The construction of China's national interest: between top-down rule and societal ideas
Mokry, S.

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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]

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[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

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[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)
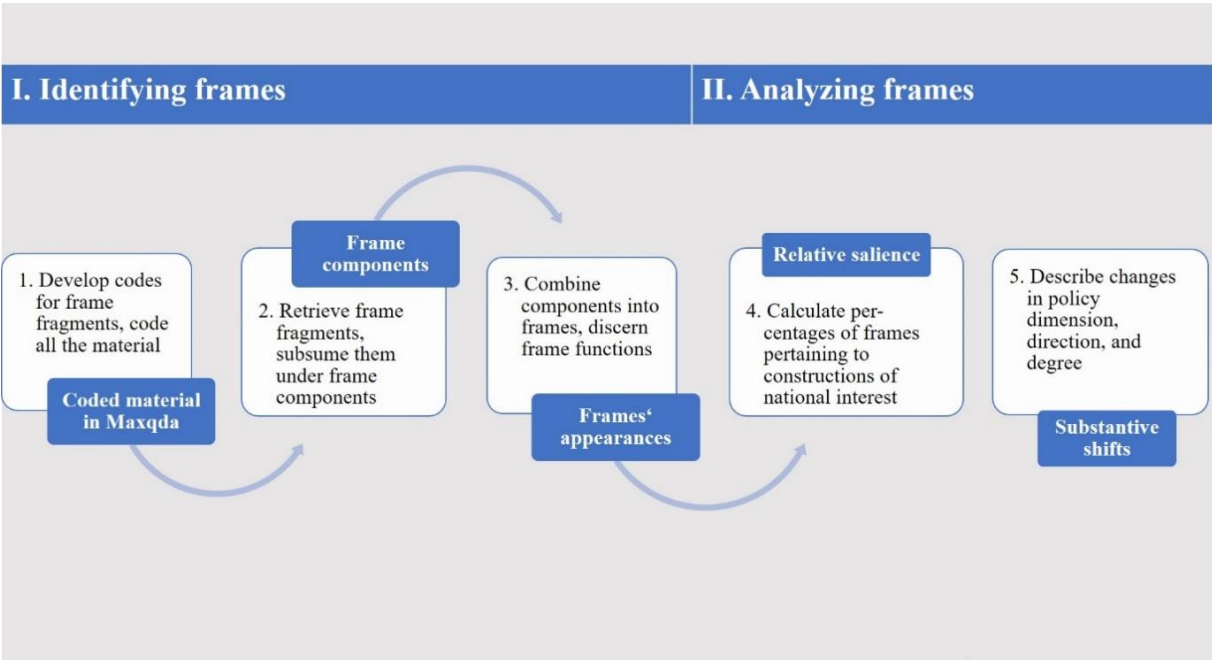
To identify frames in the material, I performed the following step, as Figure 4.1 illustrates. I first coded the frame fragments.[12] I developed codes that cover the frame fragments inductively on the material. In the end, there needs to be a code for every frame fragment, meaning codes need to be exhaustive, 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

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[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

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[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.

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.

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[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

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[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

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[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

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[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

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[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,

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[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

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[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.