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**How Chinese Media Covered the Cancellation of the
Sister-city Relationship between Beijing and Prague: A
Study Based on Sentiment Analysis and Keyword
Extraction**

Master's Thesis

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Year of the defence: 2024

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
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.

In Prague on 23th, July 2024

Yijin Wang

References

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Abstract

In October 2019, the Prague City Council passed a resolution announcing the termination of sister-city relations with Beijing, and in January of the following year stated the establishment of friendship with Taipei. Under the backdrop of the downward trend in bilateral relations, this incident received attention from the Chinese media. This paper takes the termination of the sister-city relationship between Beijing and Prague as the starting point and analyzes the content and sentiment of Chinese media reports on this incident. The investigated media articles were categorized into institutional media, market-oriented media, and online media, and the publishing period was limited to July 2019 to February 2020. The preliminary statistical investigation based on frequency-based keyword extraction and sentiment analysis led to the conclusion that the sentimental tendencies of Chinese media reports were mainly negative, with special attention to the Taiwan-related part. This paper further examines the sentimental and content differences of articles in different types of media, and provides a more in-depth qualitative interpretation.

Keywords

Prague, Beijing, Sister-city, Chinese Media, Sentiment Analysis, Keyword Extraction

Název práce

Jak čínská média informovala o zrušení vztahu sesterského města mezi Pekingem a Prahou: Studie založená na analýze sentimentu a extrakci klíčových slov

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Introduction

Compared with traditional Western countries (mainly Western Europe and North America), Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has received relatively less attention in Chinese media reports. Although the related academic literature is limited, the contribution of Li Rui, Czeslaw Tubilewicz, Yang Ning, Richard Turcsányi and Runya Qiaoan, Song Lilei and Ding Weiling can still provide complete information on the image changes of CEE in Chinese media from the 1950s to the mid-2010s. Li Rui's investigation covered a span of nearly 30 years from the 1950s to the 1980s. He suggested that Chinese media frequently reported on political events of CEE in the 1950s. In the 1960s and 1970s, as bilateral relations cooled, the comments were more negative, while the number of reports declined as well. In the 1980s, the image of the CEE region was no longer politicized. Due to the demand of promoting reforms, the public could receive more information including culture, technology, education, etc. According to Czeslaw Tubilewicz, Chinese media had a high interest in CEE's post-communist political and economic transformation in the 1990s. Their attitudes went through a transition of positive - negative - a mixture of positive and neutral. Richard Turcsányi pointed out that the media's concern shifted to the West and attention to CEE declined after entering the millennium. Yang Ning's investigation of Chinese media coverage of CEE during the 2000s suggests that the region was stereotyped in media articles as having a weak economy and political turmoil. In the 2010s, when China attempted to establish cooperation with CEE countries, the region returned to the media's scope. Richard Turcsányi and Runya Qiaoan did a brief examination based on the reports from *People's Daily*, which proved the media's increased attention and a more positive attitude toward CEE. Song Lilei and Ding Weiling analyzed CEE's image in the Department of European Affairs of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' official social

media account, which further confirms the increasing attention paid to CEE's politics and economy, while each country also has its own unique image.

In summary, Chinese media coverage of CEE is often influenced by then-Chinese leadership, political events, and bilateral relations. Therefore, the initial assumption is that in the context of the cooling of bilateral relations between China and the Czech Republic, Chinese media coverage of the termination of the sister-city relationship between Prague and Beijing would present a different picture from the positive attitude in the mid-2010s. This paper aims to explore the sentimental tendencies and content characteristics of Chinese media articles reporting on the sister-city incident, and hopes to contribute to possible follow-up investigations on media discourse after the decline of bilateral relations between China and the Czech Republic.

The analytic object of this paper is the articles reporting on the sister-city incident published by Chinese media between July 2019 and February 2020. The main source of the text is the official archive and the social media accounts of the media. Searching engines Google and Baidu were used as auxiliary search tools to ensure that no articles were missed. However, since some webpages have been deleted by the publisher or are inaccessible due to time constraints, it can't be stated that the sources of this paper covered all related media articles from July 2019 to February 2020. The media under investigation are divided into three categories, including institutional media (traditional media and social media platform accounts under the government's control), market-oriented media (operated in the form of enterprises but administrated or financially supported by the government), and online media (private news portals and social media

accounts). In the methodology section below, the author will provide a more detailed introduction and explanation of the classification.

In the first part of the analysis, this paper introduced the background of the cancellation of the Prague and Beijing sister-city relationship, so that audiences can have a basic understanding of the cause, process, and result of the event. Secondly, the author conducted frequency-based keyword extraction and sentiment analysis on the collected texts to examine the overall sentimental tendency and content characteristics, and provided a qualitative explanation of the logic behind them. Subsequently, the collected media articles were divided into three categories according to the above trichotomy. Keyword extraction and sentiment analysis were performed to compare whether the media articles of the three categories differed in sentiment and content features, and further qualitative analysis was performed based on the results of keyword extraction and sentiment analysis. A complete result will be fully presented in the conclusion section, and the limitations of the study and its contribution to subsequent potential projects will be further pointed out as well.

1. Literature review

When discussing the coverage of the Czech Republic in China, it is necessary to point out that the reports are rather limited, thus the number of relevant academic studies is quite few. In most cases, Czechia is categorized under the larger regional classification of “Central and Eastern Europe” and compared with other CEE states such as Poland, Hungary, Estonia, etc. Regarding the Chinese media’s reports on CEE before the 1980s, Chinese scholar Li Rui conducted an investigation in his work *The Changing Image of Eastern Europe in the Chinese Press during the Early 1980s*. He conducted a detailed investigation based on the *Renminribao (People’s Daily)* archive from the 1950s to the 1980s, with the supplementation reports from other official media such as *Cankaoxiaoxi (Reference News)* and Xinhua News Agency, and analyzed the texts from the perspective of the strategy formulation of the Chinese leadership at that time. His work fully reflects the interaction between the media and domestic political changes, which is an indispensable element when examining Chinese media discourse. Finally, to avoid misunderstanding, it needs to be clear in advance that Li defines “Eastern Europe” as the post-socialist countries in Europe, and its geographical scope is consistent with the term “Central and Eastern Europe” used in this thesis.

According to Li’s work, due to the close political relationship between the two sides, Chinese media reported more frequently on CEE in the 1950s and 1960s, with the main attention focused on events in Poland and Hungary.¹ Relations between China and CEE entered a period of decline in the 1960s, and the number of reports on Bulgaria,

¹ Rui, Li. “The Changing Image of Eastern Europe in the Chinese Press during the Early 1980s.” *Bulgarian Historical Review/Revue Bulgare d’Histoire* 3-4 (2015): 14-26.

Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, and Hungary reached its lowest point, while Albania was the only exception in this region because of its close diplomatic relationship with China.² Until 1976, when the Chinese Communist Party had basically determined the necessity of the upcoming reforms, the relations between China and CEE states began to thaw again. After the Chinese President visited Yugoslavia and Romania in 1978, a large number of editorials calling for reforms following the experience of CEE countries began to appear in official media.³ Except for the political and diplomatic situation, the media has extensively reported on the culture, technology, sporting events, and people's lives, reconstructing the image of CEE in Chinese public opinion from a more non-political perspective.⁴

Li further argues that in the early 1980s, out of the demand to promote reform, more information about CEE began to be introduced to the Chinese public.⁵ The Chinese media took the initiative to pay attention to the situation in CEE and published relatively positive comments on the ongoing changes. The 1980 workers' uprising in Poland received significant attention and was reported positively rather than critically.⁶ In international affairs, the media held a negative attitude towards the Soviet Union on the issue of the invasion of Afghanistan, with CEE being portrayed as indirect victims. Romania's independent stance was praised, because at that time the Chinese government was opposing the Soviet Union and seeking to establish a global system.⁷ *People's Daily* described Eastern European countries' involvement in the war in Afghanistan as "having no choice", and claimed that a large number of resources were shipped to the Soviet Union

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

in the name of supporting the war, thus affecting the people's livelihood in CEE countries.⁸ In conclusion, the images of "Central and Eastern European countries" and "the Soviet Union", which were regarded as a whole in the past, began to separate from each other in Chinese media discourse in the 1980s. The countries of CEE were not viewed just as "satellite states" taking orders from Moscow, and ideological judgments were also diminishing.⁹

The *Chinese press coverage of political and economic restructuring of East Central Europe* published in 1997, written by Czeslaw Tubilewicz, is the earliest relevant research that can be retrieved. Compared with Li's study, the primary data selected by Tubilewicz were relatively more extensive, including academic journals in addition to official media. Li was more concerned with the interaction between media and domestic politics and the theme changes of the media articles in his research, while Tubilewicz explored the impact that transformation in CEE had on the Chinese Communist Party and further affected media discourse. Meanwhile, compared with Li's paper, Tubilewicz's analysis of ideological changes in media texts is more complete and sufficient.

Tubilewicz suggested that the Chinese media commentary on economic and political change in the CEE region was strongly ideologically dominated from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s.¹⁰ The experience of CEE was used as a warning case to avoid repeating the mistakes and to educate citizens that only the stable rule of the party-state could avoid the political and economic turmoil encountered in CEE.¹¹ From the late 1980s

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Tubilewicz, Czeslaw. "Chinese press coverage of political and economic restructuring of East Central Europe." *Asian Survey* 37, no. 10 (1997): 927-943.

¹¹ Ibid.

to 1990s, the Chinese media's attitude toward the transformation in the CEE region went through five stages:¹²

1. In early 1989, the media discussion was positive. The changes underway in Hungary and Poland were portrayed in largely affirmative terms as a boost to the ongoing reforms in China.

2. By late 1989, as reforms in CEE deepened further and a wave of liberalization erupted in Chinese civil society, newspapers and academic journals shifted to a more critical presentation. Reports were used to educate the public to be wary of the West's strategy of peaceful evolution, emphasizing that the struggle between socialism and capitalism is not yet over.

3. From 1990 to 1992, when the early stage of transformation caused turmoils in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria, the Chinese media's assessment further pessimized, arguing that the road to capitalism in CEE would be quite difficult and predicting further deterioration in the region.

4. After 1992 and till the second half of 1993, with the changes in CEE had become irreversible, negative evaluations of marketization had almost ended, and positive reports of the pursuit of market economy results appeared. But the capitalist transformation was still denied as it can't bring peace and happiness to the people. The anti-communist wave was exaggerated, with typical images including the occupation and burning of party-owned buildings, the removal of former communists from government and forced unemployment.

5. After the second half of 1993, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and the former East Germany began to be praised for their successes in economic and political

¹² Ibid.

transformation. Even in countries where the process was not yet complete, the Chinese media attempted to maintain a neutral assessment.

Regarding the studies from Tubilewicz, the selection of publications was based on official media and academic journals. His work is more of a commentary on the transformation of CEE in the official media and academia. However, no scholars have investigated the market-oriented media during the same period. The television and radio media had already begun to grow exponentially since the beginning of China's economic reforms in the late 1970s and had become more mature by the 1980s and 1990s. Several "city media" aimed at ordinary city residents were already in operation at the time, such as *Beijingwanbao* (*Beijing Evening News*) and *Xinminribao* (*Xinmin Evening News*, operated in Shanghai). In the context of the tight control of the media by the party-state, it might be assumed that the city media were in line with the official newspapers and academics. But whether the hypothesis is actually the case, and exactly how city media reported on the CEE countries at the time, are still awaiting possible investigations. Therefore, in order to more sufficiently examine the trend in media discourse, in addition to government-controlled media, this thesis also collected market-oriented media and online private or personal media when selecting original media texts.

Throughout the 2000s, China and CEE had almost no interest in each other.¹³

The only academic article can be found is *The Media Landscape of "Others" - Analysis of Central and Eastern European Societies in Chinese Media Reports* published in 2010 by Chinese scholar Yang Ning. This paper examines the overall picture of CEE societies in the 2000s portrayed by the Chinese media in news reports.

¹³ Turcsányi, Richard, and Runya Qiaoan. "Friends or foes? How diverging views of communist past undermine the China-CEE '16+ 1 platform'." *Asia Europe Journal* 18, no. 3 (2020): 397-412.

Yang argues that the Chinese media in the 2000s paid particular attention to the politics and economics of CEE.¹⁴ In contrast to the relatively precise country-specific division of the CEE region in the 1990s, the Chinese media at the start of the new century were targeting a more homogeneous narrative of the CEE region and portrayed it as the “Other”.¹⁵ The political and economic conditions of different countries were generalized, and the differences were ignored. CEE was described as a unit with typical stereotypes as political inefficiency and worrying economic prospects.¹⁶ From the perspective of intercultural communication, this may be caused by differences in political systems and cultural mentality on both sides.¹⁷ Yang gave an example in the paper that the non-turnover in the ruling party in the Chinese political system and the repeating emphasis on social stability have led to a spread mentality in the Chinese public that the tradition of extensive political debate and more frequent changes of power in democracies is destabilizing and unnecessary.¹⁸

Yang also pointed out a widespread problem in the Chinese media in the 2000s, which is the lack of accurate investigation and perception of the political logic and mentality of the countries targeted by the report. Yang introduced a press released by *News References* in October 2008, titled “Czech Prime Minister’s Political Position Shaken by Party’s Senate Election Defeat”. It claimed that the then-Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek considered resigning as leader of his right-wing party after he suffered a crushing election defeat by the left-wing opposition. The article believes that this political crisis may have an

¹⁴ Yang Ning. “The media landscape of ‘Others’—Analysis of Central and Eastern European societies in Chinese media reports.” *News Communication* 4 (2010): 17-19. (in Chinese)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

impact on the Czech Republic's upcoming EU presidency.¹⁹ Indeed, the resignation of the then-Czech prime minister was a political storm and a blow to his party, but under the EU's rotating presidency statute, the change of prime minister does not affect the Czech Republic's appointments and dismissals.

Compared with Li and Tubilewicz's research, Yang's work does not provide a clear narrative and presentation of the collected original texts. The only two sources of information visible in the article are two news reports from Xinhua News Agency and *Reference News* respectively. However, Yang introduced the perspective of cross-cultural communication for the first time when interpreting Chinese media reports on CEE, rather than analyzing it from a political perspective. Yang's research provides necessary inspirations for the analysis of media articles reporting on international interactions that it is important to maintain an awareness of the differences in cultural mentalities on both sides.

Entering the 2010s, China's leadership accelerated the pace of reform and opening up to the outside world. After the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed, the Chinese media's attention to CEE increased significantly. In their paper *Friends or Foes? How Diverging Views of Communist Past Undermine the China-CEE "16+1 Platform"*, Richard Turcsányi and Runya Qiaoan did a brief investigation based on *People's Daily's* coverage with "CEE" in the title. The number of articles from *People's Daily* with "Central and Eastern Europe" in their titles has increased from an average of about two per year before 2012 to about six. At the same time, the neutral and negative tone that dominated

¹⁹ Ibid.

coverage of CEE before 2012 has almost disappeared, with positivity taking over.²⁰

Another conclusion from Turcsányi and Qiaoan is that when Chinese media mentioned CEE before 2012, the basic theme was usually “economic crisis”. This finding is consistent with the argument from Yang mentioned above.

Scholars Song Lilei and Ding Weiling have studied the posts made by the Department of European Affairs of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs on its official account “Zhongouxinshi (Sino-European Messenger)” to explore the image of CEE countries on the new media platform. With 17 million followers and more than 320,000 posts in August 2013,²¹ the account could be recognized as the largest introductory platform on the Chinese internet about the CEE region. At the same time, as it was an authoritative account run by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was able to reflect the attitude of the officials at that time. However, the choice of official accounts as a sample also means that the study is unable to examine the attitudes and tendencies of privately owned online media. New media allows individuals to break away from the traditional media dominated by officials and elites to publish opinions and comments with more personal elements. Therefore, the difference between selecting only official release channels in the context of new media and directly choosing traditional media such as TV and newspapers for research seems to be only in the means of communication, not in the subject of information release and content pluralism. Therefore, out of the above considerations, this thesis includes review articles published by personal media while examining.

²⁰ Turcsányi, Richard, and Runya Qiaoan. “Friends or foes? How diverging views of communist past undermine the China-CEE ‘16+ 1 platform’.” *Asia Europe Journal* 18, no. 3 (2020): 397-412.

²¹ Lilei, Song, and Ding Weiling. “Central and Eastern European Countries Through the Eyes of Chinese Social Media: A Case Study of the Official Micro-Blog of China’s Foreign Ministry with Regard to European Affairs.” *International Communication Gazette* 78, no. 1-2 (2016): 64-82.

Song and Ding's study found that political issues (70%) and economic affairs (24%) continue to be the most reported topics of the CEE region. Official posts are more interested in a specific picture of each country than in regional image building. At the regional level, conceptual posts about "Central and Eastern Europe" predominate, while subregions such as the Visegrád Group, the Baltics, and South-East Europe do not receive much attention. At the country level, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary were the most popular countries compared to others, with 938, 476, and 453 posts respectively. The least postings were made about Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, and Albania. Topics that received the most interaction from regular users included sports, culture, and tourism, while political and economic topics, which were posted the most by official accounts, did not generate much response. This directly reflects the out-of-sync between official concerns and private interests, and further proves the necessity of collecting private media and self-media content. In a follow-up analysis, Song and Ding suggested that the number of posts on a country is strongly positively correlated with its GDP and volume of trade with China, and moderately positively correlated with the closeness of bilateral relations with China. During periods of more frequent bilateral political exchanges, such as 2014 - 2015, the investigated account has correspondingly more postings.

In addition, Song and Ding also suggested that the "Sino-European Messenger" account tends to start from the basic knowledge that Chinese audiences are already familiar with when presenting the image of regions and countries, such as the cuisine of the Balkans, the music of Poland, the Czech Republic as a tourist attraction, and roses in Bulgaria. For countries that are not well known to the Chinese public, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia, the content about their cultural nature and characteristics is

highly limited, and often replaced by economic and political topics. In other words, the account did not provide a more comprehensive and novel introduction to the culture of the target countries, preferring instead to reinforce established impressions. They argued that as the largest official platform on the Chinese internet at the time, the “labeling” of one or a few characteristics of a country may have further strengthened the stereotypes that existed among the public.

To prove the argument that cultural posts about Poland have music as the most prominent theme, the authors of the article show the *Word cloud of the top ten posts on Poland* as a graph. However, the rest of the countries and subregions with their main cultural keywords, such as the Balkans with gastronomy, the Czech Republic and Hungary with tourism, and Bulgaria with roses, are not sufficiently demonstrated and visually displayed. For the sake of completeness of the study, presenting the keywords of the remaining countries at the same time would not only further enhance the audiences’ recognition, but also provide a reliable source for possible follow-up research. Another theme that could be further analyzed is whether there is a positive or negative emotional tendency in the account’s content about CEE countries by capturing keywords with different emotional connotations, which is also one of the direct sources of inspiration for this paper.

Based on the above research, the changes in Chinese media’s attention to the CEE region from the 1950s to the 2010s can be basically summarized. In the 1950s, Chinese media frequently reported on CEE, with the main focus being on political events in Poland and Hungary. During much of the time in the 1960s and 1970s, Chinese media paid less attention to CEE as bilateral relations cooled. It was not until the late 1970s that

the restoration of political communication prompted the media to turn their attention to the region again. In the 1980s, to promote the reform, more information about CEE states was introduced to the public by the Chinese media. In the 1990s, Chinese media had a relatively high interest in the post-communist political and economic transformation of CEE countries. Entering the millennium, the media's concern shifted to the West and attention to CEE declined. It was not until the 2010s, when the then-Chinese leadership attempted to reach cooperation with CEE countries, that the region began to return to the media's perspective. The proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative has made it an urgent need to build strategic "soft power", thus launching a large-scale media campaign guided by the government to improve the contradictory pattern of domestic and foreign public opinion and conduct internal and external publicity.²²

The hypothesis that can be put forward is that after bilateral cooperation went cold in the late 2010s, the wording of the Chinese media towards the CEE countries once again took on a new dimension. However, there has been very limited academic inquiry into Chinese media's portrayal of CEE states. Therefore, this thesis will take the dissolution of the Prague-Beijing sister-city tie as an entry point to investigate the Chinese media's basic narrative and comments on this diplomatic event.

Objectively, researchers from the CEE states may be constrained by language availability, the accessibility of sources, and the reliability of information triggered by the distance of transmission. Political science research can be challenging for foreign researchers due to the nature of the regime in China, especially when conducting field

²² Bahoo, Salman, and Ilan Alon. "News framing of the China's belt and road initiative: A media analysis." *Nordic Journal of Media Management* 1, no. 4 (2020): 495-525.

visits.²³ In addition, political climate change and alterations in diplomatic approaches within the researcher's home country may also have an impact. For Chinese scholars, the marginalization and relative limitations of qualitative research under the current authoritarian regime may prompt scholars to seek out more "data-driven" quantitative research projects, instead of qualitative analysis.²⁴ Sensitivity to national foreign policy has also led Chinese scholars to be more interested in larger international actors, such as the United States and the European Union, rather than in "small states". Moreover, for unknown reasons, Chinese scholars involved in the CEE region seem to pay more attention to the portrayal of the home country in the media of the target country than the basic picture of the target country in the Chinese media.

²³ Reny, Marie-Eve. "Authoritarianism as a research constraint: Political scientists in China." *Social Science Quarterly* 97, no. 4 (2016): 909-922.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

2. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research method, collects media articles related to a specific event within the elective period, and processes textual analysis combined with frequency-based keyword extraction and sentimental investigation on them. Nvivo, as a qualitative data analysis tool, was introduced when conducting initial descriptive statistics on text samples. Further qualitative analysis will be conducted based on frequency-based keyword extraction and sentiment judgments, aiming to further explain the results, such as the logic behind the repeated mention of a particular topic (for instance, Taiwan and the mayor of Prague) by the media, or to verify the hypothesis that different media have basically consistent sentiment tendencies when reporting the sister-city incident.

2.1 Time range and collection method of analytic resources

The original analytic data consisted of online articles from simplified Chinese media of the PRC, with publishing time between July 2019 and February 2020. The decision of the collecting period is based on the occurrence of the main diplomatic event, which is the cancellation of the sister tie between Prague and Beijing in October 2019. When undertaking early planning for this thesis project, one of the first decisions is to determine the time frame for collecting samples. From the perspective of research project design, in order to ensure the coherence and completeness of the research content, it is necessary to adopt coverage before and after October 2019. In the discourse of Chinese media, the entire chain of events started in July when Mayor Hřib announced that he would reconsider the “One China” clause, and ended with the establishment of the sister-city relation between Taipei and Prague. From July to August, Mayor Hřib’s speech on re-discussing the “One China” principle in the sister-city agreement and his pro-Taiwan

tendency were already frequently mentioned by several Chinese media. The most intensive discussion happened after the Prague City Council officially decided to dissolve the sister-city relationship, and the signing of the sister-city agreement between Prague and Taipei in January 2020. Subsequent related discussions still appeared when Hřib visited Taiwan with the President of the Senate Vystrčil in mid-2020. However, considering objective limitations such as the length of the paper and research time, the original data collection range does not exceed February 31, 2020.

After excluding reprinted and irrelevant content, a total of 72 media articles were collected for analysis, including 14 from institutional media (traditional official media and the social media accounts controlled by them), 20 from market-oriented media (media organizations operate as enterprises and their social media accounts. But these media are partially funded or administrated by the government), and 39 from online media (private-operated news portals and social media accounts). The main source of collected texts is online searches. Due to the wave of internetization of Chinese media in recent years, all media retrieved in this thesis have accessible online archives. Regarding the content of social platform accounts operated by media organizations, WeChat Public Platform and Bai Jiahao are two main collection sources. Since the analytic object of this paper is long-length report articles, social media platforms that mainly use short posts (such as Weibo) are excluded. In addition, due to the great popularity of Bai Jiahao and WeChat Public Platform among simplified Chinese internet users, the articles published by the media through social media accounts can mostly be found on the above two platforms. In most cases, a media institution will repeatedly publish the same report on multiple social media platforms. Therefore, a centralized examination of the two main platforms can effectively avoid duplicate collection while covering all source texts. When screening texts

from personal social media accounts, the following two criteria are mainly used: a) whether the publisher is a creator certified by the platform with a certain degree of influence and content authenticity; b) whether the relevant text published is an article with more than 200 characters.

Moreover, Google and Baidu were used as supplementary searches to confirm whether there was omitted relevant coverage. Compared to Google, the latter is the most widely used search engine in mainland China and can direct to more comprehensive simplified Chinese online content. The searched keywords (phrases) for both media archives and search engines include “布拉格 (Bu La Ge, Prague)”, “布拉格市长(Bu La Ge Shi Zhang, Mayor of Prague)”, “布拉格市长, 一中原则 (Bu La Ge Shi Zhang, Mayor of Prague; Yi Zhong Yuan Ze, One-China principle)”, “布拉格, 姐妹城市 (Bu La Ge, Prague; Jie Mei Cheng Shi, sister city)”, “布拉格, 北京 (Bu La Ge, Prague; Beijing)”, “布拉格, 上海 (Bu La Ge, Prague; Shanghai)”, “布拉格, 台北 (Bu La Ge, Prague; Taipei)”. Through the advanced search option, the publishing time of the relevant pages displayed is limited to the period from July 2019 to February 2020. This data set includes the most relevant coverage that can be queried, but because individual pages have been deleted or cannot be browsed due to the time limitation, it is impossible to claim that all reports from July 2019 to February 2020 have been collected.

2.2 Analytic resources categories

The collected media texts come from three main sources: traditional media and new media accounts controlled by the government, media operated as enterprises but under the influence of the government, as well as private news portals and self-operated social media

accounts. Since the 2000s, social media has become an important platform to spread the news and share the opinions for Chinese citizens.²⁵ Through the analysis of self-media texts, to understand the attitudes and preferences of common Chinese audiences becomes possible, rather than just focusing on traditional elite groups such as think tanks, government personnels, and scholars. In addition, since most related research in the past only focused on government-controlled media or academic journals, this thesis introduces news reports from private portals and self-media to provide new analytical perspectives and content.

Many studies on media in other countries often distinguish media according to their political leanings, for instance, left-wings or right-wings. However, due to the long-term censorship and control of Chinese media by a single ruling party, the traditional left-right framework is inapplicable in this context. The *Report on Development of China's Media Industry* released by Tsinghua University in 2022 mentioned that today's Chinese media are mainly divided into mainstream media embedded in the social system and online digital media operated in a market-oriented manner (Figure 1).²⁶ Beyond this simple dichotomy, the media system in mainland China is also divided into party newspapers and periodicals, city media, and online media (Figure 2). It is sometimes called central media, local media, and online media as well. This classification is widely used in relevant internet platforms, social discussions, and even official announcements.²⁷ Moreover, some scholars believe that Chinese media has formed a three-dimensional structure of

²⁵ Wang, Yiran, and Gloria Mark. "Trust in online news: Comparing social media and official media use by Chinese citizens." In *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work*, pp. 599-610. 2013.

²⁶ Cui, Baoguo, Mei Zhao, Mai Ding, and Min Hang, *Report on Development of China's Media Industry (2022)*, 2022. (in Chinese)

²⁷ Xinhua News Agency. "Interpretation of the 'Decision': Guiding public opinion well and giving full play to the role of various media," *Chinese Government Website*, November 8, 2011. https://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2011-12/08/content_2014855.htm. (in Chinese)

institutional media, market-oriented media, and online media.²⁸ Institutional media include traditional media controlled by the central or local governments, as well as social media accounts operated by the governments. Market-oriented media refers to commercially operated media, but some of them are still partially financially supported or administrated by the party or the government. Online media includes new media such as news portals and content-creating accounts owned by individuals or private enterprises.

Figure 1.

Division of the Chinese Media Based on Tsinghua University's Report

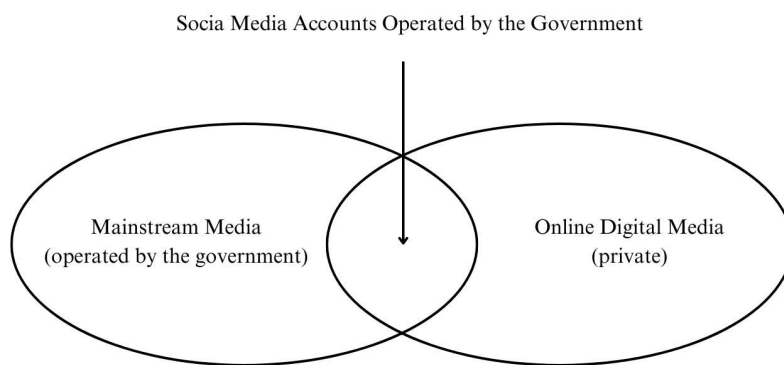
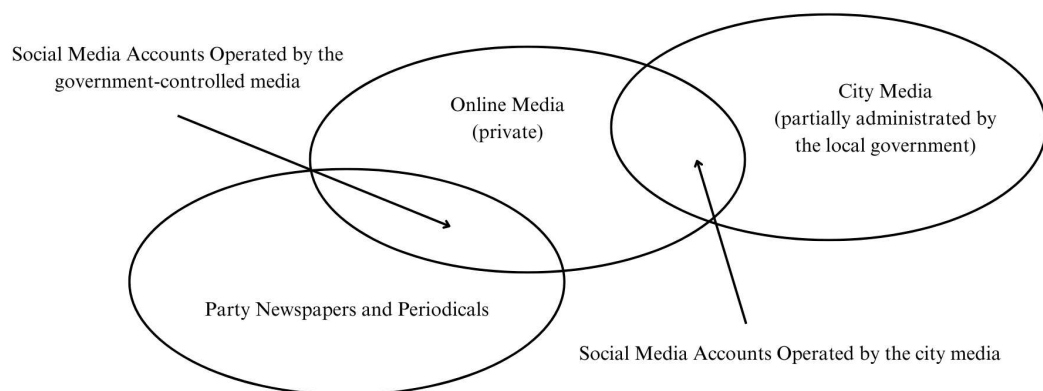


Figure 2.

The Trichotomy of the Chinese Media



²⁸ Tian, Jin, Liping Zhu. "Research on the formation mechanism of policy issues triggered by online public events in the Internet environment." *Electronical Government Affair* 8 (2015): 13-20. (in Chinese)

This thesis will adopt the third classification of the media under investigation: institutional, market-oriented, and online media (Table 1). The first dichotomy (mainstream media and online digital media) based on the division of government-guided discourse and public spontaneous debate is only a simple summary of China’s post-1980s media system, and is far from sufficient to describe the complex reality. Examples such as online new media accounts controlled by the party-state and market-oriented media operated as state-owned enterprises hover at the blurred intersection of the dichotomy (Figure 1). The classification of party newspapers and periodicals, city media, and online media, which are mainly based on the central-local power structure as a framework, seems to be complete but ignores market-oriented media administrated by the central government, such as the *Global Times* (环球时报, *Huan Qiu Shi Bao*) (Figure 2). It is sponsored by *People’s Daily*, a media institution directly under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. In comparison, the division between institutional media, market-oriented media, and online media is more reasonable. It takes into account both the “dual-track system” of China’s governance model - which means the parallelism of the socialist political system and the market-oriented economic system - and the division of public opinion between government guidance and people’s spontaneous debate.

Table 1.

Categories of Investigated Media

Institutional media	Traditional official media
	Content-create accounts operated by the government on social media platforms
Market-oriented media	Self-operated media (and their accounts on social media platforms), but partially administrated by the government

Online media	Private news portal
	Private content-create accounts on social media platforms

2.3 Frequency-based keyword extraction and sentiment analysis

The collected texts were imported into the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo for further investigation. Frequency-based keyword extraction was used to verify whether a specific topic exists in the collected texts. The methodological inspiration comes from Liu Zhiyuan, Chen Xinxiong, and Sun Maosong's work of user's interests on Chinese social media Weibo, which applied frequency-based keyword extraction to search for keywords related to specific interests. According to Nazanin Firoozeh, the task of keyword extraction is identifying the lexical units that best represent the document, and not limited to any type of document.²⁹ From the information-provision perspective, the criteria of electing keywords should be based on Exhaustivity (the keywords should cover all topics with potential information value in the documents), Specificity (selected language units should be truly representative of the documents, but not common text units that can be found in any similar document), Minimality (keywords should have different meanings from each other), Impartiality (keywords should be objective and without involving personal emotions or opinions), Representativity (keywords should reflect the core elements of the document, and different from other words or phrases that reflect secondary aspects).³⁰

²⁹ Firoozeh, Nazanin, Adeline Nazarenko, Fabrice Alizon, and Béatrice Daille. "Keyword extraction: Issues and methods." *Natural Language Engineering* 26, no. 3 (2020): 259-291.

³⁰ Ibid.

In the specific application of this thesis, a preliminary evaluation of the collected materials revealed that more than half of the media articles were published in January 2020, coinciding with the establishment of the sister-city relationship between Prague and Taiwan. Therefore, the initial assumption is that Chinese media paid special attention to Taiwan-related parts when reporting on the sister-city incident. In order to verify this hypothesis, frequency-based keyword extraction was introduced. According to the Minimality principle of determining keywords, a group of keywords with different meanings but directly related to the topic were determined, including “台湾 (Taiwan)”, “台北 (Taipei)”, and “涉台 (She Tai, Taiwan-related)”. When further examining the paragraphs related to Taiwan, it was found that the then mayor of Prague was repeatedly mentioned in these texts. In order to confirm whether the mayor played an important role in the texts, relevant keywords “贺瑞普 (He Rui Pu, the Chinese transliteration of mayor’s name)”, “贺瑞卜 (He Rui Bu, another version of mayor’s name transliteration)”, and “市长 (Shi Zhang, mayor)” were also introduced into the keyword extraction. After the keyword extraction, further qualitative analysis will be conducted on the texts related to the keywords, such as examining the Chinese media’s description of the Prague city government’s position on the Taiwan issue, as well as the image of the mayor portrayed in media reports.

Based on Maite Taboada’s interpretation, the main goal of sentiment analysis is to determine whether a text is subjective, and if so, whether it expresses a positive or negative opinion.³¹ Esuli and Sebastiani defined three processes of sentiment analysis: (a) determining the subjectivity of a text (if the text expresses an opinion of its subject); (b) investigating whether a text expresses a positive or negative opinion; (c) determining the

³¹ Taboada, Maite. “Sentiment analysis: An overview from linguistics.” *Annual Review of Linguistics* 2, no. 1 (2016): 325-347.

strength of the text's polarity (the positive/negative degree of the opinion expressed by a text is slight or strong).³² In the application of this paper, sentimental analysis composed of "positive" (further divided into "moderately positive" and "very positive"), "negative" (further divided into "moderately negative" and "very negative"), and "neutral" are performed on per-sentence units. According to Walaa Medhat, taking one sentence as a unit could be more reliable than document-level and paragraph-level analysis when the collected texts have a widely mixed sentiment.³³ After the automatic judgment of sentiment analysis was completed, manual inspection was necessary to confirm whether there were misjudgments, such as reverse applications of positive words in negative contexts that resulted in sentences being classified as positive. However, considering the limitations of NLP (Natural Language Processing, a technology to provide computers the ability to process data encoded in natural language, widely used in text and speech processing) itself and the researcher's bias, the judgment of sentiment codes is partially subjective. The analysis results are firstly presented to observe the overall sentiments of Chinese media in this event, and then to compare whether there are differences in sentimental tendencies between different types of media or publication times.

³² Sebastiani, Fabrizio, and Andrea Esuli. "Sentiwordnet: A publicly available lexical resource for opinion mining." In *Proceedings of the 5th international conference on language resources and evaluation*, pp. 417-422. European Language Resources Association (ELRA) Genoa, Italy, 2006.

³³ Medhat, Walaa, Ahmed Hassan, and Hoda Korashy. "Sentiment analysis algorithms and applications: A survey." *Ain Shams engineering journal* 5, no. 4 (2014): 1093-1113.

3. Results

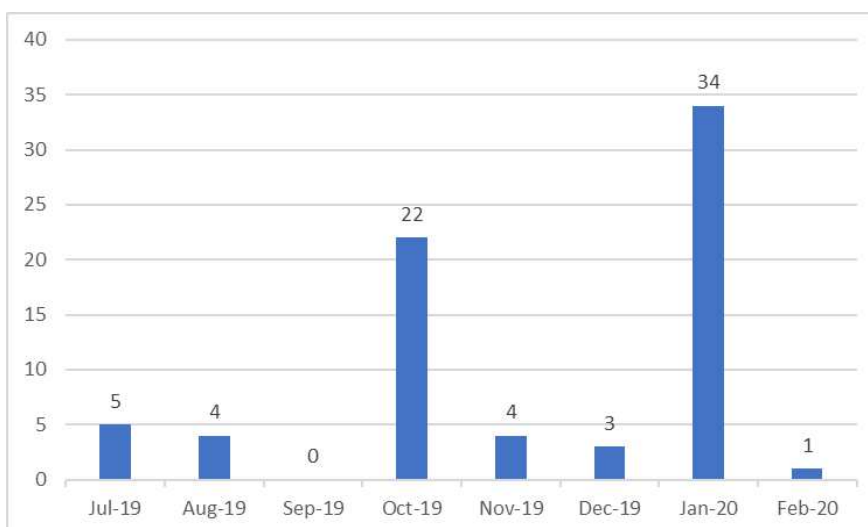
3.1 Overall trend of collected media articles

3.1.1 Not Beijing-Prague relations but Taiwan as the key of the discussion

In an investigation of the affective tendencies of media texts about the sister-city incident, a total of 72 media articles were imported into Nvivo for investigation. In terms of time, the largest number of publications was published in January 2020. This period does not coincide with the time when the sister-city agreement was officially terminated but occurred when Prague decided to sign a sister-city agreement with Taipei and caused Shanghai to announce the termination of friendly relations with Prague. A total of 35 of 72 articles were published after Prague and Taipei concluded a sister-city agreement, nearly half of the total. Among them, 34 were published in January 2020 and one was published in February 2020. Only 21 news articles were published after Prague officially ended its sisterhood with Beijing in October 2019. (Figure 3)

Figure 3.

The Numbers of Media Coverage Based on Publication Times



Judging from the frequency and time of publication of news reports, the Chinese media seems to have focused on the Taiwan-related part of the sister-city incident. Therefore, it is necessary to find a feasible method to explore the interests of the media. Liu Zhiyuan, Chen Xinxiong, and Sun Maosong used frequency-based keyword extraction in their survey of user's interests on Chinese social media Weibo.³⁴ Their work provides a methodological reference for finding the focused points of collected media articles. According to Nazanin Firoozeh's paper, the task of keyword extraction can be defined as identifying the lexical units that best represent the document.³⁵ By investigating the keywords with the highest frequency of occurrence, it is possible to confirm the main topics of the collected coverage to verify if the assumption that Chinese media pays great attention to Taiwan-related part in the sister-city incident is established.

The process of keyword extraction is conducted in Nvivo. After excluding words “布拉格 (Bu La Ge, Prague)”, “捷克 (Jie Ke, Czechia)”, “中国 (Zhong Guo, China)”, “北京 (Beijing)” that represent both parties directly related to the event, the three most frequently occurring words in all sentences marked as negative sentimental tendency are “关系 (Guan Xi, relation)”, “市长 (Shi Zhang, mayor)”, and “台湾 (Taiwan)” (Figure 1). As a third party in the incident, Taiwan was mentioned far more frequently than expected. “台湾 (Taiwan)” was mentioned for 222 times, “台北 (Taipei)” 115 times, and “涉台 (She Tai, Taiwan-related)” 12 times (Table 2). A total of 20 media texts have “Taiwan” or “One China” principle in their titles, accounting for nearly one-third (27.8%) of all collected articles.

³⁴ Liu, Zhiyuan, Xinxiong Chen, and Maosong Sun. “Mining the interests of Chinese microbloggers via keyword extraction.” *Frontiers of Computer Science* 6 (2012): 76-87.

³⁵ Firoozeh, Nazanin, Adeline Nazarenko, Fabrice Alizon, and Béatrice Daille. “Keyword extraction: Issues and methods.” *Natural Language Engineering* 26, no. 3 (2020): 259-291.

Figure 4.

The Word Cloud of All Media Coverage



Note: The minimum word length is set to 2 while conducting frequency-based keyword extraction.

Table 2.

Frequency of Taiwan-related Keywords Appearing in All Media Reports

台湾 (Taiwan)	222
台北 (Taipei)	115
涉台 (She Tai, Taiwan-related)	12
In Total	349

The preliminary conclusion that can be drawn is that Taiwan is a critical topic in media opinions related to Beijing-Prague relations. Compared with the termination of the sister-city tie itself, the Chinese media paid more attention to the Taiwan-related part of the incident. In their discourse, the dispute between Prague and Beijing is not just a bilateral issue, but more likely a multilateral relationship between Prague, Beijing, and Taipei. Interestingly, Taiwan is a significantly vital point in the Czech Republic’s public discourse

on China as well - Czech sympathy for Taiwan and Tibet has been a non-stop topic.³⁶ Since 2017, the Czech media's attention to the current situation of human rights in China has gradually increased.³⁷ At the international political level, Taipei plays a key role in Prague-Beijing relations. According to a study from Bartosz Kowalski, China hopes to exchange economic benefits for the support (or at least neutrality) of CEE countries in the face of human rights accusations, the recognition of its core interests (Taiwan and Tibet are part of China's territory), as well as the lifting of the EU arms sales ban.³⁸ But in the Czech Republic, maintaining friendly relations with Taiwan and Tibet and supporting political dissidents have long been a tradition in China policy.³⁹ On this point, Qin Fangxing, Jeremy Garlick, and Liu Siyang suggested that the Chinese government has seriously underestimated the impact of political ideology differences on bilateral relations.⁴⁰ The Czech official's attitude on related issues has softened after the China-Czech relations warmed up, and the "One China" principle was included in the Prague-Beijing sister city agreement in the hope that it can be transformed into actual economic returns.⁴¹ However, a lack of investment and the rise of Czech political opposition have created existing differences and become an important reason for the breakdown of friendly relations between Beijing and Prague. Matej Šimalčík and Adam Kalivoda argued in their review article that, with the context where discussions related to China in the Czech Republic have

³⁶ Fürst, Rudolf, and Gabriela Pleschová. "Czech and Slovak relations with China: Contenders for China's favour." *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 8 (2010): 1363-1381.

³⁷ Qin, Fangxing, Jeremy Garlick, and Siyang Liu. "A meteoric strategic partnership? The still long march of mutual understanding and trust between China and the Czech Republic." *Asia Europe Journal* 21, no. 1 (2023): 43-59.

³⁸ Kowalski, Bartosz. "Central and eastern Europe, China's core interests, and the limits of relational politics: lessons from the Czech Republic in the 2010s." *East European Politics and Societies* 36, no. 01 (2022): 51-74.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Qin, Fangxing, Jeremy Garlick, and Siyang Liu. "A meteoric strategic partnership? The still long march of mutual understanding and trust between China and the Czech Republic." *Asia Europe Journal* 21, no. 1 (2023): 43-59.

⁴¹ Kowalski, Bartosz. "Central and eastern Europe, China's core interests, and the limits of relational politics: lessons from the Czech Republic in the 2010s." *East European Politics and Societies* 36, no. 01 (2022): 51-74.

become a means for political actors to express their positions and strengthen their political identity, Prague's representatives utilized the termination of the agreement with Beijing as a tool to strengthen their identity as heirs to Vaclav Havel's legacy, opponents of communism, and supporters of human rights.⁴² Therefore, the end of the sister-city agreement is not a response to a specific event in the bilateral relations between China and the Czech Republic, but to the Czech domestic political climate.

In public discussions of the Chinese media, Taiwan is also a key issue in Chinese-Czech bilateral relations. Despite the relative lack of political debate in Chinese society, the vital status of Taiwan-related topics can still be analyzed through the framework of international politics and domestic public opinion. To ensure the territorial sovereignty of Taiwan and Tibet has been set as the "core interest" by the Chinese government, "Taiwan is part of the sacred territory of the People's Republic of China" has been written into the PRC's constitution.⁴³ Public statements and actions by foreign politicians or organizations supporting Taiwan's independence are seen as unacceptable provocations to China and interference in China's internal affairs. Domestically, the complete propaganda and education machine has created a strong consensus that "Taiwan has always been a part of China" and also isolated relevant narratives that are conducive to Taiwan's independence views.⁴⁴ Therefore, any claim to support Taiwan's independence is completely unrecognized by China's domestic public opinion. Moreover, the sensitivity of Taiwan-related issues is also because of the popular Chinese nationalism psychologically

⁴² Šimalčík, Matej and Adam Kalivoda, "Sister-City Relations and Identity Politics: The Case of Prague, Beijing, Taipei, and Shanghai," *The Diplomat*, February 26, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/sister-city-relations-and-identity-politics-the-case-of-prague-beijing-taipei-and-shanghai/>.

⁴³ Xinhua News Agency, "Constitution of People's Republic of China," *Press Center for the Second Session of the Fourteenth National People's Congress*, March 21, 2024. http://www.npc.gov.cn/rdxwzx/xwzx2024/xwzx2024019/202401/t20240129_434463.htm. (in Chinese)

⁴⁴ Cabestan, Jean-Pierre. "Taiwan: An internal affair! How China's domestic politics and foreign policy interact on the Taiwan issue?." *East Asia* 26 (2009): 1-20.

driven by a sense of historical humiliation and victimization.⁴⁵ The long-term “national humiliation (armed invasions and unequal treaties from imperialist powers from 1848 to 1949)” education led to a result that the public will be angry at any hint of concession on national sovereignty and territorial disputes.⁴⁶ Out of the psychological need to get rid of historical humiliation and demonstrate national self-confidence, the Chinese citizens look forward to a government that takes the initiative in the face of external provocations and territory disputes. After the 2000s, Chinese diplomats, officials, and academics claim that the top leadership is more constrained by “rising nationalism” on foreign policy than in the past.⁴⁷ Thus, the expectation for a tough stance puts pressure on government-controlled official media, as well as the wording used in reports by market-oriented media. According to Adam Liu and Li Xiaojun’s survey on Chinese citizens’ attitudes toward Taiwan policy of the Chinese government, although only a slight majority (55%) of respondents explicitly support launching a full-scale war against Taiwan, about 71% of participants still claimed that Taiwan’s separation is unacceptable.⁴⁸ Therefore, the high level of attention and the harsh rhetoric toward Taiwan in the media discourse is not only due to political reasons, but also an inevitable result of the influence of the trend of public opinion. From this point of view, similar to the role that China-related topics play in the political debate in the Czech Republic, the heated discussion in the Chinese media about the sister-city agreement between Prague and Taipei is more like a reaction to domestic public opinion and political consensus.

⁴⁵ Callahan, William A. “National insecurities: Humiliation, salvation, and Chinese nationalism.” *Alternatives* 29, no. 2 (2004): 199-218.

⁴⁶ Quek, Kai, and Alastair Iain Johnston. “Can China back down? Crisis de-escalation in the shadow of popular opposition.” *International Security* 42, no. 3 (2017): 7-36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Liu, Adam Y., and Xiaojun Li. “Assessing Public Support for (Non) Peaceful Unification with Taiwan: Evidence from a Nationwide Survey in China.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 33, no. 145 (2024): 1-13.

The pressure from mainstream society consensus helps explain the tendency of Chinese media to portray Beijing as the dominant party in the event. Among the 16 news headlines with “北京 (Beijing)”, “布拉格 (Bu La Ge, Prague)” and “友城协议 (You Cheng Xie Yi, sister-city agreement)” as keywords, “北京 (Beijing)” was used as the subject in 14 of them, emerging as the structure “Beijing canceled the sister-city agreement with Prague”. There are only two articles that have the title with sentence structure as “Prague canceled the sister-city agreement (with Beijing)”. The intuitive message displayed by most news headlines is that Beijing has taken the initiative in this incident, which meets the psychological expectations of potential audiences.

Based on the above analysis, a hypothesis can be drawn that the significant influence of social consensus might have caused a more negative evaluation of the Prague authorities’ stance and actual actions towards Taiwan than the dissolution of the friendship with Beijing. Therefore, sentimental analysis is introduced to confirm if the presumption is valid. According to Walaa Medhat, sentiment analysis identifies and analyzes emotions of texts.⁴⁹ Taking Prague and Taipei as sister cities in January 2020 as a node, the collected media articles were divided into two categories depending on publication time: published from July to December 2019, or published from January to February 2020. The two types of texts will be subjected to sentiment analysis and comparison to determine whether their sentimental tendencies have changed after January 2020.

According to the sentimental identification processed in Nvivo, the results showed that negative and neutral sentiments predominated in all coverage. One sentence is taken as a unit for sentimental identification, because it is more reliable than document-level and

⁴⁹ Medhat, Walaa, Ahmed Hassan, and Hoda Korashy. “Sentiment analysis algorithms and applications: A survey.” *Ain Shams engineering journal* 5, no. 4 (2014): 1093-1113.

paragraph-level analysis when the collected texts have a widely mixed sentiment.⁵⁰ Across all texts, sentences marked as negative have an average coverage of 43.0%, and sentences with a positive slant have an average coverage of only 12.0%. The titles of all coverage were created as a separate file, and their sentiment was judged by taking one title as a sentence. Among the 72 articles collected, there are 32 articles with negative emotional titles, a total of 37 use a neutral tone, and only three headlines have positive elements. If taking the signing of the sister-city agreement between Prague and Taipei as a node, news published after January 2020 have a stronger negative sentimental tendency than those published before January. The average percentage of content with negative sentiments in each row of text (hereinafter referred to as “negative row percentage”) for reports published in January 2020 is much higher than others, reaching 56.46% (Table 3). Among the 35 articles with publication dates after January 2020, 21 of them have a negative tone in their titles, accounting for 60.0%. Meanwhile, only 12 texts have a neutral title, and only two news headlines have a positive tendency. Among the remaining news reports published between July and December 2019, only 11 have a negative tendency in their titles, 25 are neutral, and one is positive (Table 4). Except for an increase in negative sentiments, the sister-city agreement between Prague and Taipei has also caused a sharp decrease in neutral-leaning discourse.

Table 3.

The Negative Row Percentage of All Media Coverage Based on Publication Times

	July 2019	August 2019	October 2019	November 2019	December 2019	January 2020	February 2020
Negative	10.02%	6.17%	22.16%	1.19%	2.95%	56.46%	0.95%

⁵⁰ Wankhade, Mayur, Annavarapu Chandra Sekhara Rao, and Chaitanya Kulkarni. “A survey on sentiment analysis methods, applications, and challenges.” *Artificial Intelligence Review* 55, no. 7 (2022): 5731-5780.

Moderately Negative	12.43%	4.01%	14.71%	1.41%	8.65%	57.03%	1.77%
Very Negative	9.44%	6.69%	24.07%	1.13%	1.58%	56.33%	0.76%

Note: “Moderately Negative” and “Very Negative” are subcategories summarized under “Negative”. When examining the “Negative” sentiment tendency, it is assumed to include “Moderately Negative” and “Very Negative” (“Negative” = {“Moderately Negative”, “Very Negative”}).

Table 4.

The Numbers of Titles with Different Sentiments

	Negative	Neutral	Positive
From July to December 2019	11	25	1
From January to February 2020	21	12	2

From the perspective of the specific content of the text, in media articles from July to December 2019, the most common accusations include ignoring the norms (or consensus) of international relations and challenging China’s core interests, which both refer to violations of “One China” principle. And since the Prague authorities expressed their support for Tibetan independence in the summer of 2019, the Tibetan issue was sometimes mentioned as well. But after January 2020, criticism was mostly targeting the stance of Taiwan-related issues. In addition, damaging bilateral relations is another accusation frequently made by Chinese media against the Prague municipal authorities, including challenges to Beijing-Prague relations and exchanges at the state level would be negatively affected.

In conclusion, based on the keyword extraction and sentiment analysis, it is proven that the Chinese media is more interested in the Taiwan-related part when reporting the sister-city cancellation between Beijing and Prague. Taipei is mentioned frequently in the Beijing-Prague bilateral dispute that the incident became a “triangular relationship” in their narrative. After Prague announced its sister-city relationship with Taipei, Chinese media took a more negative approach in reporting. In the subsequent analysis of institutional media, market-based media, and online media, similar methods - keyword extraction and sentiment analysis - will be used to examine the specific content and sentimental tendencies of the texts, which will be compared according to the types of media.

3.1.2 The significant role of Mayor Hřib, and the image differences between Prague municipal authorities and Czech central government

In addition to the intensive attention towards Taiwan, another obvious common feature of all media texts is the hostility towards the then-mayor of Prague. In all 72 articles, the keywords “贺瑞普 (He Rui Pu, the Chinese transliteration of mayor’s name)” or “贺瑞卜 (He Rui Bu, another version of mayor’s name transliteration)” directly related to the mayor are mentioned in 32 texts, in a total of 218 times, of which 117 times appeared in sentences with a negative context. Since Chinese media always refer to the Chinese side as “Beijing municipal government” and “Shanghai municipal government” in their reports but not the mayor of the cities, the search results for the keyword “市长 (Shi Zhang, mayor)” only include the mayors of Prague or Taipei. Among them, “(布拉格) 市长 (Shi Zhang, mayor (of Prague))” appeared 212 times in 45 articles, 105 of which were in sentences with negative emotional tendencies.

In fact, it is not Mayor Hřib himself who attracts the attention of the Chinese media, but his pro-Taiwan stance. A total of 22 articles mentioned his experience in Taipei or his friendly attitude towards Taiwan. Another Czech politician frequently mentioned by the media is former President Miloš Zeman. But in articles reporting on events of the sister-city dissolution, Zeman always appears alongside Hřib or Prague city government. In texts that mentioned both politicians, Zeman is often portrayed as an opponent who criticized Hřib for terminating the agreement with Beijing and making overtures to Taiwan, or as an unlucky president who has to take responsibility for the mayor's deeds.

The clear distinction between the former president and the mayor is in fact due to the media's division of the Czech (central) government and the Prague municipal authorities. All negative accusations were only directed at the Prague municipality or the then-mayor, while 30 articles clarified to audiences directly that the Czech government always respects the "One China" principle or President Zeman did not approve of the political move by the Prague municipal authorities. The direct message conveyed to audiences is that although the Prague municipal government has betrayed its promises, the Czech central government is still worthy of trust. Further implicit connotations include the internal divisions in Czech politics and the overall stable functioning of bilateral relations and cooperation. The former is a long-standing stereotype in Chinese public discourse constructed by the government and domestic socialist theorists, aimed at belittling Western democratic politics and emphasizing the superiority of China's system.⁵¹ Social stability and national unity in China is shown through the description of the political turmoil in European (Western) countries, thus proving the current political system and ideology are advanced.

⁵¹ He, Yinan. "Domestic troubles, national identity discourse, and China's attitude towards the West, 2003–2012." *Nations and nationalism* 24, no. 3 (2018): 741-766.

Interestingly, it can be analyzed through Emilian Kavalski's framework of "localizing the Other". Kavalski suggested the concept of "localization" of the Other when he analyzed China's image in the Czech Republic. He argued that in the context that the globalization of the media has strengthened the national identity of the press and made the stories from "faraway lands" further packaged into more familiar, accessible, and consumable for audiences in different countries, "localization" refers to the way in which images and representations of the external Other are internalized in domestic discourse. In this process, the particular "Other" is used as a tool to validate the positions of the parties in the localization controversy. Localization is thus usually prioritized over dissemination in terms of domestic politics. In Kavalski's study case, images of China have been adapted and appropriated to serve as a "borderline" that distinguishes different domestic political factions in the Czech Republic. A political actor's attitude toward China often symbolizes which side of the ideology he stands on. Zeman's government, for example, has been criticized for currying favor with Beijing, while the opponents have gained support by bashing China. In this dispute surrounding China, China's image has been simplified into a single, one-sided "human rights oppressor" while ignoring its complexity, and has been instrumentalized to cater to local value narratives, in order to obtain greater political discourse power. The debate in Czech politics about the dissolution of the agreement between Beijing and Prague followed a similar pattern and can serve as a typical example of the "localization of the Other".⁵² The opposition, represented by Hřib's Pirate Party, strengthened its political identity by accusing China and supporting Taiwan, while Zeman's group opposed their actions. China's image has become divorced from reality in this

⁵² Kavalski, Emilian. "The end of China's romance with Central and Eastern Europe." *Global Media and China* 6, no. 1 (2021): 77-99.

debate, becoming a tool to distinguish political factions and a symbol to emphasize existing values.

Due to the invisibility of political dissidents and the lack of social debate, when using the “localizing the Other” framework for Chinese media’s discussions of the Prague-Beijing incident, it is important to note that it does not have the function of dividing domestic political factions. However, the Czech Republic’s image in the Chinese media is indeed revised, such as highlighting the chaos of domestic politics, the shortcomings of the decentralized system, and the intrusion of Western values. As mentioned above, a total of 30 articles explicitly mentioned the conflict between the Prague municipality and Zeman’s government in their texts. A total of eight of them further claimed that the president (or the Czech central government) was powerless to do anything about it, and four articles expressed doubts about the Western democratic system. The behind sense is confirmation of the superiority of China’s current political system. The Czech Republic is packaged as an imaginary country with an “unsuccessful” Western-style democratic system to suit China’s domestic audiences and political needs.

It was suggested that the image of China and the related debate in the Czech Republic is already politicized.⁵³ The Czech media reports paid more attention to the political and ideological issues of China, while the practical bilateral cooperation and economic actions lack concern.⁵⁴ The same inclination appeared in the Chinese media texts of the sister-city cancellation. Because of the diplomatic nature of this incident, all

⁵³ Karásková, Ivana. “China’s Image in the Czech Republic: Media Reflection of Elite Policies.” In *European Perceptions of China and Perspectives on the Belt and Road Initiative*, pp. 171-187. Brill, 2021.

⁵⁴ Turcsányi, Richard, Ivana Karásková, Tamás Matura, and Matej Šimalčík. “Followers, challengers, or by-standers? Central European media responses to intensification of relations with China.” *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* 5, no. 3 (2019).

collected coverage reported it as an “international provocation”, and most of them claimed that the Prague side would suffer losses due to their action. However, only few articles have mentioned concretely the impact on economic or cultural exchanges would happen or have already arisen, including the cancellation of aircraft purchase plans, forbidden performances by the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra, and suspension of sponsorship of soccer club Slavia. As China’s posture on the international stage became more assertive, the use of informal economic sanctions as a diplomatic tool has become more frequent.⁵⁵ Taking Tibet, which has a similar “core-interest” status as Taiwan for the Chinese government, as an example, Fuchs and Klann provide statistical evidence that the Chinese government retaliates by informal economic sanctions, which means informally and temporarily reducing imports, to countries whose leaders have met with the Dalai Lama.⁵⁶ Therefore, it is perhaps unusual that there are only a few reports in the media about informal economic sanctions against the Prague municipality for taking a “wrong position” on Taiwan-related issues. But regardless of the cause of this phenomenon, the direct result is that the media creates such an impression among its audiences: the breakdown of friendship between Beijing and Prague is because Prague betrayed its commitment to support the “One China” principle while ignoring the complex political and economic reasons (such as the insufficient investment and the rise of the opposition in Czech politics) behind it. Meanwhile, it is also proved that the Chinese media’s attention to issues related to Taiwan is far greater than the actual cooperation between China and the Czech Republic.

⁵⁵ Lim, Darren J., and Victor A. Ferguson. “Informal economic sanctions: the political economy of Chinese coercion during the THAAD dispute.” *Review of International Political Economy* 29, no. 5 (2022): 1525-1548.

⁵⁶ Fuchs, Andreas, and Nils-Hendrik Klann. “Paying a visit: The Dalai Lama effect on international trade.” *Journal of international economics* 91, no. 1 (2013): 164-177.

3.2 Institutional Media

The vast majority of the collected articles from institutional media came from their online sites, with only three coming from accounts operated by media on online forums or platforms (Table 5). These accounts are set up on forums or online social platforms to publish news articles. To explain it in a more understandable way, they are similar to CNN or BBC accounts on social platform X (formerly Twitter). Not all institutional media own an account, but they all have their own online sites or archives, thus articles collected from online sites and archives account for a larger proportion. However, all of them only simply reproduced the statements issued by the government or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and added a very brief introduction of the incident without making any comments, while in the three reports collected from the online accounts of institutional media emerge comments. Therefore, when analyzing the specific content of institutional media coverage, these three commentary articles will be the focus of investigation.

Table 5.

The Origins and Publication Institutions of Collected Institutional Media Coverage, and whether the Comments Exist

Origin	Name of Media	Number of Article (s)	Whether with Comments
From the media's accounts on online platforms or forums	Reference News	1	Yes
	Liberation Daily	1	Yes
	China Daily	1	Yes
	GuangMing Daily	1	No
	People's Daily	1	No
	Xinhua News Agency	2	No

From sites or archives	CCTV Website	2	No
	China Economic Weekly	1	No
	China Youth Network	1	No
	China News Service	3	No

The main characteristics of institutional media articles are: 1. Relatively low negative sentimental tendency; 2. Short length and highly consistent with the government's position; 4. Special focus on the Taiwan-related part of the sister-city incident; 5. Negative comments on the mayor of Prague; 6. The statement of the Czech national government or President Zeman.

3.2.1 Relatively low negative sentimental tendencies

Through the sentimental tendency identification processed in Nvivo, it is possible to confirm the official media's attitude towards the event. In reporting on the sister-city incident, institutional media is the least negative compared to other media. The average percentage of content with negative sentiments in each row of text (hereinafter referred to as "negative row percentage") is only 18.88%, while the number is 24.13% for the market-oriented media and 56.99% for online media (Table 6). Although institutional media is more restrained in the specific wording, the overall tone remains mainly negative or neutral. Seven articles expressed negative attitudes directly in their titles, and only three news headlines adopted a neutral tone. The average negative row percentage of articles published in January 2020, when Prague and Taipei signed a sister-city agreement, reached 68.77% (Table 7).

Table 6.

The Negative Row Percentage of Different Types of Media

	Institutional Media	Market-oriented Media	Online Media
Negative	18.88%	24.13%	56.99%
Moderately Negative	10.56%	21.36%	53.38%
Very Negative	20.88%	24.80%	54.33%

Note: “Moderately Negative” and “Very Negative” are subcategories summarized under “Negative”. When examining the “Negative” sentiment tendency, it is assumed to include “Moderately Negative” and “Very Negative” (“Negative” = {“Moderately Negative”, “Very Negative”}).

Table 7.

The Negative Row Percentage of Institutional Media Coverage Based on Publication

Times

	July 2019	October 2019	January 2020
Negative	11.25%	19.98%	68.77%
Moderately Negative	-	-	67.84%
Very Negative	12.62%	22.41%	64.97%

Note: “Moderately Negative” and “Very Negative” are subcategories summarized under “Negative” (“Negative” = {“Moderately Negative”, “Very Negative”}). No reports related to the sister-cities incident were published in August, September, November, December 2019, and February 2020.

3.2.2 Short length and highly consistent with the government’s statement

Compared with the market-oriented media and online media, the articles in institutional media are the short length of their content. The length of most reports is limited to about 500-600 Chinese characters, because all the collected institutional media outlets simply reprinted the statements from the Beijing (or Shanghai) municipal government and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and added a very brief description of the incident. As a typical authoritarian regime, Chinese media (especially official media)

have long been defined as the “mouthpiece of the party” to carry out propaganda and mobilization.⁵⁷ In this case, it is unavoidable that the attitude and the specific wording of institutional media is strictly synchronized with the government. On reporting the sister-city incident, except for the synonymous substitution of some words, the narrative and stance of institutional media articles are completely consistent with the official attitude. Only three articles from institutional media accounts on online platforms exceed 600 characters due to their comments on the incident.

Due to the need to maintain a close consistency with the government and the censorship, the style of institutional media is cautious and any risk of deviating from the official line is avoided as much as possible - adding more commentary content to articles is one of the risks. This directly leads to the fact that most institutional media articles tend to directly reprint government statements without adding commentary text when reporting the sister-city incident, making the article length relatively short. However, as young Chinese internet users gradually gain a certain degree of social discourse power, the need to improve the mechanism of public opinion guidance emerges.⁵⁸ Some institutional media attempt to cater to young audiences, thus they open accounts on forums and social media platforms, to publish articles with informal expressions, which are closer to the reading habits and aesthetics of internet users.⁵⁹ As a certain civic consciousness is established in cyberspace, participation and expression in political topics have become an important part

⁵⁷ Wang, Jianwei, and Xiaojie Wang. “Media and Chinese foreign policy.” In *The Making of China's Foreign Policy in the 21st century*, pp. 180-199. Routledge, 2018.

⁵⁸ Party Building Network. “Better Unite, Organize, and Mobilize Young People on the Internet,” *Party Building Network*, March 26, 2024. http://www.dangjian.cn/shouye/sixianglilun/lilunqiangdang/202403/t20240326_6755183.shtml. (in Chinese)

⁵⁹ Chen, Caihua. “Young People’s News Reception Interest and Mainstream Media’s Response Strategies.” *Audiovisual Horizons* 6 (2020): 61-64. (in Chinese)

of young users' online activities.⁶⁰ This indirectly requires institutional media to publish more opinionated texts in their online accounts in order to gain audiences and user stickiness, thereby further guiding public opinion.

3.2.3 Special focus on the Taiwan-related issue

In the collected texts from institutional media, vocabularies related to Taiwan rank quite high in keyword extraction. In the frequency-based keyword extraction, keywords directly related to Taiwan appear in 13 of the 14 articles. These keywords include “台湾 (Taiwan)”, “台北 (Taipei)”, and “涉台 (She Tai, Taiwan-related)”, which emerge a total of 31 times (Table 8). From the perspective of publication time, the negative sentiment of institutional media peaked after Prague established friendly relations with Taipei, reaching 68.77%. This figure is only 19.98% for the coverage published in October 2019 when Beijing-Prague relations broke down (Table 7). It can be argued that the action of Prague to establish friendly relations with Taipei sharply worsened the sentimental tendencies of institutional media. While Beijing interpreted Prague's actions as provocative and touching the red line (ignoring the “One China” principle), the rhetoric of institutional media also became harsher, which once again confirmed the characteristics of institutional media that are highly consistent with official positions.

Table 8.

Frequency of Taiwan-related Keywords Appearing in Institutional Media Reports

台湾 (Taiwan)	25
台北 (Taipei)	4

⁶⁰ Ke, Lin, and Hugh Starkey. “Active citizens, good citizens, and insouciant bystanders: The educational implications of Chinese university students' civic participation via social networking.” *London Review of Education* 12, no. 1 (2014): 50-62.

涉台 (She Tai, Taiwan-related)	2
In Total	31

The core accusations against the Prague city government include provoking the “One China” principle and undermining bilateral relations. Prague’s position and actions on Taiwan (sometimes also on Tibet) are defined as a “mistake”. The municipal government is portrayed as violating diplomatic rules, stubborn, and provocative in articles published by institutional media. It was described as “ignoring the basic norms (or consensus) of international relations”⁶¹, “repeatedly taking wrong actions on issues involving China’s core interests”⁶², “grossly interfering in China’s internal affairs”⁶³, “undermining the atmosphere of friendly bilateral exchanges”⁶⁴, “openly challenging the sister-city relationship with Beijing”⁶⁵, and “challenging ‘One China’ principle”⁶⁶. Correspondingly, Beijing, as the victim of the incident, is portrayed as simply making a reasonable response. However, it should be noted that all criticism is directed only at the Prague municipality. Not only has the Czech central government not received any negative comments, but it is sometimes recognized as friendly and respectful of China’s interest by the reports from institutional media.

⁶¹ CCTV Website. “Beijing announced the termination of its sister city relationship with Prague, Czech Republic. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a statement,” *CCTV*, October 10, 2019. <https://news.cctv.com/2019/10/10/ARTIE1LFWU1Jzt2tPPBMmYgS191010.shtml>. (in Chinese)

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Xinhua News Agency. “Ministry of Foreign Affairs: We advise the Prague municipal authorities and the mayor to stop undermining the overall situation of China-Czech relations,” *Xinhua News Network*, July 17, 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2019-07/17/c_1124766598.htm. (in Chinese)

⁶⁵ China News Service. “Beijing terminates sister city relationship with Prague, Czech Republic, suspends all official exchanges,” *China News Service*, October 10, 2019. <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2019/10-10/8975031.shtml>. (in Chinese)

⁶⁶ Reference News. “Prague, addicted to anti-China, is blacklisted by a Chinese city again,” *Sina News*, January 15, 2020. <https://news.sina.cn/gn/2020-01-16/detail-iihnzhha2700074.d.html>. (in Chinese)

3.2.4 Clarification on the friendly attitude of the Czech central government (or President Zeman)

However, when it comes to the prospects for national bilateral relations, the attitude of institutional media is not entirely negative. President Zeman's friendly attitude toward China is clearly mentioned in all three commentary texts. Another four articles wrote that "some far-sighted Czech politicians, including President Zeman, have condemned the wrong actions of Prague municipal authorities"⁶⁷. Moreover, in 13 of 14 articles emerged the statement "hope (or urge) the Prague authorities to recognize and correct their mistakes as soon as possible and create conditions for the resumption of exchanges and cooperation between the two sides (or eliminate negative impacts with practical actions)". This series of statements originally appeared in official announcements from the Beijing (and Shanghai) municipal governments and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and were widely reprinted by the media. The message that the audience received was that the incident is a diplomatic dispute provoked by the city of Prague and did not represent the attitude of the Czech central government. The statements provided the information that although the Prague city government took a "wrong action", the Czech central government represented by Zeman still remained friendly to China and adhered to the "One China" principle. Finally, the seemingly severe condemnation still left room for maneuver - if the Prague authorities choose to change their position, bilateral cooperation can be restored.

According to a study from Jessica Chen Weiss and Allan Dafoe, the phrases that range from blaming Prague to confirming the attitude of the Czech central government

⁶⁷ Xinhua News Agency. "Ministry of Foreign Affairs: We hope that the Prague municipal authorities will recognize and correct their mistakes as soon as possible," *Xinhua News Network*, October 10, 2019. http://m.xinhuanet.com/2019-10/10/c_1125088952.htm. (in Chinese)

can be seen as a specific manifestation of the “bluff and empty menace” mode, which means that the government issues harsh but vague threats to increase people’s approval.⁶⁸ They also suggest that in China, where nationalist resistance and the trauma of the “national humiliation” are intertwined, even symbolic defenses of national honor may be crucial to maintaining popular support.⁶⁹ The diplomatic threats issued by the Chinese government sometimes do not mean actual actions, but a measure used by leaders to “biding time” and obtain strategic détente. At the same time, Weiss and Dafoe’s evidence suggests that Chinese audiences sometimes would endorse more vague and (yet) unfulfilled threats against real international disputes.⁷⁰ It is firstly because the Chinese public is relatively more hawkish and believes that defending national honor is important. According to *China-US Security Perceptions Survey 2012*, when public attitudes are dominated by hawkishness and nationalism, domestic audiences are more likely to reward the government’s blustering behavior.⁷¹ Weiss and Dafoe’s work proved the validity of this conclusion in the Chinese context. Meanwhile, the Chinese public also believes that it is unwise to start an armed conflict, which is due to a variety of possible reasons, such as the perception of maintaining international peace, the belief that war would cause much more complicated trouble, and the opinion that economic development rather than war is the top priority at present.

In the incident of Beijing-Prague friendship dissolution, the Prague municipality was severely condemned by institutional media, but no specific sanctions were mentioned. On the other hand, the Czech national government, who is the main

⁶⁸ Weiss, Jessica Chen, and Allan Dafoe. “Authoritarian audiences, rhetoric, and propaganda in international crises: Evidence from China.” *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2019): 963-973.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Pew Research Center. “U.S. Public, Experts Differ on China Policies,” *Pew Research Center*, April 14, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2012/09/18/u-s-public-experts-differ-on-china-policies/>.

character of bilateral cooperation with China, was not criticized at all. National honor is protected through condemning the Prague municipal authorities, being in line with the psychological expectations of potential audiences in China. At the same time, the clever avoidance of blaming the Czech government also prevents potential further cooperation from encountering too much public opposition.

3.2.5 The Mayor's image: an anti-China human rights defender with Western values

Compared with the more formal articles on the official sites, three articles published by online accounts of institutional media adopt an unofficial tone and contain more commentary content. The basic stance of the comments is the same as the official statement from the government, with the most obvious difference being the emphasis on Mayor Hřib - this doesn't mean that he was not featured in the other articles. In fact, the other six non-commentary texts mentioned Hřib as "the mayor" or "the principal official of the municipality" to criticize him without a specific name. The Chinese transliteration version of the mayor's name "贺瑞普 (He Rui Pu)" appears 26 times in all institutional media coverage, and 16 times in sentences with negative sentiment. Since all institutional media articles do not mention the mayor of Beijing, Shanghai, or Taipei, when "mayor" is used as the keyword, the analytical objects are the level of attention and sentimental attitude towards the mayor of Prague. The keyword "mayor" emerges 23 times, and 16 times in negative sentimental sentences.

All three commentary articles explicitly described the mayor as "anti-China". Two of the articles paid more attention to the mayor, while the comments in another article focused on the Chinese internet users' support for Shanghai's decision to terminate its

friendship with Prague. The articles tended to show their audiences that support for Western values but not the pro-Taiwan stance, is the main reason that prompted the mayor's attempt to remove the "One China" clause from the sister-city agreement. Both articles emphasize the mayor's statement on values. One article claimed that he "touted shared values with Taiwan" at the beginning of the article, and put the introduction of the mayor's Taiwan-related experience in the second half of the article. The mayor's political values are considered to be a more important influencing factor and ranked ahead of his related experiences. Another article mentioned Hřib's exchange study in Taiwan and suggested that he may have been influenced by it, while explicitly stating twice the mayor's statement that "human rights are much more important than pandas".

It is clear that Mayor Hřib's image in institutional media's comments is that of an anti-China figure who has Western values. Further implications behind it are the negativity of Western values, and the view that Western values are incompatible or even antagonistic to China. From the perspective of co-occurrence in linguistics,⁷² "human rights" and "anti-China" frequently appear together when describing the mayor of Prague, enabling audiences to establish a cognitive link between them. Therefore, an opposition between the recognition of democratic and human rights values and supporting China (or patriotism) is set up in this context.

From the view of a larger social background, since patriotism has evolved into a virtue in the context of Chinese society due to the education system,⁷³ the liberal and democratic political tendency, and the narrative of human rights are defined as immoral by

⁷² Kroeger, Paul R. *Analyzing grammar: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁷³ Zinda, Yvonne Schulz. "Propagating New 'Virtues' - 'Patriotism' in Late Qing Textbooks for the Moral Education of Primary Students." In *Mapping Meanings*, pp. 685-710. Brill, 2004.

their “anti-China” characteristics given by the text. According to the work of Jamie Gruffydd-Jones, China’s authoritarian regime strategically narrates human rights violations through the media as a form of humiliation from a foreign country, causing citizens to react to human rights allegations as denying or explaining (the actual human rights situation in China is acceptable), to defend their country internationally rather than considering it as individual violations.⁷⁴ The word “human rights” is inevitably devalued in this context, implying that it is a tool for supporters of Western values to attack China. Therefore, for ordinary Chinese audiences, Mayor Hřib’s support for Western values is not his political attribute, but an undesirable “flaw” that means he remains hostile to China as well.

3.2.6 Hypothesis: coverage of institutional media was a model for other types of media

In conclusion, on reporting the Prague-Beijing sister-city termination, institutional media mainly conveyed the government’s official attitude. Taiwan not only received special attention, but also acted as a catalyst for depriving media sentiments. The Prague municipal authorities were severely criticized to cater to the audience’s mentality of safeguarding national honor, while the attitude of the Czech central government or former President Zeman is further reiterated and considered to be in line with China’s interests. In addition, the focus and negative comments about the mayor of Prague and his political stance and values imply the view that the Western values of human rights and freedom are “anti-China”, and incompatible with Chinese society.

⁷⁴ Gruffydd-Jones, Jamie J. “Citizens and condemnation: Strategic uses of international human rights pressure in authoritarian states.” *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 4 (2019): 579-612.

By examining the articles from institutional media, the basic framework for reporting on the dissolution of the Prague-Beijing sister city can be obtained: 1. Condemnation of the “wrong position” of the Prague municipality (mostly on Taiwan issue, sometimes Tibet is mentioned as well); 2. (Possible) comments on the mayor’s pro-Taiwan political leanings and personal experiences in Taipei; 3. (Possible) confirmation of the attitude of the Czech central government (or former President Zeman); 4. The influence that the Prague municipality’s actions would bring, or the requirement for it to change its stance to restart cooperation.

Daniela Stockman pointed out in her work that due to the existence of censorship, the news sources of Chinese media are relatively unified.⁷⁵ According to Lu Fangzhu, Huang Zhongbin, and Meng Tianguang’s investigation, China’s official media serves as an emotional valve system that channels social sentiments.⁷⁶ Wang Haiyan, Colin Sparks, and Yu Huang further pointed out that the basic stance of non-official media is usually synchronized with the official one due to financial and administrative interference by the Chinese government.⁷⁷ Therefore, it is possible to infer that the rest of the media would be consistent with the official media in terms of content structure and sentimental tendencies. Institutional media coverage of the sister-city incident yields the “media vane” of all reporting texts - including basic sentimental tendency, used wording, and textual structure. In the subsequent analysis of the texts from the market-oriented media and online media, the hypothesis will be further verified.

⁷⁵ Stockmann, Daniela, and Mary E. Gallagher. “Remote control: How the media sustain authoritarian rule in China.” *Comparative political studies* 44, no. 4 (2011): 436-467.

⁷⁶ Lu, Fangzhu, Zhongbin Huang, and Tianguang Meng. “Official Media as Emotional Valves: How Official Media Guides Nationalism on Chinese Social Media.” *Asian Survey* 63, no. 4 (2023): 611-640.

⁷⁷ Wang, Haiyan, Colin Sparks, and Yu Huang. “Measuring differences in the Chinese press: A study of People’s Daily and Southern Metropolitan Daily.” *Global Media and China* 3, no. 3 (2018): 125-140.

3.2 Market-oriented Media

Many scholars believe that Chinese media underwent a market-oriented transformation in the 2000s. Betty Winfield and Peng Zengjun suggested that the transformation does not mean the liberalization of Chinese media, but a shift from totalitarianism to market-authoritarianism.⁷⁸ However, the elements of marketization and new media brought about a certain degree of freedom of expression within the existing framework.⁷⁹ Therefore, it is still feasible to discuss whether there are differences between official and unofficial media reports. This section will verify the hypothesis that the emotional tendency and text structure of market-oriented media are synchronized with the institutional media, through sentimental inspection and keyword extraction. Then further illustrate if market-oriented media has its own characteristics when reporting the dissolution of the sister-city tie.

The investigated market-oriented media includes two categories: media subject to the administrative management or financial support of the central government, and media subject to the administrative management or financial support of local governments (Table 9). Generally speaking, the biggest difference between market-oriented media supported (or managed) by the central government and those supported (or managed) by local governments lies in the commentary perspective and reading audience. The former often reports from the perspective of national policies or positions and targets a nationwide audience. The latter pays special attention to regional hot spots and affairs, and its main audience is the local public. As mentioned above, in the context of China's

⁷⁸ Winfield, Betty Houchin, and Zengjun Peng. "Market or party controls? Chinese media in transition." *Gazette (Leiden, Netherlands)* 67, no. 3 (2005): 255-270.

⁷⁹ Yan, Mei Ning. "The impact of new media on freedom of expression in China and the regulatory responses." In *Free speech and censorship around the globe*, pp. 381-407. Central European University Press, 2015.

authoritarianism, the “marketization” discussed in this article is limited and different from the marketization in the West. Although a narrow space for freedom does exist, it does not mean that media organizations are free from government control. This is the most important prerequisite when reading this section. However, for viewers who are not familiar with China’s media ecology, the boundary between the institutional media and market-oriented media can sometimes seem blurred. This thesis mainly classifies them based on two criteria: 1. Being directly or indirectly controlled by the government (for example, *People’s Daily* is directly controlled by the central government, while *Global Times* is operated by *People’s Daily*); 2. Whether they **actively** cater to the market.

Table 9.

The List of Investigated Market-oriented Media

Name of Media	Number of Article (s)	Supported (administered) by central government / local government
Global Times	9	Central government
China Taiwan Network	1	
Nanfang Metropolis Daily	1	Local government
The Beijing News	3	
Taiwan Strait Network (operated by Fujian Daily)	2	
Yangtze River Network (operated by Yangtze River Daily)	3	
Beijing Daily	1	

However, while being controlled by the government, China’s market-oriented media also strives to cater to its target audience. Take the main representative of market-oriented media, the *Global Times* and its online website as an example, it is

sponsored by a famous official media institution *People's Daily* and has considerable influence in mainland China. But according to Luo Chang, Ding Wenhui, and Zhao Wei's discourse analysis of *Global Times* editorials and editor-in-chief's remarks on online social platforms, *Global Times* editor-in-chief Hu Xijin's content orientation on his Weibo caters to the needs of online audiences and hot topics in online media.⁸⁰ The editor-in-chief himself has strong leadership in the writing process of editorials,⁸¹ so that the market-influenced and hot-topic-chasing style is obvious in *Global Times's* articles.

3.2.1 Negative sentimental tendencies

An analysis of the overall emotional tendency of all market-oriented media articles shows that the average row percentage of sentences with negative emotions is 24.13%, which is higher than 18.88% for the institutional media and lower than 56.99% for online media (Table 6). For coverage published after January 2020, the average negative row percentage reached 48.93% (Table 10). Among the 20 news headlines, 13 have negative emotional tendencies and only seven are neutral. It shows that the basic emotional trend of market-oriented media is consistent with that of official media, and is mainly negative.

Table 10.

The Negative Row Percentage of Market-oriented Media Coverage Based on Publication Times

	July 2019	August 2019	October 2019	November 2019	December 2019	January 2020

⁸⁰ Luo, Chang, Ding Wenhui, and Zhao Wei. "Factual framing and emotional discourse: News framing and discourse analysis of the *Global Times* editorial and Hu Xijin's Weibo." *International Journalism* 36, no. 8 (2014): 38-55. (in Chinese)

⁸¹ Ibid.

Negative	11.31%	4.35%	25.71%	2.71%	6.99%	48.93%
Moderately Negative	24.72%	4.83%	11.43%	6.6%	16.73%	35.69%
Very Negative	8.53%	4.25%	28.67%	1.91%	4.97%	51.68%

Note: “Moderately Negative” and “Very Negative” are subcategories summarized under “Negative” (“Negative” = {“Moderately Negative”, “Very Negative”}). No market-oriented media reports related to the sister-cities incident were published in September 2019 and February 2020.

3.2.2 Special focus on Taiwan-related issues

The focus on Taiwan is one of the distinctive features of market-oriented media. Four articles directly mentioned “Taiwan” or “Taipei” in their titles. The frequency-based keyword extraction shows that “台湾 (Taiwan)” ranked fifth, appearing 28 times in nine articles, second only to “布拉格 (Bu La Ge, Prague)”, “捷克, (Jie Ke, Czechia)”, “中国 (Zhong Guo, China)” and “关系 (Guan Xi, relationship)”. The figure below shows a word cloud of market-oriented media reports based on Chinese language (Figure 4).

Figure 4.

The Word Cloud of Market-oriented Media Coverage



Note: The minimum word length is set to 2 while conducting frequency-based keyword extraction.

From the view of publication time, the average negative row percentage in the coverage published after the establishment of the sister-city relationship between Prague and Taipei reaches 48.93%, while the number of texts published in October 2019, when Prague and Beijing officially cut the sister-city tie, is only 25.71% (Table 10). Similar to the situation of the institutional media, Prague's cooperation with Taiwan further deteriorated the rhetoric of reports, which is far more negative than reporting on Prague's estrangement from Beijing.

For market-oriented media, the most frequent accusations on Prgua's actions towards Taiwan are similar to the institutional media, including "taking wrong actions on issues involving China's core interests"⁸², "grossly interfering in China's internal affairs"⁸³, "challenging 'One China' principle"⁸⁴, and "hurt bilateral relations between the two countries"⁸⁵. But compared with the institutional media, market-oriented media gives more description to extended topics related to Taiwan - such as Taiwan's parliament and public's reaction to the sister-city incident, rather than simply repeating the accusations against the Prague municipal government. Three articles claimed that the bill to end the sister-city tie with Beijing passed by the Prague City Council did not attract much attention in Taiwan. In another coverage reporting on the Taipei City Council's discussion of the bill to establish a sister-city relationship with Prague, the parliament scene is described as chaotic and with non-stop conflicts. The report further claims that the bill was likely to be shelved due to disputes among representatives.

⁸² Sha, Xueliang. "Beijing Municipal Foreign Affairs Office: Beijing terminates sister city relationship with Prague, Czech Republic," *The Beijing News*, October 10, 2019.
<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1646976674165129493&wfr=spider&for=pc>. (in Chinese)

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Global Times. "Shanghai Foreign Affairs Office solemnly declares," *Global Times*, January 14, 2020.
<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1655710647082215033&wfr=spider&for=pc>. (in Chinese)

⁸⁵ Global Times. "Chinese Embassy in the Czech Republic: Prague's termination of its sister city agreement with Beijing is a breach of trust," *Global Times*, October 9, 2019.
<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1646891274182779787&wfr=spider&for=pc>. (in Chinese)

Through a description of the lukewarm response from the Taiwanese media and public, and the slow progress of the bill to establish relations with Prague, the pro-Taiwan actions of the Prague municipality are implied to be a invalid political performance without audiences, and did not even receive the attention of its target audience (Taiwanese public and media). Another hint is that Taiwan's independence is not widely supported by the Taiwanese citizens. Since the 1990s, Beijing has actually allowed a more relaxed interpretation of the "One China" principle, and even to a certain extent tacitly acknowledged the existence of Taiwan as the Republic of China, but its stance on "unifying the two sides of the Taiwan Strait" remains firm.⁸⁶ The Chinese government stated that "unification of the motherland is the aspiration of the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait", and defined the recovery of Taiwan as a "historical inevitability (or inevitable trend)".⁸⁷ The media portrayed Prague's support for Taiwan independence as not welcomed by Taiwanese society, thereby proving to the audiences that Taiwan independence is against the trend and violates historical inevitability. Only reunification is truly in line with the interests and wishes of the people of both sides.

Market-oriented media's attention to Taiwan in the sister-city incident also shows regional characteristics. Fujian Province has the media with the most intensive focus on Taiwan's reactions, which is determined by the fact that media supported (or administrated) by local governments tend to be more oriented towards local audiences. Due to frequent communications with Taiwan, the media in Fujian Province pay more

⁸⁶ Chen, Dean P. "Constructing Peaceful Development: The Changing Interpretations of "One China" and Beijing's Taiwan Strait Policy." *Asian Security* 10, no. 1 (2014): 22-46.

⁸⁷ Party Building Network. "Xi Jinping on upholding 'One Country, Two Systems' and promoting national reunification," *Party Building Network*, January 14, 2022. http://www.dangjian.cn/shouye/dangjianyaowen/202201/t20220114_6282635.shtml. (in Chinese)

attention to Taiwan's society than media from other regions. The remaining local market-oriented media include *Nanfang Metropolis Daily* (Guangdong), *The Beijing News* (Beijing), and *Yangtze River Network* (Wuhan). However, none of them made any interpretations of Taiwan's domestic politics. Their reporting perspectives are completely consistent with market-oriented media supported (or administrated) by the central government. Their most important concern remains the "One China" principle and the provocation of China's sovereignty, while the main commentary target is still the Prague municipal authorities. But two outlets from the media of Fujian province both took the mainland-Taiwan relationship as their starting point. One of the articles directly described the series of disputes of Taipei, Prague, and Beijing as a "diplomatic war" between Taiwan and mainland China, and said that Taiwan, as the weaker side, would affect the economic and trade exchanges with mainland China and lose greater long-term interests because of the pursuit of short-term victory. Moreover, while all other media articles lacked information on Taiwan's domestic politics, these two articles briefly interpreted Taiwan's political situation at the time. Compared with other media reports, they tended to examine the reaction and motivation of Taiwan rather than mainland China. Both coverage believed that since Taiwan's election in 2020 had just ended, the Democratic Progressive Party sought further diplomatic breakthroughs after its winning, which promoted the establishment of sister-city relationship between Taipei and Prague. One of the articles further states that although the mayor of Taipei is not a member of the Democratic Progressive Party, establishing friendly relations with Prague has "indicative significance" for him since Taipei is the political, economic, and cultural center of Taiwan.

3.2.3 The Mayor's image: an anti-China, right-wing political spectacular

Similar to the institutional media, market-oriented media also paid attention to the mayor of Prague. In all collected market-oriented media articles, “市长 (Shi Zhang, mayor (of Prague))” appears a total of 58 times, and 32 times are in sentences with negative emotional tendencies. The two Chinese transliteration versions of the mayor's name “贺瑞普 (He Rui Pu) or “贺瑞卜 (He Rui Bu)” are mentioned in nine articles and appear 55 times. In total 30 times, the mayor's name exists in sentences with negative sentiment.

Although the descriptions of Mayor Hřib from the institutional and market-oriented media are both negative, there are some differences between the specific images of the mayor. In the articles published by market-oriented media, the biggest label on the mayor of Prague is not simply “anti-China”, but also includes “right-winger” and “political speculator”. Among the ten articles that directly mentioned the mayor's name, seven of them explicitly described him as “anti-China”, five classified him and his party as “right-wing”, and four reports believed that he took the opportunity to gain “political capital”. At the same time, the mayor's political values are also mentioned in market-oriented media reports. Three articles directly quoted his statement that “human rights are more important than pandas”. In the commentary reports from the institutional media, “human rights” and “anti-China” frequently appeared simultaneously through the mayor as a medium, suggesting to audiences the negativity of Western values and the use of human rights as a tool to attack China. However, in market-oriented media, “anti-China” and “human rights” are not bound together. The accusation that Hřib is “anti-China” mainly focuses on his support for the Tibetan government-in-exile and Taiwan independence, which is more political but not ideological. In the context of non-Chinese-dominated societies, “anti-China sentiment” (or “Sinophobia”) is defined as

“fear or disgust towards China, Chinese people and/or Chinese culture”⁸⁸, usually involving racism and colonialism. But in China, the definition of “anti-China” is more political. According to the “Counter-Espionage Law of the People’s Republic of China” passed in 2014, “anti-China forces” (or “foreign hostile forces”) refer to organizations that are hostile to the regime and socialist system of the People's Republic of China and endanger national security as determined by the Ministry of State Security or the Ministry of Public Security.⁸⁹ Since supporting the Tibetan government-in-exile and Taiwan independence is regarded as a violation of China’s territorial sovereignty and national security, the mayor of Prague was defined as “anti-China” by the media. Meanwhile, it also conveys a further message to the potential audiences that individuals and groups expressing support for Tibetan and Taiwanese independence are a threat to the country and should be resisted.

Although there is no clear definition of left-right classification of politics and it may be already outdated, the Pirate Party’s position could be somehow considered to be middle or center-left - they are often seen as a possible new “culturally left-wing” force following the collapse of traditional left parties in the Czech Republic.⁹⁰ Although most Pirate Party voters define themselves as centrist or center-right, it is difficult to prove the accuracy of this self-classification. In the Czech historical context, due to the close association of the “left-wing” concept with communism, people often do not like to identify themselves as leftists, even when they are more supportive of social equality and

⁸⁸ Collins, *Collins English Dictionary*, 2009.

⁸⁹ Central Government of the People’s Republic of China. “Order of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, No. 692,” *Chinese Government Network*, December 6, 2017. https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-12/06/content_5244819.htm. (in Chinese)

⁹⁰ Horký, Petr, “The Czech Left on the Ropes,” *Týdeník Respekt*, n.d., <https://www.respekt.cz/respekt-in-english/the-czech-left-on-the-ropes>.

welfare.⁹¹ According to its leadership, the Pirate Party prefers to define itself as a “liberal party”.⁹²

If the Chinese government and ordinary Chinese people are assumed to be extreme left-wing who adhere to communism, then the Pirate Party is obviously “right-wing” to them. But in fact, the issue may be more complicated than imagined. Because China’s “left” and “right” are very different from Western countries, it is necessary to clarify the definition in the Chinese context before examining the political stance of Chinese people. In a survey of left-right tendencies of Chinese internet users, Ma Deyong and Zhang Shuxia used four indicators to divide “left” and “right”: individual rights - state power, government intervention - economic freedom, state property rights - private property rights, affirmation - negation of Mao Zedong (Table 11). To explain the political appeals and value orientations of Chinese “left-wing” and “right-wing”, they used a more detailed six dimension: personal freedom is more important or state power, support for market dominance or government dominance, support for globalism or nationalism, whether China should continue on its current path or embrace universal values, support or oppose the traditional communist legacy, and whether corruption and the gap between the rich and the poor are due to excessive or incomplete reforms (Table 12).

Table 11.

Dimensions and Indicators to Divide “Left” and “Right”

Measurement Dimensions (Topics)	Indicators (Questions)	Position (Agreement)
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⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Mas. “Pirates Want to Lead the Liberal Political Center and Get 20 Percent in May, It Was Announced at the Forum in Tábor,” *ČT24*, January 19, 2019, <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/clanek/domaci/pirati-chtej-vest-liberalni-politicky-wednesday-and-in-may-earn-20-percent-was-voiced-on-the-forum-in-the-camp-69472>. (in Czech)

		Left-wing	Right-wing
Individual rights vs. State power	1. Human rights are above sovereignty?		√
	2. There are no universal values of freedom, democracy and human rights in the world?	√	
State property rights vs. Private property rights	3. Land ownership belongs to individuals rather than the state?		√
Government intervention vs. Economic freedom	4. All areas related to national security and people's livelihood must be controlled by state-owned enterprises?	√	
Affirmation vs. Negation of Mao Zedong	5. Mao Zedong's mistakes are insignificant compared to his achievements?	√	

Source: Ma Deyong, and Zhang Shuxia. "The 'Left' and 'Right' of Chinese Internet Users." *Twenty-first Century* 142 (2014): 86-103. <https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c/media/articles/c142-201309061.pdf>.

Note: The original table is in Chinese.

Table 12.

The Left and Right Positions of Intellectual Elites

Dimensions	Left-wing	Right-wing
Individual freedom - State power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Personal interests are subordinate to national interests. · Citizens' universal participation in politics. · Strengthening "national capacity" takes precedence over limiting government power. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Individual power takes precedence over state power. · The greatest threat to individual freedom comes from the government. · Power needs to be constrained.
Market-led - Government-led	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The market is often out of order and inevitably causes social injustice. · The market must be regulated by government and social forces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The market economy has its own logic. · If the market can't solve the problem, the government can't solve it as well.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The operation of the market needs to be closely linked to the state. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The government should maintain minimal intervention in the market.
Globalism - Nationalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Anti-globalization. · China has been included in the unfair global capitalist system. · Resist foreign capitalism and be wary of economic invasion by multinational corporations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Support globalization. · The obstacle of China's progress is not foreign capitalism, but the old system and ideology. · Deepening reform and opening up to the outside world are necessary.
Judgment on state conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · China's problems have been transformed into the dangers of the capitalist market economy. · China's future lies in confronting the existing world economic structure and taking a new path that no existing civilization has taken. · China's model and path are special. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · China's main problem is the lagging political system reform. · Promote nomocracy, constitutionalism, and democracy to constrain power and regulate the market. · China is not special. The universal values of freedom and democracy also apply in China.
Attitudes toward heritage of traditional system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Affirm the traditional socialist path. · Affirm Mao Zedong and the Mao system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Deny the traditional socialist path. · Deny Mao Zedong and the Mao system.
How to view the corruption and wealth inequality during the reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Market-oriented reforms lead to capital liberalization, increased privileges, and wealth inequality. · Maintain public ownership of property, strengthen state power, and promote redistribution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Incomplete market-oriented reforms (or profiteering by those in power) lead to wealth inequality. · Adhere to market-oriented reforms, promote privatization, and limit government power.

Source: Ma Deyong, and Zhang Shuxia. "The 'Left' and 'Right' of Chinese Internet Users." *Twenty-first Century* 142 (2014): 86-103. <https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c/media/articles/c142-201309061.pdf>.

Note: The original table is in Chinese.

According to the result of Ma and Zhang's study, Chinese internet users generally tend to be "right-wing" in their political stance. The percentages for the four indicators of human rights being above sovereignty, recognition of universal values, privatization of land ownership, and opposition to Mao Zedong's "merits outweighing his faults" all exceeded 35%.⁹³ Based on further calculations, they suggested that the "left"

⁹³ Ma, Deyong, and Zhang Shuxia. "The 'Left' and 'Right' of Chinese Internet Users." *Twenty-first Century* 142 (2014): 86-103. (in Chinese)

only accounts for 7% of the sample, “centerists” accounts for 42.7%, and the “right” accounts for 50.3%; the “left-wingers” and “right-wingers” who clearly show their political inclinations account for 4.9% and 21.1% respectively.⁹⁴ Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that most Chinese online users support further political liberalization and economic market-oriented reforms, and do not fully trust or even doubt the traditional communist legacy). In a subsequent research, Ma Deyong and Wang Lina further proposed that “left-wing” Chinese citizens are with stronger authoritarian personality and nationalist sentiments, and are more conservative, prefer to maintain the existing political system, while “right-wingers” are more inclined towards liberalism, concerned about social fairness, and believe that power should be constrained.⁹⁵

Therefore, it is interesting that market-oriented media use “right-wing” as a negative label to describe Mayor Hrib and his Pirate Party. Most of their potential readers are highly educated and interested in political topics, and their profiles overlap greatly with those of the respondents in the above surveys. It means that more than half of the target audiences are “right wing”. Under common logic, market-oriented media should attempt to please their audiences rather than belittle their political leanings. Especially when reporting on Taiwan-related issues, simply using the phrase “betraying the ‘One China’ principle” is already enough to unite most of the audiences, and further using the derogatory description of “right-wing” to stir up emotions is unnecessary. This may be because China is nominally a socialist country, thus the media maintains an “anti-right” tone in order to emphasize the orthodoxy of its values. The orthodoxy of “left-wing” was established in

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ma, Deyong, and Wang Lina. “Ideological stance of Chinese netizens and its formation: an empirical analysis.” *Journal of Social Science* 35, no. 5 (2015): 142-167. (in Chinese)

China after 1949, reaching its peak during the Cultural Revolution.⁹⁶ Even after the reforms of the 1980s, although liberal thought gained its legal status, it was often criticized by the “neo-left”.⁹⁷ Despite the political stance of an ordinary Chinese online user is more likely to be “right-wing”, the idea of “left-wing” as orthodoxy is still held today. The description of the mayor as “right-wing” proves this point in reverse: the villain in the text is associated with “right-wing”, and two articles directly derogatorily describe “right-wing”, saying that Hřib “has long been drowned in right-wing party culture”, suggesting to readers the negativity of “right-wing” supporters and their values.

From the audience’s perspective, it may become difficult to publicly express their real positions and opinions when their political inclinations are generally questioned by the “orthodox”. Therefore, media discourse that promotes the “left” and belittles the “right” may intensify personal users’ self-censorship, thereby limiting freedom of expression in cyberspace. However, the above inference is only a hypothesis, and the actual situation needs to be verified by possible future research.

In contrast, “political speculator” is not the most prominent label for Mayor Hřib in market-oriented media reports, with only four articles making similar descriptions. The mayor’s “anti-China” actions were interpreted as a gimmick created to cover up his poor performance in politics in order to gain media attention and political capital. Three articles sarcastically described the mayor as receiving “celebrity-like praise” or “such (high) attention that flattered him”. However, in this context, the real target of satire is no longer the mayor of Prague, but the Western media and its discourse.

⁹⁶ Ma, Deyong, and Zhang Shuxia. “The ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ of Chinese Internet Users.” *Cultural Perspectives* 4 (2014): 14-32. (in Chinese)

⁹⁷ Ibid.

In market-oriented media's texts, the mayor was described as a politician with poor performance and relies on creating disputes to seek opportunities, and was praised by western media only because of his stance on the Taiwan issue. Through complimenting the mayor, western media is in fact expressing the support of Taiwan's independence. Market-oriented media's articles attempted to illustrate to audiences the "political propaganda against China" of the West (mostly refers to America and its allies). For foreign media, content that might be considered as "political propaganda against China" typically includes, but is not limited to: support for Taiwan and Tibetan independence (or related activists), reporting on human rights issues of China, and systematic questioning of party-state rule. Because in above all three contexts, the connotation is that the Chinese government is an anti-freedom or anti-human rights oppressor. Foreign media articles reporting on related events are usually denied as untrue, fictitious, or exaggerated. Defining them as propaganda will also make audiences tend to believe that similar reports by foreign media are purely for political purposes, in order to stigmatize China's national image. Such a media context inevitably leads to distrust of foreign media among the local public. In fact, the claim that the country's image is maliciously smeared in the Western media is already widely spread and accepted in China.⁹⁸

3.2.4 Clarification on the friendly attitude of the Czech central government (or President Zeman)

While criticizing the Prague city government, market-oriented media also emphasized the Czech national government's adherence to the "One China" principle and Zeman's overall pro-China attitude. A total of 11 of 20 articles mentioned the position of

⁹⁸ Shen, Yamei. "Reflections on the hot debate on 'China's image' in the Western media." *International Studies* 4 (2011): 8-14. (in Chinese)

the central government or the president. Compared with the formulaic wording of the institutional media, market-oriented media adopted more various expressions. For example, “The Czech Republic is one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with China, and the Czech government has long adhered to the ‘One China’ principle”⁹⁹, “President Zeman expressed great attention to Sino-Czech relations during his visit to China in April”¹⁰⁰, and “The Czech president called for strengthening relations with China”¹⁰¹. The most frequently appearing is “Czech President Zeman’s spokesman once criticized the Prague City Council for ‘deliberately damaging relations with China’”¹⁰². Although there are differences in the specific form of expression, the basic position of market-oriented media is completely consistent with the institutional media: although the Prague municipal authorities have made provocative actions, and the position and attitude of the Czech national government are still friendly.

3.2.5 More attention on the impact on non-political affairs

Compared with the institutional media, market-oriented media are also more concerned about whether the dispute between Beijing and Prague will impact on non-political exchanges, which include bilateral cooperation with both Czech Republic and Taiwan. A total of five reports mentioned the possible effect on bilateral communications, two of which specifically reported on whether the Shanghai-Taipei City Forum would be affected by the sister-city incident. The forum is a mechanism for communication and

⁹⁹ Yu, Yang. “Prague wants to establish a ‘sister-city’ with Taipei, but the reaction is cold: there is no comment from netizens under the related report,” *Global Times*, December 14, 2019. <https://m.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKok8n>. (in Chinese)

¹⁰⁰ Nanfang Metropolis Daily. “Behind the termination of the friendly city relationship between Beijing and Prague: Prague mayor repeatedly made inappropriate remarks and actions regarding Taiwan and Tibet,” *Sohu*, October 10, 2019. https://www.sohu.com/a/346096883_161795. (in Chinese)

¹⁰¹ Qingmu Jiangbei. “The mayor of Prague once again slandered China as ‘unreliable’, and netizens denounced it as an irrational ‘pirate’ style,” *Global Times*, January 13, 2020. <https://m.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKoRVP>. (in Chinese)

¹⁰² Qingmu. “Use Taiwanese pangolins to replace mainland giant pandas? Prague mayor’s ‘absurd’ behavior angers people,” *Global Times*, August 8, 2019. <https://m.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKm4Ty>. (in Chinese)

dialogue between the leaders of Shanghai and Taipei, and has been held alternately by the two cities every year since 2010.

The remaining three articles focused on the possible impact of non-political exchanges between China and the Czech Republic. One article specifically reported that China might cancel its plan to purchase a batch of aircraft from the Czech Republic. This article also wrote that China is the Czech Republic's largest trading partner outside the European Union, and the Czech Republic's imports and exports to China have achieved rapid growth in the past 20 years, while the growth of exports is significantly faster than imports. The behavior of the Prague municipality might cause a negative impact on the Czech economy. Other two reports both mentioned that the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra's performance originally scheduled to be held in mainland China was canceled. But interestingly, one of the articles specifically stated that the Czech National Philharmonic Orchestra's performance will be held as usual, which is in line with the trend of separating the Czech central government and the Prague city government when reporting on the sister-city incident.

In general, compared with the institutional media that only report from a political perspective, market-oriented media pay more attention to non-political affairs. However, judging from the fact that only five out of 20 coverage mentioned this topic, the attention it received is actually not enough.

3.3 Online media

As early as 2014, the argument that online media has replaced traditional information channels and become the mainstream media in China has been put forward.¹⁰³ The large and diverse user base has prompted online media to produce richer content. Among the reports collected on the sister-city incident, articles from online media accounted for more than half (38 articles). The online media examined can be divided into two main categories: news portals and social media platforms (Table 13). News portals are completely privatized, but are subject to government censorship and supervision. With the development of the network ecology, some individuals or groups have opened accounts on social media platforms, published articles on current events they are concerned about. Similar to news portals, their public speeches on the internet are under censorship. But compared with institutional media and market-oriented media, they still have a border speech space. Some of these creators are certified by the platform and have special tags on their homepages. They gather their own audience groups and have a certain influence in cyberspace, and act as “opinion leaders” of internet users. Therefore, all the investigated social media articles are collected from them. Since this thesis mainly examines longer media articles, social media with posts as the main form of dissemination are not included (such as Weibo). Platforms with longer text as the main content include WeChat Public Platform and Bai Jiahao, which are also the largest source of collected online media articles.

Table 13.

The Investigated Online Media

¹⁰³ Min, Dahong. “From marginal media to mainstream media: A review of the 20-year development of China’s online media.” *Journalism and Writing* 3 (2014): 5-9. (in Chinese)

Name of News Portal (Social Media Platform)	Number of Article (s)	News Portal / Social Media Platform
SOHU	2	News Portal
Sina	4	
Guancha Syndicate	6	
Wechat Public Platform	13	Social Media Platform
Bai Jiahao	13	

3.3.1 The most negative sentimental tendencies

In comparison, articles from online media have the strongest sentiment. The average negative percentage is 56.99%, much higher than the 18.88% of institutional media and the 24.13% of market-oriented media (Table 6). Among the 38 article titles, 22 have obvious negative sentiment. After Prague announced its sister city relationship with Taipei in January 2020, the average negative percentage of online media articles rose sharply to 55.58% (Table 14). In conclusion, the sentiment trend of online media is consistent with the institutional media, with the negative being the main sentiment. At the same time, the interaction between Prague and Taipei further strengthened the negative sentiment of online media as well.

Table 14.

The Negative Row Percentage of Online Media Coverage Based on Publication Times

	July 2019	August 2019	October 2019	November 2019	December 2019	January 2020	February 2020
Negative	9.06%	8.99%	21.55%	0.93%	2.22%	55.78%	1.67%
Moderately Negative	10.50%	4.37%	18.02%	-	7.46%	57.06%	2.59%
Very	8.63%	10.38%	22.61%	1.21%	0.64%	55.13%	1.40%

Negative							
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Note: “Moderately Negative” and “Very Negative” are subcategories summarized under “Negative” (“Negative” = {“Moderately Negative”, “Very Negative”}). No online media reports related to the sister-cities incident were published in September 2019.

3.3.2 Special focus on Taiwan-related issues

Similar to the institutional media and the market-oriented media, online media also paid special attention to Taiwan-related issues. In the frequency-based keyword extraction, keywords directly related to Taiwan appeared in total of 174 times, including 116 times for “台湾 (Taiwan)”, 54 times for “台北 (Taipei)”, and 4 times for “涉台 (She Tai, Taiwan-related)” (Table 15). In the frequency-based word cloud generated for online media articles, “台湾 (Taiwan)” ranked eighth (Figure 5). Moreover, as pointed out above, Prague and Taipei becoming sister cities also significantly negatively affected online media’s attitude.

Table 15.

Frequency of Taiwan-related Keywords Appearing in Online Media Reports

台湾 (Taiwan)	116
台北 (Taipei)	54
涉台 (She Tai, Taiwan-related)	4
In Total	174

Figure 5.

The Word Cloud of Online Media Coverage



Note: The minimum word length is set to 2 while conducting frequency-based keyword extraction.

Same as the institutional and market-oriented media, online media's condemnation of Prague city government mainly focuses on violating the "One China" principle (threatening China's core interests) and undermining bilateral relations. The criticisms of "betrayal" and disregard for "basic norms of international relations" also frequently appeared.

3.3.3 The Mayor's image: similar to market-oriented media but with slight differences

The focus on the mayor of Prague is also one of the characteristics of online media articles. The Chinese transliterations of the mayor's surname "贺瑞普 (He Rui Pu)" or "贺瑞卜 (He Rui Bu)" were mentioned 139 times in 22 articles, and in 72 times it appeared in sentences with negative sentiments. The image of the mayor portrayed by online media is basically consistent with the market-oriented media, which is an "anti-China" and "right-wing" "political speculator". "Anti-China" remains the most prominent label, appearing 44 times in 10 articles. "Right-wing" was mentioned eight times in seven reports. In addition, eight coverage claimed that the mayor's behavior was

“fishing for political capital”, and four texts described it as an “anti-China (political) show”.

In the description of market-oriented media, the mayor’s “political speculation” was unfairly praised by Western media, leading to the conclusion that Western media is not trustworthy. However, online media articles further expressed doubts about the Western democracy. Skepticism about the democratic system appeared in four articles, and the following are the related sentences. Some believe that the actions of the Prague mayor and municipal authorities are due to infiltration and manipulation by Western countries (sentence 1 and 6). Some suggest that the mayor is striving for political capital for his personal career while ignoring national interests (sentence 2). According to the controversy between Mayor Hřib and President Zeman, some articles said that Czech politics is chaotic and inconsistent (sentence 3, 4, and 6). There are also voices that the Prague city government is kidnapped by Western values and democracy, making irrational decisions (sentence 5). Finally, by claiming that the mayor is an unqualified leader elected by irrational voters, the validity of the general election is also questioned (sentence 7).

1. Before the fall of Czechoslovakia, it was always called a “model of democracy” by the West... As long as a country is called a “model of democracy” by Western powers, its fate is always determined by them. The Czech Republic is one of the typical examples.¹⁰⁴

2. Politicians’ self-interest is above all else? What is democracy for?¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Housha Yueguang. “Beijing and Shanghai have successively ended their friendship with Prague. The Czech Republic should not forget where it came from,” *Guancha Syndicate*, January 22, 2020. (in Chinese)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

3. As a country, there must be a unified will and action... This is the minimum requirement. However, facts show that the democratic system can't achieve this.¹⁰⁶

4. Although the communist regime has fallen for nearly 20 years, Eastern European countries are still struggling to establish a stable democratic system. These countries lack a political center, full of various ideologies, corruption is rampant, and the entire state is in a mess.¹⁰⁷

5. Prague's actions are totally incomprehensible and out of place. Only the future can give the answer whether it reflects the spirit of democracy or is kidnapped and blackmailed by democracy.¹⁰⁸

6. The multi-party parliamentary system and local government autonomy model leave a room for Western anti-China forces to operate, resulting in different voices from the Czech government on specific matters concerning China.¹⁰⁹

7. This is one of the typical characteristics of bad democracy. Stupid people elected awful leaders, and everyone would die together.¹¹⁰

From the above text, it is possible to summarize the basic reasons against the democratic system, which these articles attempted to convey to their audiences. Firstly, the democratic system is considered to be infiltrated and manipulated by the West, which usually refers to the United States. Corresponding to this view, eight articles believe that the actions of the Prague city government were influenced or manipulated by the United States. Secondly, politicians in democratic politics are also considered to be prone to

¹⁰⁶ Ririri Ririri. "Talking from Prague's termination of its friendly city relationship with Beijing," *Wechat Public Platform*, October 15, 2019. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6CL6oQ7zb1E8ghM5CETjkQ>. (in Chinese)

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Jian Gao. "What are Prague Mayor Hrib and his Pirate Party trying to do?" *Wechat Public Platform*, January 20, 2020. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/NkxLMvtdVUq34IUYRhiRJQ>. (in Chinese)

¹¹⁰ Tracing History. "Why did the Prague Mayor sign his own death warrant?" *Wechat Public Platform*, January 20, 2020. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/IbV6wCn8rBH4KRUmNB4sUQ>. (in Chinese)

ignore the public benefits and only focus on personal interests. In addition, democratic governments may be coerced by public opinion and thus make irrational decisions, and leaders elected by universal suffrage may not have good political qualities. Finally, democratic countries lack a single power core, which leads to looseness and chaos in both politics and thoughts. The logic behind the hostility to the democratic politics is the confirmation of the superiority of China's current system. By showing the chaos and inaction of democracy, the unity and efficiency of Chinese politics are reflected. However, it must be pointed out that "democratic skepticism" does not represent the overall trend of online media, and the vast majority of articles did not make any comments on the democratic political system. In most cases, negative comments about the mayor of Prague limited to himself and did not extend further.

3.2.4 Clarification on the friendly attitude of the Czech central government (or President Zeman)

As is the case with the institutional and market-oriented media, online media's criticisms are limited to the Prague municipal authorities and do not extend to the Czech central government. A total of 21 articles explicitly pointed out that the Czech national government or President Zeman held different positions from the Prague municipal government on the sister-city incident. However, compared with the institutional and market-oriented media, online media's statements are more straightforward. For example, "President Zeman has repeatedly criticized the Prague municipal government"¹¹¹, "(anti-China politicians in the Czech Republic) are dissatisfied with Zeman"¹¹², or directly

¹¹¹ Fu Peng's Observation. "China announces termination of sister city relationship with Prague," *Bai Jiahao*, October 11, 2019. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1647061854577536700&wfr=spider&for=pc>. (in Chinese)

¹¹² Dao Jian Xiao. "What did Prague do that made China unable to tolerate it and take action against it?," *Guancha Syndicate*, July 30, 2019. <https://user.guancha.cn/main/content?id=150924>. (in Chinese)

call the president “the umbrella of Sino-Czech relations”¹¹³ or “pro-China faction”¹¹⁴. The connotation conveyed to audiences is also similar to the institutional and market-oriented media, which is that although the Prague municipal government has made inappropriate actions, the Czech government and the president are still friendly and trustworthy.

3.2.5 The most attention on the impact on non-political affairs among three types of media

Compared with institutional and market-oriented media, online media paid more attention to the impact of the sister-city incident on non-political affairs. A total of 14 articles mentioned potential impacts or negative consequences that already occurred, including the cancellation of the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra’s performance in China, the withdrawal of Sinobo Group’s sponsorship of SK Slavia soccer club, and China’s decision not to purchase L-40 aircraft as originally planned. Among them, one article paid special attention to the withdrawal of the sponsorship of SK Slavia, which was not reported by the institutional and market-oriented media. Meanwhile, these 14 articles also suggested that since China is an important economic partner of the Czech Republic, the actions of the Prague municipal government would cause losses to the Czech economy. When mentioning China’s aircraft purchase plan, three articles indicated that these aircrafts entered the Chinese market because of the promotion by President Zeman, but further orders were canceled due to the actions of the Prague municipal authorities. This statement implied to audiences the disagreement between the Czech central government and the Prague municipal authorities. Zeman was placed in the position of a “victim” and

¹¹³ Housha Yueguang. “Beijing and Shanghai have successively ended their friendship with Prague. The Czech Republic should not forget where it came from,” *Guancha Syndicate*, January 22, 2020. (in Chinese)

¹¹⁴ Ririri Ririri. “Talking from Prague’s termination of its friendly city relationship with Beijing,” *Wechat Public Platform*, October 15, 2019. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6CL6oQ7zb1E8ghM5CETjkQ>. (in Chinese)

portrayed as an unlucky president implicated by irrational politicians. Apparently, online media's attitude towards President Zeman is much milder than Mayor Hřib. In articles of the institutional media and market-oriented media, Zeman and his government are mostly considered friendly due to their pro-China attitude, while online media sometimes describe him as an "unlucky president" and showed sympathy.

Another feature of online media articles is the concern about the possible impact on Chinese tourists traveling to Prague. Six articles showed concern for the tourism industry and argued that the actions of the Prague city government will cause it to lose the favor of Chinese tourists. Interestingly, three articles highly praised Prague's culture, history, and urban scenery while criticizing the actions of the Prague municipal authorities. The city was portrayed as having artistic temperament, full of beautiful historic buildings, with many music and literary masters, and as a "living specimen" representing the old time of Europe. Furthermore, these three reports expressed regret that the actions of the Prague city government will affect Chinese tourists' willingness to travel there. In addition, there is another article that expressed a unique view: the current excessive number of tourists has far exceeded Prague's carrying capacity, and the excessive tourist activity has already invaded the daily lives of local residents. Therefore, the growing number of Chinese tourists might not be welcomed by Prague. And since the number of tourists other than Chinese is also increasing significantly, the local tourism industry would not be greatly affected.

There are two articles focusing on the history and ideological heritage of the Czech Republic. One of the articles gave a detailed introduction to the history of the Czech Republic from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the present, but the author's attitude is

mainly negative. The article claimed that the history of the Czech Republic is an example of a small country being manipulated by a big country as a pawn, and further proposed that the current political system of the Czech Republic is the result of Western infiltration and control. Another article introduced Havel's human rights values and argued that Havel's political legacy is one of the reasons that prompted the Prague city government to support Taiwan's independence. But the author's attitude is also mainly negative, evaluating Havel as "anti-communist and anti-China".

Moreover, one article believes that the reason why the Prague city government took "anti-China" actions is that China's national image propaganda and cultural influence overseas are insufficient, resulting in "anti-China" a trend in the Western world. At the end of the article, the author complained about the relevant government departments and policies: "With the propaganda methods and strength of our related departments, I don't expect them to turn the tide... If our media and our officials can be more down-to-earth and stop using content that they themselves don't even believe in to fool their own people, we would be highly appreciative."¹¹⁵ This also reflects the basic status quo of China's new media - while some criticisms of the government indeed exist in cyberspace, they are sporadic and short-lived. These criticisms are not only non persistent, but also lack organized opposition factions behind to support.¹¹⁶ Through selective online censorship and regulation, public dissatisfaction is limited to the individual level, such as protests against specific officials or government departments, rather than systematic resistance.¹¹⁷ The only media article collected that made critical comments about the government also revealed a

¹¹⁵ Qicaibudingdexiaowu. "Why did Shanghai break off relations with Prague?," *Wechat Public Platform*, January 15, 2020. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/sjyAa2FPbWvHC2rW2AOuFg>. (in Chinese)

¹¹⁶ Hyun, Ki Deuk, and Jinhee Kim. "The role of new media in sustaining the status quo: Online political expression, nationalism, and system support in China." *Information, Communication & Society* 18, no. 7 (2015): 766-781.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

similar trend, which is that accountability was only directed at the relevant department, and no systematic accusations were involved.

In conclusion, it is possible to suggest that compared with the institutional and market-oriented media, although the main positions are highly consistent, the secondary views of online media are more diverse. Due to the differences in the preferences of audience groups and content creators, the narrative angles of online media are more varied, and in a few cases they even directly criticize the Chinese government. But it must also be pointed out that the existing criticism is very few, unsustainable, and unsystematic.

Conclusion

In general, when reporting on the dissolution of the Beijing-Prague friendship city relationship, the attitude of Chinese media is mainly negative. The degree of negative sentiment tendency of institutional media is the lowest, while online media has the highest and the market-oriented media is in the middle. In addition, after Prague announced its sister-city relationship with Taiwan in January 2020, a strong negative trend of sentiments appeared in all types of media.

From the content perspective, institutional media tended to strictly follow the government's attitude, thus their wording is completely consistent with the official announcement, and has less commentary content. At the same time, due to the relatively homogeneous information sources of Chinese media and the "weathervane" characteristics of institutional media, the reports of institutional media guided other media in terms of main positions, sentimental tendencies, and content structure. Through the investigation of institutional media articles, the basic framework of reporting on the dissolution of the Prague-Beijing friendship can be drawn: 1. Condemning the "wrong position" of the Prague city government (mainly on the Taiwan issue, and sometimes Tibet might be mentioned); 2. (Possibly) commenting on the Mayor's pro-Taiwan political stance and personal experience in Taipei; 3. (Possibly) confirming the friendly attitude of the Czech central government (or former President Zeman); 4. The impact of the Prague authorities' actions, or calling on it to change its position to restart cooperation.

- A special focus on Taiwan-related issues

Special attention to Taiwan is a common feature of all three media types. In the frequency-based keyword extraction, keywords directly related to Taiwan appear very frequently in articles from all three types of media. Compared with the termination of the sister-city relationship itself, Taiwan-related issues obtained more attention from the Chinese media. In all three types of media, the number of published reports increased sharply after Prague and Taipei became sister cities in January 2020, and the negative sentiment tendency also became more significant at the same time. The dispute between Prague and Beijing is no longer a bilateral issue, but a multilateral relationship between Prague, Beijing, and Taipei.

The highly intensive focus on Taiwan does not just appear in media reports about the sister-city incident, but is always a key topic in Chinese media's foreign-related discussions. From the perspective of international politics, "Taiwan is part of China" is recognized by the Chinese government as a core interest, and any public remarks and actions supporting Taiwan's independence are regarded as provocations and interference in internal affairs. On the other hand, China's integral domestic propaganda mechanism has shaped a strong consensus that "Taiwan is part of China" and isolated discourses that favor Taiwan's independence views. National sentiment and a strong desire to cast off the "national humiliation" result any concessions in national sovereignty and territorial disputes are unacceptable by the public, thus exerting pressure on the government's and official media's attitudes on the Taiwan issue. Therefore, the Chinese media's special attention to Taiwan in the sister-city incident is not only politically motivated, but also a response to domestic public opinion and consensus.

In making accusations against the Prague municipal authorities, both market-oriented media and online media followed the model of institutional media, which is criticizing from the perspective of betraying the “One China” principle (threatening China’s core interests) and undermining bilateral relations. In comparison, market-oriented media paid the most attention to Taiwan’s domestic politics and public reactions. In their reports, establishing friendly relations with Prague was portrayed as an unpopular move among the Taiwanese media and the public, suggesting to audiences that supporting Taiwan’s independence is not in line with the trend. Meanwhile, market-oriented media’s attention to Taiwan also showed its regional characteristics: the media from regions that have more frequent exchanges with Taiwan reported more concrete information about Taiwan’s domestic politics, and were more inclined to comment on the incident from the perspective of Taiwan-mainland China relations.

- The mayor’s image in different types of media

Mayor Hřib also plays an important role in media commentary. In articles of institutional media, the mayor was portrayed as an “anti-China” politician, who supports Western values. In three commentary articles from institutional media, “human rights” and “anti-China” often appeared together when describing the mayor. The co-occurrence allows audiences to establish a cognitive connection between the two words, which creates an impression that the identification with democratic human rights values is opposed to supporting China (or patriotism). Since patriotism is promoted as a virtue in the Chinese social context, the liberal democracy and the human rights narrative have become “immoral” due to their “anti-China” characteristics.

In the description of market-oriented media, Hřib's image has further changed to "anti-China", "right-winger" and "political speculator". However, compared with institutional media, the definition of "anti-China" in market-oriented media is not ideological, but more political. "Anti-China" was not linked with "human rights" anymore, but mainly referred to support for the Tibetan government-in-exile or Taiwan's independence. Market-oriented media frequently describe the mayor as "right-wing" in a derogatory manner. However, according to China's special political spectrum, most of the target audiences are more inclined to be "right-wingers". It is necessary to note that the "left" and "right" division in China is different from the convention. On this political spectrum, the mayor and the majority of the market-oriented media audiences are on the "right" side (for the concrete information of China's political spectrum, please check the analysis of negative comments on the mayor in the market-oriented media section).

Rhetoric that derogatorily describes potential readers' political leanings does not conform to the basic logic of the market, but might be due to the need for emphasizing the "left-wing" orthodoxy established in the last century. At the same time, the idea of devaluing the "right-wing" and praising the "left-wing" may intensify internet users' self-censorship, thereby further restricting freedom of speech in Chinese cyberspace.

Finally, market-oriented media's portrayal of the mayor as a "political speculator" in the article is actually a criticism of the Western media. In the texts, the mayor was described as a politician with unideal performance and relies on creating disputes to seek opportunities, but was praised by the Western media only because of his position and actions on the Taiwan issue. The implicit information conveyed to audiences is the "propaganda against China" from Western media, which is recognized as political stigmatization towards China. Because in the case of expressing that Taiwan should be independent, the connotation is

that PRC is an anti-freedom oppressor. In such a media discourse, Chinese audiences' distrust of foreign (mainly Western) media is inevitably resulted.

The image of the mayor in online media articles is basically consistent with market-oriented media. However, in accusations of “political speculation”, some online media articles further raised questions on Western democratic politics. According to their criticism, the democratic system is believed to be infiltrated and manipulated by the West (usually refers to the United States), and politicians of democratic countries are also considered to be egoists who are prone to ignore the public interest. In addition, democratic governments are considered to be easily swept up by irrational public opinion, thus universal suffrage can not elect the ideal leaders. Finally, due to the lack of a single power core, the democratic system would lead to political and ideological chaos. By demonstrating the flaws of democracy, the unity and efficiency of Chinese politics are demonstrated, thus confirming that China's current system is superior.

- Confirmation of the friendly attitude of Czech government (or President Zeman)

Another common feature of all three types of media is the confirmation of the friendly attitude of the Czech central government or President Zeman, and all accusations are specifically stated to be limited to the Prague city government. Statements from online media are the most direct, Zeman is directly described as “pro-China” or the “umbrella” of Sino-Czech relations. In addition, in online media articles, Zeman is sometimes portrayed as an “unlucky president” who got into trouble by irrational politicians and is given a sympathetic attitude. By informing the disagreements between Prague authorities and Zeman's government, further implications include the internal divisions in Czech politics, thereby demonstrating China's unity and coherence to prove again the superiority of the

current system. According to Emilian Kavalski's framework of "Localizing the Other", the image of the Czech Republic in Chinese media has been revised, mainly highlighting its domestic political conflicts, decentralized power, and the intrusion of Western values. The Czech Republic is packaged as a country with an "unsuccessful" Western-style democratic system to suit the domestic audiences and political needs of China.

- The lack of discussion on the impact of non-political affairs

In discussing the possible impact of the sister-city incident, institutional media only talked about the possible rift in bilateral relations and called for the Prague municipal authorities to change their position. Market-oriented media paid limited attention to non-political issues, including China's abandonment of plans to purchase a batch of aircrafts from the Czech Republic, the cancellation of the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra's performance, and whether the city forum between Shanghai and Taipei would be affected. Online media focused the most on the impact of non-political affairs, and the views were also more diverse. Tourism is the biggest interest of online media. While condemning the Prague city government's actions, Prague's urban scenery was highly praised, and regrets were expressed for the impact on Chinese tourists' visits. In addition, the withdrawal of sponsorship of SK Slavia soccer club received one special coverage. The political and ideological heritage of the Czech Republic was also mentioned in two online media articles. Moreover, one online media article believed that the reason why the Prague municipal government took "anti-China" actions is because China's insufficient cultural influence overseas led to an "anti-China" trend in the Western world, and then criticized the relevant Chinese government departments. This reflects the current trend of criticism against the government in China's cyberspace - while the criticism indeed exists, it is

number-limited. Systematic criticism is still not allowed, and mature opposition factions are absent.

But overall, Chinese media, especially institutional media and market-oriented media, still lack attention to non-economic affairs. It shows that Chinese media is more politicized when reporting the sister-city incident. The politicization of media reports created an impression among their audiences that the breakup of friendship between Beijing and Prague was due to Prague's betrayal of its commitment to supporting the "One China" principle, while ignoring the complex political and economic reasons behind it (for instance, insufficient investment and the rise of the political opposition).

- The limitations and potential contributions

Finally, it must be pointed out that it can't be declared that the original data of this paper is complete, because some webpages of the texts were deleted by the publisher or could not be viewed due to time constraints. When conducting sentiment analysis based on computer software, due to the technical defects of NLP (Natural Language Process) itself and the author's cognitive bias, it is impossible to claim that the judgment of sentiment tendency is completely objective.

Despite the limitations of this study, considering the lack of academic works examining the image of CEE countries in Chinese media, it fills in some ways the blank in Chinese media discourse on the Czech Republic after the decline in bilateral relations in the late 2010s. On the other hand, it can still provide inspiration for possible future research. There are already many surveys on China's image in foreign media in the academic community. Especially in China, scholars concerning on foreign affairs are often

more interested in China's image in foreign public opinion, while ignoring the media image of the target country in China. Therefore, this research direction has far-reaching development potential, especially for Chinese-using scholars who with no language barriers.

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