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**Decrypting China's  
Self-Image as "Great Power"**

**NO. 130**

**WORKING PAPERS**

**WORKING PAPERS  
ON EAST ASIAN STUDIES**

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**JUNE 2021**

UNIVERSITÄT  
**DUISBURG  
ESSEN**

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ISSN: 1865-8571 (Printed version) / 1865-858X (Internet version)

Download: [https://www.uni-due.de/in-east/news/green\\_series.php](https://www.uni-due.de/in-east/news/green_series.php)

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NELE NOESSELT / TANJA ECKSTEIN<sup>1</sup> / ELIZAVETA PRIUPOLINA<sup>2</sup>

## Decrypting China's Self-Image as "Great Power"

WORKING PAPERS ON EAST ASIAN STUDIES, NO. 130, DUISBURG 2021

### Abstract

This paper explores the visual representation of the Chinese concept of *daguo* (literally: great power / major power) based on the 2017 CCTV documentary *Daguo Waijiao* 大国外交 (Major Power Diplomacy). Drawing on a combination of select streams of National Role Theory (NRT) and Social Identity Theory (SIT), the paper assesses the Chinese role claims and visualized role performance vis-à-vis two significant others, the Soviet Union / Russia and the US. The coding of select cases of the PRC's *daguo* role enactment sheds light on the conceptual, socio-psychological underpinnings of China's self-identity and global status reflections in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and hence offers some rare insight into the black box of the hermetically closed Chinese party-state.

### Keywords

China, *daguo*, national role theory, Russia, social identity theory, visualized narratives, US

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1 Work package: China & US

2 Work package: China & Russia

## INTRODUCTION<sup>3</sup>

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The rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in terms of economic and monetary power has been accompanied by an internal re-conceptualization of the country's national and global role conception, culminating in the months prior to the changing of the guard in autumn 2012. The dominant "narrateme" of the inner-Chinese debate is the concept of *daguo* – literally translated as "great power" / "major power." Given the claim made both by Chinese political scientists as well as political elites that the PRC neither harbors any global hegemonic ambitions nor is seeking to replace the United States as the center of world politics – and given the ongoing efforts to define a distinct "Chinese" approach to the theory and practice of international relations – the tantalizing question for international China watchers is the definitions and role claims inscribed into the concept of *daguo*.

This paper starts from three basic assumptions and observations:

- 1 As a learning modern autocracy, the PRC is permanently engaged in experimental policy recalibrations. Think tanks and research institutes provide the political elites with sets of policy and strategy. Academic and think tank debates in China reflect a huge variety of political ideas, ranging from neoliberal to neo-Maoist concepts (Ma 2015). These policy images and strategy calculations are not limited to the domestic level; they also incorporate contemplations about the global level and world order into their equation.
- 2 Reflecting the diversity of demands voiced by the various interest groups and the plurality of

developmental strategies discussed by scholarly communities within China, the PRC's political elites generally operate with abstract key terms without providing any binding definitions thereof. These frames hence appear to be used as "empty signifiers" (Laclau 1990) upon which various groups can project their own meanings and policy expectations.

- 3 The "correct" reading of core concepts of Chinese politics is generally communicated via the party-state's official news agency and state television channels, which not only release explanatory background articles, but also provide their (Chinese) audience with a visualization of key political slogans – including the concept of *daguo*.

In August 2017 China Central Television (CCTV) broadcast a documentary, composed of six episodes, entitled *Daguo Waijiao* (DGWJ; official English title: *Major Power Diplomacy*). In November 2017 – shortly after Xi Jinping's reconfirmation as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the 19th Party Congress (October 18–24, 2017) – it was aired again, providing visualized subtitles to core concepts of Chinese foreign strategy as stated in the report to the 19th Party Congress. The focus of the documentary is exclusively on China's foreign relations and its involvement in global governance issues under Xi, hence mainly ex post covering his first period in office (2012–2017). Keeping in mind the heated controversies in 2012 on the *taoguang yanghui* principle – and widespread demand for a more self-confident, active positioning of China in regional and global affairs – (Pang 2020), DGWJ can be understood as a final answer and official end to the internal debates on the reconfiguration of the PRC's foreign strategy both in theory and practice. The point of departure of this paper – undertaking a theory-guided, in-depth decryption of this 2017 CCTV documentary – is the visualized narrative linked to the concept

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3 This paper presents the first preliminary results of the first working package of the DFG project *Role Change and Role Contestation in the People's Republic of China: Globalization of "Chinese" Concepts of Order?* (Project number: 238920157)

of *daguo*. Is there just one unified definition of *daguo*, or is this national role concept complemented by a set of auxiliary roles, activated (or deactivated) depending on the concrete policy field and level of politics (domestic/regional/global) addressed?

To answer these questions, a three-step approach is adopted. In order to categorize and assess the abstract concept of *daguo*, the paper starts with some reflections on National Role Theory (NRT) and Social Identity Theory (SIT), arguing that the *daguo* notion bears layers of role as well as, simultaneously, of status and identity claims. It then continues with a section

on the operationalization of the research puzzle and methodology. The main part of the paper turns to the analysis of select scenes from DGWJ with a focus on (visualized) Chinese national role claims as documented vis-à-vis significant other great powers: namely the US and Russia. Both serve as countermodels to the PRC's self-definition as *daguo* – as Beijing underlines that Chinese approaches to world affairs will never seek to reproduce US unipolarity nor follow the development path of the Soviet Union / modern Russia. The paper concludes with a comparative analysis of the visualization of the PRC's enactment of its established *daguo* role identity.

## THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

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The dataset to be analyzed should not be taken as a compilation of facts and figures of Chinese foreign relations but rather as a narrative archiving the official role, status, and identity claims put forward by the PRC's political leaders. While recent research on NRT highlights the interactionist dimension of national role conceptions – underlining the interplay between role claims, role enactment, role ascriptions, and role perceptions, as well as the ego and alter part of role conceptions – the role-identities and status claims this paper seeks to excavate from the CCTV documentary are *unilateral* ones, being narrated (or visualized) by the Chinese side alone. This includes both national role claims by the PRC (and the visualization of their enactment) as well as roles ascribed to the other great powers or groups of states in select episodes of interaction with China or in different multilateral settings (e.g. United Nations, International Monetary Fund, G20).

Against this backdrop, the paper turns back to the origins of NRT in the 1970s, when theory reflections were mainly centered on the roles articulated by political leaders. Kalevi Holsti put forward a first systematic typology of nation-

al roles, seeking to identify basic categories of role claims and patterns of role behavior. Holsti focused on the roles voiced and proclaimed by states' political leaders, and thus did not reflect the level of domestic role contestation (Cantir and Kaarbo 2012, 2016) – which precedes the formulation of the official role set, and rather belongs to the process of role formation and role making. He identified a close connection between roles and positions (Holsti 1970, 240), thus taking the power distributions between actors into account. However, even though he did not ignore the meaning of status, he concentrated on national roles and positions, arguing that "the notion of status in the international context is more vague than that of position in the social context. Positions include well defined, and usually specialized, sets of functions and are based on explicit role prescriptions, often drawn in the form of rules or laws describing appropriate conduct. Status, however, is not necessarily linked to functions" (Holsti 1970, 242). This brings the author to the general definition of national role conceptions as "the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state

should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems” (Holsti 1970, 245–246).

The *daguo* frame, as this paper will show, is not only connected to certain position (and status) claims but is furthermore deeply rooted in narratives of (self-)identity. Mitzen, combining streams of NRT and SIT, defines role identity as “internalized roles, aspects of an actor’s sense of self that reflect the appropriation of roles and motivate behavior” (2006, 357). Inspired by Giddens, who hypothesizes that identity claims can only be upheld if the actors possess the “capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (1991, 54), Mitzen further states that “role identities are formed and sustained relationally; they depend on others to be realized” (2006, 357). In international affairs, recognition of national role, power, and status claims are of central importance (Ringmar 2002; Lindemann and Ringmar 2015) and far more powerful explanatory factors than material ones alone. Symbolic recognition can thus be expected to form part of actors’ narratives of self-identity. As Anderson and Chakars (2015, 8–9) compellingly reason, televisual representations contribute to nation-building and identity-formation (think also here of Anderson’s “imagined communities”), as political authorities (not only in autocratic regime settings) use(d) TV programs to glorify national leaders and their political agendas, to symbolically present the state as provider of stability and security, and/or to encourage certain types of social behavior

(hence, especially in socialist systems, contributing to the molding of the new socialist citizen).

Summarizing the above-sketched theory reflections, the CCTV documentary can be expected to convey a unified narrative that locates the PRC in a world as imagined (or projected) from the Chinese perspective, a multipolar one where China is recognized and treated as a “great power” on a par with other great powers. These narrated and visualized role claims are not formed via interactions, they are unilaterally proclaimed – and thus fall into the category of visual(ized) political historiography. The dataset to be analyzed, the six episodes making up DGWJ, presents itself as being located between newsreel and political documentary. DGWJ operates with a combination of (CCTV) news footage additional shots of landscapes and happy people, as well as episodes that visualize global developmental challenges such as climate change; background interviews with or spoken commentaries by Chinese scholars and policy practitioners feature too. However, a closer look reveals that DGWJ does not follow the main principles of modern documentary theory (for an overview, see Bruzzi 2000), as it does not present facts and competing interpretations but operates with one unified storyline, composed of edited or deliberately arranged material. It is hence best scrutinized by means and tools of narration analysis, as it is not fiction but a special subcategory of a Chinese re-imagined “retro(per)spective”, a visualized imagination of contemporary world politics.

## CODING PROCESS

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DGWJ combines three elements of plot narration: (1) camerawork, which relies on the nonverbal, visual-allegorical representation of the “real world”; (2) voiceovers by an omniscient narrator; (3) direct excerpts from speeches by the documentary’s central figure, Xi Jinping, or extracts from background interviews with scholars and political practitioners.

Decryption of DGWJ requires the combined analysis of the plot narration and its visualization (as well as its sounds/music). Furthermore, to critically evaluate Chinese *daguo* role claims vis-à-vis the US and Russia as based on select episodes of DGWJ, these “Chinese” narratives and narratemes have to be contrasted with the visual representation as well as the interpreta-

tion of the same events by US and Russian media, political elites, as well as scholars working on world history and world politics. By comparing China's visualized role conceptions and the

perceptions of role claims and role behavior in US and Russian eyes, the paper will identify the invisible role reflections underlying Beijing's *daguo* role-identity claims.

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHINA'S ROLE CLAIMS VIS-À-VIS OTHERS

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The analysis of the selected cases suggests that when it comes to a range of highly relevant international issues, China's conceptualization of *daguo* relies on the roles of *leading power* and *mediator*. One area where Chinese, Russian, and US role concepts starkly contrast each other is in the field of global nuclear security, visible in particular when examining two of the most prominent international issues: the Iran nuclear deal as well as the ongoing tensions over North Korea's nuclear weapons program. In both cas-

es, China has presented an official narrative of it being a responsible great power doing its utmost to aid the peaceful resolution of each conflict as a *mediator*, while US depictions are centered on its own primacy in the negotiations and deal-making processes. The Russian perspective tends to reflect the perception of the US as a side bearing most of the responsibility and, at the same time, reflects Russian claims to jointly promote with China an alternative to current US policies.

## CHINA'S ROLE CLAIMS VIS-À-VIS THE US<sup>4</sup>

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DGWJ develops an overarching narrative of China's roles in relations with the US being those of a *leading power* (E3: 0:11:33–51; E3: 0:12:19–48; E3: 0:13:30–48; E4: 0:29:08–0:30:35), *mediator* (E3: 0:11:33–51; E4: 0:29:08–53), and *active collaborator* (E3: 0:11:58–0:12:48; E4: 0:28:36–0:30:35), while also acknowledging the aspect of competition (*competitor*) – envisaged as a critical part of these two countries' bilateral relations.<sup>5</sup> China illustrates its *leading power*, *mediator*, and *active collaborator* role claims vis-à-vis the US particularly in the context of global or regional international hotspot issues. As such, the narra-

tive illuminates China's involvement in (cooperation on) reaching the Iran nuclear agreement and in facilitating negotiations on and cooperating with the US regarding the North Korean nuclear issue. However, China's self-presentation both in DGWJ as well as in domestic media more generally as a country guided by the principle of *daguo* – driving initiatives and providing solutions to international issues while also balancing cooperation and competition in its relations with the US – is rarely, if at all, reciprocated in official US media; this illustrates the mismatch between projected roles and role ascriptions by others.

First and foremost, the documentary creates the image of China as a *leading power*, putting special emphasis on the country's negotiators having been instrumental in promoting conflict resolution with regard to both the Iranian and North Korean nuclear issues, as well as in the attainment of the final Iran nuclear agreement.

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4 A systematic coding of the main role claims of China vis-à-vis the US can be found in the Appendices 1 and 2 attached to this paper. Additionally, the results of the analysis of representations of events in US media and official statements are summarized in Appendix 3.

5 Here and after E3 and E4 refer to Episodes 3 and 4 of DGWJ.

Regarding the Iran negotiations and agreement, the narrative developed here puts forwards China's initiative and constructive role in securing the deal, lauding the proposals raised by the Chinese side as having led to the resolution of some of the most contentious issues at stake (E3: 0:11:33–51; E3: 0:13:30–48). Although heralding its own input to the negotiations, at the same time China also argues for its position as a neutral *mediator* (E3: 0:11:33–51) between the principal opposing parties of the dispute: the US and Iran. Such Chinese leadership and mediation, the official state narrative upholds, are also evident in its engagement in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, citing its efforts to facilitate communication between the latter and the US-South Korea alliance through its dual-track principle (E4: 0:29:08–53) and dual-freeze proposal (E4: 0:29:57–0:30:35).

Thus, China presents itself as having been a *leader* and *mediator* for the opposing negotiating factions in both of these conflicts: Its proposals are used as model examples, it provides knowledge for the peaceful resolution of the conflicts through diplomatic means, and it is willing to assist all parties that are looking for support and advice from elsewhere (E3: 0:11:45–51; E3: 0:12:19–48; E4: 0:29:14–33; E4: 0:29:41–0:30:16). At the same time, China retains a certain level of distance through its projected image of a constructive aid but not party to the two conflicts, portraying them instead as centered on the US and Iran and the US-South Korea alliance and North Korea respectively. This is narrated not only in the voiceover (E3: 0:11:33–51; E4: 0:29:58–0:30:35) but also through the documentary's choices regarding visual representation (E3: 0:11:39–47; E4: 0:27:56–0:28:25). Furthermore, Chinese depictions of the US's position and behavior on the Iran nuclear issue as well as the contradicting and increasingly far apart views of the US and North Korea illuminate the Chinese position of central responsibility for the issues' (peaceful resolution) lying with the US. The documentary further enhances this image of China's leadership by adding the nuance of it being an *active collaborator*

(E3: 0:11:52–0:12:48; E4: 0:28:36–0:30:35), noting the country's clear willingness and steadfastness to cooperate on reaching the Iran nuclear deal as well as the mutual goal of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

This appears in stark contrast to the US narrative of these events, which is focused on the centrality of US leadership and diplomacy in the reaching of the final deal in the Iran case, as well as in maintaining and facilitating (peaceful) negotiations in both cases. While the Iran nuclear agreement has been portrayed as the greatest diplomatic achievement of President Barack Obama's time in office, explicit mentions of China by US media or official statements are largely concerned with China's interests in and motivations for engagement in the conflict's resolution as well as the Chinese side's positions on certain sections of the negotiated deal. Thus, US coverage of China's stakes in securing an agreement with Iran tend to be framed in the context of Chinese deliberations for economic and strategic development opportunities with Iran and the broader region. Particularly, energy resources, trade, and investments in connection with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are emphasized in connection to China's interest in the regional stability of the Middle East.

US reporting on the Iran case overall has been most likely to elicit imagery of conflicting interest groups, with the US and European Union on the one side facing up to a Russian-Chinese faction on the other. Similarly, in regard to the North Korean nuclear issue, the US has framed itself as the most crucial negotiating party for resolution of the conflict and as the preeminent leader of the international pressure campaign against the North Korean regime. As such, most of the issues, rhetoric, and discussions on the topic in US media reports during the period covered by DGWJ are associated with the US's role, while China is referred to mainly as North Korea's long-standing ally and trading partner. US sources portray China as a complicating factor and obstacle in the tensions, visible through the

focus on, for example, North Korea's strategic significance for China's rivalry with the US, US demands for increased Chinese cooperation on (and China's reluctance in) implementing harsher sanctions against the regime, as well as US criticism of Chinese firms' trade links with North Korean counterparts. Additionally, China is mentioned in US discussions on related military and security issues, such as Chinese-Russian opposition to US military exercises in the region, and depicted as more reactionary and restrained/reserved in dealing with current tensions than the US. Such aspects as the absence of significant changes in China's North Korea policy despite open provocations by the latter are cited in this context. In general, the US presents itself as a *protector* against a North Korean regime treated as a direct threat to the North American country, to its allies, and to its forces in the region.

Therefore, while China in its official narrative<sup>6</sup> has highlighted the constructive impact it views itself as having had on both the Iran and North Korean nuclear issues in the form of being a *leading power*, *mediator*, and *active collaborator*, the US has painted a very different picture of events. The US has positioned itself as being at the center of negotiations and tangible actions to curb those two countries' nuclear ambitions, focusing on China's role in slowing/hindering progress on related measures. Thus, quite evidently the US and China find themselves directly and openly contesting each other's versions and framings of events, with China's projected role claim of it being a leader in international nuclear security affairs juxtaposed with the US's contradictory framing of its own primacy in negotiations and achieving of agreements/results.

## CHINA'S ROLE CLAIMS VIS-À-VIS RUSSIA<sup>7</sup>

China's relations with Russia are presented in the documentary as being defined by friendship and cooperative partnership, based on the principles of the new type of international relations advocated by China. Advancing a new approach to global governance, DGWJ highlights that the cooperation with Russia in this field is an essential element of China's major-power diplomacy. In this context, such roles as *model for others* and *defender of peace* are narrated as being enacted jointly with Russia. However, the comparative analysis of Chinese and Russian perspectives on such core international security issues as the Iran nuclear deal or North Korean nuclear issue reveals a range of mismatches between China's role claims and Russian perceptions.

As mentioned in the previous section, the documentary projects China's roles of *leading power*, *mediator*, and *active collaborator* on both the Iran nuclear deal and the North Korean issue. While the US is narrated in both cases as a significant other with whom problems have to be negotiat-

ed, Russia is cast in the position of an *invisible other*. In the case of the Iran nuclear deal, this is highlighted both through the voiceover and the visual narrative. Whereas the voiceover merely fails to mention Russia, the visual narrative goes on to emphasize explicitly the juxtaposition of China and the US/EU by underplaying the role of Russia. Following the narration of China's role as a *mediator* in the negotiations in the 5+1 format, the documentary presents a scene where the ne-

<sup>6</sup> While there exist various differing sub-debates on the two issues in China, state media tends to reflect the storyline portrayed by the most influential faction(s) as the official narrative hereon.

<sup>7</sup> The dataset for analysis of Russian media is composed of 25 video reports covering the Iran nuclear deal and North Korea nuclear issue aired as parts of the news programs Novosti (Pervyi Kanal) and Vesti (Rossiya-1/Rossiya-24) broadcast by the two largest mainstream media outlets in the country. The detailed results of the coding of the documentary narrative are presented in Appendices 1 and 2. The summary of and key information on the analysis of Russian media narratives are presented in Appendix 4.

gotiating sides gather together for a press conference, each country's representative standing next to their respective national flags. The only empty space remains in front of the Russian flag (E3: 0:13:00–02, E3: 0:13:12–20).<sup>8</sup> In this way the visual narrative constructs China's role claims of *leading power* and *mediator* vis-à-vis the US and the EU.

The narrative surrounding the North Korean nuclear issue adds further nuance to China's role claims of being a *leading power* and a *mediator*. The voiceover for this case fails to mention Russia as a side involved in the related negotiations. Yet, the careful observer notices references to Russia in the visual sequence. Through the presentation of the Russian leader walking alongside or posing for a group picture next to Xi (E4: 0:29:15–19), the documentary highlights the closeness of the Russian and Chinese positions – while emphasizing also that as a *mediator* and a *leading power* China is articulating a shared position during the related negotiations. In other words, whereas Russia's role remains unaddressed in the voiceover, the visual narrative highlights that China cooperates with Russia vis-à-vis the US. At the same time, the visual narrative highlights that, acting as a *leading power*, China continuously enacts the role of a *cooperative partner* by siding with like-minded states. Finally, while China's leadership and mediation efforts are to a certain extent based on the principles and visions jointly maintained together with Russia, China implicitly claims the role of *advocate of group interests*.

This narrative in a range of respects contrasts with Russian expectations. The latter's own narrative of the North Korean nuclear issue similarly outlines the US being the core participant of the negotiation process. Moreover, it highlights

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8 This scene is preceded by a two-second shot featuring all representatives, including the Russian foreign minister. Yet, the shot excluding Russia is more "vocal" as it is on display over the course of a longer eight-second sequence.

that Russia's and China's outlooks on the issue are aligned, and they have similar positions concerning the approaches to easing tensions in the region too. The majority of the analyzed reports from the late 2010s clearly recognize the essential role of China in mediating the crisis by highlighting Sino-Russian shared efforts. Thus the dual-freeze proposal, which is referred to in the documentary as China's initiative, is narrated by Russian media as a plan jointly supported by Russia and China. Moreover, some Russian reports narrate China as being one of the core elements in the process of conflict resolution together with North Korea, South Korea, and the US, and reflect acceptance of China's role as a *mediator*. Nevertheless, significant difference is clearly observable in the way in which Russia's own role is articulated. In the early 2010s Russian reports clearly outlined the claim of a *mediator* role by making reference to Russian efforts to persuade other parties to abstain from the use of power in the conflict area and settle the issue through negotiations. During later years, the reports issued by Vesti continue to maintain this role claim vis-à-vis the US, while Novosti seems to have shifted the emphasis away from this role.

The Russian narrative of the Iran nuclear negotiations is drastically different from the one presented in DGWJ. Russian participation in the negotiations is articulated in Russian reports as being an essential part of the negotiation process. Russia's understanding of the problem is sometimes narrated as it siding with Iran and opposing the US's view of the deal. The reports highlight the important role played by Russia herein, and recognize the significance of the participation of other parties in the negotiations too. China's roles of *leading power* or *mediator* are not reflected in Russian discourses. Instead, the narrative focuses on the interests of the involved states. However, one report does mention that Russia and China have a shared understanding of the problems at hand.

Compared to the China-US case presented in the previous section, the narratives articulat-

ed by Russia and China display less contrasts and lines of conflict. However, one can observe how China uses DGWJ to put itself in the spotlight while casting Russia in the role of *invisible other*. In this way the documentary consistently highlights the role claim of a constructive lead-

ing power vis-à-vis the US. Moreover, by constituting the reference to the perceptions and positions shared with Russia, DGWJ sharpens the claims to China acting as a *mediator* not only between states but also between groups of them.

## CHINESE ACADEMIC DEBATE

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The analysis of the Chinese academic debate reveals that the narratives projected in DGWJ compete with alternative interpretations put forward elsewhere. Thus, in the case of the Iran nuclear deal one can clearly observe a range of arguments that are not reflected in the narrative of the documentary itself. Chinese scholarly papers discuss the issue from the perspective of geopolitics, arguing that Iran is a key agent in Eurasia as it is located in the Heartland and is connected to the coastline (Qin 2015, 43). From this perspective, Russia on the one side and the US (and European countries as its allies) on the other side are competing for influence in this region (Qin 2015). Moreover, given its unique geographic position, Iran is one of the crucial segments along the BRI. Lifting sanctions and including Iran in economic and political interactions with international counterparts is particularly essential for the BRI's success (Wang and Li 2015; Zhao 2015). These considerations highlight China's interest in successful conflict resolution.

Another approach to the situation is to focus on the economic interests of the parties involved. The core issue in this context is Iran's oil and gas industries. The lifting of sanctions on Iran would thus initiate significant changes in global markets (Lu 2015). From this perspective China has an interest in seeing sanctions lifted and in promoting economic cooperation with Iran in a range of fields, including both the commodities trade and beyond (Zhang 2015; Shang 2016).

Discussing the role of the US in the resolution of the Iran nuclear issue, Chinese experts unan-

imously acknowledge that the US is one of the key agents involved. The contradictions emerging between Iran and the US after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 are regarded as the origin of the problem (Qin 2015). With regard to the role of their own country, the Chinese academic debate has yielded three major perspectives. First, discussing the role of the US in the resolution of the issue, some scholars argue that the two key agents here are the US and Iran (Li 2015; Chen and Ma 2013; Xie 2014). China's participation in negotiations in this context is not emphasized, but it is mentioned as one of the participants of the 5+1 format. Second, some experts regard relations between China, the US, and Iran as triangular ones in which China has to consider its own interests and preferences vis-à-vis the complicated interplay of Iranian and US (and its regional allies') interests or discuss China, the US, and Iran as three core agents involved in the issue (Qin 2015). Finally, a range of papers emphasize China's role as *mediator*. Chinese efforts, also referred to as "shuttle-style diplomacy," are discussed as the strategy that has achieved "remarkable results" by producing "new thinking" on the best ways to resolve the problem (Sun and Zhang, 11–15). China's adopted position is discussed as an effective mechanism to coordinate negotiations between six parties in the context of deteriorating relations between Russia, the US, and Europe (Zhao 2015).

At the same time, unlike DGWJ, the Chinese academic debate does focus on Russia's role in the process. In some papers Russia is discussed as

one of the core agents involved, together with the US, Iran, and China (Gong 2015). Most importantly, scholarly experts emphasize the divergence between the shared vision advocated by Russia and China and the approach promoted by the US and Europe; it is furthermore suggested that Russia and China have a shared position on the issue at hand (Rui 2016, 241; Gong 2015; Qin 2015). Thus, China and Russia have repeatedly condemned the unilateral sanctions imposed on Iran by the US and the West and argue that Iran has the right to control nuclear technology, while its sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected (Sun and Zhang 2016, 10).

The Chinese academic debate on the North Korean nuclear issue similarly sees a diverse spectrum of opinions and interpretations, many of which go beyond the scope of DGWJ's official narrative. One strand of discussion found in the literature debates the viability of drawing upon experiences from the negotiations and final agreement on the Iran nuclear issue to inform the process regarding resolving the North Korean problem. Such mentions also tend to be accompanied by acknowledgements of and discussions on the differences between the Iran and North Korean issues, and the difficulties associated with transferring ideas from one case to another (Chang and Wang 2016; Fan 2017; Li 2016; Wang 2017; Yang 2016).

Several pieces of research focus on the analysis of the North Korean issue by discussing the interests and motivations in spheres such as economics, diplomacy, and national security of, among others, North Korea, the US, South Korea, Russia, China, and Japan regarding their involvement herewith (Chang and Wang 2016; Wang 2013b, 2013c). In connection with such discussions on interests, some papers go on to elaborate on what the central conflicting issues and views held by some parties to the dispute are. They emphasize, for example, the split between the US and the North Korean regime over the question of the basic negotiating format (Wang 2013a, 2013c).

In addition, particular focus tends to be laid upon the central role, motivations, and considerations of the US as a core party to the conflict, with academic sources highlighting topics such as the pivot to Asia, US influence in the region, and the security balance within it. These discussions frequently touch upon the issue of the US's alliances, military presence in, and increased deployment of military resources to Northeast Asia, as well as upon the US's strategy for containing China and its regional influence (Chang and Wang 2016; Luo 2013; Li 2014).

Beyond focus on the US-centric alliance network in Northeast Asia, various papers add another level of complexity to the regional strategic and security considerations by illustrating the (potential for) cooperation on the North Korean nuclear issue between China and the US (Fan 2014; Ma 2013); China, the US, and Russia (Luo 2013); or between China and South Korea (Li 2017; Li 2016). Scholarly discussions on the impacts of the long-standing Sino-North Korean relationship as allies and related Chinese commitments to North Korea (Luo 2013) are also vocal. The implications of consensus between, for example, China and Russia on the methods and strategies for resolving the Korean Peninsula's nuclear problem find strong resonance within the Chinese academic debate too (Chang and Wang 2016).

Descriptions of Sino-US agreement or cooperation often find themselves contrasted by mismatched ascriptions of responsibility. The US tends to focus on China's crucial position and responsibility for the conflict resolution (Fan 2017; Li 2014; Yang 2017) while Chinese arguments highlight the US's primary duty and leading role in this process (Wang 2013a; Zhang 2012). As Chinese academic articles tend to deflect such outside impositions of obligation for solving the conflict, some present a different framing instead showcasing Chinese agency and initiative on the North Korean nuclear issue – as through, for example, principles and proposals such as the dual-track system. As such, these narratives

illuminate China's unique position and advantages for facilitating resolution of the North Korean dispute (Luo 2013; Wang and Ling 2016; Yang 2017).

Russia is not mentioned as often as the US and China are. However, a range of publications do discuss Russia as a relevant party to the negotiations. When it is mentioned, Russia is generally acknowledged as being interested in settling the North Korean issue due to a range of security and economic reasons. The degree of Russian involvement varies in the view of different authors. Thus, some believe that Russian participation is constituted by its permanent membership of the UN Security Council (Chang and Wang 2016), while others highlight that Russia seeks resolution of the issue but it is not the main protagonist (Luo 2013). A slightly different view suggests that Russia as a major power is among the key agents in the negotiations (Wang 2013b) and should participate in any eventual settlement to-

gether with the US and China. Moreover, some scholars believe that the development of Russian relations with North Korea in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis would be a significant factor in increasing Russian impact and thus making it essential to the ongoing negotiations (Chang and Wang 2016). Finally, some scholars suggest that Russia and China have similar interests in the region and thus share similar views on the resolution of the North Korean issue (Chang and Wang 2016). In this way, both Russia and China are mentioned as states that may enact the role of mediator (Wang 2013c).

Overall, while the US is regarded as the core agent vis-à-vis the negotiation process and China is discussed as a state that has a unique position to mediate the issue (Wang 2013a; Luo 2013), Russian participation is perceived by Chinese academia as an essential but not central element of the process of conflict resolution when it comes to North Korea.

## CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

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The narratives communicated by DGWJ construct the PRC as a self-confident global player – one on a par with the US at the level of global affairs, and assisted by Russia in issues of regional (security) governance. The missing visual mentioning of the US and Russia as key players in multilateral security bargaining talks and the central position ascribed to China – by means of voiceovers in combination with edited archival newsreel footage – illustrate Beijing's iterated claims to contribute to the normative remaking of the existing regional and global order. It also documents the desire to be accepted as an equal partner, as expressed in Xi's formula "new type of great power relations" that stresses the principles of equality and reciprocity. At the same time, Xi's "Chinese Dream" and his "Community of Shared Destiny" – core conceptual references in DGWJ – frame the PRC's positioning as a contribution to the resolution of shared global chal-

lenges – security, health, stability of the financial system(s) and markets – and not as the selfish pursuit of distinct Chinese domestic economic interests or national power ambitions. This commitment to the global commons and universal governance challenges is more than striking when analyzing the symbolic meaning of water in DGWJ: river, oceans, melting ice in the Arctic region. Water and bird-eye perspectives on the blue globe follow universal narratives on the meaning of the oceans and do not integrate water metaphors from ancient Chinese symbolisms and metonymies relating to nature.<sup>9</sup>

DGWJ does not stress the uniqueness of China's distinct developmental model but presents

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<sup>9</sup> The only indirect association that lies at hand would be Xi's statement that China's development and modernization path had entered "deep waters."

the PRC as a modern global player following the unwritten code of conduct (and related visual symbols and rituals) of international diplomacy. International contracts and agreements are no longer signed with calligraphic brushstrokes; instead of tea, Xi ends his welcome address to international guests in China by raising a glass filled with red wine. Nonetheless, when hosting the G20 summit in Hangzhou (2016), the PRC constructed a modern international expo center with futuristic elements merged with Chinese symbols (e.g. the design of the buildings and landscape representing the “round sky” and the “square earth”). Moreover, Hangzhou and its famous West Lake have served as source of inspiration for Chinese poets and painters for centuries, making Hangzhou part of a narrative of ancient Chinese traditions – and the reception of international guests included a number of events celebrating Chinese culture and customs. However, at the same time, Hangzhou is the headquarter city of the Chinese artificial intelligence giant Alibaba – which probably explains the futuristic-visionary design of its G20 conference and meeting spaces. In sum, these combined symbols underline the PRC’s national role-identity as a “civilization-state” (as opposed to the Western concept of the “Westphalian nation-state”) (Zhang 2012) and as a modern “cyber great power” (Xinhua 2014).

Countering the negative scenarios (and debt-trap narratives) widely associated with China’s rise and its proclaimed construction of a globe-spanning New Silk Road, DGWJ presents the PRC and its lofty missions not as a threat but rather as a contribution to global security and stability (as visualized by the analyzed multilateral peace negotiations and bargaining rounds, as well as by the visual coverage of the PRC’s contribution to UN peacekeeping missions and global health engagement in other world regions). DGWJ depicts China’s engagement in multilateral fora on regional and global security that include Russia and/or the US not as running counter to existing institutions but as an effort to increase these formats’ efficiency and as a contribution to glob-

al governance in multilateral settings. In sum, DGWJ adds some visual subtitles to Xi’s concept of “twofold guidance” (*liang’ge yindao*) that refutes any global “leadership” (*lingdao*) ambitions. While, in terms of national role theory, “leadership” would probably be the most appropriate role concept to explain the central position of China visualized in DGWJ, the inner-Chinese narrative operates with terms and notions that are not borrowed from “Western” International Relations theories; it argues that the PRC is following a distinct developmental strategy that cannot be measured according to these “Western” IR categories.

Unilateral role claims that are not accepted by other players, as Turner (1990) has argued, might have detrimental effects and negatively impact on a country’s foreign relations. DGWJ underlines the unconditional acceptance and unreserved support for the role(-identity) claims and the (visualized) enactment of China’s regional and global role concepts by other national governments, by regional organizations, as well as by local people and civil societies across the globe. This is done by showing people on the street happily greeting Chinese delegations (sometimes even in Mandarin Chinese), and by including interviews and statements that confirm the benefits of engaging in infrastructure cooperation with China. Critical voices and threat scenarios are not included in DGWJ; hence a unified, uncontested storyline of the successful implementation of Chinese visions of future global order and global security are presented. The nexus between infrastructure modernization and regional peace and stability presented in DGWJ symbolically justifies the Chinese idea of “developmental peace” as a way to reduce the likeliness of regional conflicts – as triggered, according to the official Chinese view, by the absence of alternative perspectives and development opportunities, thus driving local youth in the hands of demagogues and religious leaders. Recognition (see Ringmar 2002) of role claims and world order conceptions (including global governance principles) is closely linked to issues

of domestic legitimacy – as the Chinese one-party state bases its claims thereto on output performance, bolstered by the proclamation that the CCP government successfully represents and defends Chinese core interests in both regional and global bargaining formats.

The narratives and visual subtitles promoted by DGWJ stand in sharp opposition to international views on the PRC and its global ambitions – as the main debates on China's role in regional and global security issues clearly evidence (see Appendices 1–4). Tensions between unilateral Chinese role claims and role ascriptions, role demands, as well as perceptions of Beijing's role enactment are not addressed in DGWJ. Furthermore, internal role contestation across Chinese academic communities and within the CCP – for example with regard to the *taoguang yanghui* principle or Beijing's relationship with North Korea, which some scholars classify as an unpre-

dictable neighbor and not as a socialist ally – do not directly feature.

In sum, DGWJ documents an interim, top-down-communicated consensus regarding the guiding principles and reference schemes of Chinese foreign policy in the era of Xi Jinping. The definition of *daguo* visualized in DGWJ combines elements of premodern Chinese philosophy, such as the *tianxia* trope, with reflections on global cooperation in a fragile, interdependent world. It is, however, striking that role conceptions at the domestic level are not depicted: the global dimensions of Chinese role conceptions, as exemplified in the field of security, treat the PRC as a "neutral" actor and do not link its international engagement to regime-type patterns (or political ideologies). In this vein, DGWJ coins a unified narrative of China's role enactment in global affairs that is guided by pragmatism and dedicated to securing development and stability.

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## APPENDIX 1: CODING SCHEME (SELECTED ROLES IDENTIFIED FOR THE ANALYSED CASES) AND REFERENCES TO THE SCENES IN THE DOCUMENTARY “MAJOR COUNTRY DIPLOMACY” (DAGUO WAIJIAO)<sup>10</sup>

Role	Major commitments / functions / behavioural patterns	Assumption of responsibility / duty / obligation	China vis-à-vis the US	China vis-à-vis Russia
Mediator / intermediary	Assistance in conflict/situations or uncertainty resolution. Commitment to the mediation between two/several interested sides. Facilitation of conflict resolution, finding the agreements among parties	Yes	E3: 0:11:33–51; E4: 0:29:58–0:30:35	E3: 0:13:12–20
Representative / leader / advocate of group interests	Claim to represent interests of other states/groups of states (with China being a part of the groups); commitment/claim to provide assistance to others in realising their interests	Yes		E4: 0:29:11; E4: 0:29:15–19; E3: 0:13:00–02
(Regional) Protector	Commitment to protect countries/regions from the external threat	Both		
Leading power	1) Provides public goods (security, infrastructure, aid, UN Development Goals commitments, financial support) 2) Puts forward initiatives, files suggestions, active in setting (global) agenda 3) Delivers/claim to deliver solutions to complicated (global) issues	Both	E3: 0:11:33–51; E3: 0:13:30–48; E4: 0:29:08–0:30:35	E3: 0:13:12–20
Active collaborator	Clearly indicated commitment to collaborate on various issues with (any) international partners/ working towards the same goal/outcome/mutual benefits (yet, there is no formal assumption of any obligations)	No	E3: 0:11:52–0:12:48; E4: 0:28:36–0:30:35	
Cooperative partner	Political/economic/other types of cooperation. Commitments to cooperate on particular issues/in particular areas (with formally indicated obligations/commitments)	Yes (agreements, treaties)		E3: 0:13:00–02; E4: 0:29:11, E4: 0:29:15–19
Defender of the peace	Adopted from Holsti 1970 <sup>11</sup> : “These statements are not qualified by reference to any particular region (regional protector); they seem to indicate a universal commitment to defend against any aggression or threat to peace, no matter what the locale.” (Holsti 1970, 272)	Yes		E2: 0:09:10–33
Model for others	Claims to provide an example for other states on how norms/ideas/institutions/principles suggested by China can be internalised/used/maintained	Both (formal commitment to role may be articulated or there are no clearly stated formal responsibilities)		E2: 0:05:01–0:06:25; E2: 0:09:10–33

10 The cases selected for the analysis are presented in Episodes 3 and 4 (E3 and E4 respectively):

Daguo waijiao [Major country’s diplomacy] (2017): Di san ji: Zhongliu jishui [Episode 3: turning the tide]. CCTV, August 28, 2017;  
Daguo waijiao [Major country’s diplomacy] (2017): Di si ji: Chuan yun po wu [Episode 4: through the clouds and fog]. CCTV, August 28, 2017.

11 Holsti, Kalevi (1970): National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy. In: *International Studies Quarterly* 14(3): 233–309.

## APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF THE CODED SCENES IN THE DOCUMENTARY

**Table 1: Compilation of role descriptions identified in the documentary**

Role claimed by China	Voiceover	Documentary: US
<i>Case: Iran nuclear deal</i>		
Mediator	[E3: 0:11:33–51] Iran issue sensitive and complicated, lack in US-Iran trust, large differences in positions, some core issues solved due to Chinese proposals	
Leading power	[E3: 0:12:19–48] Question whether to continue to negotiate/extend deadline, Xi to Obama: hope for all sides to strive to reach agreement before deadline, otherwise China supports extension of deadline [E3: 0:13:21–58] Important role of China (UNSC permanent member) in resolving international issues, new inclusive Chinese security position, for peaceful resolution of international conflicts through dialogue, protect function of UN mediation for global peace and security	
Active collaborator / Collaborative partner	[E3: 0:11:52–0:12:48] Essential role of leaders' diplomacy: then US President Obama calls Xi at BRICS conference in Brazil (July 2014), deadline for Iran nuclear agreement approaching, question whether to continue to negotiate/extend deadline, Xi to Obama: hope for all sides to strive to reach agreement before deadline, otherwise China supports extension of deadline	
<i>Case: North Korean nuclear issue</i>		
Mediator	[E4: 0:28:01–10] North Korea's repeated nuclear and ballistic missile tests, US-South Korea military manoeuvres, tit for tat, mutual hostility [E4: 0:28:22–29] China as close neighbour to Korean Peninsula not allowing war [E4: 0:29:08–33] Xi-Trump meeting at G20 Summit (Hamburg): Xi reiterates China's continued support for denuclearization of, peace and stability on Peninsula, dialogue and negotiations to resolve issues, China willing to play communication and coordination role, work for peace and stability in region	
Leading power	[E4: 0:29:41–0:30:35] Chinese position clear and unchanging: denuclearization, protect peace and stability, peaceful resolution, China's dual-track principle and dual-freeze proposal, Chinese efforts to alleviate tensions, restart dialogue, dual-freeze proposal: North Korea halts nuclear and guided missile tests, US and South Korea suspend large-scale military exercises, intention: calm situation, protect peace and stability on Peninsula	
Active collaborator / Collaborative partner	[E4: 0:28:36–56] First Xi-Trump meeting: exchange respective positions on North Korean issue, joint goal of denuclearization of Korean Peninsula [E4: 0:29:02–07] In months after first meeting: several phone calls, closely watch Peninsula's situation [E4: 0:29:08–33] Xi-Trump meeting at G20 Summit (Hamburg): see Mediator/leading power above [E4: 0:29:41–0:30:35] Chinese position clear and unchanging: see Mediator/leading power above	
Protector	Not mentioned	
Advocate of groups	Not mentioned	

## “MAJOR COUNTRY DIPLOMACY” (*DAGUO WAIJIAO*)

Visual	Documentary: Russia	
	Voiceover	Visual
A series of three shots, one each of the main Iranian negotiator, the principal US negotiator and the central Chinese negotiator, showing the US and Iranian negotiators (supposedly) looking at each other while the Chinese negotiator observes, see Screenshots 1, 2, 3 <sup>12</sup>	Not mentioned	A shot visually excluding Russia (empty space in front of the Russian flag during the press conference), see Screenshot 9 <sup>12</sup>
	Not mentioned	
	Not mentioned	A shot with representatives of the negotiating sides including Russian Foreign Minister, see Screenshot 10 <sup>12</sup>
Shots of missile starts/tests, land and air military manoeuvres, see Screenshots 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 <sup>12</sup>	Not mentioned	Russian leader standing/walking next to Xi Jinping, the US leader is visually distanced from them, see Screenshot 11, 12, 13 <sup>12</sup>
	Not mentioned	
	Not mentioned	
Not depicted	Not mentioned	
Not depicted	Not mentioned	

12 The screenshots cannot be depicted here due to copyright law. If you are interested in the code book and the detailed coding of the analyzed episodes, please contact the authors.

### APPENDIX 3: CODING OF THE US MEDIA NARRATIVES (CASES: IRAN NUCLEAR

Overarching narrative	Role(s) claimed by the US	Role(s) altercasted to China
<i>Case: Iran nuclear deal</i>		
Preeminent role of US leadership and diplomacy in Iran negotiations and reaching of final comprehensive deal, deal as best option, its effectiveness in curbing Iranian nuclear ambitions	Leading power Advocate of group interests	Advocate of group interests
Chinese strategic and economic interests in Iran, the region and Iran nuclear deal, US sanctions regime as contrast		Active collaborator / cooperative partner (China-Iran)
US crucial role in Iran deal negotiations, Russia and China opposing Western nations on sanctions	Leading power Advocate of group interests Mediator	Advocate of group interests
<i>Case: North Korean nuclear issue</i>		
US most important negotiating parties, leader of international pressure campaign against North Korea, US strategies and goals vis-à-vis North Korea	Leading power	Protector Cooperative partner (economic) Advocate of group interests
US central role in negotiations, China as ally and trade partner of North Korea and as among main obstacles to US pressure campaign towards North Korea, US willingness to negotiate based on conditions, intensified rhetoric between US and North Korean leader	Leading power Mediator Protector	Mediator Advocate of group interests
		Cooperative partner (economic)
China as hinderance to issue's resolution, North Korean issue as factor in China-US rivalry, US expectations for Chinese cooperation on sanctions, China positioned between US and North Korea, US options for dealing with North Korean nuclear issue	Leading power Mediator	Advocate of group interests Protector Mediator

(Table continued on next page)

## DEAL AND NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR ISSUE)

Keywords	Narrated in
US diplomacy	Gordon, Michael R. and David E. Sanger (2015): Deal reached on Iran nuclear program; Limits on fuel would lessen with time. In: <i>New York Times</i> , July 14, 2015. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-deal-is-reached-after-long-negotiations.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-deal-is-reached-after-long-negotiations.html</a>
US leadership	The White House Archives President Barack Obama (2016): The historic deal that will prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. <a href="https://obamawhitehouse.archives.org">obamawhitehouse.archives.org</a> , January 17, 2016. <a href="https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal">https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/foreign-policy/iran-deal</a>
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Belt and Road Initiative, trade, investment	Vatanka, Alex (2019): China's Great Game in Iran. In: <i>Foreign Policy</i> , September 5, 2019. <a href="https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/05/chinas-great-game-in-iran/">https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/05/chinas-great-game-in-iran/</a>
China-Russia faction versus US and EU	Charbonneau, Louis (2015): U.S. aims to make Iran nuclear deal immune to Russian, Chinese veto. <i>Reuters</i> , May 6, 2015. <a href="https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-idUSKBN0NQ21020150506">https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-idUSKBN0NQ21020150506</a> Gordon and Sanger (2015).
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Eminent US role	Goldman, Russell (2017): Answers to 4 crucial questions about North Korea. In: <i>New York Times</i> , August 9, 2017. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/09/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-weapons.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/09/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-weapons.html</a>
China-North Korea economic ties, China as obstacle, US criticism	Harris, Gardiner and Eileen Sullivan (2017): Tillerson suggests North Korea may soon be ready for talks. In: <i>New York Times</i> , August 22, 2017. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/world/asia/us-imposes-sanctions-on-china-and-russia-over-north-koreas-nuclear-program.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/22/world/asia/us-imposes-sanctions-on-china-and-russia-over-north-koreas-nuclear-program.html</a>
China as ally of North Korea	Nebehay, Stephanie (2017): U.S., North Korea clash at U.N. forum over nuclear weapons. <i>Reuters</i> , August 22, 2017. <a href="https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-idUSKCN1B2102">https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-idUSKCN1B2102</a>
US: more Chinese cooperation on US sanctions	AFP (2017): China envoy holds North Korea nuclear talks as US mulls options. In: <i>Guardian</i> , April 10, 2017. <a href="https://guardian.ng/news/china-envoy-holds-north-korea-nuclear-talks-as-us-mulls-options/">https://guardian.ng/news/china-envoy-holds-north-korea-nuclear-talks-as-us-mulls-options/</a>
China as obstacle to US, reluctant (harsher sanctions)	Hall, Mimi and Frank Aum (2017): From bad to worse: options for the U.S. on North Korea. <i>Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI.org)</i> , April 11, 2017. <a href="https://www.nti.org/analysis/atomic-pulse/bad-worse-options-us-north-korea/">https://www.nti.org/analysis/atomic-pulse/bad-worse-options-us-north-korea/</a>
US criticism of China-North Korea trade	Harris and Sullivan (2017).
China against harsher sanctions on North Korea	Perlez, Jane and Sang-Hun Choe (2016): China struggles for balance in response to North Korea's boldness. In: <i>New York Times</i> , February 7, 2016. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/08/world/asia/china-struggles-for-balance-in-response-to-north-koreas-boldness.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/08/world/asia/china-struggles-for-balance-in-response-to-north-koreas-boldness.html</a>
Strategic significance of North Korea for China-US rivalry, China reluctant on US sanctions demands	Revere, Evans J.R. (2016): Dealing with a nuclear-armed North Korea. <i>Brookings</i> , October 4, 2016. <a href="https://www.brookings.edu/research/dealing-with-a-nuclear-armed-north-korea/">https://www.brookings.edu/research/dealing-with-a-nuclear-armed-north-korea/</a>
US criticism and demands for harsher sanctions, China reluctant	Wertz (2018).

*(Table continued)*

Overarching narrative	Role(s) claimed by the US	Role(s) altercasted to China
US as proactive leader in pressure against North Korean regime, China reactionary/indecisive, Russia and China opposed to US military manoeuvres in the region, US sanctions regime putting pressure on China	Leading power	Advocate of group interests Mediator Protector
US protecting itself, its allies and troops in the region, urgency of handling the matter, US options on how to deal with North Korean nuclear issue/threat	Protector Leading power Mediator	Advocate of group interests

Keywords	Narrated in
Chinese opposition to US missile system in South Korea	Choe, Sang-Hun (2017): Allies for 67 years, U.S. and South Korea split over North Korea. In: <i>New York Times</i> , September 4, 2017. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/04/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-south-us-alliance.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/04/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-south-us-alliance.html</a>
China reluctant to enforce harsh sanctions on North Korea, US sanctions on China	Hall and Aum (2017).
China restrained (sanctions), Chinese North Korea policy not changing, US pressure on China for sanctions	Perlez, Jane (2017a): U.S. desire for North Korea oil cutoff puts China in a tight spot. In: <i>New York Times</i> , September 5, 2017. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/05/world/asia/north-korea-china-us-oil-fuel-exports.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/05/world/asia/north-korea-china-us-oil-fuel-exports.html</a>
China reactionary (emergency preparations), China restrained (sanctions)	Perlez, Jane (2017b): Fearing the worst, China plans refugee camps on North Korean border. In: <i>New York Times</i> , December 11, 2017. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/11/world/asia/china-north-korea-border.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/11/world/asia/china-north-korea-border.html</a>
China against US-South Korean military manoeuvres, reserved (calls for calmness)	Sengupta, Somini (2017): Tillerson, in apparent U-turn, says North Korea must 'earn' its way to talks. In: <i>New York Times</i> , December 15, 2017. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/15/world/asia/tillerson-north-korea.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/15/world/asia/tillerson-north-korea.html</a>
China as obstacle to US, China reluctant (harsher sanctions)	Hall and Aum (2017).

## APPENDIX 4: CODING OF RUSSIAN MEDIA NARRATIVES (CASES: IRAN NUCLEAR

Overarching narrative	Role claimed by Russia	Roles altercasted to China	Keywords
<i>Case: Iran nuclear deal</i>			
All sides to the negotiation process (including Russia) actively participate.	Active collaborator/ cooperative partner	Cooperative partner/ active collaborator	
All sides to the negotiation process actively participate. Emphasis on coordination between Russia and other sides (Lavrov and Kerry / Lavrov and Zarif)	Active collaborator/ cooperative partner Mediator	Active collaborator/ cooperative partner	Russia siding with Iran and contrasting the US view of the deal
Not mentioning China, emphasise Russian interest/role/contribution in settling the problem	Leading power Cooperative partner	Active collaborator/ cooperative partner	
China and Russia have a shared position, Russia and China as key players and mediators	Leading power Mediator	Leading power Mediator	
<i>Case: North Korean nuclear issue</i>			
Russia and China are equal mediators	Leading power Mediator	Leading power Mediator	Dual freeze proposal

(Table continued on next page)

## DEAL AND NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR ISSUE)

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Novosti (2015c): Buksuyut peregovory po iranskoj yadernoj programme [Talks on Iranian nuclear program stalled]. *Pervyi Kanal*, July 12, 2015. [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-07-12/15617-buksuyut\\_peregovory\\_po\\_iranskoj\\_yadernoj\\_programme](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-07-12/15617-buksuyut_peregovory_po_iranskoj_yadernoj_programme)

Vesti (2015d): Sergey Lavrov: dogovorennosti po Iranu otvechayut interesam vsekh storon [Sergey Lavrov: agreements on Iran meet the interests of all parties]. *VGTRK*, July 16, 2015. <https://www.vesti.ru/article/1734589>

Novosti (2015g): Vladimir Putin i Barak Obama vysoko otsenili itogi peregovorov po iranskoj yadernoj programme [Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama praised the outcome of the talks on the Iranian nuclear program]. *Pervyi Kanal*, July 16, 2015.

[https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-07-16/15373-vladimir\\_putin\\_i\\_barak\\_obama\\_vysoko\\_otsenili\\_itogi\\_peregovorov\\_po\\_iranskoj\\_yadernoj\\_programme](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-07-16/15373-vladimir_putin_i_barak_obama_vysoko_otsenili_itogi_peregovorov_po_iranskoj_yadernoj_programme)

Vesti (2015c): Putin i Obama vysoko otsenili itogi peregovorov po yadernoj programme Irana [Putin and Obama praised the outcome of talks on Iran's nuclear program]. *VGTRK*, July 15, 2015. <https://www.vesti.ru/article/1788102>

Novosti (2015d): Peregovory v Vene po yadernoj programme Irana obsudili po telefonu Sergey Lavrov i Dzhon Kerri [Negotiations in Vienna on Iran's nuclear program were discussed in a phone call by Sergei Lavrov and John Kerry]. *Pervyi Kanal*, July 11, 2015.

[https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-07-11/15626-peregovory\\_v\\_vene\\_po\\_yadernoj\\_programme\\_irana\\_obsudili\\_po\\_telefonu\\_sergey\\_lavrov\\_i\\_dzhon\\_kerri](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-07-11/15626-peregovory_v_vene_po_yadernoj_programme_irana_obsudili_po_telefonu_sergey_lavrov_i_dzhon_kerri)

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[https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-07-13/15531-podpisanie\\_soglasheniya\\_po\\_iranskoj\\_yadernoj\\_programme\\_vnov\\_otlozhenno](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-07-13/15531-podpisanie_soglasheniya_po_iranskoj_yadernoj_programme_vnov_otlozhenno)

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[https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-07-14/15494-v\\_vene\\_dostignuto\\_istoricheskoe\\_soglashenie\\_po\\_iranskoj\\_yadernoj\\_programme](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2015-07-14/15494-v_vene_dostignuto_istoricheskoe_soglashenie_po_iranskoj_yadernoj_programme)

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Vesti (2015a): Mirnyy atom minus sanktsii. O chem dogovorilis' Iran i "shesterka" [Peaceful atom minus sanctions. What have Iran and the Six agreed on?]. *VGTRK*, July 14, 2015. <https://www.vesti.ru/article/1744885>

Vesti (2015a): Mirnyy atom minus sanktsii. O chem dogovorilis' Iran i "shesterka" [Peaceful atom minus sanctions. What have Iran and the Six agreed on?]. *VGTRK*, July 14, 2015. <https://www.vesti.ru/article/1744885>

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<https://www.vesti.ru/article/1711811>

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Vesti (2017c): FRG: koreyskiy konflikt bez Rossii, Kitaya i SSHA ne razreshit' [Germany: the Korean conflict cannot be resolved without Russia, China and the United States]. *VGTRK*, September 17, 2017. <https://www.vesti.ru/article/1653282>

*(Table continued)*

Overarching narrative	Role claimed by Russia	Roles altercasted to China	Keywords
China as a victim of the US's assertiveness			Major actors: DPRK, RK, China, and US
No emphasis on China, Russia as a key mediator	Mediator Leading power		Resume the use of power; settle the issue through the negotiations; Russia as a mediator vis-à-vis the US
Focus on North and South Korea, China or Russia are not mentioned			
China as a core mediator		Leading power Mediator	

## Narrated in

Novosti (2017c): Pikirovka mezhdru SSHA i KNDR poka na slovakh. Komu nuzhno shou, napugavsheye ves' mir? [The conflict between the United States and the DPRK is so far in words. Who needs a show that scares the whole world?]. *Pervyi Kanal*, April 15, 2017. [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-04-15/323573-pikirovka\\_mezhdru\\_ssha\\_i\\_kndr\\_poka\\_na\\_slovah\\_komu\\_nuzhno\\_shou\\_napugavshee\\_ves\\_mir](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-04-15/323573-pikirovka_mezhdru_ssha_i_kndr_poka_na_slovah_komu_nuzhno_shou_napugavshee_ves_mir)

Novosti (2017d): Prezident SSHA Donal'd Tramp otkazalsya ot udara po KNDR [US President Donald Trump refused to strike on the DPRK]. *Pervyi Kanal*, April 15, 2017. [https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-04-15/323567-prezident\\_ssha\\_donald\\_tramp\\_otkazalsya\\_ot\\_udara\\_po\\_kndr](https://www.1tv.ru/news/2017-04-15/323567-prezident_ssha_donald_tramp_otkazalsya_ot_udara_po_kndr)

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