiang's speech at the Boao Forum in March 2019. In an article entitled "Consideration of Uncertainties, International cooperation Dilemma, and National Relative Gains (不确定性、国际合作困境 与国家对相对收益的考虑) the intensification of uncertainties was identified as the main feature of current international politics. In contrast, the article entitled "Followers" or "Autonomy": Australian Diplomatic Dilemmas and Choices in the U.S.-Australia Alliance ("追随"或"自主"：美澳同盟中澳大利亚外交困境与选择), also published in 2018, mentions uncertainties in international politics, but upon closer look, the policy shift only appears

in a footnote and relates to a white paper issued by the Australian government (Sun, Tong (孙通) and Liu, Changming (刘昌明) 2018). Hence, there is no connection with the official construction of China's national interest. This step resulted in a list of shifts in policy substance that societal actors influenced.

For determining societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest, I focus on shifts in policy substance. Since these shifts express an observable variation, I can assess what caused the change. Societal actors could of course also influence the official construction of China's national interest in areas in which it was stable. However, with the methods used in this research project, I cannot determine whether societal actors exerted influence on the official construction of China's national interest in these instances. Hence, I cannot account for such influences. As a result, societal actors' influence on the construction of China's national interest could be even bigger, contrary to common assumptions.

The discussion on assessing the fit between official and societal constructions of China's national interest showed that to determine under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest, one needs to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. Through employing quantitative approaches to content analysis, I can determine the existence and extent of overlaps between the official and societal constructions of China's national interest. Drawing on qualitative approaches allows me to determine how societal actors influenced the official construction of China's national interest. This provides the foundation for an in-depth analysis of the conditions under which Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest.

4.5 Measuring the state's openness to societal input

Measuring the state's openness to societal input, the second intervening variable that conditions societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest, poses the fifth

and last analytical challenge I had to overcome in this dissertation. Applying the political opportunity structures concept introduced in Chapter 3 allows us to identify three areas to consider for measuring the state's openness to societal input: rules and norms, resources, and the broader political environment. In the following, I discuss how I applied these broad areas to the relationship between the Chinese party-state and societal actors.

When measuring the state's openness to societal input, the rules, norms, and procedures that determine the relationship between societal actors in this project, experts, and the state need to be considered. Most importantly, this refers to laws and regulations that regulate societal actors' activities and state institutions' interactions with them. Changes in laws or policy directives that describe the relationship between the state and think tanks or scholars require scrutiny. The second area to consider when measuring the state's openness to societal input is research funding provided by the state. Here, one needs to examine what research gets funded and what incentives the state puts forward to steer research. It is critical to examine changes in the provision of funding over time, closely examining which institutions or individuals and which issue areas receive how much funding from the state. The third area refers to the broader political environment. Given that this area is vaguer than the other two, much information could be drawn from here. The leadership's speeches and overall ideological control are the most important factors to consider. From the General Secretary's speeches, one can infer what role he envisions scholars and think tanks to play by examining whether and how much he refers to these actors and how he describes them. For scholars and think tanks, the most impactful ideological controls would relate to restrictions on their work, such as limitations on what issues they can work on, censorship, and restrictions on whom they can meet.

4.6 Potential problems with causal identification

Pinning down societal actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest is analytically challenging. Even researchers working in the context of EU policy-making, which is much more open and transparent than policy processes in the PRC's system, describe the influence of interest groups as "the Higgs boson of contemporary social research" (Vannoni 2017, 369). To address problems with causal identification, I combine a frequentist understanding of causal inference inspired by preference attainment theory with a careful consideration of the context in which societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. In the following section, I detail this approach. Then, I demonstrate why other methodological approaches, including process tracing, interviews, surveys, and qualitative comparative analysis, would not help address the identified problems with causal identification, either because the approaches would not address the problem properly or because the necessary data cannot be obtained in the Chinese context.

In this project, I start with a frequentist understanding of causal inference. I assess how many policy shifts that appear in official foreign policy statements were first put forward by societal actors. This approach is inspired by "preference attainment theory" and its basic idea of comparing political outcomes with the ideal points or preferences expressed by the actor whose influence one wants to assess (Dür 2008, 567) as well as by the "text reuse approach" that examines "textual congruence between expert advisory documents and policy decision documents" (Christensen 2023, 608). These approaches share several advantages for uncovering the conditions under which Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. Societal actors' influence can be detected even if there are no visible signs of their influence. Applying the "text reuse approach" allows to demonstrate exactly whose input was incorporated (Christensen 2023, 608). Lastly, compared to process tracing, for example, a high number of cases can be considered. Process-tracing works best if one examines a concrete policy decision. In contrast, the approaches discussed here make it possible to examine more abstract concepts, such as the official

construction of the national interest. However, it is critical to note that textual congruence between official and societal constructions of the national interest does not equal societal actors' influence. Christensen (2023), for example, argues that "the correspondence between expert preferences and policy decisions is not necessarily the result of expert influence; a decision may well reflect the influence of other actors with similar preferences" (2023, 608). Similarly, Dür (2008) argues that it is difficult to control for alternative factors that could explain the outcome (2008, 568). In addition, experts can also exert influence without leaving textual traces (Christensen 2023, 609). These instances cannot be covered by applying these approaches.

To mitigate these drawbacks, I combine the frequentist understanding of causal inference that underpins "preference attainment theory" and the "text-reuse approach" with a careful consideration of the context in which Chinese societal actors supposedly influence the official construction of China's national interest. I identified intervening variables that condition societal actors' influence and assessed how these intervening variables, societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input impact societal actors' ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest. This quantitative assessment of the effect of the intervening structural variables is bolstered with an in-depth analysis of the instances in which societal actors influenced the official construction of China's national interest. Hence, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches allows me to examine under what conditions Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. In addition, to rule out that other factors influenced the observed changes in the dependent variable, I developed and tested alternative explanations (for details, see Chapter 2).

From the literature on measuring interest groups' influence in EU policy-making, I gather that process tracing could be suitable for assessing Chinese experts' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. Dür (2008) summarizes that through process tracing, scholars can examine interest groups' preferences, their attempts at influencing policy-makers, their access to these decision-makers, decision-makers' responses, and, ultimately, the degree to which

interest groups' preferences are reflected in policy outcomes and how satisfied interest groups' are with the outcome (2008, p. 562). However, even in the democratic and compared to the PRC highly transparent setting of EU policy-making, there are already difficulties for causal inference. Dür (2008) lists the following challenges: First, collecting empirical evidence that is precise enough to cover all stages of the causal process; second, cross-checking evidence gained from interviews with other sources; third, identifying a yardstick of what influence means; fourth, avoiding inferences about influence from the level of activity of an interest group; and, finally, generalizing from small-n studies. All of these difficulties would appear in the Chinese context as well. Its authoritarian system and the opacity of its policy-making process would undoubtedly worsen many of these challenges, most importantly access to decision-makers.

Interviews with scholars and decision-makers are crucial for collecting evidence for the process-tracing approach and feature prominently in existing research on Chinese scholars' influence on foreign policy. However, there are several difficulties associated with interviews, some of which are general and some unique to the Chinese context. Dür (2008) claims that relying on claims from interviews is difficult for measuring influence because "interviewees may have reasons to over- or understate the influence of interest groups" (2008, 563). I would argue that these tendencies apply equally to think tankers and scholars. It makes it necessary to cross-check the information, for example, through interviewing the side that is being influenced, that is, policy-makers. As argued above, this is very difficult in the Chinese context (Feng & He, 2020, p. 367). In addition, Chinese think tankers and scholars might not know whether they influenced foreign policy in certain instances. Abb (2015), for example, argues that "most researchers themselves never learn how their input may or may not have impacted policy debates among officials" (2015, 541). Lastly, getting access to Chinese interview partners or even the country as such has become more difficult over the past years, not only since the severe restrictions imposed on foreign researchers in response to the Covid19 pandemic (Barris et al. 2021; Greitens and Truex 2020). Possible challenges for researchers conducting interviews include concerns about the personal

safety of interview subjects, potential interviewees' reluctance to talk to researchers, and the danger of obtaining incorrect information through interviews (Sharma 2021).

Surveys can also be used to measure societal actors' influence on foreign policy-making. According to Dür (2008), in surveys, members of an interest group can be asked to assess their or a peer's influence. In addition, one can conduct surveys among informed observers. This is frequently employed to measure think tanks' influence. For example, the most prominent think tank ranking, the Global Go To Think Tank Index, is based on surveys.[25] However, when drawing causal inferences, surveys suffer from similar problems as interviews: First, self-estimation can be biased. Second, a lack of information or strategic thinking can bias peer assessments. Third, observers' responses might be shaped by certain events, or they might base their assessments on the academic literature (Dür, 2008). Overall, Dür convincingly concludes that surveys measure *perceptions* of influence rather than influence. In addition, to these methodological difficulties, implementing surveys in China has become more and more difficult over the past years due to tightening controls.

The framing of the dissertation's research question, under what conditions can Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest, suggests that Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) might be a suitable method to answer it. According to Mello (2021), QCA uncovers the conditions under which outcomes of interest occur (2021). In the context of the dissertation, the outcome of interest would be Chinese societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. I could apply this method if I already knew instances in which Chinese societal actors influenced the official construction of China's national interest. I could compare these instances and thereby identify which conditions were sufficient and necessary. However, as stated in the introduction to this chapter, there is only anecdotal evidence for instances in which Chinese societal actors influenced China's foreign policy. Therefore, in this

[25] For details on their methodology see: https://repository.upenn.edu/think_tanks/ [last accessed 05 September 2022, 10:01].

dissertation, I prioritize systematically identifying instances in which Chinese societal actors influenced the official construction of China's national interest and examining the role of the two intervening structural variables, the societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input.

4.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I demonstrated how I tackled the five analytical challenges that I had to overcome to answer under what conditions Chinese societal actors influenced the official construction of China's national interest. For mapping changes in the official construction of China's national interest, I identified relevant official foreign policy statements and applied frame analysis to examine how the national interest is constructed in these statements. To identify societal constructions of the national interest, I selected relevant scholars and think tank analysts, collected their contributions to foreign policy debates, and examined how they constructed China's national interest. To assess the fit between official and societal constructions of China's national interest, I examined thematic overlaps, scrutinized the temporal sequencing of policy shifts that appear both in official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions, and closely examined said policy shifts. Applying the political opportunity structures concept allows identifying three areas that describe the state's openness to societal input: rules and norms, resources, and the broader political environment. Lastly, I discussed what makes pinning down societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest challenging and how the dissertation's methodological innovations mitigate these challenges, in contrast to other possible methodological approaches.

In the next chapter, the dissertation's first empirical chapter, I present changes in the official construction of China's national interest, the dissertation's dependent variable, and changes in scholars' and think tanks' constructions of the national interest, the dissertation's independent variable. By tracing both changes in the relative salience of the different constructions of the

national interest and policy shifts, I show that the official and societal constructions of China's national interest do not match perfectly. Hence, there is no perfect transmission belt between societal ideas and the official construction of China's national interest.

5 Official and societal constructions of China's national interest

The gap between theory and practice is invoked frequently in international relations. Drawing on experiences in the academic and policy worlds, George (1994) recounts how "the eyes of policy specialists quickly glaze at the first mention of the word "theory"" (1994, 147). At the same time, academics might not agree on much, but share the belief that policy-makers are too "aconceptual and atheoretical", at times, even "anticonceptual and antitheoretical" (ibid., 151). Describing two cultures of academia and policy-making, George argues that academics and policy-makers are socialized into different professional and intellectual worlds, define their interest in international relations differently, and pursue different objectives in their work, which all make it difficult to communicate with each other. These observations suggest a big gap between foreign policy and foreign policy debates. This chapter takes up these claims and examines whether such a gap between theory, here experts' constructions of China's national interest, and practice, in the context of this dissertation, the official construction of China's national interest, materializes in the Chinese context.

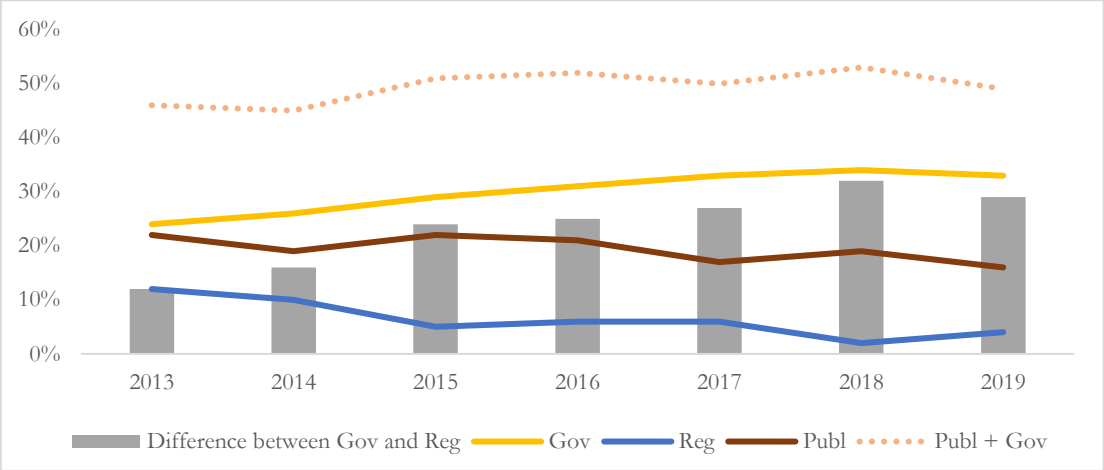
In the dissertation's first empirical chapter, I demonstrate that the official and societal constructions of China's national interest do not match perfectly. First, I describe variation in the official construction of China's national interest, the study's dependent variable. This variation entails changes in emphasis on the different components of the construction of China's national interest and shifts in policy substance. In the following sections, I detail scholars' and think tanks' constructions of the national interest, respectively. Finally, I demonstrate that there is no perfect match between the official and societal constructions of China's national interest by detailing overlaps and differences in the relative salience of the different components of China's national interest and in the prevalence of shifts in policy substance between the official and societal constructions of China's national interest.

5.1 Official constructions of China's national interest

The analysis of frames in Chinese foreign policy statements revealed striking shifts in how much attention the Chinese government attributed to the different components of the construction of China's national interest that I conceptualized in Chapter 3 and operationalized in Chapter 4 since Xi Jinping took power in 2012/2013. While *lead global governance* became more important over time, *control the region* became less important. Figure 5.1 illustrates these shifts in emphasis. It further shows that the differences in emphasis between the two components of the construction of China's national interest increased significantly between 2013 and 2017 and were particularly pronounced in 2018.

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the differences between *lead global governance* and *offer global public goods* are not always clear-cut. When combining the two, a similar pattern emerges for the assessment of relative salience. However, upon closer look, when disentangling these two components of the construction of the national interest as best as possible, as discussed in Chapter 4, one sees that while the relative salience of *lead global governance* has constantly been increasing, *offer global public goods* has decreased after 2016. The shifts in relative salience over time for the other components of the construction of China's national interest, *defend China's territory, political system, and citizens*, *expand economic relations*, and *promote China's values* were less pronounced. For details on the relative salience of these components, see the evidence presented to refute the alternative explanations in Chapter 2. Since *lead global governance* and *control the region* showed the most interesting variation over time, the subsequent analyses focus on those two components of the official construction of China's national interest.

Figure 5.1: Relative salience of selected components of the construction of China's national interest



In the following, I examine the shifts in policy substance behind these changes in emphasis. The first shift in policy substance to discuss in detail relates to descriptions of China's confidence and international standing. Over time, Chinese foreign policy statements emphasized China's confidence more. In 2014, the Foreign Minister described the Chinese government as pursuing "salient Chinese features, style and confidence" (使对外工作具备鲜明的中国特色、中国风格、中国气派) in its foreign policy (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2014c). Four years later, the CCP General Secretary/State President called for "adhering to strategic confidence and maintaining strategic resolve" (坚持战略自信和保持战略定力) at the Central Work Conference for Foreign Affairs (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2018). Increased confidence is attributed to the Chinese government and the Chinese people. First, in 2016, the Foreign Minister described China's foreign policy as more proactive, enterprising, confident, and mature (中国外交更加主动，更加进取，更加自信，更加成熟) (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2016), then, three years later, he depicted the Chinese people as "more confident and capable than ever in achieving the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation" (中国人民比以往任何时候都更有信心更有能力实现中华民族伟大复兴) in front of the UN General Assembly (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2019). These changed descriptions of China's confidence are closely related to changes in the descriptions of China's international standing. First, the Chinese

government was portrayed as seeing that it had raised China's international standing (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2013a, 2015), and China was described as being in an advantageous position to set the pace and shape events (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2016). A year later, frames about China's increased international standing were replaced by frames describing a rise in China's power to shape (塑造力进一步提高) (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2017c). Later, China was described as being at the rightful place among the world's nations (Wang, Qishan (王岐山) 2019).

How the Chinese government envisions its role in international politics also shifted over time. First, the Chinese government pointed out deficits in the status quo. Over time, it saw these deficits as becoming bigger. In 2017, the CCP General Secretary/State President described deficits in peace, development, and governance (和平赤字、发展赤字、治理赤字) that humans were facing (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2017d). Two years later, the Chinese government described a *growing* deficit in governance, trust, peace, and development (治理赤字、信任赤字、和平赤字、发展赤字越来越大) (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2019). At the BRICS summit in 2019, Xi Jinping described the world economy as facing a *greater* deficit of governance, development, and trust (治理赤字、发展赤字、信任赤字有增无减) (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2019c). From the Chinese government's descriptions of its relationship with the international community, one can infer its growing ambitions to take on a leadership role in international politics. In 2014, the CCP General Secretary/State President described China as having closer than ever interactions with the international community (我国同国际社会的互联互动也已变得空前紧密) (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2014a). The Chinese government described China as an important member of the international community (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2014a) and as working with the international community (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2014, 2016) before it described itself as "actively guiding the international community" (积极引导国际社会) (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2016) and as offering the

international community a "new option" (提供了新的选择) (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2019).

The Chinese government also detailed how it wants to lead global governance. It not only put forward that it will pursue political solutions (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2017b) but that other states should do the same (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2019; Wang, Yi (王毅) 2014b). The solutions that the Chinese government offers became more specific over time: First, the Chinese government described itself as publicly supporting China's solutions (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2013b), then the Chinese government was characterized as providing "new solutions to global economic problems" (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2015), and later as bringing solutions to international and regional conflicts (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2018). From a close look at how the community of shared future, one of the Chinese government's most prominent foreign policy slogans, was framed, one can infer the Chinese government's ambitions to lead global governance. Here, policy substance shifted from the vague notion of "strengthening a sense of community of shared future" (强化命运共同体意识) (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2017b) to a specification of what the Chinese government meant by it, that is converging interests and a high degree of interdependence (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2018a). In 2019, the notion of a *global* community of shared future was introduced (人类命运共同体思想) (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2019), suggesting an expansion in focus. Besides, the Belt and Road Initiative was described as a platform for implementing this idea (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2019).

To grasp shifts in the Chinese government's perspective on global (economic) governance and its reforms, it is necessary to examine how it described deficits and problems in this area. In 2015, the Chinese government claimed that the global governance system had yet to accommodate changes in the international system (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2015). More recently, it identified inequality as a key problem for global economic governance (Xi, Jinping (习近平)

2019a). While the Chinese government had already, in 2013, put forward that it would work seriously with others to reform the international economic governance system (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2013a), more recently, it claimed that it had already contributed to improving global economic governance (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2018a; Wang, Yi (王毅) 2015). This shift also appeared in the broader depiction of global governance reform: First, the Chinese government put forward that it had a keen sense of responsibility in shaping the reform of the global governance system (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2016), then it described how it was involved in its reform. In another indicative example, the Chinese government first claimed that it worked with others to reform the global governance system, then described that it took on a leadership role in reforming it (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2015b, 2018). In 2018, the Chinese government put forward that it contributed more ideas to reform the global governance system (Li, Keqiang (李克强) 2018). A year later, it specified this notion by claiming that the Belt and Road Initiative was a response to calls for improving the global governance system (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2019b).

In addition, the Chinese government seeks to take on a leadership role by providing international public goods. There was a slight shift from the Chinese government providing more public goods (Wang, Yi (王毅) 2013b, 2017a; Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2016b) to the Chinese government providing more and *better* public goods (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2019). Regarding the Chinese government's provision of foreign aid, it first put forward that it should do a good job in providing foreign aid (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2014a). There was also a specification that more money should go into aid for environmental protection (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2014). Then, there was a shift in degree towards increasing assistance (National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) 2016; Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2017c). Most recently, providing foreign aid was directly linked to mutual trust (State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2019).

Over time, there was less emphasis on regional cooperation mechanisms and processes in the official construction of China's national interest. The regional context faded more and more. Specifically, there was a shift in the Chinese government's position from expanding (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2013b) and publicly supporting regional cooperation (Li, Keqiang (李克强) 2014; Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2013a, 2015a) to only contributing towards it (National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) 2016; State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2017). While regional security was an important issue in foreign policy statements around 2016/2017, there were far fewer references afterward. Many frames that referred to Asia or the Asia-Pacific disappeared over time. In addition, there was more emphasis on what different organizations and their members should be doing in the region and less on China's role. For example, members of regional organizations, most importantly the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, were called upon to provide regional security. Here the focus shifted from providing credible security guarantees (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2014b) to more general calls for regional security and stability (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2017b).

The patterns in relative salience of the different components of the construction of China's national interest matched the observed shifts in policy substance. Since 2013, the Chinese government has been putting more emphasis on taking on a leading role in global governance. This was reinforced by shifts in policy substance outlining its ambitions for global governance reform. In contrast, the Chinese government put less emphasis on *control the region*. The descriptions of the role it envisions itself taking in regional cooperation became less ambitious over time. Instead, it put more emphasis on what other organizations should be doing. Three additional key findings emerge from the analysis of shifts in policy substance. The Chinese government described increases in China's confidence and international standing. In addition, it pointed more to deficits in international politics. These descriptions formed the foundation for descriptions of China's

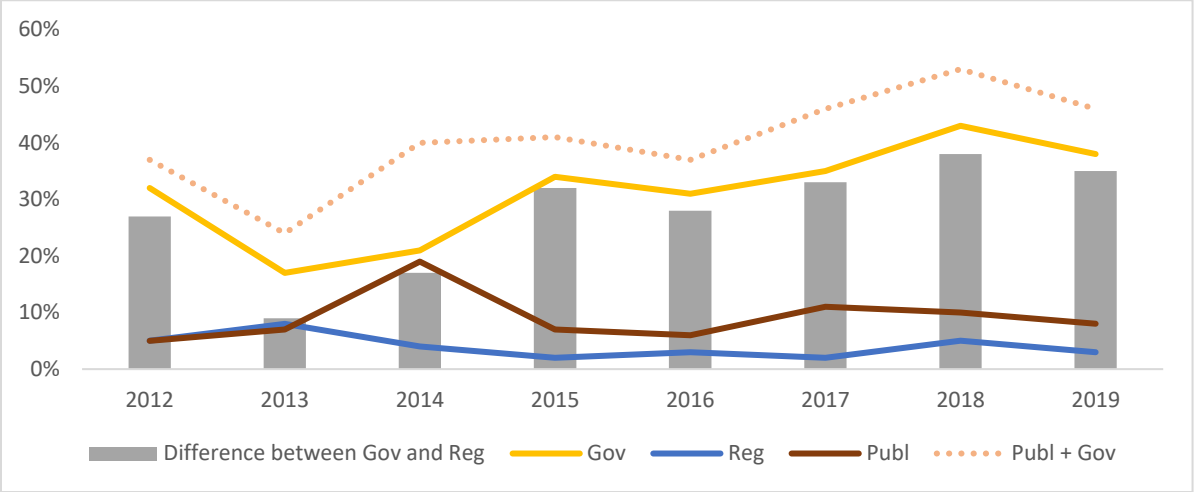
growing ambitions for leadership in international politics. These ambitions relate to the reform of the global (economic) governance system and the provision of international public goods.

5.2 Scholars' constructions of China's national interest

Before gauging the gap between theory, in the context of this project, societal constructions of China's national interest and practice, here, the official construction of China's national interest, it should be examined how Chinese scholars based at universities construct China's national interest. As for the analysis of official Chinese foreign policy statements, I assessed the relative salience of the different components of the construction of the national interest and shifts in policy substance over time (for details, see Chapter 4). Due to important differences between university-based scholars and think tank analysts (for details see Introduction), their influence on the official construction of China's national interest. Consequently, how they construct China's national interest should also be analyzed separately.

In scholars' contributions to foreign policy debates, *lead global governance* became more salient after 2013, while *control the region* became less salient. Overall, the difference in relative salience between the two components of the construction of China's national interest increased significantly over time. In 2018, the difference was most pronounced, but it had already been substantial since 2015. Over time *control the region* became less important. Around 2018 it became slightly more important, but then the relative salience of this component quickly decreased again. *Offer global public goods* was a lot less salient than *lead global governance*. Between 2012 and 2014, the relative salience of *offer global public goods* increased, then it dropped again and remained fairly constant, just above the relative salience of *control the region*. Figure 5.2 provides an overview of these shifts in emphasis in Chinese scholars' constructions of the national interest.

Figure 5.2: Relative salience of selected components of the construction of China's national interest in scholars' contributions to foreign policy debates



Policy shifts that describe the Chinese government as putting forward more encompassing and unique approaches for handling international relations and shifts in which the community of shared future replaces the community of shared interests features most prominently in Chinese scholars' constructions of China's national interest. In addition, shifts in policy substance in which the Chinese government more forcefully explained how international relations should be handled, put forward more specific solutions and proposals, and voiced a more pronounced take on multilateralism also appear frequently in scholarly constructions of China's national interest. In contrast, policy shifts describing how the Chinese government seeks to change the international system and global governance, including global economic governance and internet governance, do not appear in scholars' constructions of China's national interest. Occasionally, shifts in policy substance related to China playing a more prominent role in setting international rules and standards, contributing more to international relations, and pushing more for what it calls democracy in international relations to appear in the analyzed scholarly contributions to foreign policy debates. Policy shifts related to *control the region* infrequently appear in scholars' constructions of China's national interest. Occasionally, the Chinese government's perspective on regional integration is discussed by scholars. Similarly, the Chinese government pushes for cooperation in

regional security, and its take on how Asia should be governed also appears in scholarly discussions at times.

Chinese scholars' discussions about the more encompassing and unique approaches for handling international relations that the Chinese government puts forward focus on implementing the Belt and Road Initiative and the initiative's importance for China's foreign policy. For the most part, Chinese scholars reiterate the founding principles that the Chinese government associates with the Belt and Road Initiative, "discussing, building, sharing together" (共商、共建、共享) (Han, Zhaoying (韩召颖) and Tian, Guangqiang (田光强) 2015; Song, Guoyou (宋国友) 2015). Regarding implementing the Belt and Road Initiative, Liu Jianyong (2015) argues that adjustment in the Chinese government's geopolitical thinking is necessary. Specifically, he calls for developing a "geopolitical concept that is in line with it the "Land and Sea Harmony Theory" (构 建与 之相适应的 地缘政治 理念—海陆和合论). Apart from the Chinese government emphasizing maritime security, he argues that the coastal countries along the Belt and Road should build a sustainable security network (Liu, Jiangyong (刘江永) 2015c). Another new approach to handling international relations promoted by the Chinese government is expressed in the concept "new type of international relations" (新型国际关系). Guo Shuyong (2019) provides an in-depth description of the concept's intellectual foundations. He argues that the win-win logic of the new international relations not only draws on and transcends the ancient Chinese concept of harmony, the middle ground, and the contemporary win-win theory of the new institutionalism in Europe and the United States but also represents the successful practice of international economic cooperation between emerging and developed countries since the 1970s and 1980s (Guo Shuyong (郭树勇) 2019). While most scholarly contributions engage closely with the official concepts, there are also voices calling for looking beyond them. Liu Changming (2019), for instance, argues that when studying the Chinese government's foreign policy slogans, Chinese scholars "should look beyond the ideas themselves to find issues worth studying in the process of forming and advocating

Chinese diplomatic thought in the new era from a theoretical perspective" (Liu, Changming (刘昌明) and Sun, Tong (孙 通) 2019).[26]

Chinese scholars also discuss what the notions of "Chinese solutions" (中国方案) and "Chinese wisdom" (中国智慧) entail. Wang Yiwei (2017) explains that it is about solving world governance problems (Wang, Yiwei (王义桅) 2017). He describes the Belt and Road Initiative as a contribution to narrowing the development gap and fundamentally solving the root causes of various conflicts and contradictions. According to Wang Yiwei, the Belt and Road Initiative constitutes Chinese wisdom and solution for solving global development problems (Wang, Yiwei (王义桅) 2018c). Men Honghua (2019) describes deepening relationships between China and international organizations. According to him, China is fully engaged in international affairs, actively promoting international cooperation and innovation, and playing an increasingly important role in resolving global affairs and regional issues, with Chinese ideas and solutions attracting worldwide attention (Men, Honghua (门洪华) 2019). Guo Shuyong (2018) argues that Chinese solutions entail the reconfiguration of the world order (Guo Shuyong (郭树勇) 2018). Wang Yiwei (2015) also explains what "Chinese wisdom." We should contribute more "Chinese wisdom" in connecting with the development strategies of other countries, promoting policy coordination and innovative cooperation mechanisms (Wang, Yiwei (王义桅) 2015). Lastly, Men Honghua (2019) claims that the world pays attention to Chinese ideas, thoughts, wisdom, and solutions (Men, Honghua (门洪华) 2019). According to him, China has grown into a cooperative, responsible, constructive, and predictable shaper of the international system, exerting a significant and even leading influence on international affairs (ibid).

Chinese scholars devote some attention to the Chinese government's ambitions for setting international rules. Liu Jianyong (2013) discusses international rule-making as a prerequisite for

[26] The translations from the Chinese texts that are referred to throughout the empirical chapters were done by the author.

achieving sustainable security. He specifically argues, "a sustainable security strategy requires China to strengthen domestic morality, democracy, and the rule of law while actively participating in international law and international rule-making and improvement (Liu, Jiangyong (刘江永) 2013). Xin Qiang (2014) approaches the issue of international rules from a different angle and accuses other countries of adopting "double standards". He claims that one could work towards a code of conduct for the South China Sea but sees the United States as requiring China to adhere to these rules while failing to comply itself (Xin 2014). He argues there is nothing wrong with establishing a code of conduct to avoid surprises in the South China Sea dispute, but the point is that the U.S. has already set two "standards" for "international rules" at the same time that China is being asked to comply with the international code of conduct.

There is some discussion about multilateralism in Chinese scholars' contributions to foreign policy debates. Liu Jiangyong (2011), for example, describes the United States and Japan as pursuing "violent multilateralism" (暴力的多边主义) (Liu, Jiangyong (刘江永) 2011, 2014, 2015a). In contrast, China is called upon to promote "peaceful multilateralism" (Liu, Jiangyong (刘江永) 2015c). More recently, there has been some discussion about multilateralism as a concept. Liu Changming and Sun Tong (2019) argues that "multilateralism has deep cultural roots as the conceptual core of the European view of international order" (Sun, Tong (孙 通) and Liu, Changming (刘昌明) 2019). Zhang Shengjun and Zheng Xiaowen (2019) distinguish issue-based "plurilateralism," that emphasizes international cooperation among multiple actors, such as governments, interest groups, and NGOs, from "multilateralism" in which sovereign states are the core actors (Zhang, Shengjun (张胜军) and Zheng, Xiaowen (郑晓雯) 2019).

A couple of scholars debate China's role in regional integration. Most importantly, Wang Yiwei (2018) discusses the significance of the Belt and Road Initiative, highlighting the initiative's importance for achieving "great economic integration" (经济大融合) (Wang, Yiwei (王义桅) 2018a, 2018c). In 2015, Liu Jiangyong reflects upon how Asia should be governed. Specifically, he

underlines that "Asian countries should strengthen cooperation with other regional countries and relevant organizations, and welcome all parties to play an active and constructive role for Asia's development and security (Liu, Jiangyong (刘江永) 2015c). In another article published that same year, he briefly covers cooperation in regional security by referencing "common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security in Asia" ("共同、综合、合作、可持续的亚洲安全观") put forward by Xi Jinping in May 2014.

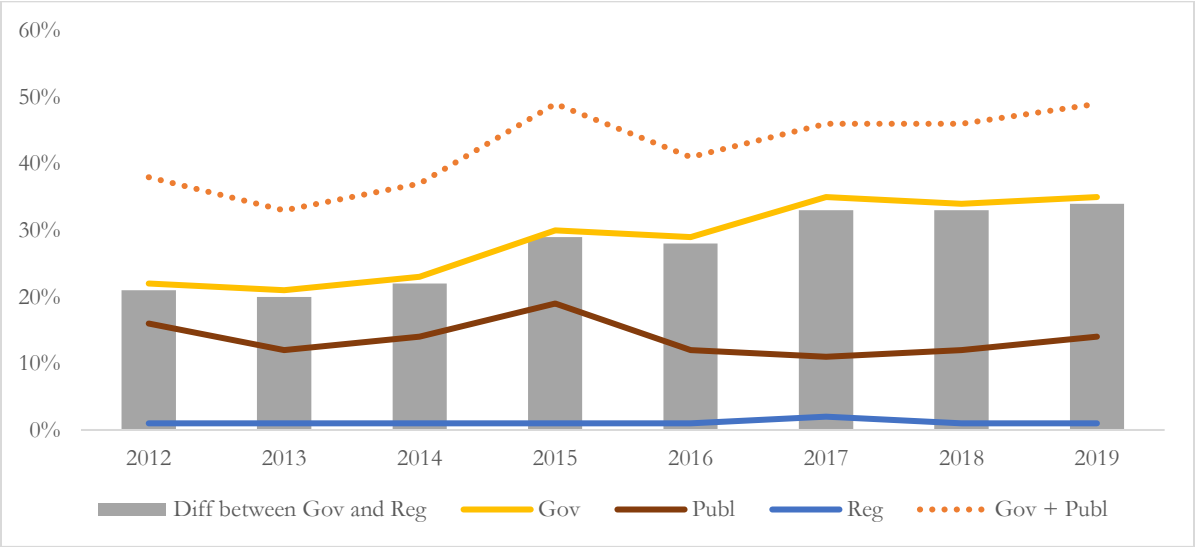
In sum, Chinese scholars' discussions about more encompassing and unique approaches for handling international relations focus on implementing the Belt and Road Initiative. They further detail what Chinese solutions and wisdom entail, most importantly, suggestions for improving global development and the reconfiguration of the world order. Scholars also discuss international rule-setting and different forms of multilateralism. The little attention devoted to China's role in regional integration focuses on how Asia should be governed, particularly on questions of regional security.

5.3 Think tank analysts' constructions of China's national interest

The following section presents how Chinese think tank experts constructed China's national interest. In think tank analysts' constructions of China's national interest, *lead global governance* became more salient over time. Throughout the study's time frame, it was the most salient component of the construction of China's national interest. In contrast, *control the region* played a marginal role, with hardly any changes in its relative salience. With *lead global governance* becoming more important over time and *control the region* staying marginally important, the difference in relative salience between the two components increased over time. If one disentangles *lead global governance* and *offer global public goods* (see discussion in section 5.1), one sees that the former was always more important than the latter. Between 2013 and 2015, *offer global public goods* became more important, then its relative salience decreased significantly, especially in comparison to lead global governance.

Figure 5.3 illustrates these shifts in the components of China's national interest in think tanks' contributions to foreign policy debate.

Figure 5.3: Relative salience of selected components of the construction of China's national interest in think tanks' contributions to foreign policy debates



In think tanks' constructions of China's national interest, policy shifts describing the community of shared future replacing the community of shared interest and the Chinese government putting forward more encompassing and unique approaches for handling international relations featured most prominently. Shifts that described how the Chinese government more forcefully explained how international relations should be handled and that it put forward more specific solutions and proposals also appear prominently. Somewhat frequently surface the Chinese government's attempts at redefining partnerships in international politics, its stronger role in setting international rules and standards, and its contributions to international politics in think tank publications. Interestingly, references to the Chinese government's calls for global governance reform are mentioned only twice in think tank contributions. In addition, many policy shifts related to global governance issues, including descriptions of deficits in international politics or ideas for global economic governance, do not appear in think tank contributions. Regarding *control the region*,

the Chinese policy shifts that describe the Chinese government's perspective on regional integration and its attempts at briefly advancing economic cooperation in the region appear most frequently. Its push for cooperation in regional security does not emerge from think tank contributions.

Several think tank analysts attribute "strategic determination" to China, especially under Xi Jinping's leadership. In 2014, an expert at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) argues that since the new leadership had taken office, "strategic determination" (战略定力) and "bottom-line thinking" (底线思维) had come to define China's diplomatic thinking. The expert explains that the former referred to identifying long-term strategic goals and overcoming the temptation to act in the short term while not being consumed by successes and setbacks (Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) 2014). A year later, a report by the same think tank specifies that China's "strategic determination" referred mainly to its domestic and international economic development (Yang, Jiemian (杨洁勉) 2015).

Related to the Chinese government's ambition to redefine partnerships in international politics, "global partnerships" are discussed in several think tank publications. Most importantly, analysts argue that the Chinese government's so-called "new global development partnership" should be linked to similar efforts within the United Nations. In 2013, a SIIS report claims that this would primarily entail establishing an implementation and monitoring mechanism and would help foster China's image as a responsible power willing to provide international public goods (Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) 2013b). Two years later, a report by the same think tank argues that China should link its concept with the one put forward within the UN in order to "make the "new global partnership for development" the dominant discourse to further "justice, equality, and the interests of all humanity" (Ye Jiang (叶江) 2015). Another report points to similarities between the two concepts that should be leveraged (Zhang, Chun (张春) 2015). Apart from that, several think tank contributions survey other countries' global partnerships, for

example, between the U.S. and Japan (Xushi (李秀石) Li 2015), India and Japan, and India and the U.S. (Cao 2015).

Discussions on Chinese solutions and proposals among think tank analysts center around the international community's expectations, the implementation of these solutions and proposals, and their reach. In 2014, a SIIS report claims that "China's voice" (中国声音) and "China's solutions" (中国方案) are increasingly expected and valued by the international community. Given that China played a more prominent role in the world economy and international security affairs, the report sees the international community's demand and expectations increasing (Chen, Dongxiao (陈东晓) 2014). Regarding implementing China's solutions, an 2017 article published by an analyst working at the Guangdong Institute for International Studies (GIIS) article refers to China's unique governance methods, paths in infrastructure construction, and industrialization as key requirements (Wang, Luyao (王璐瑶) and Ge, Shunqi (葛顺奇) 2017). In 2018, another report by the same think tank highlights China's proposals and the contribution of Chinese wisdom and voice in the United Nations, G20, APEC, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, and other international cooperation venues, all reflecting strong international leadership (周方银 (Zhou Fangyin), 2018). Regarding the reach of China's solutions, areas mentioned by think tank analysts include the governance of the Arctic (Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) 2015), the construction of a new global governance order (Wang, Huiyao (王辉耀) 2017), global investment rules (Wang, Luyao (王璐瑶) and Ge, Shunqi (葛顺奇) 2017), and cyberspace governance (Lu, Chuanying (鲁传颖) 2017). A recent report by the Center for China and Globalization (CCG) also discusses possible obstacles to implementing Chinese solutions. The report argues that many countries perceive the "Chinese solution" as a tool for China's foreign expansion and oppose it (Center for China and Globalization (CCG) 2019).

Contributions by Chinese think tankers also address the question of whether China is fully integrated into the existing international system or whether it should shape new international rules.

A 2013 SIIS report argues that in the second decade of the 21st century, China is no longer an "oppressed" but a "responsible power" in the international system. The report expects it to not only change itself but to shape the world in the future (Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) 2013a). Another report argues that the international system continues to be dominated by Western powers, which demand China become a "stakeholder" and a "responsible power". According to the report, this shows their clear intention of binding China to the international system (Wang, Falong (王发龙) 2014). Similarly, a 2013 SIIS report claims that the existing international system was still dominated by Western powers, with the vast majority of international rules being expressions of their values and reflecting their interests (L. (宋黎磊) Song and Cai, Liang (蔡亮) 2013).

Chinese think tank analysts debate the potential of economic cooperation in the region. For example, a CIIS report from 2014 discusses the differences in membership in RCEP and TPP and its repercussions for regional economic cooperation (G. (唐国强) Tang and Wang 2014). An expert working at GIIS weighs in on what factors will influence regional economic cooperation arguing that extra-regional powers will likely dominate the future of regional economic cooperation in Asia, most importantly the U.S., instead of regional powers (Li Xiangyang (李向阳) 2014). In addition, some think tank analysts discuss regional security cooperation as well. In 2015, a SIIS report referenced the official Chinese concept of "common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable concept of security in Asia" (Liu, Jiangyong (刘江永) 2015b).

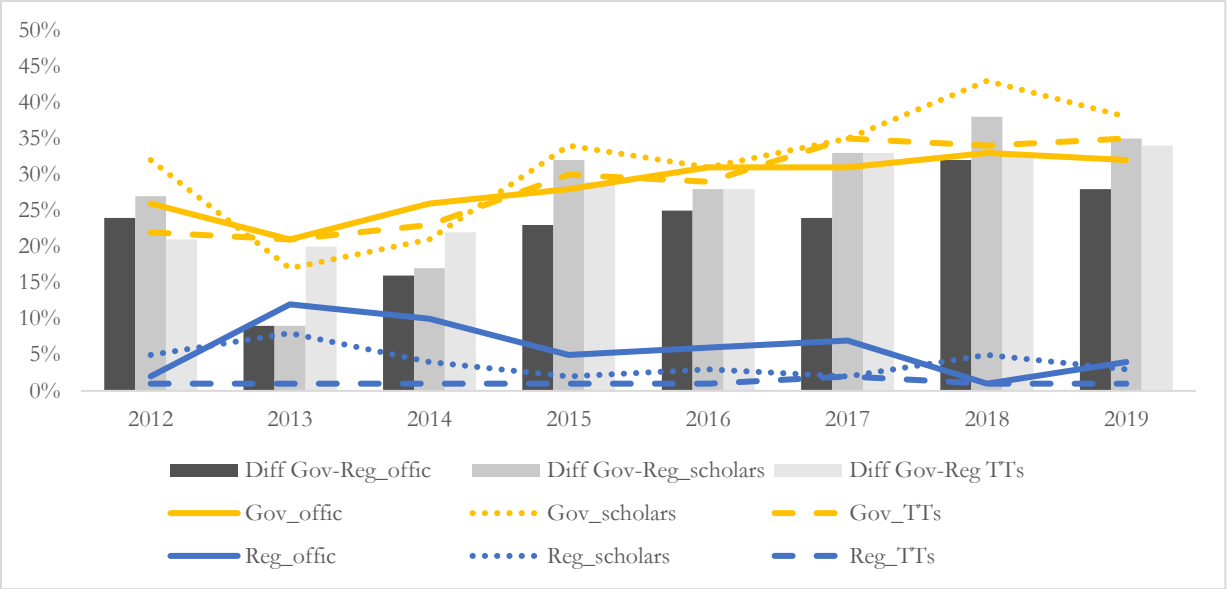
To sum up, the most important shifts in policy substance discussed by Chinese think tank analysts focus on China's "strategic determination", the importance of "global partnerships", and the international community's expectations for implementing Chinese solutions and proposals. Chinese think tank experts also discussed the extent of China's integration into the international system and whether it should shape new international rules. Lastly, Chinese think tank analysts give some thought to the potential of economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.

5.4 Comparative analysis of official and societal constructions of China's national interest

There are overlaps and differences in how salient the different components of the construction of China's national interest appear in official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions to foreign policy debates. Since 2013, *lead global governance* has become more important in all official and societal constructions of China's national interest. In addition, the weight attributed to it is roughly the same. The weight attributed to *control the region* by official and societal actors is also similar. Most importantly, this component became less important across official and societal constructions of China's national interest. The differences in emphasis between *lead global governance* and *control the region* also follow similar developments in the official and societal constructions of China's national interest.

However, there is no perfect match between the official and societal constructions of China's national interest. Upon closer look, subtle differences emerge, as Figure 5.4 illustrates. Between 2013 and 2015, there was less emphasis on *lead global governance* in societal constructions of China's national interest, especially in scholars' constructions, than in the official construction of China's national interest. In contrast, there was much more emphasis in societal contributions on *lead global governance* around 2015 in official foreign policy statements. Another striking difference is that societal actors put less emphasis on *control the region* than the official construction of China's national interest. This is especially the case between 2013 and 2015. Around 2018, think tanks and the official construction of China's national interest paid hardly any attention to this component of the construction of China's national interest. At the same time, however, scholars put more emphasis on it. By 2019, the weight attributed to it in the official construction of China's national interest was the same as in scholars' constructions of the national interest. Lastly, after 2014, the overall difference between *lead global governance* and *control the region* was always more pronounced in the official construction of China's national interest than in societal constructions of China's national interest.

Figure 5.4: Comparisons of the relative salience of selected components of the construction of China's national interest



Overlaps in policy substance between official and societal constructions of the national interest appear regarding changes in the description of China's international standing and regarding the Chinese government's role in world politics. The descriptions of China's increased international standing and increases in China's power to shape and the descriptions of increases in China's confidence in official statements overlap with references to increased strategic determination in think tank contributions to foreign policy debates. In addition, there are overlaps in descriptions of the Chinese government's role in international politics. The description of deficiencies in world politics in official foreign policy statements matches the assertation that the international system remains dominated by Western powers and that China will shape the world in the future.

Regarding *control the region*, there are also some overlaps between the official and societal constructions of the national interest. Think tank analysts, for instance, reiterated the official concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security. In addition, there is less emphasis on China's role in the region in official foreign policy documents than descriptions of what other actors should do. This matches the increased focus on how Asia should be governed in scholars' contributions to foreign policy debates.

However, there are striking differences regarding the policy substance of *lead global governance* between official and societal constructions of China's national interest. In official foreign policy statements, growing ambitions for China's leadership role, how the Chinese government will pursue such a leadership role, and Chinese proposals for global governance reform are discussed extensively. These aspects receive far less attention in societal debates. Among scholars and think tankers, more specific solutions, and proposals are discussed extensively. Think tank analysts focus on the international community's expectations, the reach of Chinese solutions, how to implement the concept, and potential obstacles. Scholars specify the purpose of Chinese solutions, especially since they are meant to solve world governance problems and entail the reconfiguration of the world order. China's stronger role in setting international rules is discussed more extensively in scholars' contributions to foreign policy debates, and attempts at redefining international partnerships receive substantial attention in think tank publications. There are important differences between ideas put forward by societal actors and the official construction of China's national interest in these regards. Some scholars even call for looking beyond official concepts when studying Chinese diplomatic thought.

Differences between the official and societal constructions of China's national interest also appear regarding *control the region*. In official foreign policy statements, there is continually less emphasis on regional cooperation. More concretely, this entails fewer references to regional security and less emphasis on China's role than descriptions of what other actors should do. In scholars' contributions, in contrast, the significance of the Belt and Road Initiative for regional integration is highlighted. The emphasis on extra-regional powers, especially the U.S., and the in-depth comparison between RCEP and TPP appear in think tanks' contributions. This is not matched in official statements in which the regional context increasingly faded.

5.5 Conclusions

The preceding analysis showed that official and societal constructions of China's national interest do not match perfectly. Regarding the overall weight attributed to the different components of the construction of China's national interest over time, there are similarities between societal and official constructions of China's national interest. In addition, there are overlaps regarding policy shifts, such as changes in the description of China's international standing and the Chinese government's role in world politics. However, upon closer look, critical differences between official and societal constructions of China's national interest appear regarding the relative salience attributed to the different components of the construction of China's national interest and policy substance. Hence, there is no perfect transmission belt between societal actors' debates and the official construction of China's national interest, which makes considering the intervening effect of domestic structures necessary.

In the following two chapters, I examine the conditions under which societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. In the next chapter, I provide quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrating under which conditions scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest. Since scholars prioritize research over policy advice and think tanks put policy advice first, and since the state might relate differently to scholars and think tanks, I discuss scholars' and think tank analysts' influence on the official construction of China's national interest separately from each other. Chapter 6 focuses on scholars. Chapter 7 zooms in on think tank analysts. After describing changes in domestic structures and how they affected scholars, I assess how these changes affected the conditions under which Chinese scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest in the next chapter.

6 Scholars' ideas, domestic structures, and the official construction of China's national interest

On 25 October 2017, a day after a resolution enshrined "Xi Jinping Thought" into the PRC's constitution, Renmin University in Beijing announced the establishment of a research center dedicated to "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era" (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想研究中心) (Financial Times 2017). The center's mission is to ensure Xi Jinping Thought "enters class materials, classrooms, and brains (进教材、进课堂、进头脑) (光明日报 (Guangming Ribao) 2017). In terms of research, the center is supposed to bring together "top academic resources nationwide in an effort to build a domestic first-class platform and base for research and dissemination of the latest achievements of Marxism in China" (ibid). Shortly after, at least 20 universities and colleges established similar centers (ibid). These centers for Xi Jinping Thought established at universities across China's provinces are widely seen as signs of increased ideological control over Chinese universities, including scholars who work there (Gan 2021; Taber 2018). This chapter details the intensification of such ideological controls as a change in domestic structures and examines how it affected Chinese scholars' influence on the official construction of China's national interest.

Since there is no perfect transmission belt between scholars' ideas and the official construction of China's national interest, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is necessary to examine domestic structures as conditioning factors for scholars' influence on the official construction of the national interest. In this chapter, I provide quantitative and qualitative evidence for the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest. I show that scholars' proximity to the state and the state's openness to their input facilitate and constrain scholars' influence on the official construction of the national interest. When scholars are close to the state, and the state is open to scholarly input, thinking back to the family road trip metaphor, when they sit in the driver's seat, scholars have the most influence on the official construction of China's national interest. When scholars are distant from the state, and when the

state is not open to their input, metaphorically speaking, when they are in the trunk, they have the least influence on the official construction of China's national interest. Finally, when scholars are close to the state and when the state is not open to scholarly input, when they sit in the co-driver's seat, and when scholars are distant from the state and when the state is open to their input, when they are in the backseat, they still have some influence on the official construction of China's national interest.

6.1 Quantitative evidence for the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest

For scholars' ideas to influence the official construction of China's national interest, shifts in policy substance must first appear in scholars' contributions to foreign policy debates and then in official foreign policy statements. In addition, there must be evidence of close links between the two, as discussed in Chapter 4. In line with the hypotheses deduced from my theoretical argument, I expect that the highest number of policy shifts is influenced when scholars are close to the state and when the state is open to their input and that the lowest number of policy shifts is influenced when scholars are distant from the state and when the state is not open to their input.

Based on the analysis described in Chapter 4, I identified 36 instances in which scholars influenced policy shifts in the official construction of China's national interest. All expectations about the conditions under which they influence the official construction of China's national interest deduced from the theoretical argument are fulfilled: As expected, when scholars are close to the state and the state is open to their input, thinking back to the road trip metaphor introduced in Chapter 3, when scholars are in the driver's seat, they influence the highest number of policy shifts (67 percent). In contrast, when scholars are distant from the state and when the state is not open to their input, when they are left in the trunk, the percentage of influenced policy shifts is lowest. In fact, the empirical evidence shows that scholars did not influence any policy shifts under these conditions. When scholars are close to the state, and when the state is not open to their input,

they influence a lot more policy shifts (25 percent) than when scholars are distant from the state and when the state is open to their input (8 percent). Table 6.1 provides an overview of the quantitative evidence indicating that the expectations about the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest were fulfilled.

Table 6.1: Quantitative evidence for the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest

		Scholars' proximity to the state	
		close	distant
The state's openness to scholars' input	open	*In the driver's seat* Most influence expected 67% of policy shifts influenced	*In the backseat* Some influence expected 25% of policy shifts influenced
	closed	*In the co-driver's seat* Some influence expected 8% of policy shifts influenced	*In the trunk* Least influence expected No policy shifts influenced

The analysis of the shifts in policy substance which scholars influenced provides quantitative evidence for the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, there are clear limits to such a frequentist understanding when examining scholars' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. I, therefore, bolster my claims by providing qualitative evidence for the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest in the next section.

6.2 Qualitative evidence for the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest

Since this dissertation aims to explain the observed variance in the official construction of the national interest, in particular the increased emphasis on *lead global governance* and the decrease in emphasis on *control the region*, the following presentation of qualitative evidence about the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest focuses on these two issue areas. However, scholars did not influence shifts in policy substance related to these two areas when the state was not open to their input and when scholars were close to the state. In order to be still able to describe Chinese scholars' influence on the construction of the national interest under this condition, the presentation of qualitative evidence will incorporate depictions of scholars' influence from other components of the construction of China's national interest, where appropriate.

When scholars were close to the state and the state was open to their input, metaphorically speaking, when they were in the driver's seat, scholars substantially influenced the Chinese government's ambitions of taking on a more proactive role in setting international rules. Xin Qiang's analysis, published in 2014, indirectly relates to the Chinese government's ambition to play a more active role in setting international rules that it put forward a year later in its Government Work Report. He argues that while there is nothing wrong with establishing a code of conduct for the South China Sea, the U.S. should not ask China to comply with such international rules (Xin 2014). This hints at a certain dissatisfaction with international rules. A year earlier, Liu Jiangyong (2013) directly foreshadowed the Chinese government's position of playing a stronger role in setting international rules. Two years before the Chinese government shifted its position, he argues that "actively participating in the process of drafting and refining international law and international rules" was one of the prerequisites for China's sustainable security strategy (Liu, Jiangyong (刘江永) 2013).

Under the same conditions, scholars influenced the Chinese government by voicing a more pronounced take on multilateralism in two ways. First, scholars set the scene for this shift in policy by criticizing how other countries pursued multilateralism. They thereby underscore the necessity of China developing its own form of multilateralism. In a description of the evolution of China's strategic environment since the establishment of the PRC, the U.S. and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are accused of pursuing "violent multilateralism." In addition, Japan is accused of balancing against China, specifically by spreading "violent multilateralism" through its alliance with the U.S. (Liu, Jiangyong (刘江永) 2014). Similarly, Liu Jiangyong (2015) argues that in today's world, international peace and security are seriously threatened by the simultaneous confrontation of "violent extremism" and "violent multilateralism" (Liu, Jiangyong (刘江永) 2015a). He also describes Japan as pursuing "violent multilateralism" under the Abe government. Second, scholars explain that the Chinese government should adopt its own form of multilateralism. Liu Jiangyong, (2015) for instance, argues that as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China should make its voice heard to promote "peaceful multilateralism" and build a sustainable and secure world (Liu, Jiangyong (刘江永) 2015b). Both the introduction of the term "violent multilateralism" and the suggestions of how the Chinese government should behave instead can be directly linked to the Chinese government voicing a more pronounced take on multilateralism in its foreign policy statements.

When scholars are close to the state and the state is not open to their input, when they are in the co-driver's seat, they influence a few shifts in policy substance related to the component of the construction of China's national interest *defend China's territory, political system, and citizens*. Wang Yiwei (2018) describes the ambition to treat "both symptoms and root causes" of policy problems and argues that the Chinese culture and economy are particularly well suited for it (2018b). Liu Jiangyong (2016) and Liu Changmin (2018) develop the notion "great power game" (大国博弈) before it appears in the official construction of China's national interest. Liu Jiangyong (2016) characterizes "the game of great powers" and the "strategic adjustment of great powers" as key

features of the international environment (Liu Jiangyong (刘江永) 2016). Liu Changmin (2018) applies the notion of a "great power game" to U.S.-China relations (Liu, Changming (刘昌明) 2018).

When scholars were distant from the state and when the state was open to their input, that is when they sat in the back seat, they influenced the policy shift that describes China as developing its own form of multilateralism. Liu Changming (2012), in particular, describes Obama's "smart power diplomacy" extensively. He argues that it combines "strategic contraction, multilateralism, great power coordination, allied collaboration, and image building" (2012, 71). At the same time, the U.S. still retained the use of hard power to defend its interests as a last resort.

The in-depth analysis of conditions under which scholars influenced the official construction of China's national interest shows that scholars influenced two important policy shifts related to the Chinese government's growing ambitions to take on a leadership role in global governance. When scholars were close to the state, and when the state was open to their input, they substantially influenced the Chinese government to adopt a more proactive role in international rule-making and voiced a more pronounced take on multilateralism. The increased focus on *lead global governance* to the detriment of *control the region* fits well with the decline in relative salience observed for the two components of national interest in Chapter 5. Hence, quantitative and qualitative evidence supports the argument that scholars' proximity to the state and the state's openness to scholars' input condition scholars' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. In the following, I assess how changes in domestic structures affect the state's openness to societal input and subsequently impact the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest.

6.3 Changes in domestic structures and their effects on scholars

Xi Jinping's speech at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities (全国高校思想政治工作会议) in December 2016 marked a new level in the intensification of ideological control over universities. Alongside increased restrictions for scholars and changes in communicated priorities in the provision of research funding, it signaled to Chinese IR scholars that the state was less open to their input.

In his speech, Xi emphasized that higher education institutions were under the party's leadership and must adhere to Marxism as their guiding ideology. He further described the party's attempts to turn faculty and students into firm believers, active propagators, and exemplary practitioners of socialist core values. In his view, universities were to be turned into model places of stability and unity. He tasked party committees that already oversee universities with ensuring the correct direction of running colleges and universities. More concretely, party committee members were encouraged to go to colleges and universities more often and get in touch with students and faculty. He cast educators as "engineers of the human soul" (人类灵魂的工程师) whose firm support for the party should be reflected in their teaching. While ideological and political work is supposed to happen through classroom teaching mainly, he also hinted at intended changes in how academic disciplines were structured (Xi, Jinping (习近平) 2016a).

Debates among Chinese scholars on implementing what Xi had outlined focused on teaching (M. Chen 2017; Ding 2017; L. Tang 2020). However, severe repercussions for the climate at universities more broadly manifested since his speech. Most importantly, there was an increase in retaliatory action against scholars. Florence Yang (2021) lists cases of Chinese scholars who were investigated, suspended, or whose contracts were terminated. From 2017 onwards, she observes a steep increase in cases "where academics were dismissed or disciplined by university authorities" (2021, 12). Moreover, restrictions on scholars' work were introduced beyond targeting individual scholars. This shows that the strengthening of ideological control goes well beyond the classroom:

In addition to constraints on what can be taught, limits were introduced on research with individuals and institutions overseas, travel outside of China, and meetings with foreigners. There is also increased scrutiny over publications in Chinese and international outlets (Woodman and Pringle 2022, 643). These developments changed the political environment significantly and signaled to Chinese IR scholars that the state was less open to their input.

In addition, shifts in resource configurations, that is, the amount and ways in which the Chinese government administers research funding for the social sciences, are worth paying attention to for assessing the state's openness to scholars' input. Holbig (2014) lists five primary sources of funding for social science research in China, the National Social Science Fund of China, the Ministry of Education, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the National Natural Science Foundation, and local funding sources. The National Social Science Fund of China, administered by the National Planning Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences (NPOPSS), which is directly in the Propaganda Department's orbit, is the most important funding source (Holbig 2014, 15). Perry (2020) argues that "the propaganda department's influence can be seen in the extraordinary number of major research grants earmarked for the study of "Xi Jinping's Thought". She further describes these grants as "lucrative and prestigious" and poses that there is considerable pressure on faculty to apply for them and "discrimination against those who are unwilling or unsuccessful in garnering them" (Perry 2020, 14f.).

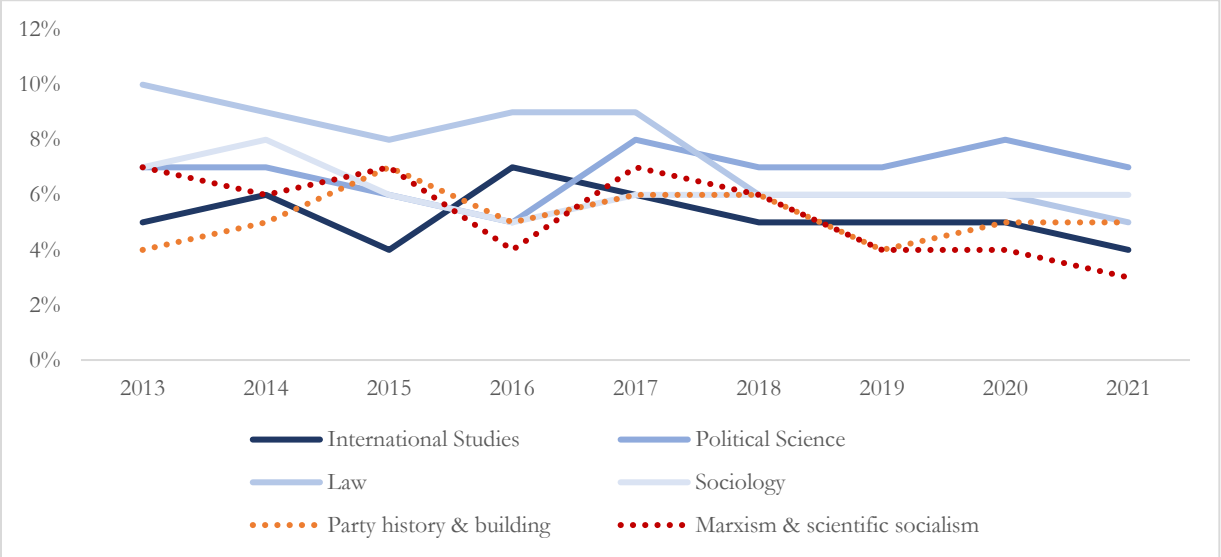
Shifts in the Chinese government's calls for research funding, especially in calls for the most prestigious funding lines, further signal the tightening of ideological control. Building on Holbig's work, I examined shifts in the funding calls issued by the NPOPSS between 2013 and 2021. The examined "major projects" funding line is the most prestigious and well-funded project line. For this line, the NPOPSS publishes a list of topics scholars can apply for each year (Holbig 2014, 21). Based on this analysis, I identify signals for a decrease in the state's openness to Chinese IR scholars' input on three levels: the overall weight attributed to IR compared to other disciplines, references

to CCP ideology across disciplines, and references to official foreign policy slogans in the topics listed for IR scholars.

First, I examined how much weight the NPOPSS attributes to IR compared to other disciplines.[27] I assume that the more topics are listed for a discipline, the more the state is interested in input from scholars working in this area. To measure this, I compare the number of topics listed under "International Studies" to the average number of topics per discipline. Based on the yearly average, International Studies ranks in the middle, alongside Marxism, Party History & Party Building, Philosophy, Media Studies, Library and Information Studies, and Physical Education. More research topics are listed based on the yearly average for Law, Political Science, various economic disciplines, and sociology. An overview of how much weight is attributed to the different disciplines can be found in the appendix. More importantly, Figure 6.1 shows that the proportion of research topics listed for International Studies has decreased constantly since 2016. The same patterns can be observed for adjacent disciplines, particularly Political Science, Law, and Sociology. In contrast, disciplines closely related to the CCP ideology, first and foremost Party History and Building, Marxism & Scientific Socialism became more important around 2016. From these trends, I gather that Chinese IR scholars infer that the Chinese state has become less interested in their input since 2016.

[27] Academic disciplines are structured differently in different countries. In some countries, International Relations would be considered a sub-discipline of Political Science, in other countries, it appears more like a separate discipline. Leaving such discussions aside, I followed the categories put forward by the NPOPSS and focused on the category "International Studies".

Figure 6.1: Proportion of research topics listed per discipline in NPOPSS funding calls

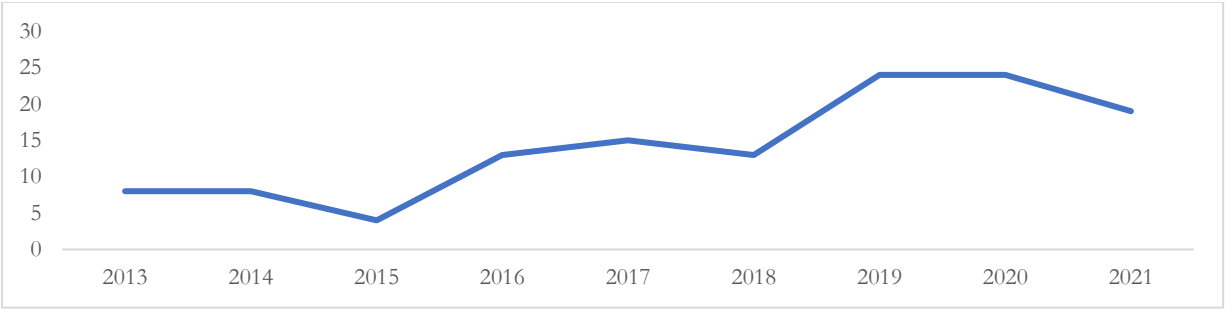


Second, I examined shifts in how frequent terms that reflect the CCP's ideology appear in the suggested research topics. If only to increase their chances of winning these prestigious grants, I assume that scholars pay close attention to how the topics are framed and what role the Chinese state attributes to ideology. If the number of references to ideology in the project calls increases, I assume Chinese scholars infer that the Chinese state is less open to listening to diverse input from societal actors. Figure 6.2 shows that right after 2016, there was a steep increase in how often ideological concepts were mentioned in the NPOPSS funding calls. At the same time, Xi Jinping's name featured more frequently between 2016 and 2019. Both trends suggest that after 2016 the CCP's ideology featured much more prominently in the NPOPSS' funding calls conveying to Chinese scholars that the state was less interested in hearing diverse input.

Figure 6.2: Number of yearly mentions in NPOPSS' funding calls

Third, more frequent references to the Chinese government's foreign policy slogans indicate increased ideological control. Figure 6.3 illustrates shifts in how frequently the research topics listed referenced prominent foreign policy slogans, specifically the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese Dream, community of shared future for mankind, community of shared interests, democratization of international relations, five principles of peaceful coexistence, harmonious world, an important period of strategic opportunity, type of great power relations, peaceful development, socialism with Chinese characteristics, win-win cooperation. In line with the other trends observed, after 2016, the Chinese government's foreign policy slogans featured much more frequently in the list of possible research topics in the NPOPSS funding calls.

Figure 6.3: Number of references to foreign policy slogans in NPOPSS' funding calls



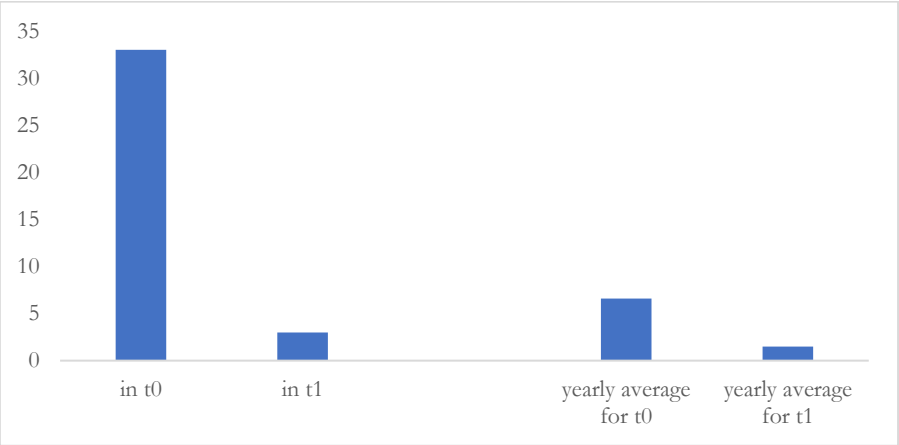
To sum up, Xi Jinping's speech at the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities in December 2016, increased restrictions on scholars' work, and changes in funding priorities all signaled to scholars that the state was less open to their input.

6.4 The impact of changes in domestic structures on scholars' ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest

In this section, I examine the impact that these changes in domestic structures had on scholars' ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest. For this, I first compared the number of policy shifts they influenced before and after the change in domestic structures detailed above. Then I examine in-detail effects on the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest.

As stated above, I identified 36 instances in which a scholar influenced a policy shift in the official construction of China's national interest. However, big differences appeared in how many of these policy shifts were influenced by scholars, depending on whether the scholar published the contribution before or after the change in domestic structures. The overwhelming majority, that is, 92 percent of shifts in policy substance influenced by scholars, were influenced before the change in the domestic structures, that is, when the state was open to their input. In contrast, only 8 percent were influenced after the change in domestic structures. Since the time frames are not the same length (t0 covers 2010-2016, t1 covers 2016-2019), the yearly averages should be compared. Before the change in domestic structures, on average, 6.6 shifts in policy substance were influenced by scholars compared to 1.5 after the change in domestic structures. Figure 6.4 illustrates this.

Figure 6.4: Number of policy shifts influenced by scholars before and after the change in domestic structures



For scholars, the change in domestic structure meant that the state became less open to their input, significantly affecting their ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest, as Table 6.1 illustrates. After the change in domestic structures, when the state was less open to their input, scholars influenced a lot fewer policy shifts than before the change in domestic structures. Before the change in domestic structures, scholars close to the state influenced many policy shifts, while even scholars distant from the state influenced a few shifts in policy substance. After the change in domestic structures, the latter group did not influence any shifts in policy substance. Hence, when the state was not open to scholars' input, distant scholars no longer influenced the official construction of China's national interest. In addition, even the ability of scholars that were close to the state to influence the official construction of China's national interest was reduced significantly. Close scholars went from having the most influence on the official construction of China's national interest to still having some influence. In the road trip metaphor, they went from being in the driver's seat to sitting in the co-driver's seat. Distant scholars went from some influence to almost no influence. Metaphorically speaking, they went from sitting in the back seat to being put into the trunk.

6.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I showed that scholars' proximity to the state and the state's openness to their input facilitate and constrain scholars' influence on the official construction of the national interest. Scholars close to the state influenced a lot more shifts in policy substance related to the official construction of China's national interest than scholars distant from the state. The in-depth examination of changes in domestic structures revealed that the state became less open to scholars' input after 2016. The state's decrease in openness to scholars' influence significantly affected their ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest. After the change in domestic structures, scholars close to the state hardly influenced policy shifts related to the official

construction of China's national interest, and scholars distant from the state did not exert any influence anymore.

In the next chapter, I examine how changes in domestic structures influence think tanks' abilities to influence the official construction of China's national interest. Just like for scholars, I first present quantitative and qualitative evidence for the conditions under which think tanks influence the official construction of China's national interest. Then, I detail how think tanks were affected by changes in domestic structures under Xi Jinping. Lastly, I assess how these changes in domestic structures impacted think tanks' ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest.

7 Think tank analysts' ideas, domestic structures, and the official construction of China's national interest

In recent years, the PRC experienced a remarkable enthusiasm for the development of think tanks, which is commonly referred to as "think tank fever" (智库热) (Li 2017; Qi 2018; Yang 2018). Strongly promoted and heavily endorsed by Xi Jinping and his government, the trend has been accompanied by heavy criticism (C. Li 2017). Wang Simin and Qu Yilin (2016), for instance, describe Chinese think tanks as "thanks without thinkers" (有库无智) (2016). Huang Yanzhong (2015) equals the trend with the Great Leap Forward, describing it as wasting a devastating amount of resources (2015). At the same time, observers point out that the relationship between think tanks and the state is complicated and deserves close scrutiny (Li 2017).

By examining the Chinese government's strategy for strengthening think tanks and its effect on them as a change in domestic structures, this chapter assesses how domestic structures facilitate and constrain think tank staffers' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. First, I provide quantitative and qualitative evidence for the conditions under which think tank analysts influence the official construction of China's national interest. Similar to the assessment of scholars' influence on the official construction of China's national interest in the previous chapter, I show that think tanks' proximity to the state and the state's openness to their input facilitate and constrain think tank analysts' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. When think tanks are close to the state and the state is open to societal input, in the language of the family road trip metaphor, when they sit in the driver's seat, their staff has the most influence on the official construction of China's national interest. When think tanks are distant from the state and the state is not open to their input, metaphorically speaking, when they are in the trunk, they have the least influence on the official construction of China's national interest. Finally, when think tanks are close to the state and when the state is not open to their input, that is when they sit in the co-driver's seat, and when think tanks are distant from the state and the state

is open to their input, when they sit in the back, think tank analysts somewhat influence the official construction of China's national interest.

7.1 Quantitative evidence for the conditions under which think tank analysts influence the official construction of China's national interest

For ideas put forward by think tank analysts to influence the official construction of China's national interest, shifts in policy substance must first appear in think tanks' contributions to foreign policy debates and then in official foreign policy statements. In addition, there must be evidence of close links between the policy shifts as they appear in official foreign policy statements and think tanks' contributions to foreign policy debates, as discussed in Chapter 4. Based on my hypotheses deduced from the theoretical argument, I expect that the highest number of policy shifts is influenced when think tanks are close to the state and when the state is open to their input and that the lowest number of policy shifts is influenced when think tanks are distant from the state and when the state is not open to their input.

In 85 instances, analysts working at Chinese think tanks influenced policy shifts related to the official construction of China's national interest. Contrary to my expectations, most policy shifts were influenced when the state was open to think tanks' input and when think tanks were distant from the state (35 percent). In line with my expectations, when the state was not open to input from think tanks and when think tanks were distant from the state, think tank analysts influenced the smallest number of policy shifts (19 percent). For think tanks close to the state, the state's openness to their input hardly affected their ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest. When the state was open to their input, think tanks close to the state influenced 22 percent of policy shifts, compared to 23 percent when it was not open to their input. Table 7.1 summarizes the quantitative evidence for the conditions under which think tank analysts influenced the official construction of China's national interest.

Table 7.1: Quantitative evidence for the conditions under which think tank analysts influence the official construction of China's national interest

		Think tanks' proximity to the state	
		close	distant
The state's openness to input from think tanks	Open	*In the driver's seat* Most influence expected 22% of policy shifts influenced	*In the backseat* Some influence expected 35% of policy shifts influenced
	Closed	*In the co-driver's seat* Some influence expected 23% of policy shifts influenced	*In the trunk* Least influence expected 19% of policy shifts influenced

The quantitative evidence shows that for think tanks, differences between the four conditions under which they influence the official construction of China's national interest are not very pronounced. In particular, for think tanks close to the state, there are hardly any differences based on the state's openness to their input. Since the variation was much more pronounced for scholars (see Chapter 6), differences between think tank analysts and scholars become immediately apparent. This provides evidence for the expected differences between the two groups introduced in Chapter 1 and shows that it made sense to analyze their respective influence on the official construction of the national interest separately from each other. The next chapter will discuss comparisons between scholars and think tank analysts. The remainder of this chapter will focus on think tanks.

Examining the shifts in policy substance influenced by think tank analysts provides quantitative evidence for the conditions under which think tanks influence the official construction of China's national interest. However, as discussed in Chapter 4 and reiterated in the previous chapter, there are clear limits to such a frequentist understanding when examining societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. I, therefore, bolster my claims by providing qualitative evidence for the conditions under which think tank staffers influence the official construction of China's national interest in the next section.

7.2 Qualitative evidence for the conditions under which think tank analysts influence the official construction of China's national interest

When think tanks were close to the state, and the state was open to their input, metaphorically speaking, when they were in the driver's seat, experts at think tanks pushed the Chinese government towards a stronger role in international rule-making by explaining why this was necessary. Two years before the Chinese government described itself as playing a more proactive role in international rule-making, Zhang Yuyan from the Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP) at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences argues that China is increasingly under pressure from international rules (Yuyan (张宇燕) Zhang 2013). Similarly, a year before the policy shift appeared in official statements, Lin Limin (2014) argues that the post-cold war international system advocated a Western-dominated international system and associated international rules (L. (林利民) Lin 2014). Hence, both experts show that it is in China's interest to play a stronger role in developing international rules. Relatedly, experts at think tanks also influenced calls for global governance reform. Three years before the Chinese government openly called for global governance reform, He Fan, Feng Weijiang, and Xu Jin (2013) from IWEP describe China's goals in this area in detail (F. (何帆) He, Feng, and Xu 2013). Think tank experts indirectly influenced the Chinese government by voicing a more pronounced take on multilateralism by describing other actors' behavior. Two years before the Chinese government put forward a more pronounced take on multilateralism, Wang Yuzhu (2013) describes the U.S. stance on the issue (Yuzhu (王玉主) Wang 2013). Jin Ling (2013) argues that the EU's willingness to construct multilateral mechanisms has declined significantly (L. (金玲) Jin 2013).

Under the same conditions, when think tanks were close to the state, and the state was open to their input, experts at think tanks influenced two shifts in policy substance related to *control the region*. First, seven years before the Chinese government described itself as more involved in regional cooperation, Lang Ping (2012) provides a first overview of the issue. This could be

interpreted as an attempt to bring the issue to the table. The author explains that regional trade agreements are commonly described as regional economic integration (Lang 2012). Second, three years before the Chinese government increasingly expressed its perspective on regional integration, Wang Shida (2014) zooms in on a regional conflict detailing the security situation in Pakistan (S. (王世达) Wang 2014). Since the solution to such regional conflicts is a prerequisite for regional integration, this article explaining how the Chinese government could go about it could be seen as one step towards developing a more pronounced perspective on regional integration.

When think tanks were close to the state, and the state was not open to their input, that is, when they were in the co-driver's seat, experts at think tanks influenced the policy shift in which the community of shared destiny replaced the concept of a community of shared interests. One contribution characterizes the "community of shared interests" as something that needs to be built. A year before the Chinese government replaced the "community of shared interests" with the "community of shared future", Li Wei (2013) describes the core of a country's international strategy as building a new "community of interests". He specifies that this "community of interests" was a new international structure based on political pluralism, economic globalization, respect for different peoples, religions, and cultures, and non-threat of force (W. (李伟) Li 2013). Two other contributions see "the community of shared interest" as evolving in the background. A year before the Chinese government replaced "community of shared interests" with "community of shared destiny", a China Institute for International Studies (CIIS) report argues that in today's multipolar world with economic globalization, cultural diversification, and social informatization, many interdependent "communities of interest" have been formed (Liu 2013). Shortly before the Chinese government replaced the "community of shared interests" with the "community of shared future", Jin Canrong and Zhao Yuanliang (2014) argue that because of the increasingly close trade and investment relationship between the U.S. and China, there is already a community of interest between the two countries (C. (金灿荣) Jin and Zhao 2014).

When think tanks were distant from the state, and the state was open to their input, when they were in the back seat, experts at think tanks influenced the Chinese government's rethinking of international partnerships. Experts analyze other states' approaches to partnerships in several contributions, especially the idea of forming global partnerships. These analyses form the backdrop of China catching up in this area of international politics. Two years before the Chinese government started to redefine partnerships in international politics, Li Xushi (2015) analyzes developments in the U.S.-Japanese alliance and observes a shift from security cooperation to global partnership. He finds that they were simultaneously promoting their strategic alignment in economics, diplomacy, and non-traditional security and that their focus remained on the Asia-Pacific (Xushi (李秀石) Li 2015). Experts also describe other countries' approaches to forming partnerships. For example, Yu Jun mentions that the U.S. and India formed a "global partnership" in 2015. He describes India and Japan as having formed a "global partnership" at the beginning of the 21st century but argues that the implementation had been sluggish (2015). In a report analyzing the "asymmetric triangle" between China, India, and the U.S., Cao Dejun (2015) argues that since 2000, India-US relations have gone through three stages of development from "new partnership" to "strategic partnership" and then to "global partnership" (2015). The description of partnerships between China's competitors forms the backdrop of the Chinese government rethinking its approach to international partnerships.

When think tanks were distant from the state and the state was open to their input, when they were in the back seat, two experts prepared the Chinese government to play a stronger role in international rule-setting by showcasing what India was doing in this realm and providing the rationale for increased engagement. Two years before the Chinese government started to describe itself as playing a stronger role in setting international rules, Li Wei (2013) observes that India seeks to change international rules through cooperation with international organizations to create a framework for international mechanisms that meet its interests (2013). At the same time, Song Lilei and Cai Liang (2013) argue that Western powers still dominated the international system and that

the vast majority of its rules were based on Western values and reflected the will and interest of these countries to a considerable extent (2013).

When think tanks were close to the state, and the state was not open to their input, when they were in the trunk, experts working at think tanks influenced the policy shift that described the Chinese government as briefly advancing economic cooperation in the region. A year before this shift in policy substance appeared in Xi Jinping's speech at the CICA Summit, Feng Yujun (2014) describes factors that would undermine China's efforts in regional economic cooperation (2014). Examining potentially adverse factors is crucial in developing the government's position. Hence, there are important links between the article and the policy shift. Shortly before the Chinese government advanced economic cooperation in the region, Tang Guoqiang and Wang Zhengyu (2014) argue that TPP's exclusion of China and RCEP's exclusion of the U.S. were detrimental to regional economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific. They further pose that, at present, Asia-Pacific regional economic cooperation focuses on dealing with the relationship between the two paths, TPP and RCEP. This required a correct understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the two paths and their underlying mechanisms to find the direction of Asia-Pacific regional economic cooperation development (2014). Hence, the article weighs in on the debate of the policy issues and has strong links to the policy shift.

Under the same conditions, experts at think tanks still exerted some influence over the policy shift that described how the community of shared future replaced the community of shared interests. Two years before the shift in official foreign policy statements, experts observe communities of interest between China and Japan and between the U.S. and China. Wu Jinan (2012) argues that China and Japan have made great progress in exchanges in various fields. According to the author, they had already become a mature "community of interests" (2012). Zhang Chun (2012) claims that the U.S. and China had so many common interests that their relationship had moved from a "stakeholder" relationship to a "community of interests" characterized by joint decision-making (2012). However, experts also go beyond describing communities of interest and say that

the Chinese government should establish such communities. Two years before the shift in policy substance, experts begin ascribing the concept of "community of interests" to Western countries and argue that the Chinese government should put forward something more encompassing. Specifically, Zhang Chun (2012) argues that cultivating and strengthening a sense of common destiny and advocating a more ambitious "community of human destiny" that goes beyond the "community of interests" advocated by the West should be a key goal of Chinese foreign policy. He adds that it is necessary to construct a theory of international crisis response with Chinese characteristics around the frequent occurrence of systemic crises, especially to oppose the "community of interest" and "coalitions of volunteers" approach dominated by the West (2012). A year before the Chinese government replaced the "community of shared interests" with the "community of shared future", Cai Penghong (2013) argues that the goal of China's neighborhood policy was to build a community of interests around itself. He further claims that China advocates constructing a community of interests and does not need to adhere to existing forms of regional cooperation (2013). Shortly before the Chinese government replaced the "community of shared interests" with the "community of shared future", Cheng Guoping (2014) describes the Chinese government's approach in the region as creating a "community of destiny" and a "community of interest" (2014).

Similarly, when think tanks were distant from the state, and the state was not open to their input, when they were in the trunk, experts working at think tanks still influenced two policy shifts related to *control the region*, albeit in minor ways. In 2014, Wang Falong applies the Chinese government's security concept to the conflict between India and Pakistan and argues how it could help solve it (2014). Ye Zicheng and Du Peng (2012) mention regional economic cooperation related to the policy shift that describes the Chinese government as advancing regional economic cooperation (2012). However, regional economic cooperation is just listed as one policy field among many, and there are no direct links to the policy shift in question.

Under all four theorized conditions, Chinese experts at think tanks influenced policy shifts related to the Chinese government's ambitions for global governance. When experts were close to the state and when the state was open to their input, experts influenced the Chinese government's more proactive role in international rule-making and its calls for governance reform. Experts exerted considerable influence on these issue areas closely related to the Chinese government's high ambitions for global governance. Regardless of whether think tanks were close to or distant from the state, think tank experts influenced the policy shift that described the Chinese government as replacing the "community of shared interests" with the "community of shared destiny" even when the state was less open to input from think tanks.

7.3 Changes in domestic structures and their effects on think tanks

This section describes changes in domestic structures and what these changes meant for Chinese think tanks. After 2015, the Chinese state signaled that it was more open to input from think tanks. In a policy document issued in January 2015, the Chinese government put forward that the role of think tanks in decision-making, including regarding international issues, should be strengthened. This policy change was accompanied by increased funding provided by the state and supported by broader changes in the political environment, all supposed to enhance the importance of think tanks in policy-making.

Through the "The Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics" (关于加强中国特色新型智库建设的意见 (hereafter, the Opinions)) jointly issued by the General Offices of the CCP Central Committee and the State Council on January 20, 2015, the Chinese state signaled to think tankers that it was more open to their suggestions. In this document, the Chinese government outlined how it intended to enhance think tankers' roles in decision-making on domestic and international issues. It described three roles for think tanks: First, support the party's and government's decision-making; second,

contribute to the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity; third, act as carriers of Chinese soft power by establishing a positive image of socialist China, promote Chinese culture and values and making China's voice heard on the international stage (General Office of the CCP Central Committee and State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2015).

In the literature, the document is widely claimed to have accelerated the development of Chinese think tanks. Qi Dongtao (2018), for instance, interprets the document as a reflection of Xi's enthusiasm for developing think tanks (2018, 33), which brought about a "golden age for think tank development in China" (2018, 42). Similarly, Jiang Jiaying and Yan Yilong (2019) describe a "golden era in which a wide variety of Chinese think tanks will voice a diverse set of opinions, all to strengthen the country's two brains: the internal brain, in their understanding, the party's leadership, and the external brain, there the new type of think tanks (2019, 40).

The Opinions contain several instructions for how policy-makers should enhance think tanks' involvement in decision-making. Implementing these instructions will change the rules, norms, and procedures that determine interactions between experts and the state. According to the 2015 document, government institutions should regularly release information on their decision-making needs and guide think tanks to conduct policy research, decision-making assessment, and policy interpretation. Besides, government institutions like the Central Foreign Affairs Office are encouraged to strengthen communication with think tanks and take their research results seriously. The document also discusses "improving the system of collecting opinions on major decisions". Critical elements discussed are holding hearings and seminars, listening widely to think tanks' views and suggestions, exploring decision-making departments to respond to think tank advice, and promoting positive interactions between government decision-making and think tank recommendations (General Office of the CCP Central Committee and State Council Information Office (SCIO) 2015).

These effects are particularly pronounced for the think tanks that were selected as "national high-end pilot think tanks" (国家高端智库), a crucial step in the implementation of the

Opinions.[28] In the first round in November 2015, 25 institutions were selected. In the second round, in March 2020, five more were added.[29] Most relevant for this project, Hayward (2018) observes that "their uncensored reports will be transmitted directly to the top leadership, receiving special priority within the relevant bureaus" (2018, 34). She further argues that "this is designed to diversify and accelerate the channels of expertise into central policy-making" (2018, 34).

The second area from which one could infer changes in the state's openness towards think tanks is changes in the amount of funding it provides for these organizations. This is particularly important because many Chinese think tanks receive most of their budget directly from the Chinese state. However, Chinese think tanks' financial operations are highly opaque. Only about a third of all think tanks disclose such information (Xiong, Xiaoxiao (熊晓晓), Shi, Yunyan (施云燕), and Ren, Fujun (任福君) 2021). Hence, it is impossible to examine changes in the amount of funding the state provides to think tanks over time. However, Hayward (2018) mentions that think tanks' funds have increased recently (2018). In addition, the selection of high-end think tanks came with the announcement of an extra fund for these institutions. Hence, the state's funding to think tanks can be expected to have increased.

The third area from which one can infer changes in the state's openness towards input from think tanks is changes in the broader policy environment. In the communiqué of the Third Plenum of the 18th Central Committee in November 2013, the word "think tank" (智库) appeared for the first time in a CCP central-level document (Anh 2022, 287). At the sixth meeting of the powerful Central Leading Small Group on Comprehensively Deepening Reform in 2014, Xi Jinping identified constructing a new type of think tanks as an important and urgent task (Anh 2022). Most authoritatively, the report to the 19th Party Congress in 2017 reiterated strengthening the construction of a new type of think tank with Chinese characteristics, further highlighting how much importance the Chinese leadership attributes to it. Another indicator of changes in the policy

[28] http://news.163.com/15/1203/21/B9UKB40J00014SEH.html [last accessed 07.09.2022, 13:13]
[29] For details, see (Anh 2022).

environment is the renewed emphasis on meetings between Xi and experts in the party-state media. In June 2020, a meeting was held with leading medical experts on fighting Covid-19. In addition, he held a seminar for preparing the 14th Five-Year Plan only two months later. Both these meetings were reported extensively in the Chinese party-state media, signaling to other Chinese think tankers that the leadership valued their input (Anh 2022).

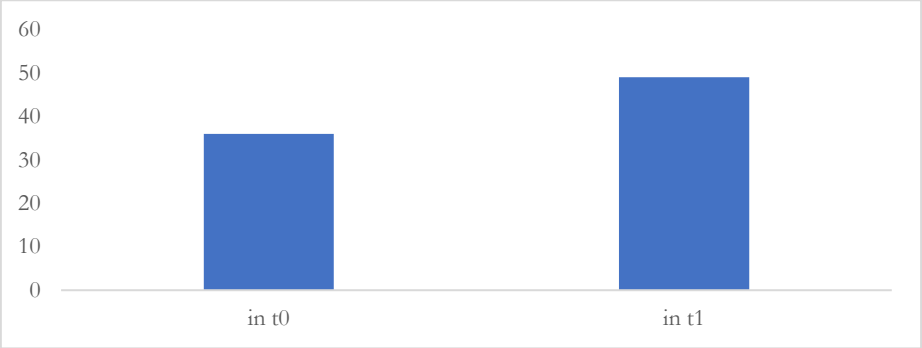
To sum up, the policy document on think tanks' role in policy-making issued in early 2015 and its subsequent implementation demonstrated the Chinese state's increased openness towards input from think tanks by publicly recognizing their importance, giving them more access to the decision-making process, and by attempting to streamline the channels through which expertise gets fed into policy-making.

7.4 The impact of changes in domestic structures on think tank analysts' ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest

In the following section, I assess how these changes in domestic structures impacted think tanks' ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest. For this, I first compare the number of policy shifts they influenced before and after the changes in domestic structures described in the previous section. Then I examine in-detail effects on the conditions under which scholars influence the official construction of China's national interest.

I identified 85 instances in which a think tank analyst influenced a policy shift in the official construction of China's national interest. There were differences in the number of policy shifts influenced by think tanks, depending on whether the think tanker published the contribution before or after the change in domestic structures. 42 percent appeared of influenced policy shifts appeared before the change in domestic structures, compared to 58 percent that appeared after the change in domestic structures. Both time frames stretch across four years; t0 covers 2010 – 2014, and t1 covers 2015 – 2019. Hence, when the state was more open to input from think tanks, think tank analysts influenced more shifts in policy substance.

Figure 7.1: Number of policy shifts influenced by think tank analysts before and after the change in domestic structures



For think tanks, the change in domestic structures meant that the state became more open to their input. This change in domestic structures affected their abilities to influence the official construction of China's national interest differently depending on their proximity to the state, as Table 7.1 illustrates. For think tanks close to the state, the change in domestic structures did not affect their abilities to influence the official construction of China's national interest. Metaphorically speaking, one could say, their move from the co-driver's seat to the driver's seat did not affect their influence on the road trip. In contrast, the abilities of think tanks distant from the state to influence the official construction of China's national interest increased significantly when the state was more open to their input. The metaphor illustrates that think tanks distant from the state move from the trunk to the back seat, hence gaining more influence on the official construction of China's national interest.

7.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I demonstrated that the state became more open to think tank input over time. This change in domestic structures facilitated think tanks' influence on the official construction of China's national interest when think tanks were distant from the state. The empirical analysis also revealed that when think tanks were close to the state, the state's openness did not affect their influence on the official construction of China's national interest. In addition, I provided detailed

evidence of think tanks influencing shifts in policy substance regarding China's ambitions for leadership in global governance and its role in the region across all four conditions under which societal actors can influence the construction of China's national interest.

In the next chapter, I present the dissertation's conclusions. After summarizing findings about the direct impact of societal actors on foreign policy in authoritarian states, I emphasize the importance of considering how domestic structures condition social actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest. Then, I detail the differences between scholars and think tanks to substantiate these claims. Before addressing the limitations of the analysis, I discuss its implications for understanding China under Xi Jinping and the foreign policy of other authoritarian states. Lastly, I outline how future inquiries about China and other authoritarian states could build upon the analysis and findings of this dissertation.

8 Conclusions

In discussions about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the oversized table at which Vladimir Putin receives other state leaders and members of the Russian government is commonly interpreted as a symbol of how much he isolated himself from outside input. Similarly, the fact that international observers give at least some credence to rumors that he calls commanders in the field instead of relying on the chain of command underlines how removed this authoritarian leader seems from outside advice (Sabbagh 2022). However, while Vladimir Putin might try to depict himself as unaffected by outside influences, in most authoritarian contexts, there is still at least some degree of societal debate, and under certain conditions, societal actors still influence the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes. In this dissertation, I demonstrated under what conditions this is the case for the PRC under Xi Jinping.

In this chapter, I summarize the study's main findings about the conditions under which Chinese societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest, address the study's limitations, and discuss implications for future research. After discussing insights on societal actors' impact on the foreign policy of authoritarian states, I highlight the importance of domestic structures and tease out differences between Chinese scholars and think tank analysts in the extent to which changes in domestic structures impacted their influence on the official construction of China's national interest. Then, I discuss what these insights mean for understanding China under Xi and other authoritarian states. Before outlining how future research on China and other authoritarian states could build upon the analysis conducted in this project, I address the study's limitations, primarily its focus on foreign policy rhetoric and possible challenges to its premises.

8.1 Societal actors' impact on the foreign policy of authoritarian states

The review of the existing literature in Chapter 2 showed that even under highly centralized authoritarian rule, societal actors could influence the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes. Most

research on societal actors' influence on the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes details the ways in which these actors exert influence and refrain from offering a clear assessment of how much influence they have. Building on these insights about how societal actors influence the foreign policy of authoritarian regimes, this dissertation examined under what conditions Chinese societal actors influenced the official construction of China's national interest. From the assessment of the potential influence of public opinion, NGOs, business interests, and experts, the latter emerged as the most likely group of societal actors to influence the official construction of China's national interest. Hence, this dissertation examined under what conditions Chinese scholars based at universities and Chinese think tank analysts influenced the official construction of China's national interest.

If societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest, there must be substantial overlaps between societal ideas and the official construction of the national interest. To assess such overlaps, I examined patterns in the relative salience of components of the construction of the national interest and the occurrence of policy shifts in official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions to foreign policy debates. I identified important overlaps in how salient the different components of the construction of China's national interest appeared in official foreign policy statements and societal actors' contributions to foreign policy debates. Based on the conceptualization of the construction of the national interest introduced in Chapter 3, I distinguish the following six components of the construction of China's national interest: *protect China's territory, political system, and citizens*, *expand China's economic relations, lead global governance, promote China's values*, *control the region*, and *offer global public goods*.

Since 2013, *lead global governance* has become more important in all official and societal constructions of China's national interest. In addition, the weight attributed to it is roughly the same across official documents and societal contributions. For *control the region*, the weight attributed by official and societal actors is also similar. Besides, the differences in emphasis between *lead global*

governance and *control the region* followed similar developments in the official and societal constructions of China's national interest.

However, there was no perfect match between the official and societal constructions of China's national interest. Upon closer look, differences emerged. Between 2013 and 2015, there was less emphasis on *lead global governance* in societal constructions of China's national interest, especially in scholars' contributions, than in the official construction of China's national interest. In contrast, around 2015, there was much more emphasis in societal contributions on *lead global governance* than in official foreign policy statements. After 2017, this trend continued, especially for scholars. Another striking difference was that societal actors put less emphasis on *control the region* than the official construction of China's national interest. This was especially the case between 2013 and 2015. Around 2018, think tanks and the official construction of China's national interest paid hardly any attention to *control the region*. Around the same time, scholars emphasized it. By 2019, this component of the construction of China's national interest also featured prominently in official foreign policy statements. Lastly, after 2014, the overall difference between *lead global governance* and *control the region* was always more pronounced in the official construction of China's national interest than in societal constructions of China's national interest.

Overlaps in policy substance between official and societal constructions of the national interest appeared regarding changes in the description of China's international standing and the Chinese government's role in world politics. The descriptions of China's increased international standing and increases in China's power to shape and the descriptions of increases in China's confidence in official statements overlap with references to increased strategic determination in think tank contributions to foreign policy debates. In addition, there were overlaps in descriptions of the Chinese government's role in international politics. The description of deficiencies in world politics in official foreign policy statements matched the assertion that the international system remains dominated by Western powers and that China will shape the world in the future. Regarding *control the region*, there were also some overlaps between the official and societal constructions of

the national interest. Think tank analysts, for instance, reiterated the official concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security. In addition, there was less emphasis on China's role in the region in official foreign policy documents than descriptions of what other actors should do. This matched the increased focus on how Asia should be governed in scholars' contributions to foreign policy debates.

However, there were striking differences regarding the policy substance of *lead global governance* between official and societal constructions of China's national interest. In official foreign policy statements, growing ambitions for China's leadership role and how to implement these ambitions were discussed extensively, and Chinese proposals for global governance reform also featured prominently. These aspects received far less attention in societal debates. Among scholars and think tankers, more specific solutions and proposals were discussed, for example, how conflicts between neighboring countries could be mitigated. Think tank analysts focused on the international community's expectations, the reach of Chinese solutions and potential obstacles for implementing Chinese solutions. Scholars specified that Chinese solutions were meant to wolve world governance problems and claimed that implanting Chinese solutions entailed the reconfiguration of the world order. China's stronger role in setting international rules is discussed more extensively in scholars' contributions to foreign policy debates, and attempts at redefining international partnerships receive substantial attention in think tank publications. There were other important differences between the official and societal constructions of China's national interest. As detailed in Chapter 6, some scholars even called for looking beyond official concepts when studying Chinese diplomatic thought. Differences between the official construction of China's national interest and societal ideas also appeared regarding *control the region*. In official foreign policy statements, there is continually less emphasis on regional cooperation. More concretely, this entailed fewer references to regional security and less emphasis on China's role than descriptions of what other actors should do. By contrast, scholars' contributions highlighted the significance of the BRI for regional integration. The emphasis on extra-regional powers, especially the U.S., and the in-depth

comparison between RCEP and TPP appeared in think tanks' contributions and are not matched in official statements in which the regional context increasingly faded.

This summary of overlaps and discrepancies between official and societal constructions of China's national interest shows that there is no perfect transmission belt between societal ideas and the official construction of China's national interest. This made it necessary to consider how domestic structures condition societal actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest. I argue that societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input determine the conditions under which societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. When societal actors are close to the state, and when the state is open to their input, they exert the most influence over the official construction of China's national interest. In contrast, when societal actors are distant from the state and when the state is not open to their input, they hardly influence the construction of China's national interest. Societal actors somewhat influence the official construction of China's national interest when they are either close to the state and the state is not open to societal input or when they are distant from the state but the state is open to their input.

8.2 The importance of domestic structures

Societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input condition societal actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest. Societal actors' proximity to the state depends on the quantity and quality of formal ties and interactions with state institutions. Formal ties to state institutions provide the setting for institutionalized interactions between societal actors and the state. Societal actors can also interact with state institutions in less structured ways, for instance, through presentations in front of the Chinese leadership and regular interactions with policy-makers at lower levels.

Regarding the second structural variable, the state's openness to societal input, references to the state's responsiveness to society are more common, as detailed in Chapter 3. While the two

concepts overlap, the former is more expansive than the latter. For this project considering the state's openness to societal input was sufficient because the state's openness to societal input affects the political opportunity structures that societal actors face. If one assumes state and society to be interlinked, as the discussion of state-society relations in authoritarian states revealed, the state's openness to societal input is tied to societal actors' ability and willingness to provide such input. In this context, political opportunity structures incentivize societal actors to participate in foreign policy debates and provide societal input that the state can consider. Hence, examining policies towards these groups, their resources, and the broader policy environment, the concept of political opportunity structures helped to uncover how the societal actors perceive their opportunities to exert influence and trace changes in the state's openness to societal input.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I presented quantitative evidence to support the argument that societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input condition societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. For scholars, I documented 36 instances in which scholars influenced policy shifts related to the official construction of China's national interest. All expectations about the conditions under which they influence the official construction of China's national interest deduced from the theoretical argument were fulfilled. When scholars were close to the state and the state was open to their input, they influenced the highest number of policy shifts (67 percent). In contrast, when scholars were distant from the state and when the state was not open to their input, they did not influence any policy shifts. When scholars were close to the state and when the state was not open to their input, they influenced a lot more policy shifts (25 percent) than when scholars were distant from the state and when the state was open to their input (8 percent). For think tank analysts, a slightly different picture emerged. In 85 instances, analysts working at Chinese think tanks influenced policy shifts related to the official construction of China's national interest. Contrary to my expectations, most policy shifts were influenced when the state was open to think tanks' input and when think tanks were distant from the state (35 percent). In line with my expectations, when the state was not open to input

from think tanks and when think tanks were distant from the state, think tank analysts influenced the smallest number of policy shifts (19 percent). This shows that for think tanks close to the state, whether or not the state was open to their input hardly affected their ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest. When the state was open to their input, think tanks close to the state influenced 22 percent of policy shifts, compared to 23 percent when the state was not open to their input.

From the presentation of qualitative evidence for the conditions under which societal actors influenced the official construction of China's national interest in Chapters 6 and 7, a few points are particularly worth reiterating. Scholars substantially influenced the Chinese government's ambitions of taking on a more proactive role in setting international rules and voicing a more pronounced take on multilateralism when they were close to the state and the state was open to their input. When think tanks were close to the state and the state was open to their input, think tank analysts also pushed the Chinese government towards a stronger role in international rule-making. Irrespective of whether the state was open to their input, think tanks distant from the state influenced the policy shift in which the community of shared future replaces the community of shared interest. In addition, when think tanks were distant from the state and the state was open to their input, they influenced the Chinese government's rethinking of international partnerships. When think tanks were close to the state, and the state was not open to their input, experts working at think tanks influenced the policy shift that described the Chinese government as briefly advancing economic cooperation in the region.

8.3 Differences between scholars and think tank analysts

The intervening variables, societal actors' proximity to the state, and the state's openness to societal input affected scholars' and think tankers' influence on the official construction of China's national interest differently. Scholars influenced most policy shifts when they were close to the state and when the state was open to their input. In contrast, think tank analysts influenced the highest

number of policy shifts when they were distant from the state and when the state was open to their input. While scholars still influenced a quarter of policy shifts when they were distant from the state and when the state was open to their input, they hardly influenced any policy shifts anymore when they were distant from the state and when the state was not open to their input. For think tankers', differences between the conditions under which they influenced the official construction of China's national interest were less pronounced. While they influenced most policy shifts when they were distant from the state and when the state was open to their input, the number of policy shifts influenced under the other three conditions was roughly the same.

Table 8.1: Comparative assessment of scholars' and think tank analysts' influence on the official construction of China's national interest

		Societal actors' proximity to the state	
		close	distant
The state's openness to societal input	open	*In the driver's seat* Most influence expected Scholars: 67% of policy shifts influenced TTs: 22% of policy shifts influenced	*In the backseat* Some influence expected Scholars: 25% of policy shifts influenced TTs: 35% of policy shifts influenced
	closed	*In the co-driver's seat* Some influence expected Scholars: 8% of policy shifts influenced TTs: 23% of policy shifts influenced	*In the trunk* Least influence expected Scholars: 0 policy shifts influenced TTs: 19% of policy shifts influenced

In the following, I evaluate the impact of the intervening variable, proximity to the state, on scholars and think tank analysts' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. Overall, the intervening variable, proximity to the state, affected scholars much more than think tank analysts. Its effect was particularly pronounced for scholars when the state was open to scholars' input. Here, close scholars influenced 67 percent of policy shifts compared to 25 percent of distant scholars. When the state was not open to societal input, the difference was much smaller:

close scholars influenced 8 percent of policy shifts, and distant scholars did not influence any policy shifts. For think tanks, societal actors' proximity to the state had a bigger impact when the state was open to societal input, but the effect was not as big as for scholars. When the state was open to societal input, distant think tanks influenced 35 percent of policy shifts compared to 22 percent of policy shifts influenced by close think tanks. When the state was not open to societal input, the difference between close and distant think tanks was negligible. Close think tanks influenced 23 percent of policy shifts, and distant think tanks influenced 19 percent of policy shifts.

For scholars, the state's openness to societal input had a much bigger impact than for think tank analysts. The impact of this intervening variable was significantly bigger for scholars close to the state than for scholars distant from the state. Scholars close to the state influenced 67 percent of policy shifts when the state was open to societal input, compared to 8 percent of policy shifts when the state was not open to societal input. Distant scholars influenced 25 percent of policy shifts when the state was open to their input and no policy shifts when the state was not open to their input. Changes in the state's openness affected distant think tanks. When the state was open to societal input, think tank analysts influenced 35 percent of policy shifts compared to 19 percent when the state was not open to their input. For close think tanks, changes in the state's openness to societal input did not impact their influence on the official construction of China's national interest.

Overall, scholars' abilities to influence the official construction of China's national interest were more affected by the change in domestic structures than think tank analysts' abilities. Pinning down exactly why this is the case is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I suspect that it has less to do with the specific properties of the two groups of actors and more with the differences in the nature of the changes in domestic structures examined. To scholars, the state signaled that it was less open to their input. To think tanks, it signaled that it was more open towards their input. Under the CCP's highly centralized authoritarian rule, I suspect closing signals to have a bigger effect on societal actors than opening signals. Societal actors should be highly

attuned to the state's efforts to curb their space for expression. In contrast, even when the state signals more openness towards societal input, I expect societal actors to remain skeptical about the state's intentions. This could explain why the state's increased openness towards think tanks had a less pronounced effect on their ability to influence the official construction of China's national interest.

8.4 Implications for understanding China under Xi Jinping

By integrating insights from the authoritarian politics literature and scholarship about China's political system into the study of China's foreign policy, I showed that ties between the party-state and society are multifaceted and that under certain conditions, societal actors can still influence China's foreign policy despite the increasing centralization of political power. These insights allow us to reexamine societal actors' influence on China's foreign policy and its involvement in international politics by acknowledging the importance of societal actors' proximity to the state and changes in the state's openness to societal input. For assessing proximity to the state, I showed that whether an actor can be considered distant from or close to the state depends on several institutional factors, including formal ties to party-state institutions, membership in advisory groups, success in obtaining research funding provided by the government, governmental recognition, for example, through awards by the government and direct interactions with the CCP leadership or policy-makers. To examine the state's openness to societal input, one needs to trace changes in domestic structures and their effects on the political opportunity structures that societal actors face. In this dissertation, I demonstrated that the state's openness to societal input shifts over time depending on changes in domestic structures. I further showed that the state's openness can differ depending on the group of actors, here scholars at Chinese universities and analysts working at Chinese think tanks.

These insights on changes in the state's openness to societal input have implications for research on how the Chinese government mitigates the "dictator's dilemma" introduced in Chapter

3. The "dictator's dilemma" describes that authoritarian rulers must walk a fine line between allowing societal debates where citizens can voice their true opinions and controlling the resulting tensions to avoid authoritarian collapse. Most importantly, I showed that the state's openness to societal input can vary between groups of societal actors and that it can change over time. While changes that unfold over longer time periods or leadership generations have well been established in the existing literature, I demonstrated that such changes also occur in a shorter period, for example, in the fairly short time frame examined in this project. Since 2015, the Chinese state's openness to societal input from think tanks has increased, whereas its openness to input from scholars has decreased since 2016. With regards to the scholarship focusing on the dictator's dilemma, this dissertation contributes the insight that the regime can adapt its strategies to consider societal input. Hence, it is important to acknowledge the time-boundedness of one's assumptions about how the regime considers societal input. In addition, it is critical to specify whose input is under consideration. While this dissertation focused only on university scholars and think tank analysts, the fact that differences appeared already between these two comparatively similar groups lets one assume that there are even more pronounced differences in the state's openness to societal input between other societal actors, such as business interests, NGOs, or the general public.

In contrast to work emphasizing the shrinking space for societal debate in China, my research uncovered that Chinese societal actors still influence China's foreign policy despite the increasing centralization of political power. These findings have two important implications for other governments' policies toward China. While it is important to acknowledge severe restrictions on societal actors and their debates on foreign policy in the PRC, it is also critical to see that there is still limited room for societal actors to debate and influence foreign policy. As a result, engagement with these societal actors is still possible and necessary. Policy-makers should still try to listen to these voices, possibly through the help of scholars and think tank analysts in their countries, who should continue to engage in conversations with their Chinese counterparts. At the same time, this dissertation showed that it is important to pay close attention to changes in

domestic structures and to assess how changes in political structures affect the political opportunity structures that Chinese societal actors face. Such close assessments help determine which societal actors might influence China's foreign policy at certain times instead of making broad-sweeping statements about their lack of involvement.

8.5 Relevance for understanding other authoritarian states

An in-depth assessment of the scope conditions is critical to assessing how relevant the study's findings are for understanding other authoritarian states. Key factors shaping the scope conditions in the Chinese context under study are the degree of centralization of political power, state-society relations, and an observable change in foreign policy. Similar to the PRC under Xi, Turkey under Erdogan and Russia under Putin exhibit tendencies towards strongman authoritarian rule, a crackdown on civil society, and growing geopolitical ambitions. Hence, I expect my findings on the conditions under which societal actors can influence the official constructions of their countries' respective national interest, to apply to these contexts as well. Further research should examine whether this is the case.

Even if the dissertation's findings were not to be generalized, the study would still provide important insights for studying societal actors' foreign policy debates in other settings. The dissertation showed that societal actors' proximity to the state and the state's openness to societal input shape the conditions under which societal actors can influence foreign policy. The operationalization of these concepts could be easily adapted to the particularities of other authoritarian regimes. In addition, by accounting for societal actors' proximity to the state, this dissertation offered a way to account for the fact that under authoritarian rule, societal actors are not completely independent from the state. This is an important contribution to any study about societal debates about foreign policy, not only for research that tries to assess societal actors' influence on foreign policy.

8.6 Limitations of the analysis

As a "hard case in a data-poor environment"[30], this study suffers from several methodological and empirical limitations. Most importantly, it focuses on the rhetorical level of China's foreign policy and draws only on written sources. Apart from the fact that drawing definite causal links is difficult in the context of the project, there are also instances in which societal actors did not influence the official construction of China's national interest. In addition, political change in China, either threatening the stability of authoritarian rule or doing away with societal debate, could hurt the study's premises.

Focusing on the official construction of China's national interest, the study focuses solely on the rhetorical level of China's foreign policy. While there are not only pragmatic but also conceptual reasons for this focus, as discussed in the Introduction, there are still the following draw-backs: First, given the secrecy associated with authoritarian rule due to the lack of checks and balances (Barros 2016), there might be big differences between what is publicly communicated and what is discussed behind closed doors. Second, observations of China's foreign policy hint at potential differences between the official portrayal of China's national interest and how the government pursues it. Most recently, Nathan and Zhang (2022), for instance, argued that "Chinese foreign policy behavior often diverges from the face meaning of its rhetoric [...]" (2022, 58). China's approach to territorial disputes in the South China Sea is a prominent example of these differences. In its rhetoric, the Chinese government emphasizes that disputes should be settled through mutual respect and negotiations. In practice, however, it does not acknowledge the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling and continues building large, militarily fortified artificial islands to stake its claims (ibid, p. 70). This dissertation can neither account for such gaps between China's foreign policy rhetoric and behavior nor can it make claims about societal actors' influence on China's

[30] My supervisor, Daniel Thomas, described my dissertation in that way a while ago. The image helped me a lot to situate the study in its scholarly context.

foreign policy behavior. Section 8.7 will discuss what this means for future research on China's foreign policy.

Due to severe restrictions imposed on foreign researchers in response to the Covid-19 pandemic when research for this dissertation was conducted, the study is only based on written sources and informal conversations with Chinese researchers. It is important to note that scholars working on Chinese politics felt and discussed the increased difficulty in gaining access to Chinese interview partners or the country as such, even before the pandemic (Barris et al. 2021; Greitens and Truex 2020). Challenges for researchers include concerns for their safety and the safety of their interview subjects, potential interviewees' reluctance to talk to researchers, and the danger of obtaining incorrect information (Sharma 2021). Hence, it is safe to say that all similar current research on China's foreign policy suffers from these limitations. However, even though there are good reasons to focus on written sources, as explained in Chapter 4, the study would certainly have benefited from a triangulation of its results with data gathered through interviews with Chinese scholars and think tank analysts.

As discussed in Chapter 4, pinning down societal actors' influence on the official construction of the national interest is analytically challenging. To address problems with causal identification, this project drew on "preference attainment theory" (Dür 2008) and the "text-reuse approach" (Christensen 2023) and combined the frequentist understanding of causality underpinning these approaches with a careful consideration of the context in which societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest. I focused on instances in which Chinese societal actors influenced the official construction of China's national interest. However, there are also instances in which Chinese societal actors did not exert influence. When considering all policy shifts identified in official foreign policy statements, it becomes apparent that many of these shifts were not influenced by the societal actors whose influence I examined. To be more specific, for *lead global governance* and *control the region,* only around a quarter of the ideal-type policy shifts identified in official foreign policy statements were influenced by scholars and think tank

analysts (see a detailed overview of ideal-type policy shifts identified in official foreign policy statements in the appendix). In some instances, policy shifts first appeared in official foreign policy statements and then in societal actors' contributions suggesting that the government might have influenced societal actors. This observation opens up new avenues for research. Applying the same methodology, one could examine how the government influences societal foreign policy debates.

Several policy shifts traced in official foreign policy statements did not appear in societal actors' contributions. Policy shifts describing the Chinese government's ambitions of making international affairs more equitable and inclusive, including the pushes for what it calls "democracy in international relations", did not appear in societal actors' contributions. Similarly, the Chinese government's efforts at redefining the use of platforms and other cooperation mechanisms and its more specific solutions and proposals do not appear in societal contributions. Apart from this, policy shifts related to specific policy areas, including the fight against climate change, the reform of global (economic) governance, proposals for changes in the international order and system, internet governance, UN reform, WTO reform or the BRI do not appear in societal actors' contributions. Regarding China's role in the region, several policy shifts did not appear in societal actors' contributions. This includes the shifts where the Chinese government describes itself as more involved in regional cooperation or voices how Asia should be governed more forcefully and offers more to the region. Moreover, societal actors do not mention the policy shift that identifies an increasing number of challenges in the region. The fact that there are many instances in which societal actors did not exert influence fits the common expectation that societal actors cannot influence foreign policy under highly centralized authoritarian rule. However, this makes the finding that, in some instances, scholars and think tank analysts did influence policy shifts even more noteworthy and highlights that under certain conditions, Chinese societal actors can still influence the official construction of China's national interest.

The second set of limitations relates to the study's premises. Political change in the PRC, either threatening the regime's stability or doing away with societal debate entirely, could hurt the

study's premises. The starting point of this study was the observation that the CCP's General Secretary and China's State President, Xi Jinping, had centralized political rule more than his predecessors. At the time of writing, shortly after the CCP's 20th Party Congress in October 2022, Xi Jinping had centralized political rule in such a way that observers started to question the stability of his and, as a result, the CCP's rule over the long term (Blanchette 2022; Johnson 2022; Tsang and Cheung 2021; Xia 2022). However, while such discussions have yet to leave the realm of speculation, if Xi Jinping's and the CCP's rule faltered, one of the dissertation's key premises would no longer apply. The other premise this dissertation was built on is that there is still some societal debate about foreign policy. While this was still the case for the time frame under study, increasing totalitarian tendencies such as all-encompassing surveillance could stifle such debate (Chin and Lin 2022; Kang 2022). This would eliminate the second key premise this dissertation was based on.

8.7 Future research

In this final section, I discuss how future inquiries about China and other authoritarian states could build upon the analysis and findings of this dissertation. Most immediately, the substance of the different components of the official construction of the national interest could be an additional intervening variable to be considered. More generally, future research on Chinese societal actors' influence on China's foreign policy could expand this dissertation's sole focus on foreign policy rhetoric in two different ways. It could move beyond foreign policy rhetoric to cover foreign policy behavior and explore scholars' and think tankers' motivations for influencing foreign policy.

In this dissertation, I understand the official construction of China's national interest to be made up of six components, *defend China's territory, political system, and citizens*, *expand China's economic relations*, *lead global governance*, *offer global public goods*, *promote China's values*, and *control the region*. Future research could examine whether and in what ways the substance of these components of the national interest could be an additional intervening variable that conditions societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest. For instance, Chinese societal

actors could exert more influence on the expansion of China's economic relations than on issues related to the defense of its territory because, under the CCP's rule, more debate is permitted on economic issues than national security.

Now that I could establish that Chinese scholars and think tank experts can influence the official construction of China's national interest, their influence on foreign policy should be examined in more detail. Future research should examine whether societal actors' influence is limited to foreign policy rhetoric or extends to foreign policy behavior. To do so, I suggest assessing the gap between China's foreign policy rhetoric and behavior across policy issues. In cases where the gap between foreign policy rhetoric and behavior is marginal, the insights from this study on societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest can easily be transferred. Only when there is a significant gap between foreign policy rhetoric and behavior would one need to develop new approaches for assessing societal actors' influence.

In this dissertation, Chinese scholars and think tank analysts were represented by their contributions to foreign policy debates. Since certain limitations come with only considering what they are putting out, especially in an authoritarian system where censorship and self-censorship are rampant, future research should center on societal actors. One could assess their motivations to influence China's foreign policy through interviews. Differences in think tankers' and scholars' motivations and the incentive structures provided through their forms of employment could also provide details regarding the conditions under which they influence the official construction of China's national interest.

Based on a careful examination of scope conditions, findings from this dissertation can be generalized and applied to other authoritarian regimes. Key factors shaping the scope conditions in the Chinese context under study are the degree of centralization of political power, state-society relations, and an observable change in foreign policy. Similar to the PRC under Xi, Turkey under Erdogan and Russia under Putin exhibit tendencies towards strongman authoritarian rule, a crackdown on civil society, and growing geopolitical ambitions. Hence, I expect my findings on

the conditions under which societal actors can influence the construction of their countries' national interest, to apply to these contexts as well. Given the high degree of centralization of political power and the restrictions on research in the Chinese context, the PRC is a hard case for examining societal actors' influence on foreign policy. Nevertheless, I was able to show under what conditions Chinese scholars and think tank analysts can still influence the official construction of China's national interest. I expect similar research to be feasible in other authoritarian contexts. But as my research showed, analyzing societal actors' contributions to official constructions of the national interest is done best in light of shifts in the state's openness to societal input and societal actors' proximity to the state.

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10 Curriculum Vitae

Sabine Mokry was born on September 29, 1989, in Aalen, Germany. After four years of elementary school, she attended Hellenstein Gymnasium in Heidenheim an der Brenz from which she graduated in 2007.

Between 2007 and 2011, she studied at Passau University with semesters abroad in the UK and Switzerland and obtained a BA degree in Governance and Public Policy. After moving to China for a year to study Chinese funded by the China-Scholarship Programme by the Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach-Stiftung and the German National Academic Foundation, she pursued two Master's degrees in parallel, International Relations and China Studies at Free University Berlin. After graduating she worked as a research associate at the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) in Berlin.

She pursued her PhD as an external PhD candidate at Leiden University's Institute of Political Science. During the first years, she still worked at MERICS almost full-time. In 2019, she obtained a scholarship from Cusanuswerk Scholarship Foundation which allowed her to focus on my PhD research. From then on, she was a visiting researcher at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg.

While working on her PhD research, she published peer-reviewed journal articles in International Politics, the Pacific Review, and Foreign Policy Analysis. Findings from her master's thesis in China Studies were published in the Journal of Contemporary China. In addition, she published her suggestions for how to use frame analysis to study Chinese politics in The Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods and the Routledge Handbook of Chinese Studies. She presented her research at the International Studies Association's annual conferences in 2021 and 2022 and at various conferences hosted by the German Association for Political Science (DVPW), online and in-person.

In the past few years, she taught several courses at the BA level, including a seminar entitled authoritarian rule in the digital age, introductory seminars into Foreign Policy Analysis and international politics, as well as a seminar on Chinese foreign policy at the universities of Hamburg and Freiburg as well as Leuphana University Lüneburg. To professionalize her teaching skills, she participated in 100h of training on teaching skills for higher education and obtained a certificate awarded by Hamburg University's Center for Teaching Excellence.

Since 2020, she has been one of the speakers of the research group "Foreign and Security Policy" and of the IR Early Career Group of the German Association for Politics Science. She has been asked to review manuscripts for the journals International Studies Review, Comparative European Politics, and German Politics. She is a member of the International Studies Association, the German Political Science Association (DVPW), and the German Association for Asian Studies (DGA).

Propositions for the dissertation

"The construction of China's national interest: Between top-down rule and societal ideas"

Sabine Mokry-Frey

Propositions relating to the subject of the dissertation

#1 Experts working at think tanks and university-based scholars can stand in for societal actors.

#2 Drawing on "preference attainment theory" (Dür 2008) and the "text-reuse approach" (Christensen 2023) and combining the frequentist understanding of causality underpinning these approaches with careful consideration of the context in which societal actors influence the official construction of China's national interest, allows capturing instances of societal actors' influence on the official construction of China's national interest, rather than mere correlations between societal ideas and the official discourse.

#3 The state's influence on societal ideas might be larger than societal actors' influence on the state. However, examining societal actors' ideas and their influence is still important for explaining changes in the construction of China's national interest.

#4 We must re-examine Chinese societal actors' influence on China's foreign policy and China's involvement in international politics.

Scientific propositions relating to the field of the subject's dissertation

#1 The Chinese party-state's openness to societal input changes faster than previously assumed.

#2 When engaging with (foreign policy) experts who work in authoritarian contexts or with the work they produce, these actors' proximity to the state needs to be considered.

#3 Close analyses of public statements reveal more about a state's foreign policy than investigations into concrete foreign policy decisions.

#4 Findings on Chinese societal actors' influence on foreign policy are most generalizable to foreign policy-making in similar authoritarian settings. Some elements of the research process and findings might be transferable to other policy fields in the Chinese context or democratic contexts, but such a transfer will be more demanding.

Propositions on societal subjects

#1 European governments' China policies should make more room for engagement with Chinese societal actors.

References

Christensen, Johan. 2023. "Studying Expert Influence: A Methodological Agenda." *West European Politics* 46(3): 600–613.

Dür, Andreas. 2008. "Measuring Interest Group Influence in the EU: A Note on Methodology." *European Union Politics* 4: 559–76.

The resurgence of strongman politics, typified by Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, has raised doubts about the influence of societal actors on authoritarian regimes' foreign policies. Despite tightening authoritarian rule, there are vibrant societal debates about foreign policy in China. Scholars have pinpointed influential societal actors and their channels of impact. However, the conditions under which these Chinese societal actors affect China's foreign policy remain elusive.

This dissertation analyzes how experts from Chinese foreign policy think tanks and International Relations scholars, the most probable societal influencers, shape the construction of China's national interest. It draws upon frame analysis and quantitative content analysis of official statements, think tank reports, and academic articles, revealing no perfect transmission belt between official and societal interests. The study argues that proximity to the state and state openness dictate societal actors' influence. This study also assesses changes in political institutions and state-society relations during Xi Jinping's era, uncovering shifts in state openness to societal input and distinctions between think tanks and scholars. These insights prompt a reassessment of societal actors' role in authoritarian regime foreign policy.