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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Department of Journalism

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Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Department of Journalism

**Navigating Narratives: Framing the Sino-
Norwegian Relationship in Norwegian News
Media since 2016**

Master Thesis

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Study programme: Journalism, Media and Globalisation

Supervisor: Mgr. Jan Missler

Year of the defence: 2024

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2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.
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In Prague on 26.04.2024

Malene Solheim

References

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Length of the Thesis: 93972 characters

Abstract

When Norway awarded the Noble Peace Prize to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo in 2010, China responded by withdrawing its diplomatic relations from Norway. Only in 2016 the relations normalised through a declaration that sparked widespread reactions – some celebrated it whilst others argued the declaration directly clashed with Norwegian values. This study investigates fourteen articles that are analysed to engage in a discussion on how Norwegian news media outlets (Klassekampen, Aftenposten and NRK) have framed China during three major events in their bilateral relationship: (1) the declaration of normalisation in 2016, (2) negotiations of a free trade agreement in 2021, and (3) China's increasing role in the Arctic in 2023. Applying the framework provided by frame theory, this study conducts a text-based interpretative, qualitative analysis on the frames used to cover China by Norwegian news media. The study found five frames have dominated the narrative of China. These frames demonstrates that there are multiple and contradicting frames of China, showing both positive and negative outcomes of collaboration with China. It demonstrates a complicated diplomatic relationship that is primarily motivated by economic opportunities, but recently also geopolitical collaboration.

Abstrakt

Když Norsko v roce 2010 udělilo Nobelovu cenu za mír čínskému disidentu Liou Xiaopovi, čínská vláda reagovala zmrazením diplomatických vztahů. Až v roce 2016 se vztahy mezi zeměmi normalizovaly na základě deklarace, která ale vzbudila rozporuplné reakce – někteří ji oslavovali, zatímco jiní tvrdili, že je deklarace v naprostém rozporu s norskými hodnotami. Tato studie zkoumá čtrnáct článků tří vybraných norských médií (Klassekampen, Aftenposten a NRK) a analyzuje, jak tato média prezentovala Čínu v průběhu tří významných událostí v čínsko-norských vztazích: 1. deklarace normalizace v roce 2016, 2. vyjednávání o dohodě o volném obchodu v roce 2021, a 3. rostoucí vliv Číny v Arktidě v roce 2023. Tato interpretativní a kvalitativní analýza diskurzu o Číně v norských médiích vychází z teorie rámcování. Studie odhalila v narativu o Číně pět převládajících rámců. Z toho vyplývá, že o Číně existuje několik protichůdných rámců, vykazujících pozitivní i negativní hodnocení spolupráce s Čínou. To naznačuje složitý diplomatický vztah motivovaný především ekonomickými příležitostmi, ovšem v poslední době také geopolitickou spoluprací.

Keywords

China, Norway, frame theory, international relations, power

Klíčová slova

Čína, Norsko, teorie rámců, mezinárodní vztahy, moc


Title

Navigating Narratives: Framing the Sino-Norwegian Relationship in Norwegian News
Media since 2016

Název práce

Navigace příběhů: Rámování čínsko-norského vztahu v norských zpravodajských
médiích od roku 2016

Research Proposal stamped 15.11.2023

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism FSV UK Research proposal for Erasmus Mundus Journalism Diploma Thesis	
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Study program/form of study: Erasmus Mundus Journalism	
Thesis title in English: 'The high price of bullying the big boys: A media discourses analysis on Norwegian news coverage on China since the declaration of normalisation in 2016'	
Expected date of submission (semester, academic year) (Thesis must be submitted according to the Academic Calendar.) Spring semester 2024	
Main research question (max. 250 characters): How did the normalisation of diplomatic/political relations between China and Norway in 2016 affect Norwegian news discourse on China?	
Current state of research on the topic (max. 1800 characters): The relationship between Norway and China have seen many ups and downs. When the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to human rights activist Liu Xiaobo in 2010, China completely cut all diplomatic and political contact with Norway. Six years later, on December 19, 2016, the foreign ministers of both countries declared a normalisation of the relationship between the two countries. In the declaration, Norway committed to not undermine China's sovereign integrity, respecting their one-China vision and not challenge the regime. It also stated that the two countries shared "core interests". Since then, Norway, including its media houses, has been confused as to how they should interact with China. The declaration of normalisation was also met with many types of reactions. Accepting to not support actions that undermine China's core interest, territorial integrity, and its one-China policy, was by some interpreted as China grabbing too much power over its own discourse/power in Norway. But for others, usually people in business, the declaration was reason for celebration as it meant a return of normal trade relations with a very important trade partner. This declaration caused a moment of confusion in academia: what meaning do we make of the declaration, and how should Norway act in relation to China from now on? The answer to this is mixed. In academia, the focus has predominantly been on this moment of confusion caused by the normalisation. Gåsemyr (2023) and Bekkevold (2021) both discuss Norway as a small and powerless state in comparison to China. However, recently, China has shown interest in the Arctic region and want to become a member of the Arctic council (Bērziņš, 2022). Research on this topic has found that Norway is a lot more assertive when China wants to enter its own home turf (Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2016).	

As far as my research thus far goes, I have not yet found any research that has studied the frames/discourses of China by Norwegian media.

Expected theoretical framework (max. 1800 characters):

Framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience influences the choices people make about how to process information (Goffman, 1974). The media creates frames by introducing information with predefined and narrow contextualisation, thus enhancing understanding, or using them as cognitive shortcuts to link stories to metanarratives. By using framing theory, I can conceptualise how China is reported on in the Norwegian media and use the general themes to situate my research into a greater context.

This thesis will identify narratives communicated by Norwegian media and use framing theory to identify how Norway is shaping perceptions about the China and its relationship with it, particularly in the context of: (1) China as a 'near arctic state', (2) the declaration of normalisation between Norway and (3) China and the debate around establishing a free trade agreement between the two countries.

The framing of China in the Norwegian media is shaped by many things. According to numbers from Reporters Without Borders, Norway ranks as number one in the world on press freedom. Therefore, this thesis assumes that China does not have the opportunity to directly influence Norwegian news coverage on China. However, the media narrative of China in Norway is subject to domestic and international events and with China's growing power, it is in Norway's interest to act carefully in the relation.

Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis (max. 1800 characters):

As describes above, the relationship between Norway and China is complex, mostly shaped by Norway's desperate attempt at tightrope balancing between economic opportunities, political stability, and ideological differences. By choosing a qualitative approach, this research is more readily able to draw links between articles, identify common themes, and distinguish reoccurring narrative frames. This approach also allows me to clarify and interpret the nuances within and between the frames.

The data will be collected from three digital news media in Norway: Aftenposten, NRK and Klassekampen. These three sources have been chosen because they represent a broad spectrum of political alignment in Norway. Though it is important to note that no newspaper in Norway is explicitly owned by or sympathise with one given political party, they often have a general alignment on the political spectrum (except "Friheten" which is owned and published by the Norwegian Communist Party). Klassekampen (literally translates to the class struggle) deems itself as the newspaper "for the left". Aftenposten has historically aligned with the conservative party (Høgre), but has in recent years aligned itself more towards the centre.

I will collect all articles that mention China within the following issues:

- The declaration of normalisation of diplomatic ties in 2016
- China's engagement in the Arctic council and wish to be deemed as a "near-Arctic" state.
- Proposal of a bilateral trade agreement between Norway and China

These three topics were chosen because they explicitly discuss the interaction between Norway and China and contribute to the public discourse on the relationship between the two nation-states. By analysing these topics, I can induce a discussion on how Norwegian media report on China in response to the political and economic context they derive from. In all three issues, Norway's role in relation to China differs greatly in terms of power.

Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):

Given the limited media coverage on these three issues, I will collect all the news articles that (more than briefly) address these issues in relation to China. This will give me roughly a sample size of 50-70 articles to analyse.

Expected frames:

Though the frames will only emerge after I have conducted the research, I expect the frames to be along the lines of portraying

- "China as a threat to Norwegian security",
- "China poses economic opportunities for Norway",
- "Norway is too accepting of China's demands", and
- "China's power is infiltrating on Norwegian society".

I expect Aftenposten to have a generally more critical view of China and of the Norwegian government's dealing of China, and for NRK to have a broader spectrum of views to emphasise their neutrality on the topic.

Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):

Title page

Table of content

Introduction:

Literature review:

Methodology:

Research design:

Findings:

Discussion:

Conclusion:

Reference list:

Basic literature list (at least 5 most important works related to the topic and the method(s) of analysis; all works should be briefly characterized on 2-5 lines):

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Harvard University Press.

I will define frame analysis through the definition provided by Erving Goffman in his book titled "Frame Analysis". His theory can be defined through these 5 key aspects of frame analysis,

(1) frames as cognitive structures, (2) organising experience, (3) primary and secondary framework, (4) role of communication and (5) social interactions and rituals.

Sverdrup-Thygeson, B. (2016). «Forbrytelse og straff» Forholdet Mellom Norge og Kina. *Internasjonal Politikk*, 74(3), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.17585/ip.v74.490>

This study was published right before the declaration of normalisation between Norway and China was announced. It gives a detailed and critical review of the relationship between the two countries, from a Norwegian academic perspective.

Bērziņš, V. (2022). *Chinese Arctic Narratives: How Chinese Media is Approaching the Nordic-Arctic States*. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence

This study, published by NATO, researches the narrative of the Nordic countries in Chinese English-spoken media. In addition to giving valuable information on the bilateral relationship between Norway and China, this study also inspired my methodological approaches. This study uses framing analysis to conceptualise the frames used by one country about another. I expect to present my findings in a similar way as they have done it (see page 16).

Bekkevold, J. I. (2021). Norges relasjon med Kina I 70 år: Småstatsidealisme og realisme i møte med en Stormakt. *Internasjonal Politikk*, 79(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.23865/intpol.v79.2574>

This article provides a historical outline of the relationship between Norway and China. It categorises this relationship into four phases. I will be analysing the media discourse during the fourth phase, which the authors claims started in 2016. The authors emphasises that the relationship between Norway and China is uniquely characterised by having gone through a deep political fissure where China excluded Norway from political interactions. Norway's alignment with USA poses serious challenges in its relationship with China.

Gåsemyr, H. J. (2023). Kina-politikken I Søreides periode som utenriksminister: Kjente Spor og Nye Konfliktlinjer. *Internasjonal Politikk*, 81(1), 65–89. <https://doi.org/10.23865/intpol.v81.5062>

Hans Jørgen Gåsemyr is a leader research on Norway's relationship to China and is a natural author to include on a research project on this exact topic. In 2017, the year of the declaration of normalisation, prime minister Erna Solberg appointed a new foreign minister, Ine Marie Søreide. This article outlines the difficult task Søreide had in normalising (in practice) the relationship between China and Norway, and finding a new and friendlier dynamic with the superpower in the east.

Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):

KWEI, Quaye-Foli. *A comparison of online news media framing of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict in Ukraine, Russia, the U.S. & China*. Diplomová práce, vedoucí Van Puyvelde, Damien. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra bezpečnostních studií, 2022.

BURDA, Leonardo. *US, Russian and Chinese Arctic Policy as precursors for their foreign policy*. Diplomová práce, vedoucí Svoboda, Karel. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra ruských a východoevropských studií, 2020.

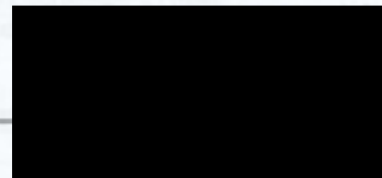
TOLEPBERGEN, Miras. *European Union Artificial Intelligence Regulation: framework and discussion*. Diplomová práce, vedoucí Kołodziej, Jacek. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra evropských studií, 2023.

KHANNOLAINEN, Daria. *Media framing of immigration in the United Kingdom: a critical discourse analysis of newspaper coverage of the Windrush scandal between 2018 and 2020*. Diplomová práce, vedoucí Rodón, Toni. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra evropských studií, 2023.

GOUGH, Raymond Lee. *No Safe Harbour: Is economic reliance on the People's Republic of China sinking regional foreign policy independence?* Diplomová práce, vedoucí Romancov, Michael. Praha: Univerzita Karlova, Fakulta sociálních věd, Katedra politikologie, 2021.

Date / Signature of the student:

Date: 14.11.2023



THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:

I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.

MIESSLER JAN

M.

Surname and name of the supervisor

Date



Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:

Further recommendations of literature related to the topic:

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry office (podatelna) in two copies, by **November 15**, addressed to the Program Coordinator. Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Program Coordinator's Office, Sandra Lábová. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

RESEARCH PROPOSALS NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE HEAD OF ERASMUS MUNDUS JOURNALISM PROGRAM.

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Introduction

The times when China was discussed as a “rising economic power” is in the past. It is no longer rising, and it is no longer solely an economic power. When Deng Xiaoping introduced the opening up and reform, economic liberation was at the core of his policies. The promise of economic growth and a ‘better tomorrow’ was the source of his legitimacy (Rolland, 2020). However, the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) power has since transformed. After twelve years of Xi Jinping rule, economic factors have become subordinate to political ones (Ibid.). In the past few years, China has become a confident peace negotiator, military power, and political ally (for those who treat them nicely, that is) (Rolland, 2020; Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2017; Forsby and Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2022).

With accusations of persecuting the Uyghur Muslims, shrinking the democratic space in Hong Kong and escalating military tensions with Taiwan, Western countries have raised concerns about China’s increasing power (Bekkevold, 2021). Simultaneously, it has not been afraid to use coercive diplomatic strategies and economic retaliation to punish those who challenge China (Forsby and Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2022; Gao, Ingram and Kee, 2017).¹ On the other hand, the CCP has reassured that their vision of a ‘peaceful rise’ is rooted in pillars of mutual trust, mutual benefit, and mutual learning (Rolland, 2020; Gao, Ingram and Kee, 2017). This has sparked a broader debate on what kind of power China has, what kind of power it aims to have, and how the world should respond to it (Lanteigne, 2017; Rolland, 2020; Sloss, 2023; Gao, Ingram and Kee, 2017). Although this debate can be found in every corner of the world, this study will focus on how this debate has unfolded in Norway specifically. The case of the Sino-Norwegian relationship serves as a textbook example of

¹ These terms will be explained later.

how China uses its economic dominance to punish small states, and what consequences this can have.

The story this study derives from dates back to 2010. This was the year the Oslo-based Noble Peace Prize was awarded to the Chinese human rights fighter and dissident, Liu Xiaobo (Andersen, 2018; Bekkevold, 2021; Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2015). Arguing that this was a case of meddling in their domestic affairs, the CCP responded by withdrawing all diplomatic ties from Norway (Svendrup-Thygeson, 2017). It was not until 2016, after six years of negotiation, that the Norwegian foreign minister at the time, Børge Brende, finally managed to establish a declaration of normalisation with his counterpart, Wang Yi. In the declaration, Norway committed not to undermine China's sovereign integrity, respecting the one-China policy and not challenge the regime. It also stated that the two countries shared "core interests" (Regjeringen, 2016; Bekkevold, 2021).

The declaration immediately sparked a public debate in Norwegian media. On the one hand, human rights activists were frustrated about Norway's tactic and failure to address questions of human rights at such a critical moment. On the other hand, the seafood industry celebrated the removal of political obstacles in trading with China, whilst academics hailed the declaration as a diplomatic success. For the politicians, this meant the resumption of negotiations of a free trade agreement (FTA) with China (Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2015). Although the normalisation settled a conflict between Norway and China, it symbolised the climax of a domestic discussion on how to *deal* with China. It raises questions of how to respond when economic opportunities clash with normative values. How far should Norway compromise its own standpoints, and what price is the government willing to pay for it? Can economic collaboration be a bridge between democracies and authoritarian states, or is it the very source of conflict? I believe the relationship between Norway and China serves as a textbook example of these questions.

Since the declaration was settled, China-knowers have called for a more meaningful public debate on how Norway should engage with China, a debate they claim has been lacking until present. One of them is the Norwegian author and journalist, Torbjørn Færøvik. He wrote an opinion piece to *Aftenposten* in 2018 where he argued that the negotiations of a free trade agreement between Norway and China have been going on in silence, without bothersome press people waiting in the hallways. In his article, he calls for a real debate on to what extent free democracies like Norway should engage with China, which until today, in his words, has remained close to absent (Færøvik, 2018).

In sympathising with Færøvik's argument that such a debate has been lacking, I conducted this study to provide an overview of what the debate thus far has been like and how it has unfolded. This study recognises the need for small states like Norway, which cannot match the power China possesses, to have focused debates on how they can and should engage with China (Waage and Lindgren, 2021). This study is rooted in the idea that if Norway wants to adapt a more active and leading position in collaborating with China, it is necessary to understand what kind of narratives exist and how they unfold in the public debate, most easily measured through the news media.

This study will therefore answer the question: *What frames have Norwegian media used in its coverage on China since 2016?* In order to answer, this I will collect fourteen articles from three Norwegian news media outlets to analyse how they have framed the public debate on the Sino-Norwegian relationship since 2016. Using the digital archives from Klassekampen, NRK and *Aftenposten*, this study investigates the frames, including the language, rhetoric and sources used and how journalists have approached questions of China in the Norwegian society. With the changing power dynamic between the West and China, this study will provide a novel and up-to-date analysis on how Norwegian media perceive and report on what kind of global actor China is, what kind of threats and opportunities it poses

and how Norway can best engage with it (Gu, 2022). The three outlets, Klassekampen, NRK and Aftenposten will be used as representation of the Norwegian media more generally as they represent a wide variety of political thought. As research on this topic remains limited, I will apply frame theory which allows me to qualitatively categorise, interpret and analyse the different frames used by Norwegian journalists to explain the Sino-Norwegian relationship. This will help establish a foundation on how China has been framed in Norwegian news, setting the groundwork for further research.

This study does not aim to reveal whether the Norwegian media's portrayal of China was right or wrong, but rather focus on exploring how different interpretations of China, a mix of knowledge and imagination, developed through media's construction of meaning (Gu, 2022; Hallahan, 1999). This study stems from the need to investigate whether news media have met their obligation to offer balanced coverage and a variety of perspectives, thus fostering a deeper understanding of China. Studies such as this one might bridge the discrepancy between the political reality of the Sino-Norwegian relationship and how the media reports on it.

This thesis is divided into seven sections. This introductory chapter has outlined the circumstances in where this study derives from and given a brief overview of how I will approach this study. Chapter 1 critically evaluates relevant literature on the Sino-Norwegian relationship. As research on this bilateral relationship specifically is limited, relevant literature on Sino-Nordic and Sino-Western relationships have also been assessed. In addition to being an evaluation of the academic field, the literature review also provides a historical overview of the Sino-Norwegian relationship and the major event that have shaped their dynamic. Chapter 2 provides explanation and justification for the theoretical framework applied to this study, namely frame theory. The theoretical framework explains the opportunities and limitations of using frame theory. It also elaborates on how it will be applied to this study

specifically. Chapter 3 provides an extensive outline and justification for the research methodology used, explaining how the newspapers were chosen for this research, what considerations were made, how I navigated through the news outlets' websites and how I analysed the content collected. The findings are presented in Chapter 4 in where the five frames identified is presented graphically and explained frame by frame. The discussion in Chapter 5 engages in a debate on the interpretations and implications of the frames identified and how they relate to the literature discussed in chapter two. Lastly, the study concludes with a summary of the thesis, the learning outcomes, and recommendations for further studies in related fields.

1. Literature review

This study will aim to answer the question: *What frames have Norwegian media used in its coverage on China since 2016?* In order to do so I will explore the existing literature that have shaped the understanding of the bilateral Sino-Norwegian relationship. Although this study is a study of media, this literature derives from the political and economic spheres. This makes the literature presented below a point of reference during the discussion when comparing and contrasting my findings from the news media with the existing literature. In addition, the purpose of this review is to provide an overview of some of the major event that have shaped the relationship between China and Norway ever since the declaration of normalisation in 2016.

First, I will provide an overview of the major contributors in the field and in what ways challenges of studying this field has been approached. Then, I outline some of the most influential terms used and works published that have shaped the shared understanding of the Sino-Norwegian relationship. Furthermore I provide an outline for where the literature stands today. In the final section I will assess the gaps and weaknesses in the current literature and explain how the literature will help inform my study on frames used in media.

1.1. Studying the Sino-Norwegian relationship

The scholarly field on Norway's relationship to China has mostly been shaped by scholars like Svendrup-Thygeson (2015; 2017; Svendrup-Thygeson, Lindgren and Lanteigne, 2017; Hiim, Andersen and Svendrup, 2020), Bekkevold (2021), Lanteigne (2010; 2017) and Gåsemyr (2023a; 2023b). Due to the small size of the field, this handful of scholars have dominated the knowledge pool and discourse used to study China in the Norwegian scholarship. The Norwegian-language literature is mostly published in the pan-Scandinavian journal, *Internasjonal Politikk*. NUPI, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, is also

a major contributor in Sino-Norwegian research. Most Norwegian scholars in the sphere of international relations, are or have been affiliated with this institute. This further underscores the limited breadth and depth of the academic discourse on this topic. The limited scope of the field makes it inherently challenging to establish a diverse and comprehensive body of research on Norway's engagement with China.

That being said, Norway has been included in research on China's relations to regions and subregions, such as Europe, the Nordics or Scandinavia (Svendrup-Thygeson and Hellström, 2017; Gåsemyr, 2023b). In the introduction to the book *China and Nordic Diplomacy*, Svendrup-Thygeson and Hellström found that the Nordic countries have been studied as a uniform bloc in their meeting with China. The Nordic countries are small (less than 10 million people in each country) and can relate to each other in many aspects, also in their relationships with China. They share common interests, and also face many of the same challenges (Svendrup-Thygeson and Hellström, 2017). In addition, Gu noted that “when it comes to the foreign perception of China, the West or Europe is often treated as a single entity because most of the Western beliefs about China transcend national boundaries” (2022, p. 27). However, recent events such as Dalai Lama's visit to Denmark, Liu Xiaobo's Noble Peace Prize from Norway, Sweden's decision to ban Huawei and Iceland's FTA (free trade agreement) from 2013 are event that are continuously shaping China's relationship to each of the Nordic countries (Lanteigne, 2017; Svendrup-Thygeson, 2015; Forsby and Svendrup-Thygeson, 2022). These events characterise China's relationship with each of the Nordic countries, and becomes more specific to each of the countries as their diplomatic relations continues to take separate shapes. Therefore, it is increasingly important to study each of the Nordic countries' relationship to China to highlight their unique characteristics (Waage and Lindgren, 2021).

A study conducted by NATO further legitimises studies researching single countries' relationship with China. It found that the CCP's news media outlets (so-called mouthpiece media) use different media frames when reporting on each of the Nordic countries (Bērziņš 2022). The report suggested that this is becoming increasingly apparent as China is advancing and fine-tuning its country-specific policies to each of the Nordic countries. This has encouraged research on country-specific relations to China, such as this thesis. The study found that China often portrays itself as a partner and friend of the Nordics in its own media. Though less apparent, there were also frames suggesting that China was not trusted or not welcome in these regions.

1.2. From the economic to the political

Before the Noble Peace Prize in 2010, the Sino-Norwegian literature almost only concerned trade and finances, but the diplomatic cut-off from China gave the relationship other, more articulated, layers. This caused scholars to assess a multitude of factors when studying the Sino-Norwegian relationship (Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2015; Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2017; Andersen, 2018; Waage and Lingren, 2021). For example, the declaration of normalisation allowed for the resumption of negotiations of a free trade agreement (FTA). In Sverdrup-Thygeson's article from 2015, they argued that an FTA between Norway and China could be beneficial for both countries due to their economies' high level of trade complementarity. By this, they meant that China and Norway need the expertise and economic opportunities offered by the other part. Sverdrup-Thygeson found that in the Sino-Norwegian relationship this particularly applied to fields like energy, shipping, and green technology (2015). However, not long after, other factors were introduced, making the equation more complex. In Sverdrup-Thygeson's chapter titled *The Norway-China relationship: For Better, For Worse, For Richer, For Poorer* in the book *China and Nordic Diplomacy* published two years later, in 2017, the issue of FTA negotiations had become a

subject of human rights. Here, they argued that the resumption of diplomatic contact in 2016 also meant the resumption of Human Rights Dialogue, a bilateral forum between Norway and China. As a result, the new debates on the FTA suddenly became more challenging than before due to the increased attention to human rights issues in the Norwegian debate on China.

The increased central role of political and normative differences between China and Norway in the literature changed of direction of the academic debate. Notably, it introduced new terms that have since greatly shaped the academic discourse on China. Sverdrup-Thygeson wrote an article titled *The Flexible Cost of Insulting China and the “Dalai Lama Effect”* where they defined the Dalai Lama effect as “China's use of economic retaliation as a political tool” (2015, p. 101). With ‘economic retaliation’, they referred to the punishment of another country using economic means. This is possible for China due to their economic dominance in the global economy. ‘The Dalai Lama Effect’ specifically refers to China’s discontent with countries who welcomed the Tibetan spiritual leader on official visits. In the Nordic context, Dalai Lama’s visit to Denmark in 2009 is perhaps the most commonly used example of this (Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2015). A broader and more generally applicable term of this is “coercive diplomacy”, defined by Forsby and Sverdrup-Thygeson as non-military coercive punishment when a country “challenge its core interests” (2022, p. 1). The case of the diplomatic freeze in 2010 serves as a textbook example of this. The dominating presence of these terms in the discourse on China in Western academic literature, portrays China as an assertive and threatening power to the West. (Gao, Ingram and Kee, 2017).

However, there are schools of thought that reject the interpretation of China as an assertive, aggressive, and coercive global power (Gao, Ingram and Kee, 2017). Scholars suggest that China does not want to export its political agenda, but rather to integrate itself in the current world order to avoid conflict with the Western powers (Lanteigne, 2017; Edstrøm,

Stensdal and Hegglund, 2020; Forsby and Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2022). Although this discourse has gained attention in the literature for a long time, it is a relatively newly introduced in literature on the Sino-Norwegian relationship (Edstrøm, Stensdal and Hegglund, 2020). The first mention of China's soft power tactics was by Marc Lanteigne in 2010 but was at the time not part of the mainstream academic discourse.

1.3. A new direction

Since then, this discourse has emerged to a larger extent in research on China's increased interest and engagement in the Arctic region. The Arctic does not fall under the sovereign control of a state but has been regulated by the arctic states since 1996 (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States) (*Arctic Council Observers*, n.d.). In addition to the member states, there are 38 states and organisations that are observers in the Arctic council (ibid.). In 2013, China was approved as one of them (ibid.). Amongst other requirement, observers must have an interest and relevant expertise to the work of the Arctic Council. As an observer, China has participated in meetings with the senior arctic officials (SOA-meetings) and workgroups which are aimed at understanding and protecting the Arctic (Edstrøm, Stensdal and Hegglund, 2020).

Although the Nordic states are small in a global scale, they are powerful within the Arctic council, making up five out of the eight member states. In the context of the Arctic, studies have found that the Nordics are attractive targets for investments because of their stable and open economy, high income and relevant expertise and skills (Andersen, Hiim, Svendrup, 2020). China has, naturally, gotten its eyes up for this. Lanteigne claim that China's newly found interest in the Arctic is motivated by a wish to make foreign trade cheaper and more effective, and that there are no violent intentions behind this to make it work (2017). Edstrøm, Stensdal and Hegglund (2020) argue that China's engagement in the Arctic is primarily motivated by scientific expeditions and climate research. They further argued that

China does not have strategic military intentions in the region, but aims to coexist and collaborate (Edstrøm, Stensdal and Heggelund, 2020). A melting Arctic also means that ocean water is freed up and conditions are becoming more suitable for making the Arctic path for cargo ships (Ibid.).

In 2018, Chinese authorities published an arctic policy document called the white paper. This describes China's national interest, priorities, and approaches to the Arctic region (Edstrøm, Stensdal and Heggelund, 2020). This was the first occasion in where the Chinese authorities explicitly stated what brings their attention to the Arctic. In this document, China reassures its understanding of the Arctic states' territorial sovereignty within the Arctic, for international law and agreements. It also states that China's interest in the Arctic mainly concerns climate research, shipping, resource development, fishery, tourism, and peace and stability (Ibid.). Of all the Nordic countries, China has invested the most in Norway (Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2017).

Seven years after Lanteigne first made his argument that China has non-violent intentions in the Arctic, they added that the outcome of this is that China might become a 'norm entrepreneur' in the Arctic (2017). They argued that this stemmed from China's increasing willingness to cooperate and negotiate rather than control and coerce, essentially increasing soft power tactics in the region. This applies specifically to a region like the Arctic in where China is not on home turf, but still wishes to engage and influence how things are governed.

1.4. Summary and gaps in the literature

This literature review has highlighted the most prevailing factors that have influenced the Sino-Norwegian relationship and how they have been studied in the literature. The cases of the declaration of normalisation in 2016, negotiations of a free trade agreement and Chinese involvement in the Arctic have been highlighted as the three most influential events

in the bilateral relationship between Norway and China in the past decade. The most central question in the literature is on how Norwegian scholars understand China's intentions with its relationship with Norway (and by extension, the Nordics). The potential opportunities and challenges associated with a close relationship with China are also given due attention. Albeit small, the academic field on the Sino-Norwegian relationship has proven to engage in fruitful debates that discover multiple perspectives. However, economic factors are still the most prevailing, but political and human rights issues have also gained more scholarly attention in recent years.

Yet, some significant gaps make the field limited. To this day, few studies have been conducted on how this field is represented through the media and how the public perceives China in relation to Norway. Gu (2019) noted in their studies on how China was portrayed in German media that perception of China (or any country for that matter) is often based on stereotypes and rumours. With the emergence of new types of discourses in the academic sphere, this thesis is interested in seeing how these changes are received and interpreted by the news media. Not only does this give an indication of public perception, but it also matters in studies of political science and international relations.

Parama Sinha Palit, an author of international relations, wrote in their book *New media and Public Diplomacy* about the theoretically grounded argument that news media plays a central role in shaping geopolitical dynamics (2023). This applies particularly to democracies in where public opinion is taken into account in policy making (Ibid.). It is an idea which is rooted in more theoretical ideas where media is interpreted as a major contributor in the process of power creation. They suggest further research on the spaces in where politics and media interlink.

Based on the above-mentioned factors, this study will approach the Sino-Norwegian relationship through Norwegian news media. This will not only contribute to knowledge on

their diplomatic relation, but also allow for an investigation on how the media respond to a constantly changing power dynamic between Norway and China specifically, and the West vs. China more generally. In the following section, I will outline frame theory as a means of analysis for how the media reflects the real world and how the portrayal of the world through the media affects public perceptions.

2. Theoretical framework

Having outlined how the Sino-Norwegian relationship has been studied, this section will present the theoretical framework that will be applied to this study. Answering the question *What frames have Norwegian media used in its coverage on China since 2016* requires a comprehensive outline of what is meant by the ‘frame’. Framing is an established theoretical framework commonly applied to studies aiming to uncovering trends and tendencies in media discourses (Estupinan, 2017; Bērziņš, 2022; Yang and van Gorp, 2023; Gu, 2022). However, it is yet to be done on the Sino-Norwegian relationship. Not only is frame theory widely applicable to a large variety of case studies, but it will also help fulfil the aims of this study: to set the foundations for a basic understanding of how Norwegian news outlets have portrayed (or from now on: framed) the Sino-Norwegian relationship over time.

Frame theory is grounded in the assumption that studies on media representation are inherently studies on power structures (Reese, Gandy and Grant, 2001). Frame theory has predominantly been studies using qualitative approaches (Gu, 2022; Hammersley, 2013). This study will be no exception. As power and media discourses are unquantifiable and unstructured data, I will use frame theory to structurally assess it (Hammersley, 2013).

This section will be structured as follows. Before delving into the theoretical framework, I will outline how power has been theorised and how it applied to this study. By clarifying how this study understands power, I hope to set the theoretical foundation in which this study derives from. Second, I will provide an explanation of what frame theory is and how it has been used in studies similar to this one. I will also elaborate on which challenges it poses and how these have been overcome. Thus, I will elucidate the significance of frame analysis in advancing our understanding of media representations and their societal implications. Finally, I will outline how this framework relates and meaningfully contributes to my text-based qualitative research.

2.1. Power and discourse in the literature

The mention of terms such as ‘power’, ‘soft power’ and ‘discourse’ in the literature above requires a brief explanation provided by the academic literature on these terms.

Although ‘power’ is a commonly used term in all sorts of context, this section will set the boundaries for how this term will be used in this study and provide a clear outline for how it relates to the frame.

Power and the frame are terms commonly studied together, for example by influential scholars such as Reese et al. (2001), and Goffman (1976). Though their contexts vary, they all elaborated on the bidirectional line of influence between framing and power, frames reflect power and power is reflected through frames. Generally, they theorised how those who have power of the masses, also have power over the narrative of public debate, often expressed and guided through the media.

Traditional understandings of power are defined through the use of coercion, payments and attraction alike (Nye, 2008). Later understandings have identified that power is diffused and manifests itself as structures deeply integrated in society. This has expanded the understanding of power and acknowledged that private actors, musicians, TV-shows and sport athletes are just as important power-makers as the governmental body of a state. From a research perspective, it has made power a broader field of study, encompassing a broad spectrum of methodological approaches that aim to explain a complex network of power-creating factors.

It has given rise to terms such as ‘soft power’ which understand power as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye, 2008, p. 94). Since then, scholars have introduced more specific terms such as ‘discursive power’ (Jungherr, Posegga and An, 2019) and ‘immaterial power’ (Carr, 2016). Recently, even the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has introduced its own definition of this:

‘discourse power’ (Sloss, 2023). These types of power can be understood as terms existing under the umbrella of soft power, aiming to explain the invisible, non-coercive processes of power creation. Essentially, soft power is reflected and produced through frames in the media and the frames in media reflect and produce frame.

2.2. Frame theory

Deemed the founder of framing theory, Goffman defined the frame as “the principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them” (1974, p. 21). Since Goffman, a wide range of scholars of different fields have further developed framing, both as a theoretical framework and as a methodological approach (Linström and Marais, 2012). Entman is one of the most central scholar that have elaborated on Goffman’s frame and they claimed that media is fundamental in shaping (1) how consumers understand and interpret events, (2) public opinion and, eventually, (3) the distribution of power (2007). Iyengar defined framing simply as “the effects of presentation on judgment and choices” (1996, p. 61). Gu defined framing as “the production of meaning through language and signs” (Gu, 2022, p. 29). These definitions highlight different aspects of the process of framing. De Vreese categorised this process into three steps: "frame-building, frame-setting and individual and societal level consequences of framing" (2005, p. 52).

This study is primarily interested in the framing-building and frame-setting process of framing. Studies on the third step of the process, individual and societal level of consequences of framing, are more common in anthropology and psychology studies (Hallahan, 1999). It is also applied to studies that aim to understand the construction of social reality for example within psychology, economics, political communication, and media studies (Ibid.). Therefore, to narrow down the focus of this review, I will focus only on definitions and studies describing frame setting and frame-building. In studies on news discourse studies specifically, journalists are understood to see the world through socially created frames, which is reflected

through their reporting (Linström and Marais, 2012). These frames are created in the process of including and excluding information in media. This phenomenon and way of understanding news production has received considerable scholarly attention. Hallahan explained that frame analysis is used to understand the constructed perception existing in people's minds, as opposed to the objective truths about reality (1999). Hackett noted that framing can stem from conscious decisions made by journalists, but they also emerge from unconscious assumptions journalists have about the world (1984). Therefore, frame theory understands news as a form of representation of reality, rather than an accurate depiction of it. Although principles of objectivity, neutrality and fairness have been important in journalistic frameworks, they have proved unattainable in practise (Estupinan, 2017).

The result of researching the media through framing, according to Hallahan, is that we understand the media "imagemakers", they create mental images in the audience of how the world works (1999). Scheufele, as cited by D'Angelo and Kuypers elaborates on this: "these associations, called cognitive frames or individual, guide not only how people process facts covered in news, but also how people talk about issues in deliberative settings" (2010, p. xxv). Frames existing in journalists' perceived reality creates a process of reiterating the dominant discourse. This makes framing, in a greater context, a process of inherent power struggles for domination of the narrative (Gitlin, 1980; Hallahan, 1999). Hallahan wrote that "critical researchers consider media framing essentially a tool of power that can be used in the struggle to define whose view of the world will predominate" (1999, p. 223).

Frame analysis has since the 1980s become a widespread framework used to categorise coexisting media frames based on differences over time or across different topics. Its academic applicability has varied and become a bendable theory, applicable to different fields using different methodological approaches. According to sources reviewed by D'Angelo and Kuypers, framing has been studied as an *approach*, a *theory*, a *class of media*

effects, a perspective, and analytical technique, a paradigm and as a multiparadigmatic research program (2010, p. 2). Linström and Marais understand frame analysis to be a methodology and way of conducting research (2012), whilst Hallahan understands it to be a theoretical lens to analyse data through (1999).

Due to the wide applicability of frame theory, scholars have aimed to make it a more concrete and manageable theory, so it is easier to apply to academic research. For example, Hallahan conceptualised news framing as one of seven models of framing (the six others being framing of situation, attributes, choices, actions, issues, and responsibility) (1999, p. 210). This has helped conceptualise framing and narrowed it down to become a concrete and manageable theory. Today, news framing is a well-established sub-theory of framing, specifically focusing on the how the journalist constructs frames and what effect this has on an audience-media relationship (Estupinan, 2017; Linström and Marais, 2012; Hallahan, 1999; Reese et al., 2001; Gu, 2022). News framing understands the news media as an institution in where frame setters (the journalists) influence frame-consumers (those who read the news) through their preconceived notions of the world.

On a more methodological note, Pan and Kosicki identified four dimensions that news frames can be studied through, namely “syntactical structure, script structure, thematic structure, and rhetorical structure” (1993, p. 59). These were presented to help researchers to conceptualise the framework to identify frames within. The structures were summarised in Linström and Marais:

- syntactical structures which refer to patterns in the arrangements of words or phrases;
- script structures, referring to the fact that most news reports cover newsworthy events and that news is expected to help link audiences with their environment;

- thematic structures, which refer to a multilayer hierarchy with a theme being the central core connecting various sub-themes as the major nodes that are connected to supporting statements; and
- rhetorical structures, which describe the stylistic choices made by journalists in relation to their intended effects. (2012, p. 32)

2.3. Limitations and remedies

However, there are a few shortcomings of the frame theory. Linström and Marais (2012) identified the two most frequent criticism of this theory: reliability and validity. When boundaries between frames are not immediately obvious, it can be challenging for the researcher to accurately categorise the frames in an analytical and objective manner (Ibid.). Reese et al. pointed out the paradox in this and argued that “coming up with the names for frames itself involves a kind of framing” (2001, p. 98). With this, they referred to how researchers are themselves a victim of framing, when studying (and at times criticising) journalists of doing exactly this. As good academic practice, all research should have a methodological process that makes the study replicable, giving the same findings by using the same methodological approach. However, due to the reliance of the researcher’s own perception of what a frame is and what fits in it, studies of frame theory might not be successful in being replicable. It has received criticism for being a subjective approach where “researchers might also tend to define frames in a stereotypical or conventional way” (Reese et al., 2001, p. 98). Reese et al. further pointed out that frames may not be mutually exclusive and in the process of categorising media content in frames, it may exclude some perspectives or undermine the interdisciplinary reality of some media content (Reese et al., 2001).

Despite its criticism, Hallahan describes frame analysis as a valuable framework as it allows for a unique analysis on not only on the discourse but also suggests how people consume information and how that shapes their perception about the world. “Framing is

conceptually connected to the underlying psychological processes that people use to examine information, to make judgments, and to draw inferences about the world around them. This linkage is missing in many of the other rhetorical frameworks." (Hallahan, 1999, p. 206).

The broad applicability and lack of rigid definitions of frame analysis can be used as a strength as long as the context is made clear. This enables the researcher to highlight the parts of frame analysis that contributes most meaningfully to their study, Hallahan argued (1999). Therefore, the following section will clarify how I will apply this theory to my own research.

2.4. Frame theory applied

In this research I will apply frame theory to provide an overview of how Norwegian news outlets frame China and Norway's relationship with China. The section above has outlined that frame theory can be a useful framework for the researcher to observe and set the basic foundations for what a set of news discourse looks like. I argue that frame theory proves a particularly useful framework in the context of Norway, given the high level of freedom of speech and diverse media landscape in where multiple narratives co-exist (Østbye, n.d.)

Based on the description above, I understand the role of a researcher using frame theory as an observer in categorising frames, and an analyst in interpreting the meaning of these frames. In combination, this will help the foundations for further research on the topic. As the literature review above proved, this foundation is lacking in the field of media discourse of the Sino-Norwegian bilateral relationship. Applying frame theory to this, I will be able to provide novel and valuable information that can be applied to studies of both media discourse and to Western-Chinese diplomatic dynamics.

In fulfilling the role as an observer, I let myself be inspired by how Bērziņš (2022) categorised the media frames in their research on how Chinese state-owned framed the Nordic countries. Their research found the frames used were for example "China is a partner", "the Arctic will benefit from China", and "China is not trusted". The frames were presented in

graphs, quantifying how often and where the frames occurred to provide a common point of reference for the researcher and the reader in analysing the results. The findings were then explained textually in where examples were provided and explanation for how the frames were portrayed.

In fulfilling the role of an analyst, I will be inspired by how Reese et al. (2001) understood the meaning of the frame. Inspired by Gitlin (1980), they wrote that the frame is “a site where dominant social power is produced. In those terms, he studies the contest for the frame in terms of how hegemony is reproduced through the media” (2001, p. 126). Given this, I understand frames to not simply reflect different approaches to journalistic stories, but that the journalist’s decision of which frames to use reveal structures of existing societal power. By identifying and analysing these frames, researchers can reveal the source of these structures of power and analyse in what ways these frames dominate the media discourse.

Therefore, the discussion in this study will combine the lessons learnt from the literature review on which factors are dominating in the Sino-Norwegian bilateral relationship with the frames found in my own research. This will help guide our understanding on China’s influence in Norway and how the Norwegian media respond to China’s growing power.

3. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study use discourse analysis to investigate the frames used by Norwegian media in their coverage of China since 2016. The qualitative nature of this research calls for a verbal description and interpretation, rather than a statistical method of analysis (Hammersley, 2013). Understanding the framing of China in Norwegian media is crucial for understanding the interconnected dynamics of international relations, media representations, and public perceptions. This research seeks to outline the dominant narratives, perspectives, and discourses that shape the portrayal of China in Norwegian media discourse. To achieve this objective, this will require a methodological process in where I can derive a text-based interpretative, qualitative approach to Norwegian news frames of China from. This will allow for an in-depth examination of the topics covered and language used, and to draw links between articles, identify recurring themes and distinguish co-existing news frames (Linström and Marais, 2012).

Concretely, I collected a sample of 14 news media articles from *Aftenposten*, NRK and *Klassekampen* that concerned the Sino-Norwegian relationship specifically over the course of eight years. These articles were analysed using frame theory in where they were categorised based on thematic perspectives on the matter. The frames were then used to inform a discussion on how the Norwegian news media understands what kind of power China is in relation to Norway and which remedies the media suggests for dealing with China.

The following section will outline the methodological considerations in detail made while conducting this research. Firstly, I will explain how the news media outlets were chosen and how each of them meaningfully contributes to my research. This part will also provide some basic information on each of the outlets to give an impression of what kind of news outlets this study is collected data from. Secondly, I will outline how I chose the case studies and, hence, which times frames of data collection have been chosen. This will be done by

drawing links to the literature review to ensure that the case studies provide a comprehensive study of the Sino-Norwegian relationship. Thirdly, I provide a detailed account for how I collected the data using the digital archives of the three news media outlets. Lastly, I comment on how I analysed the data collected and what considerations I made in the process.

3.1. Choosing the news outlets

While choosing the sources for data collection, there were a few requirements I had with each of the newspapers. Firstly, I needed to collect data from a broad range of political thought in Norway to demonstrate the different editorial considerations made by Norwegian news media outlets. Although all newspapers have been theoretically politically independent in Norway since 1995, all news media have an agenda that they base their reporting on (Østbye, n.d.). I therefore collected data from news outlets that have generally report from the political right, the left and from the centre. Secondly, due to this thesis' interest on foreign news, all the outlets naturally needed to have sufficient coverage of foreign issues, and preferably an invested interest in China-related issues specifically. Thirdly, a study conducted by Kantar found that in recent years there's been an undeniable increasing trend of consuming news digitally, either through eNewspapers or news agencies' websites (Karlsen, 2023). Therefore, this study will investigate news outlets that have extensive coverage on digital platforms. Lastly, frame theory suggests that media is a central factor in shaping public opinion, but this can only be true if they hold a considerable level of trust and be widely read amongst the population. This will be further elaborated on in the following section.

After careful consideration of the above-mentioned requirements, I decided to collect data from: NRK, Aftenposten and Klassekampen. The following section will provide some basic information of each of these news media outlets.

The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) is state-sponsored and by far the largest and most influential public service media in Norway. The government-issued *NRK-*

plakaten (in English: the NRK-poster) mandates NRK to facilitate public debate and promote democracy. It must also be politically independent (Norwegian Media Authority, 2020). As part of the national budget, NRK is fully funded by the state. In 2021 the fund totalled to 6.35 billion Norwegian kroner (approximately 5,5 million euro) (Ibid.). Although there are occasional discussions about NRK's de facto neutral stance, NRK is generally perceived to be politically neutral with its main purpose being to inform the general public rather than push a political agenda. NRK is a natural outlet to include in a study such as this one due to its broad scope and influential position in the Norwegian society at large. In 2023, 1 500 800 used NRK as a digital news source, which makes up 30% of the population (Karlsen, 2023).

The second news media outlet chosen for this study, Aftenposten, was established in 1890. At the time, it sympathised with the conservative party called Høyre (meaning the right). However, in the latter half of the 20th century they became independent and started reporting from a more politically centered perspective (Østbye, n.d.). Although Aftenposten is a national newspaper, it additionally serves as a regional newspaper for the Oslo region. According to numbers from Kantar media studies agency, Aftenposten had a total of 524 500 readers (including online readers and subscribers to their physical newspaper) (Karlsen, 2023). It is the most read eNewspaper in Norway with 34 000 daily readers.

Klassekampen's (literally translates to the class struggle) tagline is "the daily newspaper for the Left". It has a history of being closely linked to the Marxist-Leninist ideology but has since moderated itself to the radical left (Østbye, n.d.). Including both readers of their physical newspaper and online readers, Klassekampen has a total of 113 200 readers where 12 800 reads it digitally (Karlsen, 2023). It is the smallest news outlet chosen for this study. Yet, this newspaper was chosen for this research because it adds a valuable and unique approach to Norway's relationship to China. It is a valuable addition to this study as it widens the political spectrum of the outlets included in this research. Klassekampen, as this

research will demonstrate, also has an articulated coverage of ideology in global politics. As ideology is a central point of conflict in the relationship between Norway and China, the aim is that Klassekampen might exemplify how this ideological debate is pushed in Norwegian media.

3.2. The news outlets' trust amongst the Norwegian population

Frame theory suggests that the frames used to describe the real world through media create mental images in people's heads and, eventually, shape public opinion (Hallahan, 1999). However, this may only be true if the public trust the news and media they consume. This thesis builds on the assumption that the higher trust the public has in a newspaper, the more likely the newspaper is to influence public thought. This section will outline how the three media outlets differ in terms of trust amongst the Norwegian population, and what implications that may have on my study.

The most recent study by the Norwegian Media Authorities from 2019-2020 found that NRK ranked as the most trusted news media in Norway, with about 80% of Norwegians stating that they have "really high" or "high" trust to NRK (2020). Aftenposten ranked as number three in the study with 60% of the interviewees stating their trust in this newspaper. Klassekampen's trust had an average of 29% and ranked 8th out the total of 11 news media that were included in the study (Norwegian Media Authority, 2020). Therefore, all three news outlets rank amongst the top eight most trusted in Norway.

However, the difference in trust implies that NRK and Aftenposten will have a bigger impact on public opinion on China, than Klassekampen. It is worth mentioning that these numbers reflect the perception amongst the Norwegian population in general, and not on amongst the readers of the respective newspapers. It may be assumed that the trust level amongst the regular readers of Klassekampen is higher than amongst the general Norwegian population. Due to Klassekampen's far left stance, voters of conservative parties might

automatically have reduced trust to this newspaper primarily because of its political stance. Similarly, since political independence is at the core of NRK'S agenda, they appeal to a large portion of the Norwegian population, thus increasing their trust nationally.

3.3. Case studies and their time frames

A quick google search of news stories on China by these three news media outlets indicate a large variety of types of stories on China. They concern global political issues such as military tensions in Taiwan and a tighter Sino-Russian relationship, domestic societal issues in China such as increased unemployment and a sluggish economy. Rather surprisingly, multi-billionaire Jack Ma has also gotten a few stories. However, due to the limited scope of this research and its interest in the Sino-Norwegian relationship specifically, I narrow down the data collection to concern only three case studies. The time frame chosen for each case study is indicated in brackets.

- The immediate discussion after the announcement the normalisation of the Sino-Norwegian relation (December 19-26, 2016)
- The discussion of a free trade agreement (FTA) between Norway and China (2021)
- China's influence in the Arctic (2023)

As outlined in the literature review, these have been the most important factors, economically and politically speaking, in the Sino-Norwegian relationship since 2016 (Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2016; Lanteigne, 2017). By using these case studies, I aim to demonstrate how the media (with their journalists) frame the relationship between China and Norway. Not only do these case studies open up for analyses on different themes, but as they expand over an 8 year period, they also allow for a historical overview of Norwegian media frames of China. I elaborate on why each of these case studies with their times frames were chosen below.

The declaration of normalisation took place on Dec 19th 2016 and gained immediate media attention which lasted for one week. Therefore, the time frame for this case study is relatively short (from Dec 19th to Dec 26th). As mentioned in the literature review, some people found the premises for this declaration controversial and sparked immediate reactions for a wide variety of sources (Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2017). Although it was a long-awaited solution to the conflict between Norway and China, it was a peak of disagreement in Norway for how to deal with China as many people disagreed with the agreement. Therefore, this case study serves as a valuable contribution to this study to demonstrate the difference in domestic media frames of China.

The two other case studies differ from the first one both thematically and in terms of time periods. China's involvement in the Arctic and negotiations of an FTA are processes that have stretched over a longer period of time, unlike the single event of Brende signing a paper in Beijing. For both of these case studies, there is not such a single event that have greatly shaped the media narrative of them. However, minor events and updates on both China in the Arctic and the negotiations on the FTA gained some media attention.

3.4. Method of data collection

To collect the data, I used the digital archives of the websites of NRK (www.nrk.no), Klassekampen (www.klasskampen.no) and Aftenposten (www.aftenposten.no). I initially intended to use Google's news archive, but it quickly became apparent that it only showed a limited collection of articles. In addition, the websites were easier to navigate through and gave a better overview of the collection of potential articles. For example, www.nrk.no thematically categorises all their online articles, where "Norway and China" is its own category. Here I could easily get an overview of all the articles that mention the relationship between the two countries.

Table 1: Overview of keywords used to search for articles on each of the newspapers:

Case Study	Search word	English translation
Normalisation agreement	Normaliseringserklæring	Declaration of normalisation
	Normalisering Kina	Normalise China
	Kina og Norge	China and Norway
China's interest in the Arctic	Arktis Kina	Arctic council
	Kinesisk forskning	Norway and China
	Svalbard ² Kina	Svalbard China
	Arktis Kina	Arctic China
China-Norway free trade agreement (FTA)	Frihandelsavtale Kina	Free trade agreement China
	Norge og Kina	Norway and China
	Handel Kina	Trade China

For each of the news media outlet, per case study, I aimed at selecting two articles. As there are three case studies and three outlets, this would give a total of 18 articles to analyse.

According to Hammersley, qualitative research often uses a small sample size of naturally occurring cases which allows for in-depth examination and to document complexity (2013). In qualitative research, all cases should be understood in their specific context because all events are given meaning based on their context and do not have “pre-determined and fixed characters” (Hammersley, 2013, p. 14). I argue that by using such a small selection of articles, I achieve the in-depth analysis that Hammersley calls for in qualitative research. Yet, by using three case studies, I am also able to draw more general conclusions and apply them to the discourse of China in Norwegian media more generally.

By using only two articles from each newspaper for each case study, the sample might fail to demonstrate the framing nuances for each of the outlets as essential information might

² Svalbard is an island group in the Arctic Sea. It falls under Norwegian sovereignty (CIA, 2024).

be left out of the sample. This applies perhaps especially to a country like Norway in where there is a high level of freedom of speech and public debate has a diverse spectrum of co-existing perspectives. In order to avoid this limitation, the two articles chosen were selected to demonstrate conflicting frames not only between but also within each outlet. This has been done where possible. Where articles were limited, I was forced to choose whatever articles were available.

During the data collection, it became apparent that the three case studies (especially on China's involvement in the Arctic) had gained less media attention than first anticipated. Although I aimed at collecting eighteen articles in total, I was in the end only successful in finding a total of fourteen relevant articles that met the requirement for this study. Aftenposten and Klassekampen had only one article covering China's involvement in the Arctic each, Klassekampen also had only one article on the normalisation back in 2016 and NRK had only one article on the free trade agreement in the chosen time frames. Although this created a slight imbalance in the number of articles collected per outlet per case study, Hammersley argued that qualitative research requires only a small number of articles. I therefore decided to accept this imbalance rather than to include less relevant articles or stories published outside of the chosen time frames.

During the data collection I came across multiple opinion pieces that contained relevant perspectives for this thesis. However, these were not included in the data collection. As much as this thesis is interested in the media output as a whole, it is also interested in how the journalists working for these news media outlets interpret and report on these news event. Opinion pieces are written by external contributors, often without a journalistic background, and do not reflect the media outlet's editorial practises. Moreover, the news coverage of the case studies provides a sufficiently diverse foundation for the analysis intended for this study.

Therefore, despite their relevance, these opinion articles were omitted from the data collection.

Lastly, I want to shortly mention that although Aftenposten only had one new article on China and the Arctic, they had three opinion pieces on the matter. These three articles went into detail of the Arctic-China-Norway dynamic. Therefore, even though there is only one article included in this research, it should not be assumed that the media was not interested in these issues at all. However, for methodological purposes only journalist produced articles were included.

3.5. Method of analysis

After the data collection, there were a few methodological considerations I made prior to analysing the data. In order to categorise and analyse the articles in a meaningful manner, I assessed characteristics that demonstrate editorial considerations made by journalists in the making of the news stories. This included language used, sources included, structure of the stories and which perspective each news story have been written from. In Gu's words, this helps "to evaluate the degree of importance media assigned to each issue and event" (2022, p. 74). This short section will highlight three considerations made in the process of categorising, counting and analysing the frames.

Firstly, although none of the article in the data sample are opinion pieces, almost all the articles included expert sources, statements made by politicians and others who provide insights on the issue. In line with frame theory, the journalists' decision on who, what and how to include reflect the journalist as well as the editorial board's perception on what is important and relevant to tell the story. It is on this idea that the frames have emerged. Therefore, frames such as "normative difference with China is a barrier", do not mean that the journalist has pushed forward such an opinion. Rather it means that the article was fully or in part concerned with this idea and/or included sources that had this opinion. According to

frame theory, this is seen as a reflection of the journalist's preconceived notions of what is relevant to include to tell the story (Hallahan, 1999).

Second, like with any theoretical framework, the frames should be seen as categorisations and a simplification of reality. When reading the upcoming findings, it is important to keep in mind that binary frames are categorisation based on which extremes of the spectrum is most articulated in each article.

Third, it is worth noting that some articles contained multiple, and at times even contradicting, frames. Some frames also overlap with each other. This means that the total number of frames found presented exceeds the number of articles.

4. Findings

After carefully reading, assessing and analysing the 14 articles collected for this study, I found five frames that have dominated the media coverage of the Sino-Norwegian relationship in NRK, Klassekampen and Aftenposten. The articles were collected from the three case studies: the declaration of normalisation between Norway and China (Dec 19th-26 2016), negotiations of a free trade agreement (2021) and China's involvement in the Arctic (2023). I will use the findings derived from this research to answer the question: *What frames have Norwegian media used in its coverage on China since 2016?* My study found that these newspapers have predominantly covered China through five different frames; *China is a partner, China is a threat, Norway and China are getting closer, Norway is powerless, and Normative differences with China is a barrier.*

A comprehensive overview of all the articles can be found in Appendix 1. The appendix provides information on what case study, what outlet and when each of the article was published, as well as which frames were found in each article. In the following section, the articles will be referred to using a number in brackets, ranging from 1 to 14. This number refers to the number each article is given in Appendix 1 and functions as a method of internal referencing.

This section will present the findings from my study. To provide an overview of what outlet and case study the frames can be found, the findings will be presented in graphs as justified in the methodology. There is also a table that show which articles have been categorised into which frame. Then, frame by frame, I will explain in detail how they were portrayed in the data samples. Lastly, I will summarise the frames first in relation to the outlets and then in relation to the case studies, focusing on China in the Arctic since this case study provides the most up-to-date information. These summaries provide a coherent

narrative of how the frames were portrayed in the media, setting the foundation for the following discussion.

4.1. Frames found

My research found five frames that dominate the discourse on coverage of the Sino-Norwegian relationship in Norwegian media: *China is a threat*, *Norway is powerless*, *Normative differences with China is a barrier*, *Norway and China are getting closer*, and *China is a partner*.

Table 2: Distribution of frames based on outlets

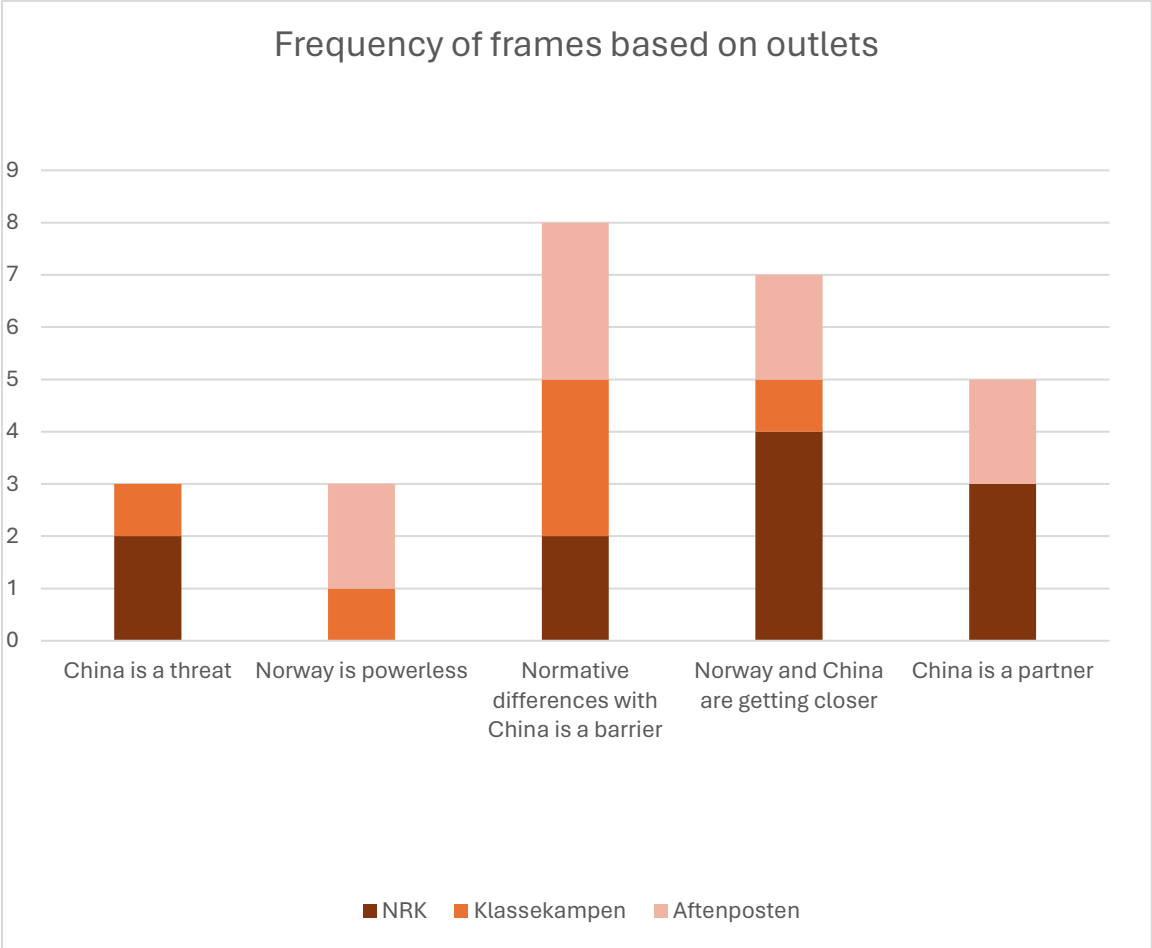


Table 3: Distribution of frames based on case study

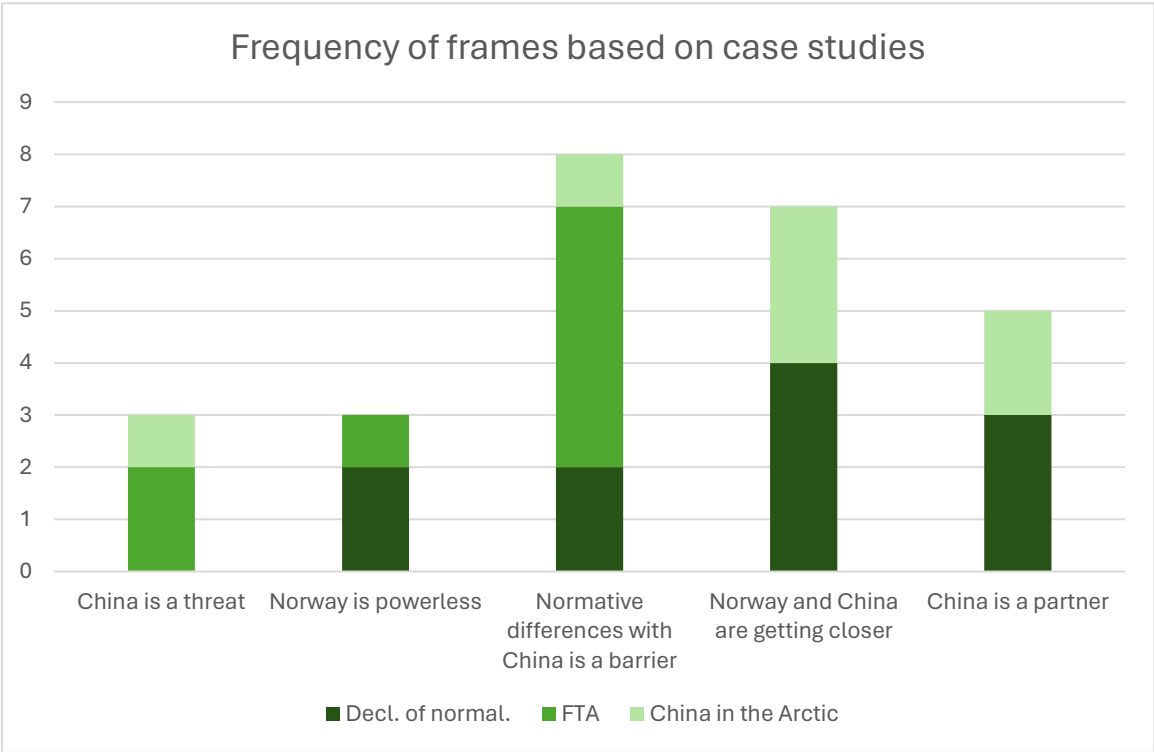


Table 4: Frames that were present in each case study. Please refer to Appendix 1 to see corresponding title to each number

	Declaration of Normalisation	Free Trade Agreement	China in the Arctic
China is a threat		6, 7, 8	12
Norway is powerless	1, 5	9	
Normative differences with China are a barrier	3, 5	6, 7, 8, 9, 10	11
Norway and China are getting closer	2, 3, 4		11, 13, 14
China is a partner	2, 3, 4		13, 14

‘China is a threat’

China was portrayed as a threat to Norwegian society in four of the articles (6, 7, 8, 12). This frame refers only to China as a direct threat to Norway. Some articles mention that the CCP is a threat to Muslims living in China or to the US as a global hegemon (9, 10), however these have not been included under this frame as it does not directly relate to the

bilateral relationship with China and Norway. This frame was most apparent in coverage of the FTA but was also found in one article on China in the Arctic.

The article *Divided on China agreement* (6) from Klassekampen portrayed China as a threat to Norway as an extension of the US. Norway's affiliation with NATO makes China an automatic threat to Norway due to the increasing tension between China and the US. China was primarily portrayed as a military threat. The article concerned the public debate on settling a free trade agreement with China. The angle to the article was that due to global tensions between the US and China, it would have been "unmusical" of Norway to settle such an agreement with China.

Klassekampen also published the article *Lost the battle for a stricter China-line* (7) which also contained this frame. The article portrayed China as a threat to Norway if the free trade agreement gets settled as there is a lot of uncertainty with establishing tighter ties with China as it is an authoritarian regime. Due to the lack of transparency from China, the article included statements from youth politicians stating that there will be no free trade with China, even with a free trade agreement.

Furthermore, NRK portrayed China as a threat through an interview with the then US President Donald Trump's security advisor, John Bolton. *Trump's security advisor: – Norway should not sign a free trade agreement with China* (8) clearly cited Bolton in that China is an existential military, political, economic, and social threat against the western democracies. This is primarily justified through China as an authoritarian country. It clearly framed China as the "other" and as a dangerous rival to the West.

The other article, published by NRK, was titled *Intelligence expert warns about increased Chinese interest for Svalbard* (12). The title immediately reveals a China-sceptic frame by using the word "warn" regarding China's increased involvement in the Arctic. The article referred to a report from the Norwegian National Security Authority (NSM) which

suggested that China will pursue a more offensive and confrontational foreign policy in the coming years. Conclusively, the article noted that although China poses some threats to the Norwegian society, collaboration should not automatically be eliminated as it also poses opportunities that should also be considered when interacting with China.

‘Norway is powerless’

Aftenposten and Klassekampen framed Norway as powerless in its relationship with China in at least one article (1, 5, 9). It was found in all three case studies, although it was particularly prominent in the coverage of the declaration of normalisation. In these articles, it was mostly along the lines of global geopolitical tensions in where China is a major actor, whilst Norway is a small one.

In the article titled – *The agreement is humiliating for Norway* (5), Aftenposten induces a perception of Norway being powerless already in the title. The same applies to the article *Promise not to annoy China* (1) from Klassekampen. The use of the word “humiliating” and “annoy” feeds a discourse in where Norway is positioned on a lower hierarchical rank than China. It gives the impression that Norway has gone far to obey demands from China at the expense of Norwegian values. Further down in article #5 this frame becomes abundantly clear. The article was centred around an interview with Oxford professor in China politics, Stein Ringen. His arguments were that Norway had bowed down too much to accept China’s demands, that the declaration was primarily symbolic, and that the declaration avoids addressing issues of human rights. Based on this, he deemed Norway indulgent.

This frame was also apparent in the article *Accusations of genocide, mass surveillance and sterilisation of Uyghurs: The youth parties have had enough now* (9) from Aftenposten, covering the negotiations of an FTA. In the article, youth party politicians outright criticised the government for considering economic gains over moral conscience. Although the article

concerned human rights issues in China more generally, it focused specifically on the case of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang province. Aftenposten interviewed professor Ringen also in this article. He reiterated his criticism of the Norwegian government of being indulgent and encouraged the state to be active and leading in setting these questions on a global agenda. This article framed Norway as powerless not because it lacks the means to exert power, but because politicians are not assertive enough.

‘Normative differences with China are a barrier’

This was the most common frame found. It portrayed the normative differences between Norway and China as not just complications, but real barriers that disrupt mutual trust and possibilities to collaborate (3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). It appeared in more than half of the fourteen articles, a total of eight times. All the five articles on the free trade agreement framed the normative issues as legitimate barriers in Sino-Norwegian collaboration, and a hinderance in establishing this agreement. Although normative differences were presented as barriers in the relationship between Norway and China, they were also frames as a source of disagreement in the Norwegian public debate. These normative differences are exemplified by the prosecution and institutional brutality against the Uighurs in Xinjiang province. Also the case of Hong Kong and more generally China as an authoritarian regime were presented as points in where China is normatively different from Norway (8, 9, 10).

The younger generation was portrayed as the main driver in setting these normative issues on the agenda (7, 9). For example, the article *Lost the battle for a stricter China-line* (7) from Klassekampen was centred around a lengthy interview with the then leader of the conservative youth leader, Ola Svenneby. He was quoted saying how the left had been blind for the advantages of a free trade agreement in similar ways to how the right has been blind for the disadvantages. Aftenposten had a similar article, also focusing on the youth party’s dissatisfaction with the current public debate on China. A quote from the deputy leader of the

conservative youth party, Leon Solve Mossing Knudsen, stated that trade has always been important for the conservative youth party, but there are more important things than to earn money from salmon trade with China (9). The same article concludes with a quotation from a member of the Norwegian Uighur committee: – When such big human rights violations take place, and we are still thinking about the economy and not our values, what do we do then? It is presented as a rhetorical question. Compared to coverage of the declaration five years before, critical voices of the government’s approach to China take up a significantly larger space in media. Not only does this demonstrate a change in the rhetoric used, but it also reflects a legitimate change in political attitudes towards China, where normative issues are higher prioritised than economic gains.

‘Norway and China are getting closer’

Thus far, the findings presented have highlighted how the media has framed China and Sino-Norwegian collaboration in negative terms. However, my research also found that the debate on China is a polarised one, and different perspectives co-exist in the media discourse. The economic gains, and later on also geopolitical gains, are also portrayed as positive outcomes of a stable, communicative and close relationship with China. These positive frames penetrated the media coverage of China substantially.

The frame ‘Norway and China are getting closer’ suggests an active and positive progression in the bilateral relationship between the two countries. It portrays a wish from both sides to increase collaboration because of its overall favourable outcomes. In this study, this frame was strongly apparent in coverage of the declaration of normalisation (2, 3, 4), but also on China’s involvement in the Arctic (11, 13, 14). It was present in three articles from NRK, two articles from Aftenposten and one from Klassekampen. These articles focused on the mutual benefits of Sino-Norwegian collaboration in a time that calls for a tighter global network to find solutions to shared struggles (such as global political tensions and climate

change). Where this frame was present, questions of human rights abuses and ideological differences were either absent or seen as complications, rather than real barriers, in Norway's approach to China.

Both the articles on the declaration from NRK, –*This is a Christmas present we've been waiting for for a long time* (2) and –*Full normalisation in the relationship with China* (3) framed the declaration as an overall positive development. There were no critical voices of the declaration included in either of the articles. Both articles focused on the economic gains the declaration would have for the seafood industry, specifically whitefish and king crab. Article #2 referred to the declaration as a “Christmas gift” for the seafood sector already in the title, which exemplified the optimistic tone of the rest of the article. Article #3 also was mostly centred around interviews with Brende and the then prime minister, Erna Solberg. It highlighted how Brende and Solberg saw the declaration as a political success, not just for them but for Norwegian diplomacy at large. A quote from foreign Børge Brende highlighted the favourable outcome for the salmon farming industry, maritime sector, and offshore industry (3). Although the declaration was settled using diplomacy, these two articles from NRK framed the issue as primarily of an economic nature.

Aftenposten's article *The relationship between China and Norway is normalising after six years of ice front* (4) takes a similar approach to article #4 where the government's diplomatic success stands at the centre. The opening sentence in the article is a quote from Brende stating that the signing of the declaration was a *day of joy*. The main argument of the article is how the declaration allows for the resumption of important bilateral collaboration such as a free trade agreement and collaboration in the Arctic.

The frame was absent in the coverage of the FTA but reemerged in 2023 on the coverage of China in the Arctic (11, 13, 14). Once again did NRK have the most optimistic coverage of Sino-Norwegian bilateral collaboration. It was particularly prominent in the article *Huitfeldt: – China plays a central role in reducing the atom threat* (13). It describes

how Norway and China's relationship is not only getting closer, but it is also taking new forms. It is transferring from being a solely economic power to also becoming a geopolitical partner. After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, China and Russia have established a closer bilateral relationship. This article focuses on the optimistic outlook foreign minister, Huitfeldt, saw this, and framed it as an opportunity to use China as a peace mediator between Russia and the West.

Klassekampen's article *Does not want collaboration on ships* (11) elaborates on this idea. Quoting China-researcher Andreas Østhagen they write that Norway used to be supportive of Russia's involvement in the Arctic region, however now China has replaced Russia in this role. Østhagen is further quoted in that natural resources from the Arctic will only be shipped to China more and more in the coming years. Lastly, the article also highlighted the importance of Sino-Russian collaboration in the Arctic, both in terms of research on climate and for military practises.

The last article in this frame, Aftenposten's *Germany, France and... Norway? Unrest under the midnight sun may explain why the China-elite is coming exactly here* (14) also highlights the role of the Russian invasion in Ukraine in changing Norway's approach to China. The article describes that Russia has been excluded from the Arctic council because of the invasion. Without Russia, China refuses to recognise the Arctic council. As much as China is Norway's key to Russia, this article framed Norway as China's key back into the Arctic council. The article claimed that the aim is to give China a friendly face around the table.

'China is a partner'

China was portrayed as a partner of Norway in six of the articles (2, 3, 4, 7, 13, 14). This frame refers to the fact that Norway and China have an established bilateral relationship that is mutually beneficial. China was framed as two different types of partners: economic partner and geopolitical partner.

In coverage of the declaration, China was framed solely as an economic partner and, most importantly, as an importer of Norwegian seafood. Articles #2 and #3 from NRK and #4 from Aftenposten framed the declaration as a new start for Sino-Norwegian partnership. It allowed for a new start for economic cooperation.

The article *Lost the battle for a stricter China-line* (7) from Klassekampen framed China as an economic partner. However, the interviewees included in this article were strongly opposed to such a close partnership with China. It recognised the dominating role of China in the current geopolitical landscape but rejects the benefits of encouraging China in becoming a leading global power.

By 2023, Norway and China's partnership has transformed. Coverage of China in the Arctic used a discourse in where China was framed as a geopolitical strategic partner, in addition to being an economic partner. Article #13, *Huitfeldt: – China plays a central role in reducing the atom threat*, is the only article in this study that explicitly mentions how China can be a key actor in helping Norway not only economically, but also geopolitically. It framed China not as something the government needs to *deal with*, but as a key to consolidating global peace.

4.2. Mapping the narrative

Based on the findings presented above, the following section will contextualise the frames given the outlets and case studies used in this study. This section does not interpret the meaning of the frames, but rather highlight the most prominent trends identified in the data sample.

4.2.1. Mapping the frames by outlet

Klassekampen stood out from the two other outlets in the way that it framed China and Norway's relationship with it in almost exclusively negative frames.³ It had a unique focus on Norway as a small and powerless state in navigating through great political powers. Although it was evident in all case studies, it was particularly prominent in coverage of China in the Arctic. China as an authoritarian regime was framed as an ideological barrier in collaboration with Norway. Neither NRK nor Aftenposten focused on the global order, the role of ideology and great power politics to the same degree as Klassekampen. As outlined in the methodology section, Klassekampen has an overall lower level of news production than Aftenposten and NRK. Nonetheless, it covered negotiations of the FTA quite substantially, and more in-depth than the two other outlets.

In contrast with Klassekampen, Aftenposten and NRK reported on China using generally quite similar frames, although there were some noteworthy differences. NRK had a generally more balanced style of reporting, using both positive and negative frames to describe the Sino-Norwegian relationship. Interestingly, NRK never framed Norway as powerless. It had a central focus of politicians' role in mediating the relationship with China, giving more agency to Norway as a state, compared to the two other outlets. In contrast, article #9 from Aftenposten encouraged Norway to be a more active and leading actor in its engagement with China and set the standard for how Western democracies should engage with China.

Aftenposten generally used more negative frames than NRK. In the coverage of the declaration of normalisation and the FTA, China was framed in negative terms in all but one article (the remaining article had a generally fact-based and neutral frame), with a

³ By using the word 'negative', I mean that the frame portrayed China and its relationship to Norway as disadvantageous for Norway or increasingly more hostile and distant. With 'positive' frames, I refer to how the Sino-Norwegian relationship was portrayed as beneficial or developing to become tighter.

distinguished focus on human rights issues. However, the discourse took a 180 degree turn in 2023 when they suddenly framed China as a peaceful global actor and partner of Norway.

4.2.2. Mapping the frames by case study

Across the three outlets, the case study that was framed in the most negative terms was negotiations of an FTA. None of the outlets used any of the positive frames ('Norway and China are getting closer', or 'China is a partner') in their coverage of the FTA. Outspoken concerns about an FTA with China also gave new life to criticism on the declaration of normalisation in several of the articles. This time with more outspoken criticism towards the Norwegian state than back in 2016. The negative portrayal of the FTA was most obvious through the frame 'Normative differences is a barrier'. The articles analysed framed human rights concerns regarding Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang as the primary obstacle in settling an FTA with China. This frame highlights the core of the larger debate of normative differences versus economic gains that was evident in all the articles analysed in this study. They, and especially the articles on the FTA, demonstrate a complicated relationship with China and a divided public debate in Norway.

The frames used in the discourse of China's involvement in the Arctic demonstrates the most recent narrative of China in Norwegian media, in 2023. The findings made from this case study add novel and valuable information that can point towards how the Norwegian government, the media and the public will approach and interact with China in the future. The articles analysed demonstrate that the media discourse portrays the threat of Chinese surveillance, military confrontations, and economic retaliations are perceived as the pressing issues. Yet, arguments supporting Chinese collaboration is granted a significant level of attention in the media discourse. The articles reveal fascinating insights in how the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has affected China's relationship with Norway and the West. Instead of rejecting China as an ally of Russia, China is seen as a potential mediating bridge

between the 'East' and the 'West'. All three outlets describe the Arctic as an arena where these dynamics are highlighted. Klassekampen even described it as a playground for the great power political triangle between USA, Russia, and China (11). They wrote that the Arctic is a region of primarily symbolic politics (as Russia and China have had military practices in the Arctic) rather than being a frontier of any real-life conflicts.

5. Discussion

This investigation on how NRK, Klassekampen and Aftenposten have framed China predominantly within these five frames: China is a threat, *Norway is powerless*, *Normative differences with China is a barrier*, *Norway and China are getting closer*, and *China is a partner*. In addition, this study found that the language used, and perspectives applied differ through time and across outlets, at times substantially. The findings demonstrate the coexistence of multiple, and at times conflicting, frames of China in the Norwegian news media. It demonstrates a complicated diplomatic relationship that used to be primarily motivated by economic opportunities, but recently also geopolitical benefits have taken a more central role in their bilateral relationship. The media frames generally coincide with the narrative outlined in the academic sphere but diverges on some points. This will be explored in detail in this section.

An essential part of the news media's role is to give an as accurate representation of the real world as possible. Assessing the findings in relation to the existing academic literature can give an indication of how successful media has been in its duty of providing a balanced, fact-based, and accurate representation of the Sino-Norwegian relationship. Where media has not done this successfully, provides an opportunity to assess how and where media's construction of meaning has diverged. This type of analysis can bridge any discrepancies between the political reality and how the media reports on it.

Therefore, in this section I will interpret the implications of my findings by comparing and contrasting them to previous literature. Then, I will outline the challenges and limitations related to my study before concluding my study.

5.1. Applying the frames to the academic literature

As found in the literature review, economic incentives have been the primary motivation for establishing a stable and friendly relationship between Norway and China (Sverdrup-Thygeson, 2015; Bekkevold, 2021; Andersen, 2018). However, as noted by Andersen in 2018, non-economic factors would influence the bilateral relationship to an increasing extent in the future. The findings developed from coverage of China's role in the Arctic demonstrate that China is becoming an increasingly important geopolitical strategic partner for Norway. Findings derived from coverage of the FTA suggests that normative differences (especially human rights) take up an increasingly important role in the news frames of the Sino-Norwegian relationship. This study therefore confirms Andersen's six-year-old hypothesis that non-economic factors would be more influential in the future (2018).

The addition of such a strategic geopolitical development in the Sino-Norwegian relationship has sparked confusion as to what extent Norway can collaborate with China as it might pose security threats. Both in the literature and in the media frames, the great question remains on China's "real" intention in getting involved in the Arctic. There are some scholars, such as Bekkevold (2021) and Lanteigne (2017), that have argued that there are some security threats associated with increased Chinese activity in the Norwegian Arctic region. However, Edstrøm, Stensdal and Heggelund (2020) specified that these should not be overstated. They argued that although China has some interests in the region, Chinese activity in general is still quite low. The wave of interest in energy and transportation never kicked off like expected and the number of planned projects has decreased in the past few years (Ibid.). My study show that the media has disproportionately focused on the security threats and the negative aspects of Chinese involvement in the Arctic. For example, Articles #11 and #12 explicitly show deep security concerns associated with increased Chinese activity in the Arctic and argues that China is the most concerning security threat to Norway in 2023. They do so

without providing a counterargument. To the reader, this might indicate a great reason for concern for how China “behaves” in the Arctic. According to Edstrøm, Stensdal and Heggelund (2020), this creates unnecessary fear. A plausible explanation for why the media has done this might be media’s tendency to sensationalise events and give them more importance and urgency than is the reality. As a result, the security threats associated with China in the Arctic might have been slightly overstated.

Furthermore, although the power imbalance between Norway and China is big, the frame ‘Norway is powerless’ was only found in three articles. Despite China’s growing power since 2016, this study suggests that between 2016 and 2023, Norway became gradually more confrontational on points they disagreed. A big change from the big compromise Norway did to China in 2016 by signing the declaration of normalisation. The subsection titled *China needs a friendly face around the table* in the article *Germany, France and... Norway? Unrest under the midnight sun may explain why the China-elite is coming exactly here* (14) from Aftenposten does not only suggest that Norway and China are getting closer, but introduces the idea that Norway can actively pursue a closer relationship with China with an aim is to provide a safe space for China within the council. As a result, Norway is more assertive and confident in its relationship with China. It sets questions of normative differences on the agenda, whilst also pursuing the economic benefits offered. This type of framing is absent in the academic literature. Yet, it does provide novel and noteworthy evidence to future research suggested by Waage and Lindgren (2021). They called for further studies on how small states, such as Norway, interact with China to gain a better understanding of how small states can use their power to interact with China. This finding provides a suitable case study for studies interested in solutions to power imbalances with China.

However, my findings also contradict some of the previous literature on Western media discourses on China. It has identified a way of framing China that has not yet received

scholarly attention. A study done by Gu suggested that Western media (German media in their case) framed China in predominantly in negative terms (2019). Although negative frames dominated the narrative of China before, this study show a softer and more positive approach to China. This sets the foundation for further research on exploring China-optimism in Western media discourse. Forsby and Sverdrup-Thygeson (2022) hypothesised that China's outgoing softer approach to Western countries might be an indication of a fear in China of being economically excluded similarly to how Russia was excluded after the invasion on Ukraine. However, further research is needed to confirm this.

5.2. Challenges and limitations

As with any research, this study suffers from a few limitations. I have identified four of the most pressing ones below.

Firstly, the generalisability of the results might be limited as I was the only researcher conducting this study. Reese et al., argued that having a single researchers doing frame analysis increases the chances of research bias and creating frames arbitrarily (2001). This limitation of using frame theory was extensively assessed in the theoretical framework section. However, within the premises of this master's thesis I am required to be the only author of this paper. Nonetheless, to limit this pitfall, I have consulted my findings and frames with my supervisor as well as fellow students. In addition, I aimed at making the frames as rooted in examples from the news articles collected as possible to limit the creation of arbitrary frames.

Secondly, the chosen methodological approach was constrained by the difference between the three news media outlets used in this study in terms of size, reach and credibility. Klassekampen was smaller in so-to-speak every aspect compared to NRK and Aftenposten. It is also less trusted than the two other outlets. However, I argue that they are still the most suitable newspapers for this task since they represent a broad spectrum of political ideas

present in the Norwegian media landscape. Together, they provide a comprehensive impression of how the China-Norway relation is perceived by Norwegian journalists.

Thirdly, due to the limited scope of this research it only investigates three case studies. Given that they span over an eight-year period, they might provide a fragmented impression of the Sino-Norwegian relationship. In addition, the case studies declaration of normalisation in 2016 and negotiations of an FTA in 2021 have a five-year gap. This study has simply failed to investigate any developments taking place in-between these two events. However, the literature review demonstrated that in this five-year period, there were no other major events taking place that greatly shaped the two countries' bilateral relation (Bekkevold, 2021). Media coverage during this five-year period focused relatively extensively on the on-going negotiations of an FTA, however this discussion peaked in 2021. Since my study investigates the frames used throughout the entire year of 2021, I hope to have covered the most dominating frames that shape the discussion of the FTA.

Lastly, my research has exclusively studied news content available through the websites of the three newspapers included in this study. *Aftenposten* and *Klassekampen* even require the readers to pay monthly memberships to access their content. However, according to a report by the media data agency Kantar Group, editorial news agencies are losing their influence amongst the Norwegian population (Karlsen, 2023). The report found that 32% of Norwegians rely on social media as their most important source of news. In the age group 12-17 years old, this number was as high as 72%. This means that the news content studied in this research has a continuously decreasing influence on public perception, especially amongst the younger generation. With the growing role of social media in news consumption, I therefore suggest that future studies extend frame theory and related research to studies on social media. This will allow for a more meaningful discussion on not only which frames are used, but also how these frames influence public opinion.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the question: *What frames have Norwegian media used in its coverage on China since 2016?* It has offered the first ever investigation of how the Norwegian news media outlets Aftenposten, Klassekampen and NRK have framed Norway's relationship to China. The study used the case studies of the declaration of normalisation in 2016 after a six-year diplomatic freeze, negotiations of a free trade agreement (2021), and China's increased interest in the Arctic (2023). My research has found five frames that dominated the discourse: *China is a threat, Norway is powerless, Normative differences is a barrier, Norway and China are getting closer, and China is a partner.*

In summary, these outlets have framed the biggest challenges in the Sino-Norwegian relationship to be normative differences, imbalance of power and security issues. In combination with the economic opportunities they pose for each other, this results in a complex bilateral relation. In the media discourse, China is portrayed as a great global power that intimidates Norway. Yet, the most recent articles (from 2023) frame their relationship as more communicative where both parties have a softer approach to each other although questions of security and trust are actively discussed. This study can be further developed with research on other Western liberal democracies. The significance of this research goes beyond Norway as media coverage and frames of China is shared with many European countries.

The above discussion has demonstrated that the media framing of China in Norwegian media generally aligns with the existing literature on the field. Although some events are dramatized and overstated in the media, the underlying arguments are mostly reminiscent of each other. Particularly, the role of human rights violations in China and the security threat of increased Chinese activities in the Arctic are dramatized by the media without having scientific grounding in the literature.

Recommendation for further studies concern the finding that China was framed as a softer and more communicative diplomatic partner after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This study was interested in the frames used by Norwegian media, but the findings will also be of great value to evaluate the consequences of the CCP's attempts to increase their discourse power globally (Sloss, 2023). It is beyond the scope of this research to assess whether this shift in discourse is a direct result of policy change by the CCP. This will add novel insights on a debate that has sparked increased academic interest over the past decade (Rolland, 2020; Andersen, 2018).

Summary

Když Norsko v roce 2010 udělilo Nobelovu cenu za mír čínskému disidentu Liou Siao-povi, čínská vláda reagovala zmrazením diplomatických vztahů. Až v roce 2016 se vztahy mezi zeměmi normalizovaly na základě deklarace, která ale vzbudila rozporuplné reakce – někteří ji oslavovali, zatímco jiní tvrdili, že je deklarace v naprostém rozporu s norskými hodnotami. Tato studie zkoumá čtrnáct článků tří vybraných norských médií (Klassekampen, Aftenposten a NRK) a analyzuje, jak tato média prezentovala Čínu v průběhu tří významných událostí v čínsko-norských vztazích: 1. deklarace normalizace v roce 2016, 2. vyjednávání o dohodě o volném obchodu v roce 2021, a 3. rostoucí vliv Číny v Arktidě v roce 2023. Tato interpretativní a kvalitativní analýza diskurzu o Číně v norských médiích vychází z teorie rámcování. Studie odhalila v narativu o Číně pět převládajících rámců. Z toho vyplývá, že o Číně existuje několik protichůdných rámců, vykazujících pozitivní i negativní hodnocení spolupráce s Čínou. To naznačuje složitý diplomatický vztah motivovaný především ekonomickými příležitostmi, ovšem v poslední době také geopolitickou spoluprací.

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Appendix

Appendix no. 1: Articles collected in the data sample (Table)

#	Case study	News media outlet	Original title	Translated title	URL	Date of publication	Frames found
1	Declaration of normalisation	Klassekampen	Lover å ikkje irritere Kina	Promise not to annoy China	https://klassekampen.no/artikkel/2016-12-20/lover-a-ikkje-irritere-kina	Dec 20th 2016	‘China is powerless’
2		NRK	– Dette er en julegave vi har ventet på lenge	–This is a Christmas present we’ve been waiting for for a long time	https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/-dette-er-en-julegave-vi-har-ventet-pa-lenge-1.13283593	Dec 19th 2016	‘Norway and China are getting closer’ ‘China is a partner’
3			– Full normalisering i forholdet med Kina	–Full normalisation in the relationship with China	https://www.nrk.no/norge/-full-normalisering-i-forholdet-med-kina-1.13282574	Dec 19th 2016	‘Normative differences with China is a barrier’ Norway and China are getting closer’ ‘China is a partner’
4		Aftenposten	Forholdet mellom Kina og Norge normalisert etter seks år med isfront	The relationship between China and Norway is normalising after six years of ice front	https://www.aftenposten.no/okonomi/i/X17QE/forholdet-mellom-kina-og-norge-normalisert-etter-seks-aar-med-isfront	Dec 19 th 2016	‘Norway and China are getting closer’. ‘China is a partner’
5			– Avtalen med Kina er ydmykende for Norge	– The agreement with China is humiliating for Norway	https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/8M9r/avtalen-med-kina-er-ydmykende-for-norge	Dec 19 th 2016	‘Norway is powerless’ ‘Normative differences with China are a barrier’
6	FTA with China	Klassekampen	Splittet om Kina-avtale	Disagreement on China agreement	https://klassekampen.no/artikkel/2021-06-14/splittet-om-kina-avtale	June 14 th 2021	‘China is a threat’ ‘Normative differences with China are a barrier’
7			Tapte kamp om strengere Kina-linje	Lost the battle for a stricter China-line	https://klassekampen.no/artikkel/2023-03-27/tapte-kamp-om-strengere-kina-linje	March 27th 2023	‘China is a threat’ ‘Normative differences with China are a barrier’

8	FTA with China	NRK	Trumps sikkerhetsrådgiver: – Norge bør ikke undertegne en frihandelsavtale med Kina	Trump’s security advisor: – Norway should not sign a free trade agreement with China	https://www.nrk.no/urix/trumps-sikkerhetsradgiver--norge-bor-ikke-undertegne-en-frihandelsavtale-med-kina-1.15443508	April 5th 2021	‘China is a threat’ ‘Normative differences with China are a barrier’
9		Aftenposten	Anklager om folkemord, masseover-våking og sterilisering av uigurer: Nå har ungdomspartiene fått nok	Accusations of genocide, mass surveillance and sterilisation of Uighurs: The youth parties have had enough now	https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/2dmG2G/anklager-om-folkemord-masseovervaaking-og-sterilisering-av-uigurer-naa-har-ungdomspartiene-faatt-nok	Feb 21 st 2021	‘Normative differences with China are a barrier’ ‘Norway is powerless’
10			Bidens folk bruker F-ordet mot Kina. Det setter Norge i en vanskelig skvis.	Biden’s people use the G-word against China. This puts Norway in a difficult position	https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/R9m2xA/bidens-folk-bruker-f-ordet-mot-kina-det-setter-norge-i-en-vanskelig-skvis	Feb 1 st 2021	‘Normative differences with China are a barrier’
11	China’s involvement in the Arctic	Klassekampen	Ønsker ikke skipssamarbeid	Does not want collaboration on ships	https://klassekampen.no/artikkel/2023-03-23/onsker-ikke-skipssamarbeid	March 23rd 2023	‘Normative differences with China are a barrier’ ‘Norway and China are getting closer’
12		NRK	Etterretningsekspert advarer om økende kinesisk interesse for Svalbard	Intelligence expert warns about increased Chinese interest for Svalbard	https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/kina-sin-interesse-for-svalbard-oker--vil-bli-en-maktfaktor-i-arktis-1.16404395	May 10th 2023	‘China is a threat’
13			Huitfeldt: – Kina spelar ei viktig rolle i å redusere atomtruselen	Huitfeldt: – China plays a central role in reducing the atom threat	https://www.nrk.no/urix/kina-og-noreg-i-samtaler-om-ukraina-1.16407396	May 12 th 2023	‘Norway and China are getting closer’ ‘China is a partner’
14		Aftenposten	Tyskland, Frankrike og... Norge? Uro under midnattssolen kan forklare hvorfor Kina-toppen kommer akkurat hit	Germany, France and... Norway? Unrest under the midnight sun may explain why the China-elite is coming exactly here	https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/jlbMaL/tyskland-frankrike-og-norge-uro-under-midnattssolen-kan-forklare-hvorfor-kina-toppen-kommer-akkurat-hit	May 12 th 2023	‘Norway and China are getting closer’ ‘China is a partner’

Disclaimer: the translation of the article titles was done by the researcher and may be subject to minor inaccuracies.