

China's Wolf Warrior Diplomacy and Xi Jinping's Grand Diplomatic Strategy*

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Draft: March 29, 2021

ABSTRACT

The media and pundits increasingly associate China's diplomacy with the term "wolf warrior" and warn about China's increased assertiveness and hostility in foreign affairs. However, there is no systematic research on how official the hostile and combative wolf warrior diplomacy is or how it relates to China's diplomacy under Xi Jinping's leadership. This article situates wolf warrior diplomacy in the broader context of Xi Jinping's diplomacy. We argue that while China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and its spokespersons are strictly following Xi Jinping's instruction on foreign affairs, combative wolf warrior diplomacy does not fully represent Xi's diplomacy. We show that Xi's diplomacy contains two conflicting components: an egalitarian "shared future for mankind" and a realist "dare to fight." Wolf warrior diplomacy only reflects the realist "fighting spirit." We analyze the transcripts of MFA's press conferences over the past 20 years and find that the hostility in the MFA spokesperson's speech has increased sharply during Xi's presidency. However, the hostility and change in hostility vary across different issues. Overall, wolf warrior diplomacy represents half of Xi's diplomacy, and it does not necessarily mean a more aggressive foreign policy from China: the combative component in Xi's diplomacy satisfies the domestic nationalist audience, and the other egalitarian portion gives room for China to deescalate.

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There has been increasing concern over China's new aggressive and assertive diplomacy among the media, pundits, and academics worldwide. Named after a patriotic Rambo-style Chinese action film, "wolf warrior diplomacy" has become the new buzzword for China's diplomacy since the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic.¹ The two most visible wolf warrior diplomats, Hua Chunying and Zhao Lijian, spokespersons of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), have aggressively confronted any external criticism of China on Social Media. In response to Trump calling the novel coronavirus "China Virus," Zhao backed a conspiracy theory on Twitter that the U.S. military brought the coronavirus to Wuhan. Zhao's controversial and blunt social media posts have incurred not only criticism but also diplomatic incidents. After Zhao posted a computer-generated image of an Australian soldier holding a bloody knife to the throat of an Afghan child and condemned Australia's violation of human rights in Afghanistan, the Australian Prime Minister called a media briefing and demanded an apology from the Chinese government.² More than just rhetorical tactics, some Chinese diplomats have also taken the combative spirit to actual actions. For example, at a recent U.N. meeting, when a delegate spoke to condemn China's Xinjiang policy, members of the Chinese delegation protested by banging on the table to interrupt the speech,³ a behavior previously depicted as a "breach of diplomatic etiquette" by the Chinese media when Cuban delegates interrupted U.S. delegate in 2018.⁴

¹ See Wilson VornDick, "Analysts Take Note: Wolf Warrior Is the New Chinese Rambo", *The Diplomat*, September 20, 2017; James Griffiths, "For China's aggressive new diplomacy, coronavirus is both a crisis and an opportunity," *CNN*, April 22, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/22/asia/china-diplomacy-coronavirus-crisis-opportunity-intl-hnk/index.html>.

² Kirsty Needham, "Australia demands apology from China after fake image posted on social media", *Reuters*, November 29, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-china-idUSKBN28A07Y>.

³ CTS, "bu man tix in jiang ji zhong ying, zhong guo dai biao meng qiao zhao (Dissatisfied with the mention of Xinjiang concentration camp, Chinese delegates pounded the table)", *Chinese Television Station*, September 24, 2020.

⁴ Guancha, "lian he guo han jian yi mu: gu ba wai jiao guan pai zhao zi da duan mei dai biao yan jiang (A rare scene at the UN: Cuban diplomat interrupts U.S. representative's speech by slapping the table)", *Guanchazhe*, October 18, 2018.

While it has received broad scrutiny outside of China, wolf warrior diplomacy has been popular among the domestic audience and has dramatically boosted the popularity of China's MFA and its spokespersons. However, there is still debate about whether it stands as China's official foreign policy or purely reflects China's MFA or its individual diplomats' incentives and tactics.⁵ Global Times, a Chinese state-controlled daily newspaper, praised the wolf warrior diplomacy as reflecting the interests of China's people and claimed that the western concern over the wolf warrior diplomacy signals the changing strengths of China and the West.⁶ At the same time, some long-serving and high-profile career diplomats such as Cui Tiankai and Fu Ying publicly condemned and tried to tamp down the wolf warrior diplomatic acts.⁷

Does the wolf warrior diplomacy signal a more aggressive China or even a revisionist state to the status quo, as media and pundits have claimed? What is the motivation behind wolf warrior diplomacy? How does wolf warrior diplomacy relate to Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy? This article situates wolf warrior diplomacy in the broader context of China's foreign policy and offers a more nuanced explanation. We argue that China's MFA and its spokespersons strictly follow Xi Jinping's instruction on foreign affairs. However, wolf warrior diplomacy does not fully represent China's foreign policy under Xi and it does not necessarily signal a more aggressive foreign policy. It is rather a complicated result of conflicting guiding diplomacy, an attempt to synchronize the domestic and foreign policy, and the formal role of China's MFA in communication instead of

⁵ See Siegfried O. Wolf, "On the Asian Century, Pax Sinica & Beyond (X): Coronavirus: Why Beijing's 'Wolf Warrior Diplomacy' will fail," South Asia Democratic Forum, April 20, 2020; Chen Dingding and Hu Junyang, "Is China Really Embracing 'Wolf Warrior' Diplomacy?" The Diplomat, September 9, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/is-china-really-embracing-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>

⁶ Wang wenwen, "West feels challenged by China's new 'Wolf Warrior' diplomacy", Global Times, April 16, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1185776.shtml>

⁷ Bloomberg News, "Rare Spat Between Chinese Diplomats Signals Split Over Trump," Bloomberg, March 22, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-23/china-s-top-envoy-to-u-s-breaks-with-foreign-ministry-on-virus>

policymaking. We argue that Xi's Thought on Diplomacy contains two conflicting components: an egalitarian "shared future for mankind" and a realist "dare to fight."⁸ Wolf warrior diplomacy only reflects the realist component in Xi's diplomacy, especially in terms of fighting for a say in international discourse. While the two conflicting components of Xi's diplomacy might counteract each other among the international audience, we argue that the two components give China great flexibility in foreign policy: the aggressive wolf warrior style satisfies the domestic nationalist audience, and the egalitarian component gives room for China to deescalate international tensions.

In addition, this article provides a large-scale empirical analysis of China's official diplomatic language to examine whether the official diplomatic language has become more hostile and combative in recent years and whether the hostility, if it exists, depends on specific issue areas. Using a supervised machine learning method and topic models, we find that, since 2012, China's MFA spokespersons have become much more hostile. However, the increase in hostility is not uniform across all issue areas. There is continued and increased hostility in issues relates to China's core interests and issues on which China has been criticized. At the same time, there is decreased hostility in issue areas where China has received little criticism. While hostile and combative, wolf warrior diplomacy contains verbal insults and expresses China's firm stances without the threats of actual action, which boosts support from the nationalist domestic audience but leaves room for China to back down.

The first part of this study reviews the evolution of foreign policy directions of Chinese leaders since Deng Xiaoping and discusses the continuity and changes in Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy. We then explain the role of China's MFA in carrying out Xi's grand diplomatic strategy. In the third section, we analyze the transcripts of China's MFA press conferences over

⁸ See also Wang, Jianwei. "Xi Jinping's 'Major country diplomacy': A paradigm shift?." *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 115 (2019): 15-30.

the past two decades. We conclude with a discussion of the implications for studying and understanding China's foreign policy.

The Evolution of China's Diplomacy

Just as the world has long been cautious about a rising China and its implications for the international system, China has long been conscious of the rising power dilemma in its diplomacy since its opening up. In fact, China is so conscious about the rising power dilemma that in the official English translation of its diplomacy, China uses the phrase "major-country diplomacy" (daguowaijiao 大国外交) instead of "great power diplomacy." In this section, we review the evolution of China's major-country diplomacy and discuss the continuity of and changes in China's major-country diplomacy during Xi Jinping's presidency.

China's Diplomacy Before Xi Jinping's Presidency

China started to reintegrate into the international society during Deng Xiaoping's leadership. In the early 1990s, Deng Xiaoping made a number of speeches on how China should deal with the international situation at that time, one of the critical contents of which was later summarized as the 20-character strategic policy: "calm observation (冷静观察), steady position (稳住阵脚), calmly cope with the situation (沉着应付), hide our capabilities and bide our time (韬光养晦), and make some achievements (有所作为)." Deng instructed China to take a low-profile in the international society and to focus on domestic development. The goal of this low-profile diplomacy was to achieve and maintain a friendly international environment for China's development.⁹

⁹ See Goldstein, Avery. "China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping: Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance." *International Security* 45, no. 1 (2020): 164-201.

Under Jiang Zemin (1993—2003), China's diplomacy gradually departed from the Deng Xiaoping era's policy of keeping a low profile and became more active after its fast economic development within a short period.¹⁰ China started to take what other countries perceived as assertive actions in defending its core sovereignty interests. For example, in 1995, China occupied and fortified the Mischief Reef in the South China Sea, disputed territory with the Philippines. Into the 2000s, given the improved domestic economy, military capacity, and increased international interdependency, scholars and policy analysts in China started to debate how to interpret and whether to change Deng's "hide our capabilities and bide our time." Some believed that as China's national power grew and its international influence increased, it should abandon the principle of "hide our capabilities and bide our time." They believed it to be a feasible time for China to take a proactive role and act as an international rule-maker.¹¹ Others warned, against the background of international public concern about "China's rise" and the "China threat," that China should not give up the principle and needed to find a balance between "biding our time" and "making some achievements."¹²

During the Hu Jintao era (2003—2013), China continued its fast domestic development and international integration. The focus of Hu's diplomacy was on dispelling the China threat theory and shaping China's image as a participant in international rules rather than a revisionist.¹³ In addition to continuing major-country diplomacy, the defining discourse of Hu Jintao's diplomacy was the "harmonious world," which sent the signal to the world that China was moving

¹⁰ Cheng Yu-shek Joseph, "China's foreign policy after 17th party congress" (shi qi da yi lai de zhong guo wai jiao zheng ce). *The Twenty-First Century Review*. 116 (2009): 11-40.

¹¹ Zhao, Xiao-Chun. "An analysis of the debate on the 'low profile' strategy". *Journal of University of International Relations*, 5 (2006): 24-27

¹² Zhu, Wei-lei. "On diplomatic strategy of 'keeping a low profile and talking a proactive role when feasible'" (guan yu 'tao guang yang hui, you suo zuo wei' wai jiao fang lue de si kao). *International Perspective* (Guojizhanwang), 3 (2010).

¹³ Khan, Sulmaan Wasif. *Haunted by chaos: China's grand strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping*. Harvard University Press, 2018.

into a new stage of development. Beijing worked within the existing international framework and enhanced its global visibility to build the image of a responsible major country by joining the international and regional cooperation initiatives and hosting major international conferences and events.¹⁴ Despite the efforts to create an image of “responsible major country” or “peaceful rise,” after the 2008 Beijing Olympics, U.S. media and academics increasingly suggested that China was adopting an assertive diplomacy. However, a study on seven events in China’s foreign relations in 2010 did not find across-the-board new assertiveness. Instead, it reflects a continuing assertiveness in its core sovereignty issues such as the South China Sea disputes and Taiwan arms sales.¹⁵

In summary, China’s foreign policy has constantly evolved given changes in its domestic power and the international environment. Since the 1990s, China’s diplomacy has gradually departed from Deng’s low-profile diplomacy. The Chinese government and diplomats started to refer China as a “major country” in diplomatic statements in the 1990s. However, during this period, major-country diplomacy was about managing China’s relationship with other major powers like the U.S., the European Union, and Russia. It was not about pursuing or making a foreign policy as a major power. While it kept evolving, China’s diplomacy before Xi was mainly about China, not about the world; it was about joining and benefiting from the international system, not about changing or improving the world. The two guiding ideological principles of the CCP added by Jiang and Hu, Jiang’s Three Represents and Hu’s Scientific Outlook on Development, both focused solely on domestic affairs. The principle of diplomacy in the service of domestic affairs remained unchanged.¹⁶

¹⁴ Zheng, Yongnian, and Sow Keat Tok. "Harmonious society and harmonious world: China’s policy discourse under Hu Jintao." *Briefing Series* 26 (2007): 1-12.

¹⁵ Johnston, Alastair Iain. "How new and assertive is China's new assertiveness?." *International Security* 37.4 (2013): 7-48.

¹⁶ Guo Weiwei, “New China's Diplomatic Strategy and Economic Development from the Perspective of Internal and External Interaction” (cong nei zheng yu wai jiao hu dong de jiao du kan xin zhong guo de wai jiao zhan lue yu jing

China's Diplomacy During Xi Jinping's Presidency

Unlike his predecessors, Xi invested much of his time and energy in foreign relations immediately after coming to power. In the second year of his presidency, Xi called for distinctive major-country diplomacy for China at the 2014 Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs given the changing international and domestic conditions.¹⁷ Major-country diplomacy is no longer about managing the relationship with other major powers but about diplomacy that suits China's major power status in the world. In March 2018, Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism were added into the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, while the two-consecutive term limit for the presidency was removed from the Constitution at the 13th National People's Congress. It marks the paramount consolidation of power and makes Xi the second most powerful president after Mao. It puts an end to the collective rule set by Deng Xiaoping domestically and an end to Deng's low-profile diplomacy internationally.¹⁸ In addition to signaling power concentration, it signals the importance of diplomacy in the minds of China's new leadership and distinguishes Xi from his predecessors.

Egalitarian "Community of Shared Future" Unlike the impression that China's diplomacy has turned more assertive and hostile under Xi, Xi Thought on Diplomacy is rather egalitarian, at least on paper: it seeks to establish a community of shared future of all mankind underpinned by win-

ji jian she de fa zhan), *Institute of Party History and Literature of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China*, Dec 28, 2007. <http://www.dswxyjy.org.cn/BIG5/n1/2019/0617/c427580-31157448.html>

¹⁷ For English translation of the speech, see

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml. Huang Yu Fan, "Shi Yin Hong: Xi Jing Ping wai jiao da zhan lue jian cheng xing (Shi Yin hong: Xi Jinping's grand diplomatic strategy takes shape)", New York Times Chinese Website, January 20th, 2015.

¹⁸ Before Xi came to power, there were still debates about whether China should continue the hide and bid strategy. There is no longer any debate on this matter during Xi's presidency.

win cooperation.¹⁹ To be clear, each point in the Xi Thought is not new: China has long emphasized win-win cooperation and the term “community of common destiny” was mentioned by Hu Jintao in 2007.²⁰ However, it was Xi that repeatedly emphasized these concepts and elevated them to the guiding principles in China’s major-country diplomacy.

During Xi Jinping’s first term, the concept of “community with shared future for mankind” appeared in his public speeches on various occasions, but only as a continuation of the international partnership proposed by his predecessors, without a strong focus on global economic cooperation. In his second term, Xi elaborated on this concept of world economic importance. At the G20 summit in 2016, Xi highlighted the importance of globalization in developing the world economy. In January 2017, when globalization was resisted by populism in various countries, Xi Jinping delivered a speech, “*Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind*,” at the United Nations headquarters in Geneva, proposing four models of global governance. The concept was developed in response to globalization’s setback, the reversal of regionalization, and the rise of populism.²¹ According to China’s state propaganda, this was the first time a Chinese leader proposed global governance.

¹⁹ See https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1215680.shtml and Wang Yi, “Practicing the idea of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,” 4 May 2016, [cppcc.china.com.cn](http://cppcc.china.com.cn/2016-05/04/content_38377875.htm), http://cppcc.china.com.cn/2016-05/04/content_38377875.htm

²⁰ Hu Jintao used the term to describe the relationship between mainland China and Taiwan in his 17th National Party Congress report, see https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-10/24/content_6204564_11.htm.

²¹ See Zhang Li Li “The content, value and impact of Xi Jinping’s thought of community of shared future for mankind” (xi jinping ren lei ming yun gong tong ti si xiang de nei rong, jia zhi yu zuo yong). *People’s Tribune*, March 28, 2017 https://web.archive.org/web/20180528234348/http://paper.people.com.cn/rmlt/html/2017-03/01/content_1759443.htm

In addition to promoting economic cooperation, the “shared future for all mankind” also emphasizes morality that China should put morality before interests when necessary.²² It’s the first time since Deng Xiaoping’s era that China openly pursues or promotes morality and justice for all in addition to China’s own economic interests. To build the shared future for mankind, China has the responsibility to assist developing countries with their development and should not narrowly pursue China’s own interests in its diplomacy.²³

Xi further institutionalized the principle of “community of shared future for mankind” in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).²⁴ This concept is also a path or solution to achieve the “Chinese dream” or “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” proposed by Xi Jinping. When globalization and multilateralism have suffered a setback, China needs to take an active role to re-advocate multilateralism in the international community. With the United States seemingly in decline and China rising, it is both necessary and appropriate for China to take a proactive role and claim a leadership position.²⁵

Part of this effort is also to get out of the rising power dilemma. The Chinese state media describes Xi’s vision as China’s solution to address a global challenge collectively. It rejects the

²² See “Exploring the path of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,” remarks by foreign minister Wang Yi at the luncheon of the Second World Peace Forum, 27 June 2013. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1053908.shtml; also Wang, Jianwei. “Xi Jinping’s ‘Major country diplomacy’: A paradigm shift?.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 115 (2019): 15-30.

²³ See Wang Yi ‘Upholding the correct view on justice and interest and actively playing roles as a responsible major country,’ People. cn, 10 September 2013. <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n1/2013/0910/c1003-22862978.html>

²⁴ See Xun Qing Zhi “Understanding the three important dimensions of community of shared future for mankind” (li jie ren lei ming yun gong tong ti de san ge zhong yao ceng mian). *People’s Tribune*, June 2017. <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0815/c40531-29470252.html>

²⁵ See Zhao Hong Tao “Community of shared future for mankind opens a new chapter of building a better world together” (ren lei ming yun gong tong ti kai qi gong jian mei hao shi jie xin pian zhang). *Hongqiwenqao*, 2018 (12). http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/hqwq/2018-06/15/c_1122992313.htm

Cold War mindset and power politics.²⁶ China is playing its consistent role as a promoter of world peace, a contributor to global development, and an upholder of the internal order by promoting international cooperation and multilateralism.²⁷ Together with the realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, building a community with a shared future for all mankind has become a goal in China's major-country diplomacy.²⁸ Ironically, this effort to reassure others of a peaceful China and the promotion of a "shared future of mankind" are perceived as signaling a proactive or even reformative China posing a challenge to the international order and international rules built by the U.S. after WWII.

"Dare to fight" for the national core interests While Xi's diplomacy might be egalitarian in economic issues, he is rather realist in security issues where win-win situations are much less possible. At the 2014 Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs, Xi stated that "we will never relinquish our legitimate rights and interests, or allow China's core interests to be undermined." Xi stressed the "bottom line" thinking in defending China's core-interests and advocated a "dare to fight" spirit. While China can and needs to make concessions in establishing a community of shared future, the "bottom line" thinking means that there is no room for compromise on issues that are considered core national interests.

At the 2017 19th National Congress, Xi emphasized national sovereignty, security, and development as the core national interests.²⁹ Once an issue becomes a "core interest," the "bottom

²⁶ See Xinhua, "Commentary: why president Xi strongly advocates building community with shared future", Xinhua, September 22, 2020. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/22/c_139388123.htm

²⁷ See Yang, Jiechi, "Working for a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind by Promoting International Cooperation and Multilateralism", Foreign Ministry of PRC, February 17, 2019.

²⁸ See Wang Yi, "Xie shou da zao ren lei mingy un gong tong ti (Working together to build a community of human destiny)", Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs, 120.

²⁹ See http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf

line” thinking requirement leaves no room for negotiation. However, what kinds of issues constitute the national core interests remain somewhat ambiguous and open to debate. While scholars argue that Xi has expanded the “core interests” in recent years,³⁰ the contents of “core interests” have always been evolving and perhaps intentionally left vague. This ambiguity makes it difficult to predict China’s diplomatic behavior on key issues³¹ but also leaves room for flexibility. Research shows that around 2004, Chinese officials, academics, and official news outlets began to use the term with increasing frequency to refer to sovereignty issues. Initially, the term was applied to Taiwan issues but, around 2006, its official use began to include Tibet and Xinjiang.³² In 2011, China State Council issued a white paper that includes state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, and national reunification, China’s policy system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the essential safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development in China’s “core interests.”³³ In 2013, MFA’s spokesperson Hua Chunying first referred to the Diaoyu Islands as a core interest.³⁴ In 2014, China warned the U.S. not to meddle in China’s internal fair during the 2014 pro-democracy protests in

³⁰ See Wang, Jianwei. "Xi Jinping's 'Major country diplomacy:' A paradigm shift?." *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 115 (2019): 15-30.

³¹ Zeng, Jinghan, Yuefan Xiao, and Shaun Breslin. "Securing China's core interests: the state of the debate in China." *International Affairs* 91.2 (2015): 245-266.

³² Swaine, Michael D. "China's Assertive Behavior: Part One: On 'Core Interests,'." *China Leadership Monitor* 34.22 (2011): 1-25.

³³ State Council. "China's peaceful development". The Information Office of the State Council, China's cabinet. September 2011. http://english1.english.gov.cn/official/2011-09/06/content_1941354.htm

³⁴ New York Times Editorial Board, "China's evolving 'core interests'", The New York Times, May 11, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/12/opinion/sunday/chinas-evolving-core-interests.html>

Hong Kong.³⁵ In 2015, when senior U.S. and Chinese military officials met, China referred to Taiwan, Hong Kong, the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and cybersecurity as core issues.³⁶

In addition to defending the national core interests, which are mostly domestic issues, Xi specifically emphasized the “fight for international discourse.” According to Xi’s speech at the National Party School Conference in 2016, China has faced three problems: starvation, being beaten, and being scolded. With the strengthening of China’s national power, China has solved the first two problems. However, China still needs to solve the problem of being scolded. The solution is to seize the international discourse and let the international audience hear the Chinese government’s voice:

“If you fall behind, you will be beaten, if you are poor, you will be hungry, and if you lose your voice, you will be scolded. Figuratively speaking, for a long time, our party has been leading the people to solve the three major problems of being beaten, starved, and scolded. After several generations of unremitting struggle, the first two problems have basically been solved, but the problem of “being scolded” has not yet been fundamentally solved. The fight for international discourse is a major issue that we must resolve.” --- Xi Jinping at the 2016 National Party School Conference ³⁷

Xi Jinping’s instructions on how to solve the problem of being scolded have been implemented in China’s foreign propaganda over the years. The government has increased its investment in state-owned media for international communications and actively expanded think tanks' influence. The state-controlled media outlets have been paying over 40 legacy news media

³⁵ Agence France-Presse, “Hong Kong protests: China warns US not to meddle in ‘internal affairs’”, October 2, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/02/hong-kong-protests-china-warns-us-not-to-meddle>

³⁶ China News, “Sun meets with U.S. deputy defense secretary, says two armies should strengthen joint exercises and training”, China News, January 27, 2015. <http://www.chinanews.com/mil/2015/01-27/7009697.shtml>

³⁷ See Xi, Jinping, “Xi Jinping zong shu ji z emo kan dang xiao gong zuo (How General Secretary Xi Jinping sees the work of party schools)”, Qiushi, 9 (2016).

in over 20 countries to publish news-looking propaganda.³⁸ MFA's spokespersons, ambassadors, and consuls in various countries have also actively engaged in "telling the China story." In a 2019 speech to the Party School, Xi again asked party cadres to dare to fight: "Leading cadres should take the initiative to devote themselves to various fights, dare to show their swords in the face of right and wrong, dare to rise to the occasion in the face of conflicts, dare to stand up in the face of crises and difficulties, and dare to fight resolutely in the face of unhealthy trends."³⁹ In an effort to synchronize domestic and international politics, this requirement was also imposed on MFA through his handwritten memos to diplomats.

In summary, China's new major-country diplomacy under Xi contains two conflicting parts. On the one hand, China signals its willingness to cooperate and promote shared interests. China is willing to take responsibilities, and even make sacrifices of its own interests to realize a shared future. On the other hand, Xi demands a "fighting spirit" for all CCP members to defend China's core national interests and to shape international discourse. The co-existence of these two conflicting features in China's new major-country diplomacy reflects the different strategies China adopts to tackle non-core interests and core interests.⁴⁰

³⁸ See China Daily, "China Daily's global development." 2018.

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/static_e/global.html; Dai, Yaoyao, and Luwei Luqiu. "Camouflaged propaganda: A survey experiment on political native advertising." *Research & Politics* 7, no. 3 (2020): 2053168020935250.

³⁹ See Xi Jinping speech at the opening ceremony of the training course for young and middle-aged cadres at the Central Party School (National School of Administration), Xinhua, September 3, 2019. http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2019-09/03/c_1124956081.htm

⁴⁰ Zhang, Denghua. "The concept of 'community of common destiny' in China's diplomacy: Meaning, motives and implications." *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 5.2 (2018): 196-207.

MFA's Role in Carrying out Xi's Diplomacy

What exactly is the MFA's role in carrying out Xi's new major country diplomacy to build a "community of shared future" and defend China's core interests? While the MFA has the responsibility to "advise the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on adopting diplomatic strategies, principles, and policies," the first responsibility of the MFA is to "to implement the state's diplomatic principles and policies and related laws and regulations; safeguard national sovereignty, security, and interests on behalf of the state."⁴¹ MFA, by design, is not the decision-making unit in the international affair. MFA's influence in policymaking further declines during Xi's presidency. In 2013, Xi established the National Security Commission for national security issues and initiated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank for regional economic and development issues. MFA is not involved in either institution. The duty of the MFA is not decision making but instead communicating: "to release information about important diplomatic activities, elaborate on foreign policies, conduct information-related work about important diplomatic activities, organize public diplomacy activities, and take charge of the affairs related to foreign journalists in China and resident foreign news agencies."⁴²

While "wolf warrior" is a new word for aggressive Chinese diplomats, Chinese diplomats have long been trained and referred to as the "plainclothes PLA soldiers" since the establishment of China's MFA. As plainclothes soldiers, the first and fundamental principle for Chinese diplomats is absolute loyalty. For a long time, under the guiding principle of Deng's low-profile diplomacy, the MFA was ridiculed as the "Department of Protests" on the Chinese Internet. The domestic

⁴¹ See "Main Responsibilities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zyzz_663306/

⁴² See "Main Responsibilities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zyzz_663306/

audience perceived MFA as weak and spineless and sent MFA calcium pills to express their anger and frustration. During Xi's presidency, MFA applauded and elaborated Xi's every speech and thoughts regarding foreign affairs. In 2017 Wang Yi, the foreign minister, wrote that Xi Jinping's thought on diplomacy "provides the theoretical guidelines for China's diplomacy in the new era, and contributes China's perspectives and wisdom for reforming and improving the global governance system." He claims that Xi thought on diplomacy "has also made innovations and transcended the traditional Western theories of international relations for the past 300 years."⁴³ In July 2020, MFA inaugurated a research center for the study of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy. Wang Yi vowed to "fully apply and follow the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy in conducting major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics."⁴⁴

Since China's MFA is not responsible for decision making but has the duty of communicating, MFA and its spokesperson have been active in "telling the China story" and the "fight for a say." The spokesman's office first opened its own WeChat, Weibo, and Tiktok (Douyin in China) accounts to target the Chinese audience in 2018. In 2019, after Wang Yi urged foreign ministry officials to show a stronger fighting spirit, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokespersons and the Chinese diplomats in different countries opened up their international front, such as Twitter accounts for reshaping and improving China's image. Among these accounts, the spokesman Zhao Lijian attracted the most attention because of his wolf warrior style.⁴⁵ Many of these statements on Twitter are translated into Chinese for domestic audiences through Chinese state media and

⁴³ Wang Yi, "Forge Ahead under the Guidance of General Secretary Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy," *Study Times*, September 1, 2017. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1489143.shtml

⁴⁴ Wang, Yi. "study and implement Xi Jinping Thought on diplomacy conscientiously and break new ground in major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics". On website of *Foreign Ministry of PRC*, July 20th, 2020.

⁴⁵ Qiu Yixuan, Lai Ouyu and Xu Jiayu, "100 tian yi qing tui te zhan: cong zhong guo wai jiao bu tui wen jie du da wai xuan bu ju (100 Days of Epidemic Twitter War: Interpreting the Big Foreign Propaganda Layout from Chinese Foreign Ministry Tweets)", April 29, 2020

social media platforms and ultimately serve the purpose of internal propaganda. Those tough statements signal a strong and confident MFA in defending China's international image, potentially increases public confidence in the nation and the government.⁴⁶ MFA's fight in international discourse has been successful among the domestic audience. Netizens call the spokesperson and Wang Yi the "diplomatic heavenly group," a term commonly used by netizens to describe popular singing groups.⁴⁷

Many career diplomats have also embraced the "fighting spirit" in international discourse. For example, Liu Xiaoming, the ambassador to the United Kingdom, published an article in 2019 in *People's Daily*, detailing his efforts to actively seek a voice in the international community since becoming an ambassador. Since he became an ambassador to the U.K., he has given more than 600 speeches around the U.K., written more than 80 articles in the British mainstream press, and given more than 30 interviews to major British TV and radio stations. "We must tell the story of China, the story of the Chinese Communist Party and the story of the Chinese people with confidence, and guide the international community to view the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics correctly; we must dare to speak out, speak out well and speak out first. Let the international community hear us, understand us, and believe us. Let the world see a more real and comprehensive China."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Huang Zhao Alexandre, and Rui Wang. "Building a network to "tell China stories well": Chinese diplomatic communication strategies on Twitter." *International Journal of Communication* 13 (2019): 24.

⁴⁷ Jiang, Gengyu, "wai jiao bu fa yan ren kai she dou yin zhang hao, wang min re lie hui xiang 'dou qi lai' (Foreign Ministry spokesman opens Douyin account, netizens enthusiastically echo "Shake it up")", HK01, July 8, 2019.

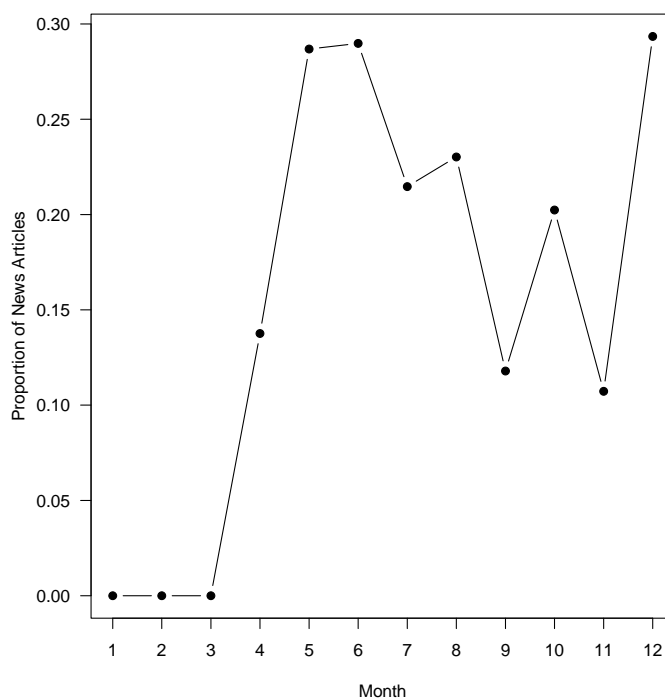
⁴⁸ Liu Xiaoming, "wo guo zhu ying guo da shi liu xiaoming: zhong guo wai jiao de feng gu geng jia ying lang (My Ambassador to the UK Liu Xiaoming: China's diplomacy has hardened its bones)", *People's Daily*, October 5, 2019. <https://wap.peopleapp.com/article/4655576/4538352>

Following the call for “fighting spirit” in international discourse, as loyal plainclothes soldiers, Chinese diplomats firmly defend China’s image and confront any negative narratives and comments on China with harsh language. This “fighting spirit” ultimately leads to the new name “wolf warrior” for Chinese diplomats.

An Empirical Analysis of the Transcripts of MFA’S Press Conference

As can be seen in Figure 1, since the outbreak of COVID-19, the media has increasingly used the phrase “wolf warrior” when mentioning China’s diplomacy. Around 20% of news mentioning China’s diplomacy also mentions “wolf warrior.” However, much of the reporting on wolf warrior diplomacy focuses on the Chinese diplomats’ social media posts. To examine whether China’s MFA has officially embraced the wolf warrior diplomacy and how the diplomatic language has changed under Xi’s presidency, we utilize 20 years of transcripts of the regular MFA press conference from September 2001 through May 2020, scraped from MFA’s official website. We argue that while diplomats’ social media posts might reflect their own incentive and tactics, the speeches at the press conferences reflect the official diplomacy of China’s MFA. In this section, we will first present a brief history and background of MFA’s Press Conference and show that the transcripts from the press conference present the official stance for the MFA.

Figure 1: Proportion of News Articles Mentioning “Wolf Warrior” When Mentioning “China’s Diplomacy” in 2020



China’s MFA Press Conference

The system of MFA’s press conference began in 1983. The Central Propaganda Department and the Central Propaganda and Leadership Group jointly issued a document requiring MFA and the State Council to establish a press release system for those parts of the State Council with external relations. The Chinese authorities have always regarded the MFA spokesperson system as the window of China’s reform and opening up to show the world of China’s development and progress.⁴⁹ In the beginning, weekly press conferences did not include question and answer sessions but soon changed to answer questions on the first press conference each month. Starting

⁴⁹ See Li Jian Ying “How the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson System was Established” (Wai jiao bu fa yan ren zhi du shi zen yang jian li de). The Paper. January 25, 2019. https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2897667

in 1988, every press conference contains questions and answers. In 1997, the limit on the number of times a journalist could ask questions and the time limit on press releases were also removed.

A spokesperson must have a firm and correct political stance and be loyal to the country. As Wang Yi, the Foreign Minister, once pointed out: “the spokesperson is steadfastly committed to upholding the country’s sovereignty, interests, and dignity, consistently interpreting China’s diplomatic concepts, policies, and guidelines, and actively working to increase the knowledge and understanding between China and the world.”⁵⁰ In terms of the speeches and responses, since China has long established the principle of “limited authority for diplomatic work,” spokespersons’ speeches result from coordinating views and policies among different departments of the Chinese government. When other ministries and commissions are involved, they have to sign off on the spokesperson’s remarks. Therefore, the spokesperson’s speech mainly reflects the policy stances or opinions of various institutions instead of one person. Moreover, the transcripts of those press conferences have to go through strict scrutiny before publication. During the censoring process, some of the questions and answers are excluded or amended. Wordings of both questions and answers can also be altered in the published transcripts.⁵¹ This means that although the spokesperson might have some autonomy to react to specific questions, the transcripts for the public have been examined and revised to reflect the government’s policy.

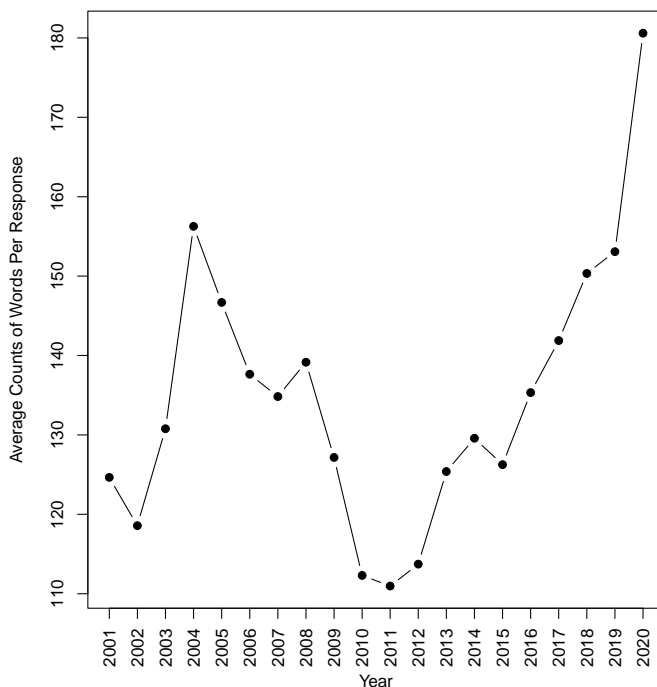
⁵⁰ Wang Yi, “wang yi bu zhang zai wai jiao bu fa yan ren zhi du 30 zhou nian ji wai guo zhu hua ji zhe xin nian zha dai hui shang de zhi ci (Minister Wang Yi's Speech at the 30th Anniversary of the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson System and New Year's Reception for Foreign Correspondents in China)”, Foreign Ministry of PRC, December 13, 2013

⁵¹ One topic that has been constantly censored on transcripts is the issue related to Hong Kong.

Data

We scraped transcripts of press conferences from September 2001 through May 2020 from MFA's official website, 3,149 press conferences in total. Because each transcript contains multiple questions and answers that usually cover several issue areas, we further split those transcripts so that each document only contains one question-and-answer pair. In the end, we have 22,375 documents (Q&As). The length of a single Q&A ranges from as short as eight words to as long as 1,203 words. On average, a Q&A is 137 words long. In Figure 2, we visualize the average length of a single Q&A per year. There seems to be a steady decline in the average length of a single response from MFA's spokesperson during Hu Jintao's presidency, except for a slight rebound in 2008. Since 2013, we observe a steady increase in the average length of a single response during Xi's presidency. The sharp increase in the average length of spokesperson's response potentially signals a more proactive and confident MFA under Xi's presidency.

Figure 2: Average Length of Q&A Per Year



Is “wolf warrior” an official MFA strategy? Hostility in diplomatic sentiment

While “wolf warrior” has become the buzzword for China’s diplomacy, there is no clear definition of wolf warrior diplomacy. Media pundits and scholars generally treat wolf warrior diplomacy as a rhetoric style. Some frequent characteristics the media and pundits use to describe the wolf warrior diplomacy include assertive, aggressive, combative, and insulting.⁵² Therefore, we first use a supervised machine learning method to identify aggressive, combative, and insulting language in the spokespersons’ speeches at MFA’s press conferences.

In supervised machine learning, researchers train a classification algorithm based on labeled data and use the trained classifier to predict the classes of unlabeled data. Intuitively, a machine is trained to learn from some ground truth (expert-labeled data) and learn a function that can map features to the labels. For any supervised method, the first step is to find or create labeled data. In our case, we hand-coded a random sample of the spokesperson’s speeches. To account for any possible variation of sentiment over time, we randomly sampled five documents per month. In cases where there are fewer than five documents, we selected all the documents. In the end, we sampled 1,056 out of the 22,375 documents (Q&As). We then label a document as hostile when a document uses combative and insulting language. Two expert coders coded the 1,056 randomly sampled documents, and 200 out of the 1,056 documents are coded by both coders. We obtain an inter-coder reliability of 91%, meaning that 91% of the time the coders agree with each other. We identified 164 Q&As as hostile out of the 1,056 sampled documents (15.52%). We then trained a convolutional neural network (CNN) on 950 (90%) hand-coded documents (training set), and test

⁵² For examples see Ben Westcott and Steven Jiang, China is embracing a new brand of foreign policy. Here's what wolf warrior diplomacy means, CNN, May 29, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/28/asia/china-wolf-warrior-diplomacy-intl-hnk/index.html>; Zhiqun Zhu, Interpreting China’s “Wolf-Warrior Diplomacy”: What explains the sharper tone to China’s overseas conduct recently?, The Diplomat, May 15, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/interpreting-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>;

Table 1: Example of a Hostile Response Predicted by the Model

<p>“法新社记者：上周五，美国商务部以中方在新疆侵犯人权为由，宣布制裁相关中国企业和机构。中方对此有何评论？</p> <p>赵立坚：美方将中国有关企业、机构和个人列入“实体清单”，泛化国家安全概念，滥用出口管制措施，违反国际关系基本准则，干涉中国内政，损害中方利益。中方对此表示强烈不满、坚决反对。</p> <p>必须指出，新疆事务纯属中国内政，任何国家无权干涉。新疆采取的反恐和去极端化举措，目的是从源头上预防极端主义和恐怖主义的滋生，完全符合中国法律，也符合国际实践。这些举措取得了实际成效，受到 2500 万新疆各族人民的广泛支持，也为国际反恐事业作出了积极贡献。美方对中方的指责完全是颠倒黑白、一派胡言，只能进一步暴露美方干扰新疆反恐努力、阻挠中国稳定发展的险恶用心。</p> <p>我们敦促美方纠正错误，撤销有关决定，停止干涉中国内政。中方将继续采取一切必要举措，维护中国企业合法权益，捍卫国家主权、安全、发展利益。”</p>	<p>AFP: On Friday the U.S. Department of Commerce said it would sanction relevant Chinese companies and government institute for human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Do you have any response to this?</p> <p>Zhao Lijian: The U.S., adding relevant Chinese enterprises, institutions and individuals to its “entity list,” has overstretched the concept of national security, abused export control measures, violated the basic norms governing international relations, interfered in China’s internal affairs, and hurt China’s interests. <i>China deplors and firmly opposes that.</i></p> <p>It needs to be highlighted that Xinjiang affairs are purely China’s internal affairs which allow no foreign interference. The measures on countering terrorism and deradicalization have been taken to prevent in a fundamental way these two evil forces from taking roots in Xinjiang. They accord with Chinese laws and international practices. They have been proved effective, widely supported by 25 million people of various ethnic groups in Xinjiang, and contributing to the global counter-terrorism cause. <i>The U.S. accusation against China, nothing but absolute nonsense to confound the public, only serves to reveal its vile attempt to disrupt Xinjiang’s counter-terrorism efforts and China’s stability and development.</i></p> <p><i>We urge the U.S. to correct its mistake, rescind the relevant decision, and stop interfering in China’s internal affairs. China will continue to take all necessary measures to protect the legitimate rights and interests of the Chinese enterprises and safeguard China’s sovereignty, security and development interests.</i></p>
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the model-fit using the remaining hand-coded documents (test set).⁵³ We achieved an AUC (Area under the ROC curve) of 94% in the test set. When applying the trained classifier on the full corpus, 3,326 are predicted to be hostile (14.86%).

⁵³ We used pre-trained Chinese word embedding to vectorize words and documents in our corpus. Unlike the commonly used bag-of-words approach in Political Science where each unique word/token is one distinct dimension, the embedding representation of words and documents vectorize the words and documents based on their semantic and syntactic similarities. Words that are semantically and syntactically

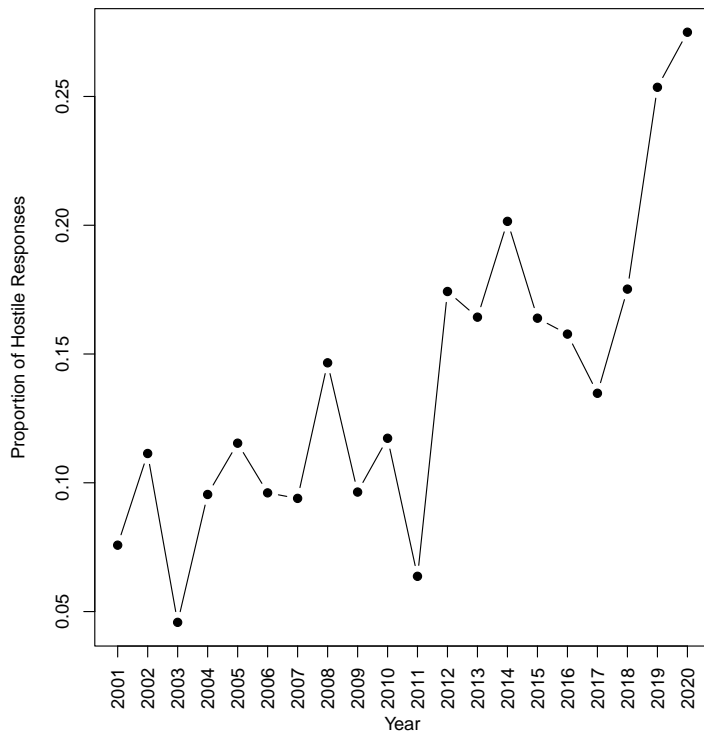
In Table 1, we include one hostile response predicted by our model and its English translation to demonstrate what a hostile response looks like. It is a random example from 1102 responses with an above 0.9 predicted probability of being hostile. This particular example is predicted to have a 96.92% chance to be hostile. The English translation is the official translation of the particular response from MFA's website. We highlighted parts that we consider as hostile.

Once we identify individual hostile responses, we calculate the percentage of hostile responses by year and visualize the trend in Figure 3. The general trend of hostility in Figure 3 before 2011 confirms previous scholar's arguments and findings that the assertiveness in China's diplomacy has been underestimated prior to 2010 and overestimated from 2010 to 2011.⁵⁴ While there are fluctuations from 2001 and 2011, the hostility stayed around 10% between 2001 and 2011. In 2012, the transition year between Xi and Hu, there is a sharp increase in hostile diplomatic responses. While there are fluctuations after 2012, the least hostile year (2017) is still almost as hostile as the most hostile year (2008) prior to Xi's presidency. We observe a sharp increase in hostile responses starting in 2018 and continuing through 2020. While wolf warrior might be a new term for China's spokesperson and diplomacy in 2020, the hostility in spokespersons' responses is not new. Still, MFA spokespersons have become increasingly hostile since the beginning of Xi's presidency, with 2019 and 2020 mark unprecedented high levels of hostility in the past two decades.

similar are positioned close to each other. Embedding representation of the corpus reduces the dimensionality of vector space substantially from hundreds of thousands (vocabulary size) to 100 to 300 dimensions. The embedding representation has shown to out-perform the n-gram and bag-of-word representation of words in many down-stream applications.

⁵⁴ See Alastair Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?" *International Security*, Vol.37, No.4 (Spring 2013), pp. 7-48.

Figure 3: Percentage of Hostile Responses by Year



Co-existence of cooperative and combative spirits: Hostility by different topic areas

Based on our previous discussion of China's new major-country diplomacy, the hostility in diplomatic language is likely to vary between different issue areas: the hostility is likely to increase in issue areas related to the "core national interests" but is likely to decrease or stay the same in cooperative issues areas during Xi's presidency.

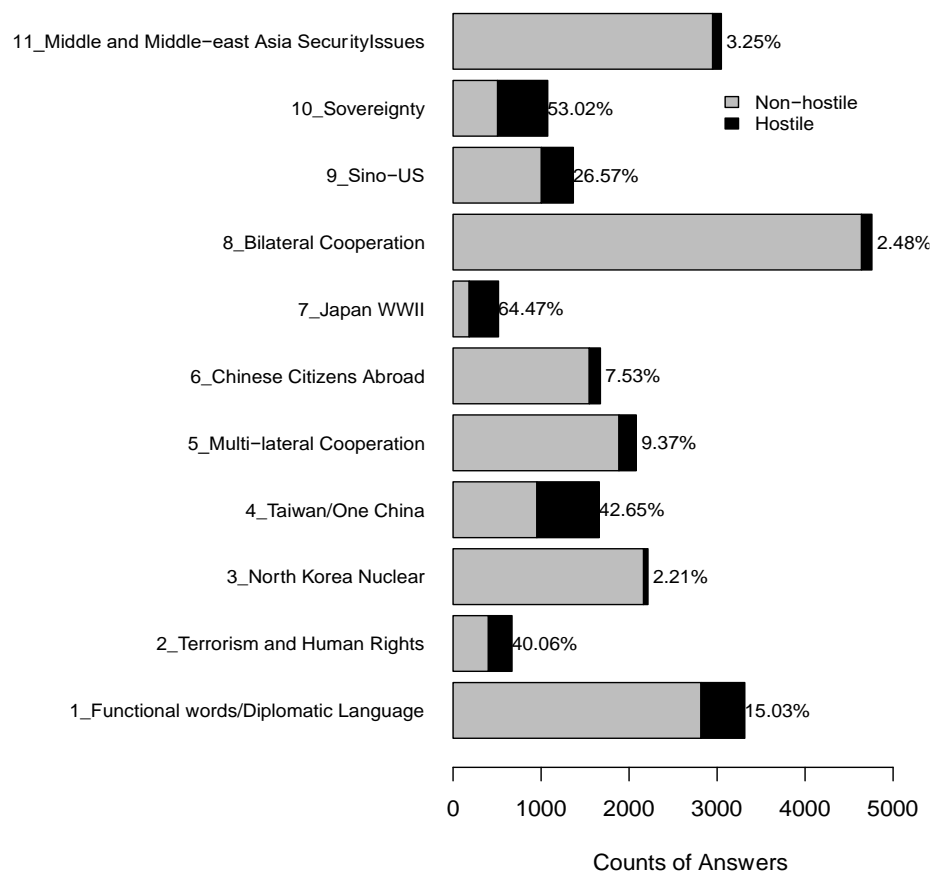
To examine the hostility in different issue areas we estimate a topic model on all the transcripts. Topic modeling, first developed in computer science, is now commonly used by social scientists to summarize large quantities of text data. There are many different algorithms in topic modeling. In our case, we used the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LAD) model and identified 11 topics or clusters of the diplomatic responses. LDA is a generative model built on the assumption that the corpus is generated by a group of topics. Within each topic, certain words are

Table 2. Topic Labels and Most Likely Terms within Each Topic

Number	Label	Most Relevant Term	Most Relevant Term Translated
1	Functional words/Diplomatic Language	中国, 问题, 是否, 不, 没有, 有关, 会, 进行, 一, 这个, 情况, 说, 一些, 方面, 中方	China, question, whether, no, not, relevant, will, on-going, one, this, situation, say, some, aspect
2	Terrorism and Human Rights	中国, 组织, 国际, 人权, 恐怖主义, 打击, 反恐, 恐怖, 社会, 合作, 政府, 反对, 国家, 人民, 宗教	China, organization, international, human rights, terrorism, strike, anti-terrorism, terror, society, cooperation, government, against, nation, people, religion
3	North Korea Nuclear	朝鲜, 会谈, 问题, 六, 方, 中方, 半岛, 各方, 解决, 对话, 有关, 希望, 朝, 和平, 努力	Korea (N.), talks, problem, six-party, China, peninsula, each party, solve, dialogue, relevant, hope, Korea (N.), peace, strive
4	Taiwan/One China	中国, 美, 美国, 台湾, 关系, 问题, 中, 美方, 不, 中方, 一个, 和平, 发展, 对此, 国家	China, America, U.S., Taiwan, relationship, issue, China, America, no, China side, one, peace, development, regarding, country
5	Multilateral Cooperation	中国, 国家, 合作, 国际, 发展, 经济, 世界, 中方, 组织, 会议, 将, 非洲, 积极, 欧盟, 社会	China, country, cooperation, international, development, economic, world, China side, organization, conference, will, Africa, active, E.U., society
6	Chinese Citizens Abroad	中国, 中方, 事件, 人员, 政府, 已, 发生, 人, 有关, 将, 安全, 名, 公民, 情况, 驻,	China, China side, event, people, government, already, happen, people, relevant, will, safety, citizen, situation, stationed
7	Japan WWII	日本, 日, 日方, 中, 历史, 问题, 首相, 中方, 亚洲, 关系, 人民, 对此, 希望, 靖国神社, 战争	Japan, Japan, Japan side, China, historical, issue, prime minister, China side, Asia, relationship, people, regarding, hope, Yasukuni Shrine, war
8	Bilateral Cooperation	关系, 中, 将, 两, 合作, 国, 访问, 发展, 中国, 问题, 总统, 总理, 共同, 主席, 进行	Relationship, China, will, two, cooperation, country, visiting, develop, China, issue, president, prime minister, together, chairman, on-going
9	Sino-US relationship	中国, 美, 中方, 美国, 合作, 中, 经贸, 问题, 贸易, 美方, 企业, 公司, 对此, 缅甸, 不	China, America, China side, U.S., cooperation, China, economic and trade, issue, trade, America side, enterprise, company, regarding, Myanmar, no
10	Sovereignty	中方, 中国, 南海, 香港, 主权, 领土, 海域, 对此, 钓鱼岛, 争议, 有关, 政府, 国家, 国际法, 行为	China side, China, South China Sea, Hong Kong, sovereignty, territory, sea area, regarding, Diaoyu island, dispute, regarding, government, country, International Law, behavior
11	Middle and Middle-east Asia Security	问题, 中方, 和平, 解决, 国际, 联合国, 有关, 局势, 安理会, 伊拉克, 希望, 阿富汗, 各方, 地区, 中东	Issue, China, peace, solve, international, U.N., related, situation, UNSC, Iraq, hope, Afghanistan, each side, region, middle-east

more or less likely to occur (or being used). Each document contains a mixture of topics. For example, the model suggests that the words “Korea (N.),” “talks,” “problem,” “six-party,” “China,” “peninsula,” “solve,” and “dialogue” frequently appear together and are likely to be generated by one topic. We labeled this topic as “North Korea Nuclear.” The number of topics is a hyperparameter in LDA, which is not estimated but is instead a choice of the researcher. We chose 11 topics based on both the coherence matrix and interpretability.⁵⁵ In Table 2, we include a list of topic labels and the most relevant terms in both Chinese and their English translation.

Figure 4: Percentages and Counts of Hostile Responses by Topic



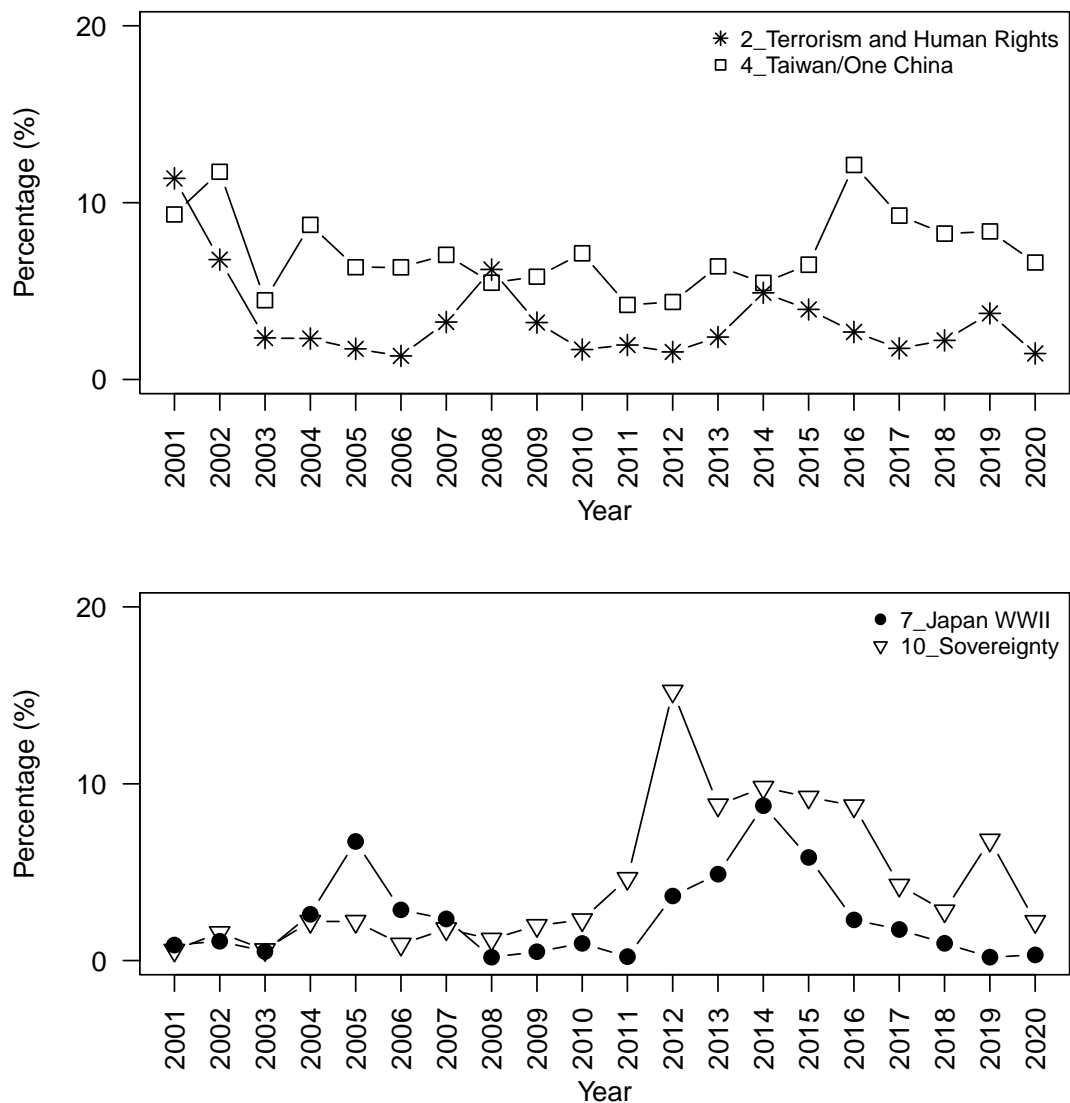
⁵⁵ We used genism library in Python for the topic modeling.

Because the hostility is measured for each response, we use the dominant topic of a response as its topic when analyzing the hostility by topic. We then calculate the percentage of hostile responses among all responses within each topic. As can be seen in Figure 4, the spokesperson's responses are much more likely to be hostile when the issues are about Japan WWII (Topic 7), sovereignty (Topic 10), Taiwan/one China (4), and Terrorism and human rights (Topic 2). When talking about Japan WWII and Sovereignty topics, more than 50% of responses are hostile. The least hostile topics are Topic 3, North Korea nuclear issue, and Topic 8, Bilateral cooperation. Less than 3% of responses on the two topics are hostile.

Although in the previous section we show a steady and sharp increase in the hostility in diplomatic sentiment during Xi's presidency, an alternative hypothesis is also possible that the hostility within specific issue stays the same, but the sensitive issues were brought up more frequently in the recent press conferences. To examine whether the increase in diplomatic hostility is due to the increase in hostile topics, in Figure 5, we visualize the percentage of responses in Topics 2, 4, 7, and 10 per year, the four most hostile topics, from 2001 to 2020. As can be seen, the coverage of Topic 2 (Terrorism and Human Rights) and 4 (Taiwan/One China) during Xi's presidency does not seem to differ from the years before 2012. However, there is a sharp increase in the coverage of Topic 10, Sovereignty, from 2012 to 2016, the first 5-years-term of Xi's presidency. Prior to Xi's leadership, the highest percentage of the Sovereignty Topic is 5% in 2011. In 2012, more than 15% of the diplomatic responses were about sovereignty. The percentage of Sovereignty Topic stayed high from 2013 to 2016, then began to decrease. However, the coverage of the sovereignty issue in Xi's second term is still higher than it was before 2012. Similarly, we observe a sharp increase of Topic 7, Japan WWII, in 2016, but the coverage quickly reverted back

to lower levels afterwards. It seems that the increased hostility in recent years is not due to increased coverage of sensitive issues.

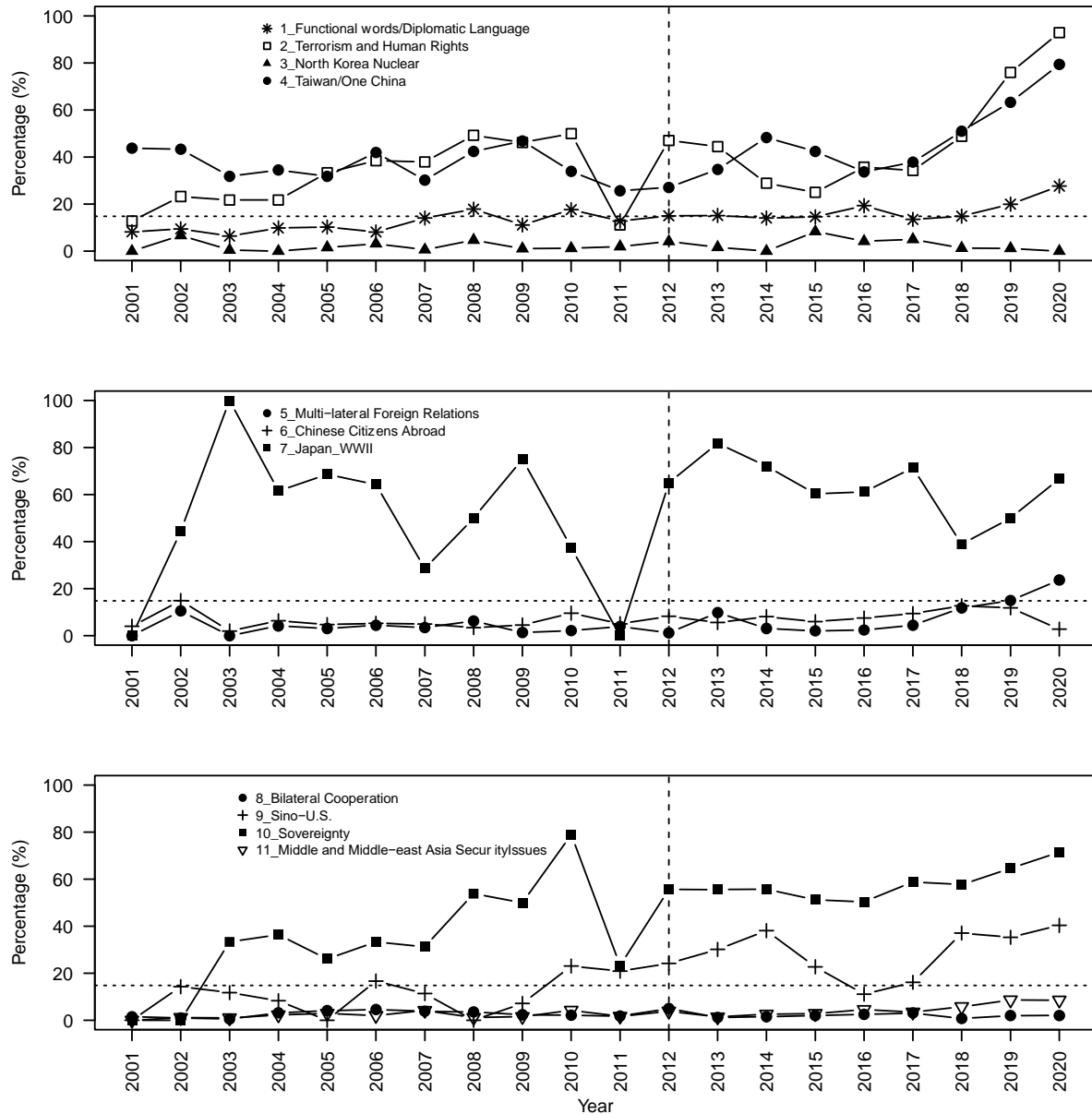
Figure 5: Percentage of Topic 3 and 4 per year from 2001 to 2020



Next, we examine whether hostility varies across different issue areas over time. In Figure 6, we visualize the percentage of hostile responses per topic per year. Because we have 11 topics, we visualize them in three subplots for better interpretation. The dotted vertical line at 2012 marks the transition between Hu and Xi. The dotted horizontal line at 14.86% represents the average

hostility of all responses from 2001 to 2020. We use this overall average hostility as a naïve baseline for comparison.

Figure 6: Percentage of Hostile Responses by topic from 2001 to 2020



Continued and Increased Hostility in Core Interests Hostility levels in four topics have consistently been above the baseline (14.86%) before and after Xi's presidency: Terrorism and

Human Rights (Topic 2), Taiwan/One China (Topic 4), Japan WWII (Topic 7), and Sovereignty (Topic 10). Strikingly, we still observe sharp increases in hostility of Topic 2, Terrorism and Human Rights, and Topic 4, Taiwan/One China, since 2017, even though both were already among the most hostile topics before Xi's presidency. The hostile responses in Topic 2, Terrorism and Human Rights, increased to 75.95% (60 out of 79 responses) in 2019 and 92.86% (13 out of 14 responses) in 2020. The hostile responses in Topic 4, Taiwan/One China, increased to 63.28% (112 out of 177 responses) in 2019 and 79.37% (13 out of 63 responses) in 2020. While the hostility in the Sovereignty topic stayed high and has increased slightly during Xi's presidency after 2016, it has not been more hostile than it was in 2010 during Hu's second term. Although hostility in Topic 7 Japan WWII has been above the baseline most of the time, it fluctuates dramatically. The hostility in Topic 7 decreased slightly during Xi's first term and started to increase again since 2019.

New Hostilities in Neutral Issues Some of the more neutral to positive topics have become more hostile in recent years, including Topic 1 Diplomatic Language and Topic 5 Multilateral Cooperation. Increased hostility in Topic 5 Multi-lateral Cooperation seemed puzzling at first, as it seems to contradict our discussion on Xi's major-country diplomacy, which emphasizes multilateralism and cooperation in non-core issue areas. We read the spokesperson's responses in Topic 5 and found that the increased hostility in Multilateral Cooperation Topic is largely driven by responses to the criticism and suspicion of China's global investment, especially the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While the Chinese government has emphasized that BRI is an innovative cooperation model to benefit people in all countries along the route, the reactions from other countries are different. Some worried that the Chinese government has a political agenda behind the economic cooperation. The BRI was seen as an example of how China uses international aid

as a foreign policy tool⁵⁶ and a component of China's contemporary geopolitical grand strategy⁵⁷. In the face of international criticism, doubts, and suspicions, the MFA's spokesperson took a defensive stance with hostile language.

Hostility in one topic, the Sino-U.S. relationship (Topic 9), became consistently above the baseline during Xi's presidency. However, this trend started in 2010 during Hu's presidency. Relations between the United States and China became strained in 2010. In January, after Google threatened to pull out of China, criticizing Chinese censorship and cyber-attacks, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made a speech criticizing China's increased internet censorship. The same month, the Obama administration notified Congress of its decision to sell arms to Taiwan, which prompted strong condemnation from the Chinese government. In February, Obama met with Dalai Lama at the White House, which again received strong condemnation from China. In the same year, the U.S. midterm elections triggered criticism of China's economic policies by both the U.S. government and the public over manipulating the exchange rate of the Chinese currency⁵⁸. Scholars and analysts called 2010 a turning point in the Sino-U.S. relationship, the worst in a decade⁵⁹. Hostility in Topic 9 Sino-U.S. Relationship dropped briefly in the last two years of Obama's presidency, then rose again in Trump's presidency during the U.S.-China trade-war and Covid-19 pandemic.

⁵⁶ Vieira, Victor Carneiro Corrêa. "From Third World Theory to Belt and Road Initiative: International Aid as a Chinese Foreign Policy Tool." *Contexto Internacional* 41.3 (2019): 529-551.

⁵⁷ Ploberger, Christian. "One belt, one road—China's new grand strategy." *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies* 15, no. 3 (2017): 289-305.

⁵⁸ Yan, Xuetong. "The instability of China–US relations." *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3.3 (2010): 263-292.

⁵⁹ Jisi, Wang, and Hu Ran. "From cooperative partnership to strategic competition: A review of China–US relations 2009–2019." *China International Strategy Review* 1.1 (2019): 1-10. Fordham, Benjamin O., and Katja B. Kleinberg. "International trade and US relations with China." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7.3 (2011): 217-236.

Issues with Few and Decreased Hostilities Topic 3 (North Korea nuclear issue), Topic 6 (Chinese citizens abroad), and Topic 8 (Bilateral Cooperation) have always stayed below the average hostility and become less hostile in recent years. China receives little criticism in those neutral to positive topics.

To summarize, in general, there is a sharp increase in hostility in MFA spokesperson's responses during Xi's presidency.⁶⁰ Two traditionally hostile issues that constitute the core interests, Terrorism Human Rights (Topic 2) and Taiwan/One China (Topic 4), have become much more hostile during Xi's presidency. Hostility in the Sovereignty topic, another core interest of China, stayed high with a slight increase and little variation during Xi's presidency. In addition to those core-interests, MFA also firmly defends any criticism on China, such as criticisms on BRI, reflected in the increased hostility in Multilateral Relations (Topics 5). On the other hand, there are few hostilities in areas where China is not criticized, such as North Korea Nuclear issue and Bilateral Cooperation.

While China's MFA has gained popularity among the domestic audience and are no longer perceived as weak and spineless, close examination of the spokesperson's speech reveals that MFA is still a "Ministry of Protest." The increased hostilities are from elaborate verbal protests and insults without clear actions. The tough rhetoric style responds to and satisfies the nationalist domestic audience, while the empty threat leaves room for concession. As recent studies find that domestic audience in China won't punish non-action or concession after vague verbal attacks⁶¹,

⁶⁰ There are also increases in undocumented hostilities towards journalists during those press conferences. Journalists are increasingly criticized for being unfriendly towards China or lack of understanding of China. In our interviews with journalists covering the press conferences in recent years, one journalist from Hong Kong complaint that Huang Chunyin criticized her as not patriot enough in her questions and suggested her introspection of "not being a good Chinese."

⁶¹ See Jessica Chen Weiss, *Powerful patriots: nationalist protest in China's foreign relations*. Oxford University Press, 2014. 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): 7-3

wolf warrior diplomacy might provide a temporary solution to satisfy a nationalist domestic audience without being forefront aggressive in foreign affairs.

Conclusion

The combative wolf warrior diplomacy has gained broad international attention. Media, pundits, and policymakers are concerned that wolf warrior diplomacy signals a more aggressive and reformative China in international affairs. While the media associates wolf warrior with China's diplomacy, most reports and analyses are on those diplomats' social media posts. It is unclear how official this wolf warrior diplomacy is and what the reasons are behind this wolf warrior diplomacy. This article situates wolf warrior diplomacy in the context of Xi Jinping's major-country diplomacy and MFA's role in China's foreign affairs. We demonstrate that MFA, as a communication or propaganda department, strictly follows Xi's instruction and embraces the "fighting spirit" in international discourse.

Under one-party rule, the CCP's deliberate emphasis on the status, legitimacy, and dignity of the party at home has inevitably evolved into the need for diplomacy to be highly sensitive to the status, legitimacy, and dignity of the state, rather than merely responding to domestic nationalism and patriotism.⁶² China's MFA and its diplomats, as the "plainclothes soldiers", must conform their words and actions to the will of the party and embrace the fighting spirit to signal their loyalty.

We analyze the transcripts of MFA's press conferences over the past 20 years and find that the spokespersons' speech has become much more hostile during Xi's presidency. However, the increase in hostility varies depending on particular issue areas. While "fighting spirit" is only one

⁶² Zhang, Qing-ming. "understanding Chinese diplomacy since the 18th party congress" (li jie shi ba da yi lai de zhong guo wai jiao). *Foreign Affairs Review*. 2 (2014): 1-20.

part of Xi's Thought on Diplomacy, the fighting spirit has received a disproportionate amount of media attention and led the international audience to doubt the intention of the egalitarian win-win cooperation. While the egalitarian and realist components co-exist in Xi Jinping's major-country diplomacy, the two competing parts might counteract one another. However, domestically, the two seemingly conflicting components serve to both boost support from the nationalist audience and leave room for concessions without incurring audience costs. In addition, this article also demonstrates that although MFA has limited a role in decision-making, MFA's statements can provide fruitful insights into China's foreign policy.

China's diplomacy has constantly evolved given its changing national power and the international balance of power. Xi Jinping's new major-country diplomacy is both new and old. On the one hand, each component in Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy came from his predecessors'. On the other hand, Xi's diplomacy is more than a rebranding of old thoughts. For the first time, China specified and institutionalized some of the vague ideas such as "shared future" and "responsible major country." Xi's major-country diplomacy is also different from his predecessor: it is no longer about managing relationships with other major powers but about diplomacy that suits China's major power status in the world. China's diplomacy is no longer purely serving domestic development. It is short-sighted to consider wolf warrior diplomacy as merely responding to China's domestic nationalism.

Media and pundits have focused on reactions to China's wolf warrior diplomacy from the U.S. and its allies, the receivers of China's verbal insults. It is unclear how other countries perceive China's diplomacy. For developing countries that are dissatisfied or disappointed with the West, especially the U.S., China's boldness in confronting the U.S. and institutionalization of multilateralism might serve to strengthen its image as a capable leader. This might make it easier

for China to find potential partners when promoting China's own institutions for international cooperation.