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DIPLOMACY: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF
WOLF WARRIOR RHETORIC**

Roxas, Maria C.

Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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**NAVAL
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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**AUDIENCE TARGETING IN CHINESE PUBLIC
DIPLOMACY: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS
OF WOLF WARRIOR RHETORIC**

by

Maria Christina A. Roxas

December 2022

Thesis Advisor:
Second Reader:

Timothy C. Warren
Sean F. Everton

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**AUDIENCE TARGETING IN CHINESE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY:
AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF WOLF WARRIOR RHETORIC**

Maria Christina A. Roxas
Lieutenant Commander, Philippine Navy
BSECE, Adamson University, 2003

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN INFORMATION STRATEGY
AND POLITICAL WARFARE**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
December 2022**

Approved by: Timothy C. Warren
Advisor

Sean F. Everton
Second Reader

Carter Malkasian
Chair, Department of Defense Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In recent years the, People’s Republic of China (PRC) has adopted an increasingly combative and assertive approach to diplomacy worldwide, dubbed “wolf warrior diplomacy.” It is particularly evident in PRC diplomats’ communication strategies, known for their individualistic and aggressive rhetoric on Western media platforms like Twitter. This communication strategy, however, is not conducted in the same way across all countries. With that in mind, this study analyzes the tone PRC diplomats use in their wolf warrior–style rhetoric. Furthermore, it considers the host country’s characteristics and cultural differences, in particular cultural individualism, which makes that country a more suitable target for wolf warrior diplomacy. Using Twitter messages collected from PRC diplomats’ official accounts, the study applies structural topic modeling and text analysis to show the correlation between the rhetoric and the characteristics of the host country as the intended audience. The findings reveal that individualistic and aggressive rhetoric is more likely to target culturally individualistic host countries. At the same time, various country-based factors also affect online rhetoric and influence the use of the wolf warrior strategy. Researching this area from a different perspective and presenting claims with data-driven evidence provides valuable guidance and learning opportunities essential to the public and policymakers.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIC	Akaike information criterion
API	application programming interface
BIC	Bayesian information criterion
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
FREX	frequency
I-C	individualism-collectivism
IDV	individualism
LDA	Latent Dirichlet Allocation
LIWC	linguistic inquiry and word count
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NLP	natural language processing
PRC	People’s Republic of China
STM	structural topic modeling
WDI	World Development Indicators

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the past decade, there has been significant interest in examining China’s confident rise as a major power. Insights from China’s diplomatic approach to contested geopolitical space have sparked negative reactions arising from its increasingly assertive and offensive approaches. The term “wolf warrior”¹ diplomacy, named after a patriotic Chinese film, emerged at an interesting time when Western media and pundits coined the term to describe PRC diplomats’ communication strategies, which use individualistic and aggressive rhetoric on Western media platforms such as Twitter. Viewed as an element of China’s diplomatic strategy, this approach increases the opportunities for diplomats to communicate with foreign publics in line with Xi Jinping’s directive to “tell China’s story well”² and to manage public opinion through heightened nationalism within Chinese domestic politics. However, wolf warrior diplomacy cannot be generalized as a favored approach that is conducted in the same manner across all countries.

The research presented here aims to contextualize and quantify wolf warrior diplomacy, a concept that has been widely used but not well defined, making it prone to subjective interpretation. This study explores how PRC diplomats leverage this form of diplomacy based on an understanding of the strategic intent of using wolf warrior-style rhetoric, especially in the selection of the host country as a target audience. Examining the impact of the characteristics of the host countries on the selection of rhetorical strategies provides a new approach to understanding the effectiveness of wolf warrior diplomats. Mapping how PRC diplomats achieve their goals, this study examines individualism as an important form of cultural variation and specific aspects of development, such as wealth, democracy, and Internet access, across countries. The results show that these country-level variables significantly influence the rhetorical behavior of PRC diplomats in addressing their target audience.

¹ Helen Raleigh, “Wolf Warrior II Tells Us a Lot about China,” *National Review*, July 20, 2019, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/07/wolf-warrior-ii-tells-us-a-lot-about-china/>.

² Zhao Alexandre Huang and Rui Wang, “Building a Network to ‘Tell China Stories Well’: Chinese Diplomatic Communication Strategies on Twitter,” *International Journal of Communication* 13, no. 0 (June 30, 2019): 24.

Using Twitter messages collected from PRC diplomats' official accounts, this study applies two approaches to quantitative analysis. Text analysis based on word counts from existing lexicons and structural topic modeling are used to predict how likely wolf warrior-style rhetoric is to be used depending on how highly individualism is valued in the host country's culture. In both approaches, the regression models are used to predict the prevalence of a particular style of rhetoric based on the characteristics of the host country of a given Chinese diplomat. This study reveals that culturally individualistic countries are more often targeted by wolf warrior-style rhetoric characterized by individualistic and aggressive tones. Moreover, different country-based factors, including democracy, wealth, and access to the Internet, are found to affect the online rhetoric of Chinese diplomats and influence the employment of the wolf warrior strategy. The findings in this study underline how cultural differences across host countries influence PRC diplomats' use of wolf warrior diplomacy.

Researching this area from a different perspective and presenting claims with data-driven evidence provides valuable guidance and learning opportunities essential to the public and policymakers. The evidence shows that the selection of target audiences is a strategic move within the Chinese government, as indicated by the varying rhetorical actions taken by their diplomats. Looking at this from the perspective of the broader information environment, wolf warrior diplomats can be seen as strategic influencers operationalizing their tactics toward specific target audiences. To fully appreciate wolf warrior diplomacy, one must recognize the complexity of how it operates and influences host countries. Host countries should be attentive to and aware of how PRC diplomats exploit cultural differences and use this strategy to expand their influence in foreign countries targeted by wolf warrior diplomacy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

If we begin to realize that our own ideas are culturally limited ... we can never be self-sufficient again. Only others with different mental programs can help us find the limitations of our own.

—Hofsted¹

A. RATIONALE AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH

The topic of international relations between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the world has been widely studied, along with the increasingly multifaceted interactions among international leading powers. The PRC’s foreign influence campaigns and efforts to improve China’s international image, focused particularly on remediating views critical of China, are among the interesting trends many media outlets and pundits have discussed.

During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, many Western commentators have been astonished by the offensive rhetoric and behavior of Chinese diplomats, which would not be expected from professional diplomats known to have maintained a low profile in the international arena over the years. Commentators dubbed this new style “wolf warrior diplomacy,” named after a Chinese blockbuster action film, that reflects Xi Jinping’s assertive foreign policy through which PRC diplomats exhibit “fighting spirit”² in defending China’s core interests.

Scholars, journalists, and analysts have widely articulated this term in the analysis of Chinese diplomacy. Specifically, they have attributed the changes in Chinese diplomats’ communication styles, which contrast with traditional diplomatic patterns, to shifts in the PRC’s goals and purposes and to its effect on the international stage. As a result of establishing the Central Committee for Foreign Affairs which centralized the party’s

¹ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind. Revised and Expanded 3rd Edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

² Eyal Propper, “The Roar of the Wolf Warriors: China’s Increasingly Aggressive Diplomacy” (Institute for National Security Studies, 2020), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27780>.

authority over foreign policy, diplomatic work has often been carried out on dual track.³ Wolf warrior–style rhetoric characterized by individualistic and aggressive behavior from these diplomats arose out of the increasing status of foreign affairs in Chinese politics. Defending rhetorical “tit-for-tat,” China’s foreign minister Lu Yucheung has described it as the way China deals with growing international criticism by fighting back.⁴

Research on the subject has been mostly restricted to limited comparisons regarding abstract reasoning about China’s vision of the international order and the newfound confidence built upon its growing material power. Yet, the dramatic turn of China’s diplomatic strategy with this kind of behavior does not fit if it is assumed that Xi Jinping wants to “tell China’s story well”⁵ to strengthen the international influence of China. Some might argue that this shift seems to be China’s response to Western criticism, driving the PRC to assert its discourse power against narratives propounded by the Western media. Still, this does not seem entirely plausible, given the negative reaction wolf warrior diplomacy receives from the international community.

After examining the different perspectives offered by studies I have read, I realized that their observations came from the same lenses through which they viewed their work with China. It seems that the perspectives tend to conform to the arguments. If you follow Chinese diplomats on Twitter, you will notice that wolf warrior rhetoric is not applied in the same way in every country, particularly in countries that seem to have aligned interests with China. It is noteworthy that few studies have investigated China’s retrospective and cognitive differences from the rest of the world. Looking at wolf warrior rhetoric and behavior online and collecting samples from different countries, recent studies have delved into a novel approach to interpreting PRC diplomats’ actions on a Western social media

³ Bai Tiantian, “CPC Centralizes Foreign Affairs Decision-Making Power,” *Global Times*, March 23, 2018, <https://peoplesdaily.pdnews.cn/headline/cpc-centralizes-foreign-affairs-decision-making-power-16673.html>.

⁴ Zhou, “We’re Not Wolf Warriors, We’re Only Defending China, Says Minister,” *South China Morning Post*, December 5, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3112733/were-not-wolf-warriors-were-only-standing-china-says-senior>.

⁵ Zhao Alexandre Huang and Rui Wang, “Building a Network to ‘Tell China Stories Well’: Chinese Diplomatic Communication Strategies on Twitter,” *International Journal of Communication* 13, no. 0 (June 30, 2019): 24.

platform, Twitter. The analysis of the PRC diplomats' rhetoric toward various host countries revealed that these diplomats do not apply the same communication strategy across countries.⁶ China seems to have developed a varied communication strategy. If it is true that the wolf warrior strategy is used only in selected host countries, then it significantly contributes to how China shapes people's perceptions and opinions. Indeed, if this is a calculated strategy, no studies have thoroughly researched this aspect. Moreover, existing studies have not attempted to quantify the relationship between PRC diplomats' rhetorical style and the cultural characteristics of the host countries that were vulnerable to this strategy.

B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Behind every tactic and strategy employed by wolf warrior diplomacy lies some theoretical assumption about the strategic intention of the action. This study focuses primarily on the rhetorical behavior inherent in the tweets used by PRC diplomats and on the idea that it is a crucial part of the tactic that will ultimately target the intended audience (country). In a pragmatic approach, it is expected that the intended audience will be strategically selected, considering diplomats will generally avoid using harsh words that could undermine diplomatic relations with their host country. Furthermore, these influence and communication effects are assumed to be purposely expressed in this strategy, which reflects this specific interpretation of wolf warrior diplomacy. This research also seeks to assess China's understanding of what mechanisms are most effective in linking the wolf warrior communication style to the posture it wants as an outcome.

Understanding wolf warrior diplomacy provides policymakers, researchers, and analysts important insights from a diversity of perspectives. Exploring these ideas, and providing evidence that it is a calculated move as a response to negative portrayals of China on the international stage, I seek to find an answer to my research questions: *How do PRC diplomats employ wolf warrior style rhetoric? What characteristics make a host country an attractive target audience of wolf warrior diplomacy?*

⁶ Darren Cheong, "Polite Wolves: China's Soft Twitter Diplomacy in Southeast Asia," Fulcrum, February 21, 2022, <https://fulcrum.sg/polite-wolves-chinas-soft-twitter-diplomacy-in-southeast-asia/>.

C. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Interest in this study was driven by the intention of offering a comprehensive approach to analyze the concept of wolf warrior diplomacy quantitatively. This study uses tweets from PRC diplomats' official accounts. It helps to contextualize the behavior of the PRC diplomats and to afford answers to more detailed questions, particularly concerning their intended audience (and host country). This discourse research is relevant and important because it helps us to understand how PRC diplomats use this as a tactic and help make sense of the tactic within the context and dynamics of China's objectives. Building on a process-focused analysis, I intend to further the theory of wolf warrior diplomacy by examining whether cultural dimensions account for significant variations in its execution at the country level. Looking at the rhetoric and the selection of the target audience is an attempt to demonstrate yet another method of reframing the assessment of the effectiveness of the wolf warrior diplomats. Instead of focusing on what is already known, I argue that individualism as a cultural orientation and specific aspects of development across countries, such as wealth, democracy, and Internet access, play a significant role in how PRC diplomats respond to a host country based on their rhetorical behavior. Drawing on the methods of measurement and analysis employed by social scientists, I make inferences from extensive metadata to develop a text data model that will predict the relationship between discourse content and the intended audience.

D. CORE FINDINGS

Using structural topic modeling and text analysis, I study China's wolf warrior diplomacy by investigating the tone and content of its rhetoric. This study explores statistical models of text in which a document's content is measured by specified covariates of the wolf warrior rhetoric, which is individualistic and aggressive. Analyzing Twitter data collected from PRC diplomats' official accounts, the results show evidence of the correlation between these forms of rhetoric and the characteristics of the host country as the intended audience. The analysis demonstrates that individualistic and aggressive rhetoric is more likely to be targeted at individualistic host countries. Moreover, different

factors across countries, such as democracy, wealth, and Internet access, are found to alter the style of online rhetoric and to influence the employment of the wolf warrior strategy.

E. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS STRUCTURE

This remainder of this thesis is organized into four chapters as follows: Chapter II focuses on the literature review of the theories and historical background behind wolf warrior diplomacy. The chapter examines China's calculated behavior in selecting its identity when persuading its audiences, forming the basis upon which my research hypotheses will be developed. Chapter III lays out my ideas and hypotheses. It is geared toward explaining the narratives employed to the target audience by looking at the audience's national culture. The chapter offers a process-focused analysis and expands the theoretical framework to describe this kind of diplomacy from the perspective of the cultural variations across societies, specifically the impact of individualism-collectivism (IC). It also examines the wolf warrior rhetoric described as individualistic and aggressive. From this investigation, two hypotheses emerge for exploring the concept of wolf warrior diplomacy. Chapter IV describes my research design, dataset, respective sources, and the analytical methods used in this study. It also discusses the empirical findings found from statistical and text analysis. The last chapter, Chapter V, concludes with a discussion of the implications of the essential findings and identifies potential areas for future research.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines wolf warrior diplomacy in the broader context of China's soft power. It briefly discusses China's evolving diplomacy by examining the Chinese leadership's ambition and approach to its foreign policy. This section also examines the debates on the impacts of wolf warrior diplomacy, looking at how China shapes its discourse and influences public perception to enhance its international image and the role of PRC diplomats in conducting its grand diplomatic strategy. Finally, this chapter examines the complexity of the wolf warrior tactics and offers a nuanced explanation of the rhetoric and behavior deployed by PRC diplomacy to its intended audience.

A. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Most of what is written in the literature regarding the discussion of public diplomacy comes from a broader academic debate driven by the current trends in diplomatic practice. Yet, the central concept of public diplomacy comes from the notion of states addressing the challenge of communicating with foreign audiences with an "aim of affecting their thinking and that of their government."⁷ Richard Langhorne describes it as an "offspring of the changing role of states."⁸ He observes that the revival of ideas in the diplomatic context comes from the interest and objectives arising in international communities. According to Nicholas Cull, it is "the process by which an international actor conducts foreign policy by engaging a foreign public"⁹ to communicate narratives and images promoting national interest. This is also connected to Joseph Nye's famous concept of "soft power" as the ability to get others to want what you want.¹⁰ Nye further mentions

⁷ Gifford D. Malone, "Managing Public Diplomacy," *The Washington Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (July 1985): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01636608509450301>.

⁸ Richard Langhorne, "On Diplomacy," *Political Studies Review* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 54–62, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-9299.2007.00145.x>.

⁹ Nicholas J. Cull, "Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311952>.

¹⁰ Joseph S. Nye, "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008): 94–109.

that soft power comes from the ability to shape international institutions and agendas and could come from a country's culture, political values, and foreign policies.¹¹

Public diplomacy emerged as a contemporary state of diplomatic practice resulting from fundamental changes that occurred in the international arena and with the arrival of new technologies in the diplomatic realm. Diplomacy is changing as the trend moves away from conventional diplomatic activities. Jan Melissen claims that public diplomacy has become essential in diplomatic relations and that “most successful public diplomacy initiatives were born out of necessity.”¹² Considering the importance of foreign public opinion, he argues “domestic and international communication with the public has become an increasingly complex challenge for foreign ministries.”¹³ In another approach, Eytan Gilboa conducts systemic research to understand contemporary public diplomacy in which he identifies the three main actors involved: diplomats, the media, and public opinion and how public diplomacy varies based on the characteristics of the participants, their goals, and their methods.¹⁴

The Internet and social media have become a new forum for international relations that leverage the digital realm to achieve and maintain diplomatic objectives. These tools have encouraged countries to influence opinion through international communications and public diplomacy. Since its inception in 2006, Twitter has played an important role in diplomatic functions. The online platform has become one of the prominent means of projecting “soft power” to the world. Twitter diplomacy, or “Twiplomacy,” rose through 2012, when almost two-thirds of the world leaders had Twitter accounts.¹⁵

¹¹ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, 1st ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

¹² Jan Melissen, ed., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2005), 9, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230554931>.

¹³ Melissen, 13.

¹⁴ Eytan Gilboa, “Diplomacy in the Media Age: Three Models of Uses and Effects,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 12, no. 2 (June 2001): 4–5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290108406201>.

¹⁵ “Burson-Marsteller Study Finds Almost Two-Thirds of World Leaders Are on Twitter— but How Connected Are They Really?,” Burson-Marsteller, July 27, 2012, <http://burson-marsteller.it/newsroom/2012/07/burson-marsteller-study-finds-almost-two-thirds-of-world-leaders-are-on-twitter-but-how-connected-are-they-really/>.

Gilboa and Eban recognize that revolutionary changes have occurred in the diplomatic craft due to persistent exposure to media.¹⁶ This has altered the meaning of power and influence in the contemporary world, by putting information technologies and communications institutions at the center of world politics and economics.¹⁷ Media and politics merge as sources of influence in the information age. In the same way, public diplomacy has become a method through which a government can influence other states by using media and propaganda to advance its interests and values. According to Hamid Mowlana, a notional new world order exists resulting from the emergence of international communication, creating two perspectives that express division by substance and form: (1) the official and publicized version by the United States and several European and highly industrialized countries, envisioning a free market economy, globalization of information dominated by Western multinational firms, and military and political coalitions from a few powerful states policing the rest, and (2) the unofficial, unpublicized, and restricted access to information by nations that lack resources and numbers to bargain with the more powerful—frustrated at what they see as a Western-led order dominated by the global telecommunications and media industries.¹⁸

The role of public diplomacy, as delineated in recent scholarly discussion, depends on how foreign policy communicated in the foreign public. This engagement involves all stakeholders involved in diplomatic relations through their foreign affairs office as well as other sectors of society. R.S. Zaharna highlights that this process has become a new norm, especially in the presence of social media where networking strategies are more complex. To achieve an effective diplomatic initiative, she suggests that a state needs the “right type of stakeholders with the right level of engagement.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Abban Eban, *Diplomacy for the Next Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 75; Gilboa, “Diplomacy in the Media Age,” 199–200.

¹⁷ Hamid Mowlana, “Toward a NWICO for the Twenty-First Century?,” *Journal of International Affairs* 47, no. 1 (Summer 1993): 59.

¹⁸ Mowlana, 62–63.

¹⁹ R.S. Zaharna, “Strategic Stakeholder Engagement in Public Diplomacy,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2011, 20–22, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2194113>.

B. “CHINESE THREAT”

China’s “rising power” has expedited the transformation of the international order and economic landscape. With China’s rapid development and robust economic power, it has become a “credible strategic competitor”²⁰ of the United States and other Western powers. The global financial crisis of 2008–09 has shown the world the stark contrast between the rapid growth and socio-economic transformation that characterizes contemporary China.²¹ Yet while China’s rise is attracting attention worldwide, the “China threat”²² thesis has become dominant among Western-oriented analysts (scholars, policymakers, and think tanks). This view is primarily concerned with China’s assuming a hegemonic role in the international order and the ideological incompatibility of its values with those of the West.

The concept of the “China threat” is most often attributed to China’s growing influence in developing countries, especially its increasingly global role and strict policies at home and abroad that are gaining Western attention.²³ According to a U.S. congressional report, China’s economic rise is viewed as a growing threat to U.S. global economic interests, which advocates policies trying to contain China’s economic power, particularly in response to China’s Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI).²⁴ When it comes to the topic of ideology, this debate characterizes rising authoritarianism and argues that China threatens the United States’ status and global structure. Some are convinced that China’s rise will

²⁰ Conor M. Savoy and Janina Staguhn, “Global Development in an Era of Great Power Competition,” CSIS Briefs (Center for Strategic & International Studies, March 24, 2022), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/global-development-era-great-power-competition>.

²¹ Paul Blustein, “The Untold Story of How George W. Bush Lost China,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed October 22, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/04/the-untold-story-of-how-george-w-bush-lost-china/>.

²² Ming Xia, “‘China Threat’ or a ‘Peaceful Rise of China’?,” *The New York Times*, accessed October 22, 2022, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/college/coll-china-politics-007.html>.

²³ David O. Shullman, “Protect the Party: China’s Growing Influence in the Developing World,” *Brookings* (blog), January 22, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/protect-the-party-chinas-growing-influence-in-the-developing-world/>.

²⁴ Wayne M Morrison, *China’s Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States*, Report No. RL33534 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2019), 41, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20190625_RL33534_088c5467dd11365dd4ab5f72133db289fa10030f.pdf.

endanger “the democratically based liberal international order with a new order founded on the principles and practices of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).”²⁵ Furthermore, the cultural factor that characterizes the “clash of civilizations”²⁶ is described as a fundamental threat to the West. Another view recognizes that even if China has shed what analyst Ma Guonan describes as a “straitjacket”²⁷ regarding geopolitical and geoeconomic moves, it must still pursue its interests and secure international respect. Many studies suggest that nationalism and domestic attitudes may also be a driving force to create conflict between China and the United States.²⁸ While others are concerned that strong nationalism will arise from democracy and further lead China to become aggressive.²⁹

Similarly, Roland Vogt interprets Europe’s response to China as “fragmented and incoherent.”³⁰ He offers insights when assessing China’s success and development from five perspectives—international political economy, globalization, power balance, strategic studies, and human rights. In addition, Vogt suggests looking at China’s rise from the theoretical, cultural, or political viewpoints among scholars who study it. Meanwhile, Reuben Wong demonstrates that Sino-European relations are continuing to be derivative of China’s relations with the United States. He argues that although European countries have ties with each other that have become more cordial and multifaceted, they remain

²⁵ Reuters, “China the ‘Greatest Threat to Democracy and Freedom’, U.S. Spy Chief Warns,” *The Guardian*, December 3, 2020, sec. U.S. news, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/dec/03/china-beijing-america-democracy-freedom>; Hugh Hewitt, “Opinion | Americans Must Rally against the Real Threat to Our Democracy: China,” *Washington Post*, December 27, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/12/27/china-democracy-biden-trump/>.

²⁶ Samuel P Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: First Touchstone, 1997).

²⁷ Russell Flannery, “China Policy ‘Straitjacket’ May End After Party Congress, Economist Says,” *Forbes*, October 7, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/russellflannery/2022/10/07/china-policy-straitjacket-may-end-after-party-congress-economist-says/>.

²⁸ Suisheng Zhao, “Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: The Strident Turn,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 22, no. 82 (July 1, 2013): 535–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.766379>; Peter Hays Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, Diplomacy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967).

²⁹ Xia, “‘China Threat’ or a ‘Peaceful Rise of China’?”

³⁰ Roland Vogt, “Introduction: Europe and China: A Maturing Relationship,” in *Europe and China: Strategic Partners or Rivals?* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 1–16, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=932565>.

distant as a more substantial convergence of interests, values, and perceptions has yet to occur.³¹

C. CHINA'S EVOLVING FOREIGN POLICY

As a rising power, China is aware of the implication this has for its diplomacy and international order. It invests heavily in Chinese foreign policies designed to pursue global status, improve its image, guard itself against international criticism, and advance its domestic and international agenda.³²

Joseph Cheng and Franklin Zhan present a comparative analysis that examines Chinese foreign relations strategies, through which they identify the following basic patterns³³: (1) the international frameworks that make the United States a dominant global power; (2) China's domestic policy framework that boosts China's economic development and its role in the international community; (3) Chinese leadership's "subjective-objective linkage process"³⁴ perception of the objective world; (4) China's "century of humiliation" to "great rejuvenation" reasserting international recognition; and (5) structural transformation and institutional adaptability in the Chinese context.

Moreover, Cheng and Zhan compare Western and Chinese interpretations of strategy, contending they share common factors such as the subject, the ends, and the means. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is from the Western perspective emphasizing the use of armed force and the threat of force. In contrast, the Chinese perspective looks more at the strategy's overall and long-term aspects. This difference is relevant to assessing how China's foreign relations strategy has evolved over time. China,

³¹ Reuben Wong, "An Anatomy of European and American Perspectives on China in the International System," in *Europe and China*, ed. Roland Vogt (Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 95–112, <https://doi.org/10.5790/hongkong/9789888083879.003.0006>.

³² Barbara Onnis, "Covid-19 and China's Global Image," *European University Institute, Global Governance Programme Policy Brief*, no. 2021/57 (November 2021): 82–84, <https://doi.org/10.2870/607816>.

³³ Joseph Yu-Shek Cheng and Franklin Wakung Zhan, "Chinese Foreign Relation Strategies Under Mao and Deng: A Systematic and Comparative Analysis," *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 14, no. 3 (1999): 107–9, <https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/kasarinlan/article/view/1415>.

³⁴ Cheng and Zhan, 109.

like any other country, revitalizes its foreign policy essentially to advance its national interest. This being the case, these authors likewise assert that a more practical approach to understanding their strategy is to reconsider the way in which it is able to establish China with its own characteristics and mechanisms.³⁵ This of course comes with the idea that the fundamental changes in Chinese foreign policy have relied upon political authority executed under the CCP's leadership.

As observed by K. J. Holsti, relevant factors affecting foreign policy decisions can precisely be linked to an international conflict that defines national role conceptions.³⁶ He mentions that when incompatibility exists between the valued national interest and the norms of the behavior established, the latter gives way to the former. Moreso, he argues, as long as policymakers perceive a persistent external threat to their values and interests, the national objectives must come first.³⁷ This is also what some analysts argue has driven the relationship between PRC domestic politics and foreign policy from Mao to Xi's leadership.³⁸

D. WOLF WARRIOR DIPLOMACY

In August 2013, Xi Jinping introduced the phrase “telling China’s story well” (讲好中国故事) during a high-level propaganda and ideology conference as an affirmation of its external propaganda works and international communication.³⁹ The speech emphasized Xi’s recognition of the importance of China’s internationally oriented discourse to build and shape global narratives through the presence of Chinese media groups and actors that will elevate China to be heard on the global stage. Increasing China’s discourse power (国

³⁵ Cheng and Zhan, “Chinese Foreign Relation Strategies Under Mao and Deng.”

³⁶ K. J. Holsti, “National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy,” *International Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1970): 243, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3013584>.

³⁷ Holsti, 262.

³⁸ Joseph Torigan, “Elite Politics and Foreign Policy in China from Mao to Xi,” *Brookings* (blog), January 22, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/elite-politics-and-foreign-policy-in-china-from-mao-to-xi/>.

³⁹ Xi Jinping, “Xi Jinping: Ideological Work Is an Extremely Important Work of the Party,” Xinhua News Agency, August 20, 2013, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-08/20/c_117021464.htm.

际话语权) and influence reflects the Party's external propaganda objectives and the premise of a discursive initiative that works both at home and abroad.⁴⁰

This is further explained by the so-called “China dream,” which is not about the Chinese people's individual aspirations but of the leadership's desire for a “great rejuvenation of the Chinese people.”⁴¹ Nationalistic notions are woven throughout, including that state's ambition to be involved in global governance and to attain power status “by telling China's stories and conveying China's own voice.”⁴² In achieving the China Dream, Xi effectively conveys China's view and position to the international community, and echoing this objective is the hard line of the so-called “wolf warriors” diplomacy or zhanlang waijiao (战狼外交) which establishes a system of discourse to facilitate effective international communication over what are seen as counter-narratives:

We must actively set a positive agenda and a counter-agenda, actively showing our swords, eliminating misunderstanding, speaking clearly from a historical perspective about how certain Western hegemonic countries are self-interested, hypocritical, and cold-blooded. [We must] make it clear that no matter how far China develops, it is always a builder of world peace.⁴³

The passage arguably demonstrates a disconnect in Chinese diplomacy. As part of getting out of the rising power dilemma, China's attitude toward Western partners, despite overtures about “win-win” and cooperation ideals, displays an aggressive intractability that reveals fundamental differences in core values. It is clear that Xi intends for the CCP to undermine the credibility of the West as an ongoing strategy to defend its national interests and advocate a “dare to fight” spirit. However, this signaling has been perceived as

⁴⁰ China Media Project, “Telling China's Story Well,” *China Media Project* (blog), April 16, 2021, https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/telling-chinas-story-well/.

⁴¹ Carrie Gracie, “The Credo: Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation,” *BBC News*, November 7, 2014, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-29788802>.

⁴² China, “Tell China's Stories and Convey China's Voice (National Governance),” About China Keywords, November 30, 2018, http://www.china.org.cn/english/china_key_words/2018-11/30/content_74226258.htm.

⁴³ China Media Project, “Telling China's Story Well.”

proactive or revisionist, undermining the post-World War II international order built by the United States.⁴⁴

As part of Xi's 2019 speech to the Party school, he called on cadres to "dare to fight" and stressed the importance of strategic methods and the art of struggle when there are contradictions.⁴⁵ Furthermore, he instructed that:

No matter what position they hold, leading cadres must have the courage to take on responsibilities and overcome difficulties, be both commanders and combatants, cultivate and maintain a tenacious fighting spirit, tenacious will to fight, and superb fighting skills, ... adhere to the principle of being reasonable and beneficial, choose the method of struggle rationally, grasp the temperature of the struggle, not give an inch on issues of principle, and be flexible on issues of strategy. According to the needs of the situation, grasp the timing, degree and effect, and adjust the struggle strategy in a timely manner.⁴⁶

Most scholars argue that Xi has expanded the definition of China's core interests in recent years, moving away from his predecessors who sought to adhere to maintaining a low profile, the "hide strength, bide time" principle. China's major-country diplomacy was elevated with the strengthening of its national power over time. It has become more assertive and proactive by introducing the "new era for socialism with Chinese characteristics" policy that talks about the CCP's strategy and ambition.⁴⁷ But the "fight for international discourse" has been a problem. Xi was aware of China's image problem and began to focus more on discursive initiatives, letting the international audience hear the Chinese government's voice⁴⁸ and making the world understand China better.

⁴⁴ Yaoyao Dai and Luwei Luqiu, "Wolf Warriors and Xi Jinping's Diplomacy: An Empirical Analysis of China's Diplomatic Language," *The China Review* 22, no. 2 (March 29, 2021): 8.

⁴⁵ "Xi Jinping Delivered an Important Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Training Class for Young and Middle-Aged Cadres of the Central Party School (National Academy of Administration)," Xinhuanet, September 3, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2019-09/03/c_1124956081.htm.

⁴⁶ "Xi Jinping Delivered an Important Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Training Class for Young and Middle-Aged Cadres of the Central Party School (National Academy of Administration)."

⁴⁷ Xiang Bo, trans., "Backgrounder: Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," Xinhuanet, March 17, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/17/c_137046261.htm.

⁴⁸ Curtis Stone, "World Needs a Better Understanding of China, 'Voice of China' Can Help - People's Daily Online," People's Daily Online, accessed October 24, 2022, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/0322/c90000-9440715.html>.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been seen as a cause to deteriorate China's internal and external image, bringing detrimental consequences to the party and political system.⁴⁹ It comes at a critical time when China realizes its first centennial milestone of building a "modern socialist country" and challenges Xi's leadership and the CCP's legitimacy.⁵⁰

China adopted its use of wolf warrior diplomacy, a form of public diplomacy which is aggressive and has the effect of weaponizing Chinese discourse, in response to the international community holding Xi's government responsible for mishandling the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.⁵¹ The various accusations directed at China and the negative impact on its international image have resulted in an incessant defense on the part of its diplomats. This is a push back against "deliberate insults" as described by Foreign Minister Wang Yi.⁵² The Western media coined the phrase "wolf warrior" (*Zhan Lang*) from a successful Chinese action movie in which the protagonist inspired patriotism by fighting foreign adversaries at home and abroad. The term captures how PRC diplomats often defend China's national interest in a confrontational way. China conducts wolf warrior diplomacy through its diplomats, ambassadors, and spokesperson utilizing Western social media tools, like Facebook and Twitter.⁵³

The direct attack on China through U.S. narratives during the Trump administration, which included statements opposing the legitimacy of the CCP's rule and labeling COVID-19 "the Chinese virus," have contributed to this escalated rhetoric.⁵⁴ Zhao

⁴⁹ Onnis, "Covid-19 and China's Global Image," 78.

⁵⁰ Jo Kim, "So Much for a Rough Year: China Is Set to Achieve Its First Centennial Goal in 2020," *The Diplomat*, January 6, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/so-much-for-a-rough-year-china-is-set-to-achieve-its-first-centennial-goal-in-2020/>.

⁵¹ Alex W. Palmer, "The Man Behind China's Aggressive New Voice," *The New York Times*, July 7, 2021, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/07/magazine/china-diplomacy-twitter-zhao-lijian.html>.

⁵² 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>.

⁵³ Zhao Alexandre Huang, "'Wolf Warrior' and China's Digital Public Diplomacy during the COVID-19 Crisis," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 18, no. 1 (March 2022): 37–40, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-021-00241-3>.

⁵⁴ Propper, "The Roar of the Wolf Warriors."

Lijian, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, has made extensive use of Twitter and attacked directly, criticizing in an undiplomatic manner those who oppose China, provoking a furious reaction from former National Security Adviser Susan Rice and President Trump.⁵⁵

Other than Zhao, more PRC diplomats are engaged in the wolf warrior-style rhetoric that some international observers claim has become the new norm. Several studies have analyzed this strategy within the context of overall tensions between the United States and China, such that the competition for influence is accompanied by the idea of transition of power or the undermining of institutions.⁵⁶ Despite this, few scholars have conducted in-depth assessments that delve into the strategy, discourse, and behavior patterns that have evolved from wolf warrior diplomacy, and their impact on international audiences.

Taking diplomacy into cyberspace, Yatsuzuka Masaaki shows that in discourse power, China leverages information technology to strengthen its influence in target countries.⁵⁷ Looking at polls conducted by the United States in major industrialized Western societies, he argues that the wolf warrior strategy is ineffective; however, it creates an overbearing foreign posture to demonstrate China's power to the world. Social media attracts attention in democratic countries when China uses freedom of speech to promote the legitimacy of its Party and government.⁵⁸

Jonathan Sullivan and Weixiang Wang argue that wolf warrior diplomacy must be examined in terms of its operationalization to determine its intended effects. Although a cross-national survey showed unfavorable public opinion towards China among Western

⁵⁵ Nahal Toosi, "In Response to Trump, China Gets Mean," Politico, December 8, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/news/2019/12/08/china-trump-twitter-077767>.

⁵⁶ Zhu Zhiqun, "'Wolf Warrior Diplomacy': China's New Normal?," ThinkChina, May 4, 2020, <http://www.thinkchina.sg/wolf-warrior-diplomacy-chinas-new-normal/>; Sulmaan Wasif Khan, "Wolf Warriors Killed China's Grand Strategy," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed May 4, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/28/china-grand-strategy-wolf-warrior-nationalism/>; Yew Lun Tian, "China's 'Wolf Warrior' Diplomacy Is 'Justified Defence', Envoy Says," *Reuters*, June 17, 2021, sec. China, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy-is-justified-defence-envoy-says-2021-06-17/>.

⁵⁷ Yatsuzuka Masaaki, "China's Efforts to Seize Control of Discourse Power in Cyberspace," *Asia-Pacific Review* 29, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 14–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13439006.2022.2050546>.

⁵⁸ Renee DiResta et al., "Telling China's Story: The Chinese Communist Party's Campaign to Shape Global Narratives," Stanford Cyber Policy Center, July 20, 2020, <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/publication/telling-chinas-story>.

countries, these authors contend that this is not the underlying goal of the strategy, but instead serves two purposes demonstrating a robust foreign policy posture and salving domestic nationalist sentiments. The loud laudatory noises accompanying the wolf warrior communication provokes grassroots actors to engage themselves in China's foreign affairs through the wolf warriors.⁵⁹

Examining the *huayuquan* (discourse power) and the changes of diplomatic style used by the PRC diplomats, Nikolay Litvak and Natalia Pomozova examine the context of the concept of wolf warrior diplomacy in speeches of PRC ambassadors posted on their embassy websites in key European countries—Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and France. Their findings show that PRC diplomats communicate neutrally and effectively with government representatives. In contrast, they use the national media of the host country to communicate aggressively to the general public. Based on Foucault's discourse theory, the authors demonstrate that the PRC ambassadors' discourse reflects China's identity and how it explores and understands itself. On the other hand, according to Derrida's concept of deconstruction, PRC diplomats' discourse attempts to appeal to European rationality, and in this way, seeks an understanding of the meaning of discourse without unnecessarily politicizing it. It draws European reactions to point out that there are different ways to understand the ideas and concepts that govern countries (like, for example, human rights and democracy). This guides PRC diplomats in Europe when dealing with political authorities in key host countries. The study further reveals that the PRC diplomats continually develop their diplomatic skills; thus, the characterization of so-called "wolf warriors" is not entirely appropriate.⁶⁰

On the other hand, Yaoyao Dai and Luwei Luqiu provide a large-scale empirical analysis of Chinese diplomats' speeches looking at the broader context of Xi's

⁵⁹ Jonathan Sullivan and Weixiang Wang, "China's 'Wolf Warrior Diplomacy': The Interaction of Formal Diplomacy and Cyber-Nationalism," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, March 14, 2022, 18681026221079840, <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026221079841>.

⁶⁰ Nikolay V. Litvak and Natalia B. Pomozova, "Chinese Diplomatic Discourse for Europe: A Change of Style," *Russia in Global Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2021): 50–69, <https://doi.org/10.31278/1810-6374-2021-19-1-50-69>.

diplomacy.⁶¹ It indicates that the realist “dare to fight” rhetoric reflects the wolf warrior diplomacy more than that of liberal and egalitarian notions “shared for the future of mankind.” Interestingly, one of the findings suggests that despite the reactions of the United States and its allies, which are the primary targets of the hostile rhetoric, it is unclear how other countries perceive Chinese diplomacy. This is shown in a 2019 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project in which “people around the globe are divided in their opinions of China.”⁶² It is seen that the public in lower GDP per capita countries hold more favorable opinions of China than people in developed countries do. Furthermore, a study of Chinese Twitter accounts revealed that the PRC’s wolf warrior-style rhetoric is not a communication strategy applied uniformly across all countries.⁶³ When engaging with Southeast Asian countries, it seems China does not use it all.

E. GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

Addressing a few gaps in literature could significantly improve our understanding of the concept of wolf warrior diplomacy. For example, if China has developed this concept to form part of a strategy, how is this operationalized in the social media realm so that the intended effects will be achieved? Some scholars have addressed this by looking at wolf warrior rhetoric using speeches and articles online, yet in delving into the official Twitter accounts, will the same effect be seen in social media? Moreover, if the approach differs across countries, is there a pattern that would allow us to predict the PRC diplomat’s behavior in response to that their host country? If there is a pattern, what factors influence the use of wolf warrior rhetoric? In particular, how does a country’s culture impact China’s use of wolf warrior rhetoric?

⁶¹ Dai and Luqiu, “China’s Wolf Warrior Diplomacy and Xi Jinping’s Grand Diplomatic Strategy.”

⁶² Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang, “2. Attitudes toward China,” *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project* (blog), December 5, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/12/05/attitudes-toward-china-2019/>.

⁶³ Cheong, “Polite Wolves.”

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III. THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

Based on the rationale that determines which identity China selects to fit specific foreign audiences and the way PRC diplomats express their wolf warrior style rhetoric in social media, I argue that wolf warrior diplomacy is a signal, and that China uses this approach as a more limited form of the broader tactics employed by their Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Building upon this theory, I seek to address the literature gap in understanding the communication strategy employed through wolf warrior tactics by looking at its process and the factors that influence it. In this chapter, I present an outline of a methodological framework that this study uses to look at the communication behavior of PRC diplomats as senders, how the wolf warrior rhetoric is formulated as a message, and how the host country as a receiver becomes susceptible to such tactics. I offer a process-focused analysis as an attempt to bridge the literature gap and offer a cultural approach as an attempt to integrate ideas from a different paradigm. Very few pieces of existing literature explore the reframing of the discourse to the intended audience and the interrelationship of culture to the rhetoric in the context of Chinese diplomacy. This chapter's discussion explores the diverse ways of considering countries' cultural variations as an important context for understanding communication effects.

A. COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Wilbur Schramm introduced one of the models often used in communications research focused on information sharing. In this model, the transmission starts from the *source* or the *sender*, who conceives and composes the message. The *message* from the sender's mind must be encoded into "any signal" that can be interpreted. The *destination* or the *receiver* will wait for the encoded message to be transmitted and later decodes it.⁶⁴ This is a simple conception of how the communication process works. Schramm also explored how communication achieved effects, and he argued that by analyzing certain

⁶⁴ Wilbur Schramm, "How Communication Works," in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* (Champaign, IL, US: University of Illinois Press, 1954), 3–24.

message content, it is possible to predict the impact the message will have on its receiver by meeting the following conditions:

1. The message must be designed and delivered to gain the attention of the intended destination.
2. The message must employ signs which refer to experiences common to the source and destination to “get the meaning across.”
3. The message must arouse personality needs in the destination and suggest ways to meet those needs.
4. The message must suggest a way to meet those needs appropriate to the group situation in which the destination finds himself when he is moved to make the desired response.⁶⁵

In addition, Schramm considered the situation in which the communication is received, the response the receiver must give, and the receiver’s personality, group relationships, and standards.⁶⁶ Schramm underlined the importance of the sender, who controls and shapes the message, and knows when all other elements within the process can produce a favorable effect. In other words, communicators must know their audience to get the message across.

B. CULTURE

Among the fundamental aspects of effective communication processes, cultural context is one aspect that influences communication. There is a wide range of meanings of “culture” in contemporary academic discourse.⁶⁷ The definition of culture is related to abstract concepts that aim to capture humanity’s complexity, such concepts from academic disciplines like anthropology and sociology to institutional spheres of politics, economy, and society. In this sense, culture is defined as the study of the activities and meanings produced within these disciplines’ defined spheres. For modern cultural theory, the distinction between these definitions is not measurable but meaningful.⁶⁸ According to

⁶⁵ Schramm, 11–14.

⁶⁶ W Schramm, “Mass Communication,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 13, no. 1 (1962): 251–84, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.13.020162.001343>.

⁶⁷ A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, “Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions,” *Papers. Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University* 47 (1952): viii, 223–viii, 223.

⁶⁸ William H. Sewell, “The Concept(s) of Culture,” *Routledge*, In *Practicing History*, 2004, 39–40.

William Sewell, culture is theoretically defined as a category or aspect of life, and it can also be concrete and bound by practices and beliefs. In his view, culture is weakly bonded, which means the definition is likely to change.

Wilfred Boilewski approaches culture as an aspect of the society rather than individuals and is acquired through acculturation or socialization.⁶⁹ This means that the development of societal identity occurs when individuals realize they belong to a social group. As a result, national cultures, politics, economics, and social and historical elements form the national identity. On the other hand, Edward Hall argues that understanding the existing national cultures of various countries requires considering cultural and communication values where individuals exposed to a different culture eventually internalize the tenets of their customs and norms.⁷⁰ Geert Hofstede defines culture as the “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group from another”.⁷¹ He describes it as something invisible yet existing in values, which he categorizes as cultural dimensions to explain cultural characteristics that affect how humans respond to their environment.

The concept of culture applied in this study combines both the inherent values on which society is based (beliefs, values, and ideas) and the expression of these values in the society (language, norms, and institutions). It is often seen associated with the factors of identity and characteristics within society.⁷² Emily Spencer has claimed that the understanding of ‘culture’ is about interpreting meaning from a given situation’s perspective. Through demonstrations, she showed that culture matters when dealing with human interaction, seeing a situation through each other’s eyes to achieve specific aims.⁷³

⁶⁹ Wilfred Boilewski, “Diplomatic Processes and Cultural Variations: The Relevance of Culture in Diplomacy,” *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 9 (2008): 146.

⁷⁰ Edward Twitchell Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989).

⁷¹ Geert Hofstede, “Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context,” *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 2, no. 1 (December 1, 2011): 3, <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>.

⁷² Yoav J. Tenenbaum, “Diplomacy and Intercultural Communication,” *American Diplomacy*, September 17, 2014, 1–6.

⁷³ Dr Emily Spencer, “Solving the People Puzzle: The Importance of Cultural Intelligence,” *The Mackenzie Institute* (blog), March 13, 2014, <https://mackenzieinstitute.com/2014/03/solving-the-people-puzzle-the-importance-of-cultural-intelligence/>.

This is similar to Roger Keesing’s point that culture is an adaptive system, a “game being played” in our society.⁷⁴ He argued that each person has a unique view of culture but has to compromise and coordinate his or her behavior across cultures in everyday life.⁷⁵

It has been viewed that cultural differences contribute to cultural diversity, but when applied cross-nationally, these differences may have different effects. A vast amount of research has been conducted on understanding cross-cultural knowledge as it becomes critical when dealing with other countries. The focus on cultural variation as an approach to learning societal behavior across political, economic, technological, and political welfare prevents the likelihood of mistakes and misunderstandings in cross-national interactions.⁷⁶ Concepts such as “cultural relativism” look at human actions relative to culture,⁷⁷ “ethnocentrism” referencing one’s own culture to frame another culture,⁷⁸ and “multiculturalism” which has been called identity politics,⁷⁹ and other theories and frameworks juxtaposing ideas and processes about culture. Even though these frameworks have been around for some time, only a few studies have attempted to map the interaction between culture and communication empirically.

1. Culture and Communication

Culture is not only determined by a state’s national culture but also by its professional cultures, such as diplomats and entrepreneurs. The practical application of

⁷⁴ Roger M. Keesing, “Theories of Culture,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3 (1974): 93.

⁷⁵ Keesing, 88–93.

⁷⁶ Georgette Wang, “Culture, Paradigm, and Communication Theory: A Matter of Boundary or Commensurability?,” *Communication Theory* 24, no. 4 (November 2014): 373–93, <https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12045>; Paul Collier, “Culture, Politics, and Economic Development,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 20, no. 1 (2017): 111–25, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051215-024720>.

⁷⁷ Union of International Association, “Cultural Relativism,” in *The Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* (Union of International Association, 2020), <http://encyclopedia.uia.org/en/problem/140048>.

⁷⁸ R. A. LeVine, “Ethnocentrism,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, ed. James D. Wright (Oxford, UK: Elsevier, 2015), 166–67, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.12063-X>.

⁷⁹ Duncan Ivison, “Multiculturalism,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)*, ed. James D. Wright (Oxford, UK: Elsevier, 2015), 22–27, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.63052-0>.

Hofstede’s work demonstrates the role of the diplomat as a cultural bridge builder whose success depends on this brinkmanship where a diplomat must remain credible back home while maintaining access to the countries where they are posted.⁸⁰ Understanding communication styles across countries is an essential skill. The same words used by two people can be interpreted differently, particularly when those words have complex meaning and various connotations, which can lead to a communication gap. Some differences in the mode and styles of communication are due to diverse cultures across countries. By examining the cultural differences in affective communication, William Gudykunst and Stella Ting-Toomey argue that culture must be treated as a theoretical variable.⁸¹ The authors examine how attitudes toward emotions and antecedents to specific emotions vary across societies by looking at cultural variability to explain the observed differences. To allow evaluative discussion about culture and communication, Gudykunst offers the emic-etic framework. The emic (specific) approach focuses on studying communication from inside a particular culture, while the etic (universal) approach compares cultures using predetermined characteristics.⁸² Even though the methods are viewed as opposites, Harry Triandis’s study recommends integrating etic and emic data as much as possible.⁸³

Studies using the emic approach are often based in anthropological and sociolinguistic research. Most of the cited work draws from Hall’s theory of low and high-context communication, which distinctly identifies communication according to different cultural characteristics.⁸⁴ Intercultural communication, as determined by Hall’s model, measures how clearly the information is transmitted and exchanged in a given culture and how important the context is in communication. High-context cultures, such as Asian, African, and Latin American ones, utilize messages indirectly but are understood by the

⁸⁰ Geert Hofstede, “Diplomats as Cultural Bridge Builders,” in *Intercultural Communication and Diplomacy*, ed. H. Slavik, 2004, 29–30, https://www.diplomacy.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/IC-and-Diplomacy-FINAL_Part1.pdf.

⁸¹ William B. Gudykunst and Stella Ting-Toomey, “Culture and Affective Communication,” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 31, no. 3 (January 1, 1988): 387–89.

⁸² William B. Gudykunst, “Cultural Variability in Communication,” *Communication Research* 24, no. 4 (August 1997): 329–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365097024004001>.

⁸³ Harry C. Triandis, *The Analysis of Subjective Culture* (Oxford, England: Wiley-Interscience, 1972).

⁸⁴ Hall, *Beyond Culture*, 105–13.

members of the society. Communication works through the information contained in the hidden meaning, which does not need to be outrightly expressed. At the same time, low-context cultures such as those with Western European origins, like the United States and Australia, prefer to transmit messages more directly. Communication works through the information vested in the explicit code.

For the etic approach, communication behavior across cultures can be examined by looking at cultural differences. Hofstede's work provides empirical evaluation and inductive assessment for developing a theoretical framework for describing cross-cultural variation in behavior.⁸⁵ His study measures six dimensions to describe national culture. These cultural dimensions are as follows: individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint.⁸⁶ The significance of this study comes from the scores on the dimensions that correlated significantly with conceptually related external data. More than that, the stability of the results can be seen in country-level ecological factor analysis.⁸⁷ Besides Hofstede's six dimensions, other powerful factors used for understanding and quantifying intercultural differences include Triandis's individualism and collectivism,⁸⁸ Inglehart's world value survey,⁸⁹ and GLOBE project,⁹⁰ to name a few. Yet, Hofstede's

⁸⁵ M. M. Foschi and W.H. Hales, "The Theoretical Role of Cross-Cultural Comparisons in Experimental Social Psychology," in *Cross Cultural Contributions to Psychology*, ed. L.H. Eckensberger, W.J. Lonner, and Y.H. Poortinga (Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets and Zeitlinger, 1979), 244–54.

⁸⁶ Geert Hofstede and Michael Minkov, "Long- versus Short-Term Orientation: New Perspectives," *Asia Pacific Business Review* 16, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 493–504, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602381003637609>.

⁸⁷ Hofstede Insight, "Our Models: Geert Hofstede's: The Dimension Paradigm," Hofstede Insight, accessed March 20, 2022, <https://hi.hofstede-insights.com/models>.

⁸⁸ Harry C. Triandis, "Individualism-Collectivism and Personality," *Journal of Personality* 69, no. 6 (2001): 907–24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6494.696169>.

⁸⁹ Ronald Inglehart, "World Values Survey Database," World Value Survey, 2014, <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>.

⁹⁰ Robert J. House and Ali Dastmalchian, "An Overview of the 2004 Study: Understanding the Relationship Between National Culture, Societal Effectiveness and Desirable Leadership Attributes," GLOBE Project, 2004, https://www.globeproject.com/study_2004_2007?page_id=data#data.

model has widespread adoption among researchers due to the simplicity of his dimensions, which is straightforward and appealing.⁹¹

There are, of course, commentaries on Hofstede's works that offer recommendations for future researchers who use his framework.⁹² Some have argued that Hofstede's country score-based data is already obsolete since it started in the 1970s, and new technologies will make societies change. However, by comparing these data with related variables over time and correlating these data with other variables on an annual basis, this criticism can be overcome by not looking at the Hofstede data to establish the absolute country position but rather as relative to other countries.⁹³ Moreover, technology may be focused on cultural change, but this does not mean it will wipe out other dimensions. Instead, it may increase differences since societies adapt to technological changes differently and at different times.

Based on this literature, a relevant approach to cross-cultural communications will be drawn from the distinction between Hall's high and low context of communication and Hofstede's six dimensions of national culture. Taking these approaches, I formulate my hypotheses, looking at cultural differences to explain how PRC diplomats selected their intended audiences to apply wolf warrior rhetoric. As the most widely researched cultural dimension, individualism and collectivism are used to explain fundamental value differences among societies, predict the behavior using country-level analysis, and identify the communication styles that can achieve effect across countries.

⁹¹ Geert Hofstede, "The GLOBE Debate: Back to Relevance," *Journal of International Business Studies* 41, no. 8 (October 1, 2010): 1339–46, <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2010.31>.

⁹² Bradley L Kirkman, Kevin B Lowe, and Cristina B Gibson, "A Quarter Century of Culture's Consequences: A Review of Empirical Research Incorporating Hofstede's Cultural Values Framework," *Journal of International Business Studies* 37, no. 3 (May 1, 2006): 285–320, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400202>; Sjoerd Beugelsdijk, Tatiana Kostova, and Kendall Roth, "An Overview of Hofstede-Inspired Country-Level Culture Research in International Business since 2006," *Journal of International Business Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 30–47, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-016-0038-8>.

⁹³ Hofstede, "Dimensionalizing Cultures," 21.

2. Individualism-Collectivism

Hofstede's framework remains the dominant basis for cross-cultural studies undertaken in existing literature. Of these cultural varieties, the individualism and collectivism (I-C) cultural dimension is considered one of the most widely studied due to its compelling theoretical arguments and growing empirical evidence.⁹⁴ Based on Hofstede et al.'s Individualism Index scores for 76 countries, it appears that Western and developed countries tend to favor individualism, while Eastern and less developed countries tend to favor collectivism.⁹⁵ China ranks significantly lower in the I-C dimension compared to Western countries.⁹⁶

3. I-C Dimension and Communication

The I-C dimension reflects the extent of the integration of individuals into primary groups. Within this dimension, individualistic cultures tend to be independent, self-oriented, value personal freedom, and encourage personal opinions. In individualistic discourse, the word "I" is indispensable. In contrast, collectivistic cultures showed cohesive in-groups with communal goals, conformity, and opinions pre-determined by the group and the language in which the word "I" is avoided.⁹⁷

Hofstede suggests a correlation between collectivism and high-context culture and individualism and low-context culture.⁹⁸ He further discusses that the communication is

⁹⁴ Stephanie D. Grimm et al., "Self-Described Traits, Values, and Moods Associated with Individualism and Collectivism: Testing I-C Theory in an Individualistic (U.S.) and a Collectivistic (Philippine) Culture," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 30, no. 4 (July 1, 1999): 466–500, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022199030004005>; William B. Gudykunst et al., "The Influence of Cultural Individualism-Collectivism, Self Construals, and Individual Values on Communication Styles Across Cultures," *Human Communication Research* 22, no. 4 (1996): 510–43, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1996.tb00377.x>; Gudykunst, "Cultural Variability in Communication"; Triandis, "Individualism-Collectivism and Personality."

⁹⁵ Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. Revised and Expanded 3rd Edition.

⁹⁶ Shi Xiumei and Wang Jinying, "Cultural Distance between China and U.S. across GLOBE Model and Hofstede Model," *CSCanada International Business and Management* 2, no. 1 (2011): 15.

⁹⁷ Hofstede, "Dimensionalizing Cultures," 11.

⁹⁸ Dorota Brzozowska and Władysław Chłopicki, *Culture's Software: Communication Styles* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

more indirect and implicit in collectivistic societies that emphasize harmony within the group. At the same time, individualistic cultural communication is explicit and direct. Such findings were inspired by Marieke Mooij's works which recognized the differences in communication style within the I-C dimension and identified variations in the communication process.⁹⁹ According to Mooij's individualistic model, a message is encoded by the sender, sent via a medium, and decoded by a receiver, who may reverse the process through feedback. While in the collectivistic model, the sender evaluates the message in the context of the sending group. Messages will be understood and assessed this time within the context of the receiving group. Yet, it is still a challenge to find communication theories that explain the influence of culture on all forms of communication behavior.

4. I-C Dimension and Country Contextual Variables

Culture and communication have been theoretically connected, but the latter has only been conceptualized in more abstract terms.¹⁰⁰ The literature has identified that at the societal level, cultural values are espoused as possible moderators in understanding the behavior of society. Yet, influence coming from multiple country-level variables plays a vital role in understanding how culture is manifested in societal behavior. Contextual variables relevant to one's country's characteristics include demographic, political, economic, and technological factors.

The I-C dimension of culture describes individualistic societies as typically providing great freedom and autonomy. In contrast, collectivist societies have stronger ties among groups, contributing to loyalty and conformity. Along with these characteristics, democratic society has been recognized to exhibit social norms in which the individual takes priority over the collective and the community, becoming a dominating Western

⁹⁹ Marieke Mooij and Geert Hofstede, "The Hofstede Model Applications to Global Branding and Advertising Strategy and Research," *International Journal of Advertising* 29 (January 1, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.2501/S026504870920104X>.

¹⁰⁰ Bradford J Hall, "Theories of Culture and Communication," *Communication Theory*, 1, 2, no. 0 (1992): 50–70.

doctrine that has ignited individualistic theories in economics, law, and politics.¹⁰¹ Holding this abstract concept up to Hofstede’s I-C cultural value, it is observed that highly individualistic countries strongly correlate with national wealth (Gross National Product per capita).¹⁰² Individualism (IDV) is the degree to which each individual in the group predominates over the group. Hofstede argued that “industrialized, wealthy, and urbanized societies tend to become increasingly individualistic.”¹⁰³ Andreas Kyriacou predicted that more developed countries might not only be more individualistic but might also have better governance.¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, Yuriy Gorodnichenko and Gérard Roland found empirical evidence showing the robust causal effect of long-term growth on the I-C dimension.¹⁰⁵ Both authors argued that individualistic culture attaches social status to personal accomplishment and is likely to foster innovations and discoveries that promote long-term growth.

On the other hand, Devan Rosen et al. found differences in online behavior and levels of satisfaction across different I-C cultural backgrounds.¹⁰⁶ The results indicated an individualistic culture that self-promotes utilizes social media more extensively and has a more extensive network of friends. However, a greater proportion of these friends have not met. In contrast, the result also revealed that social media participation has greater effect in collectivistic societies in enhancing their sense of belonging and achieving interpersonal harmony. Expounding on social media adoption, Rodney Stump and Wen Gong’s parallel

¹⁰¹ Jüri Allik and Anu Realo, “Individualism-Collectivism and Social Capital,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 35, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 29–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022103260381>.

¹⁰² “National Culture,” *Hofstede Insights* (blog), accessed May 3, 2022, <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture/>.

¹⁰³ Hofstede, “Dimensionalizing Cultures,” 7.

¹⁰⁴ Andreas P. Kyriacou, “Individualism–Collectivism, Governance and Economic Development,” *European Journal of Political Economy* 42 (March 2016): 91–104, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2015.11.005>.

¹⁰⁵ Yuriy Gorodnichenko and Gérard Roland, “Understanding the Individualism-Collectivism Cleavage and Its Effects: Lessons from Cultural Psychology,” in *Institutions and Comparative Economic Development*, ed. Masahiko Aoki, Timur Kuran, and Gérard Roland, International Economic Association Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 213–36, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137034014_12.

¹⁰⁶ Devan Rosen, Michael A. Stefanone, and Derek Lackaff, “Online and Offline Social Networks: Investigating Culturally-Specific Behavior and Satisfaction,” in *2010 43rd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 2010, 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2010.292>.

study extended this framework to explain, from the perspective of tie strength, a curvilinear effect from the I-C dimension.¹⁰⁷ The result indicated a U-shaped overall effect, which means social media adoption appears to align with opposing motivations and social processes aligned with cultural dimensions of I-C. This suggests that strategists using social media must adopt a more nuanced approach. For example, interacting with a larger network of people may be appropriate in individualistic countries, while in collectivistic countries, bonding as a means of sustaining interaction may be better.

C. RHETORIC

In the previous section, I identified the conditions on how communicators use their messages to achieve effects. To understand the communication process in relation to influencing the audience, I have taken a “rhetorical” route. I argue that the rhetoric is tailored to fit the audience’s understanding, considering who chooses the words and what purpose the communicator seeks to achieve. One must look through the lens of rhetorical criticism to understand the wolf warrior style of discourse.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the definition and style of rhetoric developed over time, starting with Aristotle’s¹⁰⁸ art of persuasive argument as a form of rhetoric up to the ambivalence of the 20th century regarding the deliberate use of rhetoric to persuade people in a manner of accomplishing a specific goal.¹⁰⁹ Though the connotation of rhetoric today is often negative, rhetoric, simply put, is a form of communication and means of convincing people. As Brian Ott and G. Dickinson define it, it is “any discourse, art form, cultural object or event that – by symbolic means can move someone.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Rodney L Stump and Wen Gong, “Social Media Adoption and National Culture: The Dominant and Nuanced Effect of Individualism-Collectivism,” *Journal of Business and Management* 26, no. 2 (September 2020): 1–31.

¹⁰⁸ Christof Rapp, “Aristotle’s Rhetoric,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Redwood City, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2022), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>.

¹⁰⁹ Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Era*, 3rd ed. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), <https://cryptome.org/2013/01/aaron-swartz/Mind-Munitions.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Brian Ott and G. Dickinson, *The Routledge Reader in Rhetorical Criticism*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), <https://scholars.ttu.edu/en/publications/the-routledge-reader-in-rhetorical-criticism-4>.

Rhetorical criticism thus becomes an important method of analyzing wolf warrior diplomacy. As Foss illustrated, it can be examined by looking at the rhetorical situation through its purpose, its symbol as a medium of rhetoric, and the people as the rhetoric creator and audience as the rhetoric recipient.¹¹¹ Identifying how the choice of a wolf warrior rhetorical style is designed, what its persuasive purposes are, and who is choosing the rhetoric can help us understand how wolf warrior diplomacy is operationalized.

Generic criticism offers a method of rhetorical analysis that examines the commonalities of the rhetorical patterns and expectations that have developed and how people communicate through particular genres.¹¹² Sonja Foss has presented three conditions for determining the rhetorical genre: the situational element, which defines the situations in which a certain kind of rhetorical response is called for; the substantive and stylistic element, which identifies the characteristics of the rhetoric in a given situation; and the organizing principle, which brings all of the rhetorical features together.¹¹³ This study attempts to describe the rhetorical genre of wolf warrior diplomacy using these elements and to determine whether a distinct rhetorical genre exists to formulate an organizing principle that will contribute to a theory.

Considering the situational conditions of the wolf warrior style diplomacy, will this lead to a rhetorical response to PRC diplomats? I determine the host country's culture, particularly its level of individualism, will determine the rhetorical response to PRC diplomats. My observation of the content and form of the rhetoric is that it characteristically displays individualistic and aggressive features. By analyzing the rhetorical behavior of the PRC diplomats or the adoption of a particular rhetorical style or tone, the third element will determine the strategy, which is the primary purpose for conducting this study.

Other scholars have contributed to the study of genres and offered different approaches. Carolyn Miller, for instance, examined the potential of the Internet as a

¹¹¹ Sonja K. Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, Fifth edition (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc, 2018), 3–6.

¹¹² "Rhetorical Genre," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, by Mike Allen (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.n526>.

¹¹³ Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism*, 179–81.

medium that supports multiple genres. She argued that genres will continue to be a useful concept as it makes recurrent patterns significant.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, corpus linguistics has become a rapidly growing, “new trend” in research methods. It is preferred among researchers who employ statistical methods to study language in large corpora (samples) of the “real world,” and it offers new opportunities to research developments in using corpora in language.¹¹⁵

D. HYPOTHESES

China has designed a “soft power” strategy through its “Chinese culture” characteristic. With cultural differences complicating international relations, professional diplomats, as mentioned previously, are expected to be adept in “intercultural communication.” So, if the PRC government expects its diplomats to employ wolf warrior-style tactics, it is necessary to identify the behavior and the target selection driving this discourse. Thus, I make the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Countries with more individualistic cultures will receive more individualistic rhetoric from Chinese diplomats.

Sub-hypothesis (H1a): Individualistic countries with high levels of democracy, wealth, and access to the Internet will receive individualist rhetoric from Chinese diplomats more frequently than collectivist countries.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Countries with more individualistic cultures will receive more aggressive rhetoric from Chinese diplomats.

Sub-hypothesis (H2a): Individualistic countries with high levels of democracy, wealth, and access to the Internet will receive aggressive rhetoric from Chinese diplomats more frequently than collectivist countries.

¹¹⁴ Carolyn R. Miller, “Genre as Social Action (1984), Revisited 30 Years Later (2014),” *Letras & Letras* 31, no. 3 (June 29, 2015): 67–69, <https://doi.org/10.14393/LL63-v31n3a2015-5>.

¹¹⁵ Ana Frankenberg-Garcia, Guy Aston, and Lynne Flowerdew, *New Trends in Corpora and Language Learning* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=683404>.

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IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines Chinese diplomats' tweets in terms of their wolf warrior rhetoric and predicts where this tactic is strategically employed among different international audiences. This quantitative approach allows for a better understanding of the relationship between the rhetoric and culture of the diplomats and their host countries. The collection of relevant data sets for this study comes from various open sources. A linguistic analysis of messages published on Twitter and mapping of the findings to the known cultural differences of the target audiences are employed. To test my two hypotheses, I draw on two quantitative methods of text analysis. For the first hypothesis concerning individualist rhetoric, I use a dictionary-based method based on an Individualism-Collectivism lexicon to estimate a series of linear regression models. For the second hypothesis concerning aggressive rhetoric, I use structural topic modeling (STM), which allows regression models to be estimated for the prevalence of observed topics based on clusters of co-occurring words. In both approaches, the regression models are used to predict the prevalence of a particular style of rhetoric, based on the characteristics of the host country of a given Chinese diplomat.

A. DATA SOURCES

The primary textual sample consisted of tweets from the 189 official Twitter accounts of Chinese foreign policy entities (embassies and consulates). The basis of the validated accounts comes from the study conducted by Oxford University.¹¹⁶ The Twitter data for this research was provided via Twitter's application programming interface (API). A Python program connected to the Twitter Academic API extracted 745,661 individual messages from 01 January 2020 to 06 May 2022. It is important to note that the timeline of the tweets collected took place at the height of the growing resistance of China's top

¹¹⁶ Philip N. Howard, Marcel Schliebs, and Hannah Bailey, *China's Public Diplomacy Operations: Understanding Engagement and Inauthentic Amplification of PRC Diplomats on Facebook and Twitter*, (Oxford, UK: Programme on Democracy and Technology, Oxford University, 2021), 41.

diplomats over Western criticisms of the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020 and other politically related issues.

B. UNIT OF ANALYSIS AND VARIABLES

Individual tweets were used as the unit of analysis in this study to analyze the characteristics of the discourse utilized by the PRC diplomats. For the first set of linear regression models, the dependent variable is measured by looking into the cultural context of behavior using text analysis. A lexicon or list of words indicating individualism and collectivism was drawn from the study conducted by Hamamura et al. in 2021.¹¹⁷ Through analysis of language, this study examined China's culture between 1950 and 1999 in terms of individualism and collectivism, in both English and Chinese. The I-C dictionary was then used to calculate the proportion of words from the specified categories in each message. In order to capture the degree of individualism of each message, the dependent variable was defined as the number of individualistic words, divided by the sum of the number of individualistic and collectivist words, yielding a ratio between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating messages with more individualistic content. The limitation of this measurement lies in the static nature of the I-C dictionary. Although it has a high degree of validity and reliability, it is possible that patterns of Chinese language may forecast changes over time in its discourse related to individualism and collectivism.¹¹⁸ Thus, improvements to the dictionary approach are also considered.

The key independent variable is defined through cultural dimensions, particularly individualism and collectivism. By measuring each of the PRC diplomat host country's characteristics as an individualistic or collectivistic country, my goal is to determine where diplomatic discourse is more likely to employ wolf warrior style rhetoric on Twitter. To measure this on a global scale, I utilize secondary data from Hofstede's cultural dimension scores.¹¹⁹ The country scores are generated based on country-specific surveys which ask

¹¹⁷ Takeshi Hamamura et al., "Individualism with Chinese Characteristics? Discerning Cultural Shifts in China Using 50 Years of Printed Texts," *American Psychologist* 76, no. 6 (September 2021): 888–903, <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000840>.

¹¹⁸ Hamamura et al., 900.

¹¹⁹ Hofstede Insight, "Our Models: Geert Hofstede's: The Dimension Paradigm."

a broad range of questions; the responses are then aggregated using factor analysis. By quantifying the cultural orientation of the host country as the primary audience, this study adopts Hofstede’s individualism dimension as its focus. This variable is measured on a scale ranging from 0 to 100, with higher scores reflecting a more individualistic society.

In addition to the cultural orientation of the host country, I examine other factors that could influence the use of wolf warrior rhetoric. PRC diplomat narratives bring themes into a global context referencing the complexity of democracy, which often faces opposition in the West. For democracy, I used the Polity dataset that ranks political regime type on a scale ranging from -10 to 10, with higher values indicating more democratic countries.¹²⁰ Other independent variables intended to capture socioeconomic and technological characteristics were drawn from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators (WDI). These variables measure each country’s total population, wealth (GDP per capita), and access to the Internet.¹²¹

To further assess how cultural individualism is related to online interaction behavior, a visual map is presented in Figure 1. The left-side map shows the cultural variation among countries using Hofstede’s scale for individualism and collectivism. Darker colors indicate a country is more individualistic. The right-side map shows the rate of individualistic rhetoric utilized in each country. The darker the color, the more individualistic the tweets received by the country will be. Analyzing the two maps, it is evident that there is a high chance that individualistic countries will receive individualistic rhetoric from China’s diplomats.

¹²⁰ “User’s Manual, Dataset: The Polity Project,” Center for Systemic Peace, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>.

¹²¹ “World Development Indicators - DataBank,” The World Bank, accessed June 30, 2022, <https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>.

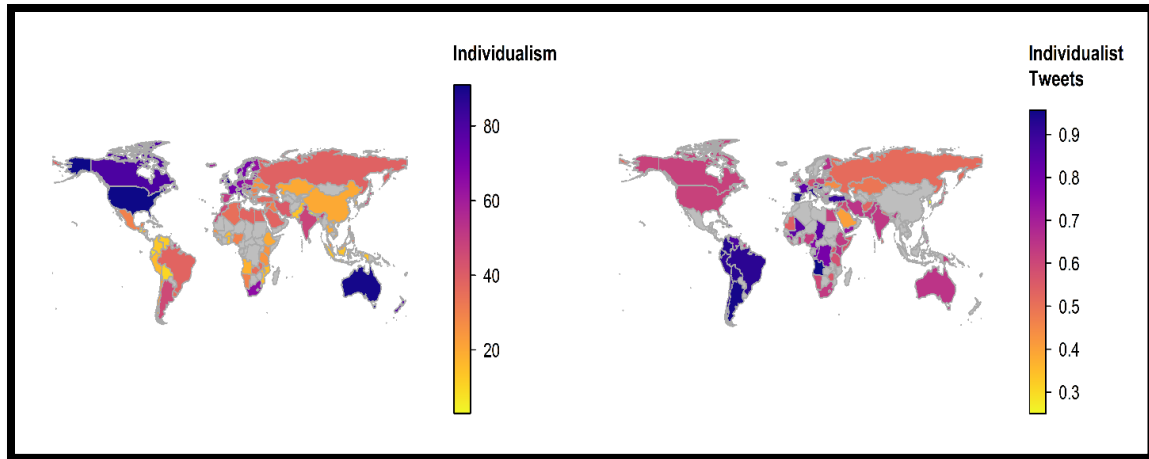


Figure 1. Visual map of I-C cultural dimension and individualistic tweets.

C. LINEAR REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Linear regression is utilized for the first set of statistical analyses in this study because the dependent variable is continuous. This statistical tool uses several independent variables to predict the value of the dependent variable. The method is used to find the best fitting model to test my hypotheses. In addition, I utilize multiplicative interaction terms to test whether the effects of culture are conditioned by the political, economic, and technological characteristics of a country.

Initially, the model assesses the effect of the I-C cultural dimension on the dependent variable, as seen in Model 1. Next, Model 2 examines the effects of the other country-level variables. These variables, including population, wealth (GDP per capita), and access to the Internet, were log-transformed to make the values closer to normally distributed. In Model 3, the effect of cultural individualism is estimated alongside the other independent variables. Model 4 adds interaction terms to the regression model to test whether there are conditional effects between culture and the other independent variables in the model.

Table 1. Linear regression results

INDIVIDUALISTIC TWEETS				
	Baseline Model <i>(main effect of IDV)</i>	Baseline Model <i>(main effects of IVs)</i>	Combined Effects Model <i>(cultural dimension added)</i>	Moderation Model <i>(interaction terms added)</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Individualism (IDV)	0.0004*** (0.00003)		-0.00003 (0.0001)	0.004*** (0.001)
Democracy		-0.001*** (0.0002)	0.001*** (0.0003)	-0.020*** (0.001)
Wealth		-0.022*** (0.002)	-0.022*** (0.002)	-0.142*** (0.005)
Access to Internet		0.048*** (0.003)	0.054*** (0.003)	0.282*** (0.007)
Population		0.014*** (0.001)	0.016*** (0.001)	0.070*** (0.002)
IDV x Democracy				0.001*** (0.00003)
IDV x Wealth				0.003*** (0.0001)
IDV x Internet				-0.006*** (0.0002)
IDV x Population				-0.001*** (0.00004)
Constant	0.637*** (0.001)	0.429*** (0.014)	0.367*** (0.025)	-0.106* (0.056)
Observations	312,358	325,027	304,889	304,889
MAE	0.379	0.379	0.380	0.377
RMSE	0.419	0.419	0.419	0.417
AIC	343,060	356,705	335,351	332,435
BIC	343,092	356,769	335,426	332,552
Log Likelihood	-171,527.135	-178,346.647	-167,668.698	-166,206.653

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

D. LINEAR REGRESSION RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Table 1 presents the results of the linear regression models. The results suggest that PRC diplomats’ rhetoric and the host country’s cultural dimension are significantly related. Model 4, which includes the interaction effects, yields the lowest Akaike information criterion (AIC) score, which means it offers the best fit for the data in terms of predictive accuracy. Also, it shows the lowest mean absolute error (MAE) and root mean squared

error (RMSE), which further confirms that it has the best fit to the dataset out of the four potential models.

The results of the regression analysis of Model 4 show that all of the variables were statistically significant predictors of individualistic tweets. Highly statistically significant coefficients with a 99% confidence level can be seen in these variables. The Individualism dimension showed a positive effect with highly a statistically significant coefficient in Models 1 and 4. This provides evidence in support of the earlier prediction in the first hypothesis (**H1**), which argues that countries with more individualistic cultures would receive more individualistic rhetoric. However, the results from Model 4, which includes the interaction terms, indicate that this relationship is more complex (as is discussed in more detail subsequently).

The results from Model 2 indicate that variables such as democracy, wealth, and access to the Internet are also highly statistically significant in impacting the number of individualistic tweets a target receives. Looking at these variables independently, there is a negative effect from democracy and wealth, while a positive impact can be seen regarding Internet access. Yet, the most revealing results from Model 4 show that the interaction effects resulted in further highly statistically significant findings. It is evident that the direction of the impact of culture changes depending on the values of the other independent variables. On a closer look, this reveals that a country described as wealthy, democratic, and individualistic has a greater chance of receiving individualistic tweets. Individualistic rhetoric is also more likely to be received by individualistic countries with smaller populations and limited Internet access. At this point, the sub-hypothesis of the first main hypothesis is partially supported (**H1a**).

Testing the hypotheses further, I quantify the measurement of effect size.¹²² The statistical findings discussed earlier should be evaluated for their substantive significance by looking into their relevance in real-world situations. Only then will this study be able to

¹²² Danielle Navarro, "Effect Size, Sample Size and Power," Statistics LibreTexts, December 30, 2019, [https://stats.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Applied_Statistics/Book%3A_Learning_Statistics_with_R_-_A_tutorial_for_Psychology_Students_and_other_Beginners_\(Navarro\)/11%3A_Hypothesis_Testing/11.08%3A_Effect_Size_Sample_Size_and_Power](https://stats.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Applied_Statistics/Book%3A_Learning_Statistics_with_R_-_A_tutorial_for_Psychology_Students_and_other_Beginners_(Navarro)/11%3A_Hypothesis_Testing/11.08%3A_Effect_Size_Sample_Size_and_Power).

interpret its meaning and speak to the importance of the results. Based on the results from Model 4, Figure 2 presents the estimated effect sizes calculated by shifting the variable of interest from its fifth to its 95th percentile while holding all other variables constant at their means. The differing effects of individualistic culture are further shown for specific values of the conditioning variables. The substantive significance of the interaction terms can be seen when the effect size is examined for individualistic culture at differing levels of democracy and wealth. The key finding here is the interaction in which a rich, democratic, and individualistic country suggests a positive effect in terms of the individualistic tweets. This difference is substantial, shifting the rate of individualistic tweets by over 20% in the real-world context of a country with high levels of wealth and democracy. This provides further support for my first hypothesis.

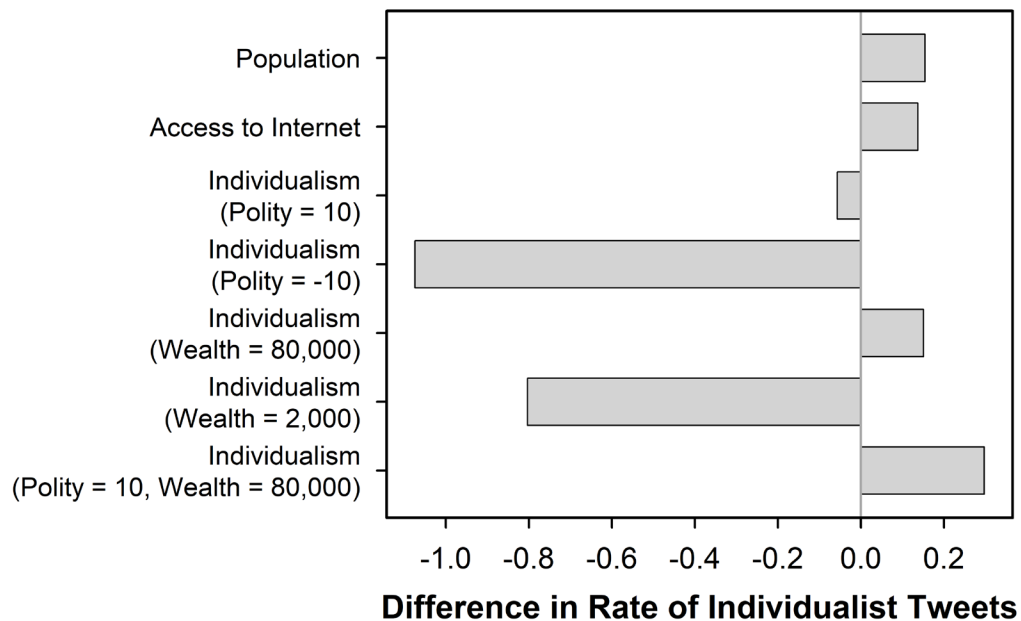


Figure 2. Predicted difference in rate individualistic tweets received.

E. STRUCTURAL TOPIC MODELS

To test the second hypothesis, that aggressive rhetoric is directed toward countries with individualistic orientations, I move beyond the dictionary-based approach by

employing a structural topic modeling methodology.¹²³ It allows researchers to estimate an unsupervised topic model, combined with a regression model based on document-level variables used to predict the prevalence of the estimated topics. Structural topic modeling is a recently developed approach in natural language processing and is used in areas of communication studies, sociology, and political science.¹²⁴ In contrast to content analysis and dictionary-based methods, where text is coded and categorized using a fixed lexicon, topic models are unsupervised models that analyze large amounts of textual data without manual annotation of topics or themes. The model automatically and empirically classifies documents into topic categories based on clusters of co-occurring words. This method is an advancement over traditional topic modeling because it incorporates attributes about the document and uses a regression framework to understand how these attributes influence the prevalence of each topic.¹²⁵ An increasing number of studies have utilized this quantitative method to infer emergent topics and thematic contents in Twitter messages.¹²⁶ STM enables researchers to identify topics and estimate their relationship to an independent variable. This gives more depth to the meaning from the text and the use of covariates in influencing the content.¹²⁷ As with the traditional regression models, the output of the model can be used to test the hypotheses.

The first stage of this analysis estimates a topic model, which is similar to a traditional Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model, but it allows the topics to be

¹²³ R Core Team, “R: The R Project for Statistical Computing,” accessed October 7, 2022, <https://www.r-project.org/>.

¹²⁴ George C. Banks et al., “A Review of Best Practice Recommendations for Text Analysis in R (and a User-Friendly App),” *Journal of Business and Psychology* 33, no. 4 (August 2018): 446, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-017-9528-3>.

¹²⁵ Banks et al., 449; Margaret E. Roberts et al., “Structural Topic Models for Open-Ended Survey Responses,” *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 4 (2014): 1064–82, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12103>.

¹²⁶ Liangjie Hong and Brian D. Davison, “Empirical Study of Topic Modeling in Twitter,” in *Proceedings of the First Workshop on Social Media Analytics, SOMA 2010* (New York: Association for Computing Machinery, 2010), 80–88, <https://doi.org/10.1145/1964858.1964870>; Jianshu Weng et al., “TwitterRank: Finding Topic-Sensitive Influential Twitterers,” in *Proceedings of the Third ACM International Conference on Web Search and Data Mining 2010* (New York: ACM Press, 2010), 261, <https://doi.org/10.1145/1718487.1718520>.

¹²⁷ Banks et al., “A Review of Best Practice Recommendations for Text Analysis in R (and a User-Friendly App),” 449.

correlated and allows the distribution of topics to be based on covariates. To estimate the topic model, the corpus is restricted to English language tweets, and the text of each tweet is first normalized by converting it to lowercase and removing URLs, punctuation, symbols, and numbers. A “bag of words” is created by splitting on spaces, then dropping single-character words, as well as very rare words (occurring at a rate of less than 5 per 100,000 documents) and very frequent words (occurring at a rate of more than 2 per 1,000 documents). The model is then estimated for 50 topics on a random sample of 50,000 tweets drawn from the full corpus. Figure 3 shows the rate of occurrence of the 50 estimated topics, labeled with the most frequent terms in each topic.

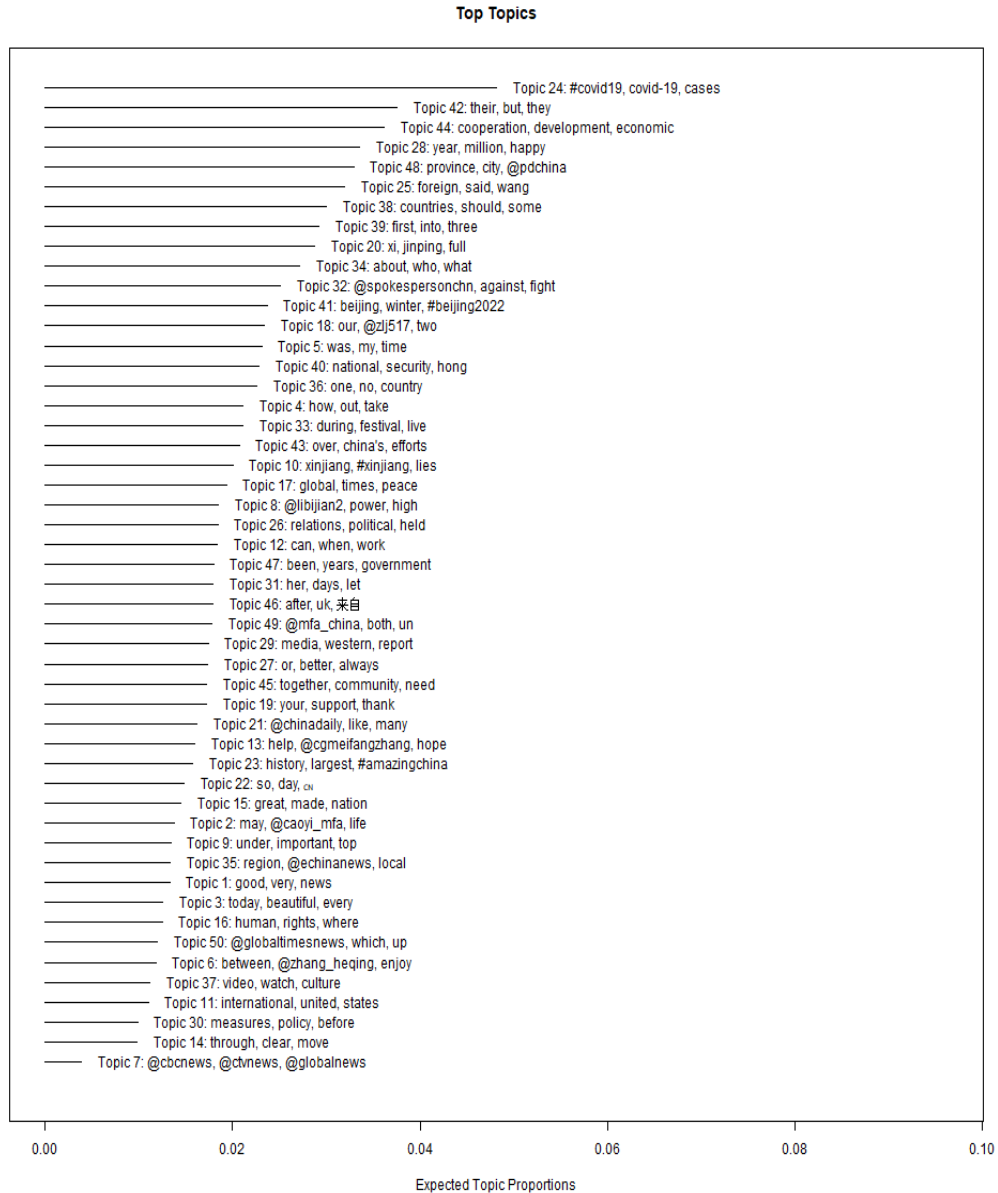


Figure 3. Topics in order of proportional importance in tweets by China’s diplomats.

Identifying the top three topics representing the attribute of aggressiveness among the collection of tweets from the PRC diplomats, by examining the words associated with each of the specific topics, I classified a small number of topics that are clearly oriented toward aggression. Three topics, 32, 34, and 38, were identified to be the most frequently referenced aggressive topics. From these selections, I analyzed the topics based on the words that are most frequently associated with each topic, as reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Top words for selected topics

Topic	Top Words
<p style="text-align: center;">Topic 32</p>	<p>Highest Prob: @spokespersonchn, against, fight, #us, make, any, must, taiwan, @ambliuxiaoming, stop FREX: against, #us, make, must, fight, battle, stand, taiwan, any, @spokespersonchn Lift: attempt, #uk, #us, battle, must, racism, stand, urges, against, make Score: against, fight, @spokespersonchn, #us, any, doomed, taiwan, must, make, stop</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Topic 34</p>	<p>Highest Prob: about, who, what, u.s, virus, does, experts, response, did, science FREX: does, science, research, scientists, virus, who, origin, did, lab, origins Lift: lab, mean, origins, research, tracing, transparent, did, does, science, detrick Score: who, what, about, u.s, virus, detrick, does, experts, response, origin</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Topic 38</p>	<p>Highest Prob: countries, should, some, other, war, while, never, own, american, democracy FREX: other, war, democracy, each, american, own, should, military, some, countries Lift: #democracy, forget, hegemony, seek, wars, american, other, #nomore, crimes, democracy Score: countries, should, other, some, war, #nomore, never, democracy, own, russia</p>

Table 2 shows for each topic the top words generated by the model. Four different types of words were produced in labeling each topic. The “Highest Prob” refers to the words that are most likely to occur in each topic. “FREX” identifies words that are both frequent and exclusive, identifying words that distinguish topics.¹²⁸ “Score” shows the top words based on a logarithmically weighted relative probability score,¹²⁹ while “Lift”

¹²⁸ Margaret Roberts et al., “STM: Estimation of the Structural Topic Model,” September 18, 2020, <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=stm>.

¹²⁹ Jonathan Chang, “LDA: Collapsed Gibbs Sampling Methods for Topic Models,” November 22, 2015, <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=lda>.

shows the highest-scoring words ranked by dividing the topic distribution by the empirical probability distribution.¹³⁰

To get a better understanding of each topic, I also looked for exemplar documents, which are tweets from the actual data with high topical content. This provides insight to come up with a good interpretation of their meaning in the topic model. Table 3 provides sample tweets for each topic which will help to describe the topic in some detail. From the three selected topics, it can be seen that these are inferred topics characterized by aggressive rhetoric: issues about Taiwan’s independence, Cold War mentality, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These estimated topics align closely with academic and professional discussions on issues related to China and wolf warrior diplomacy.¹³¹

Table 3. Tweets related to specific topic models and topic description.

Topic Description	Identified Sample Tweets
Topic 32: <i>Taiwan independence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RT @MFA_China: Seeking “Taiwan independence” is doomed to fail. So is supporting “Taiwan independence”. - RT @SpokespersonCHN: What the #US, #UK, #Canada and #EU have done is utter denigration and offense to the reputation and dignity of the #Ch... - RT @MFA_China: China urges the U.S. to stop official contacts & military ties with Taiwan, stop arms sales to Taiwan, and reject the Taiwan... - RT @SpokespersonCHN: China opposes any attempt to use the epidemic for purpose of politicization or stigmatization. We strongly condemn the...

¹³⁰ Matt Taddy, “On Estimation and Selection for Topic Models,” in *Proceedings of the Fifteenth International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Statistics* (Artificial Intelligence and Statistics, PMLR, 2012), 1184–93, <https://proceedings.mlr.press/v22/taddy12.html>.

¹³¹ Dali L. Yang, “The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Estrangement of US-China Relations,” *Asian Perspective* 45, no. 1 (2021): 7–31, <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2021.0011>; Simona Alba Grano, “Cat-Warriors vs Wolf Warriors: How Taiwan Promotes Its Brand in the Face of a More Assertive China,” *Taiwan Insight*, April 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.5167/UZH-218260>; Wiwiek Astuti, Raden Yudono, and Garcia Nathanael, “China’s Wolf Warrior Diplomacy on Social Media in the Era of Covid-19,” *Jurnal Mandala Jurnal Ilmu Hubungan Internasional* 4, no. 2 (July 2021): 120–38; Andrea A. Fischetti, Michelguglielmo Torri, and Giulio Pugliese, “US-China Competition, COVID-19 and Democratic Backsliding in Asia, Asia Maior Special Issue, 2022,” *Asia Maior*, January 1, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/86956348/US_China_Competition_COVID_19_and_Democratic_Backsliding_in_Asia_Asia_Maior_Special_Issue_2022.

Topic Description	Identified Sample Tweets
Topic 34: <i>Covid 19 leaked laboratory in Fort Detrick</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RT @PDChina: China urges #US to adopt a transparent and responsible attitude and invite WHO experts to investigate Fort Detrick lab for #CO... - RT @Li_Yang_China: What secrets does Fort Detrick hide? What does Fort Detrick have to do with the current global pandemic? The U.S. is oblig... - Does his withdrawal from the WHO intend to shirk his responsibility for the investigation in the U.S. for the origin of #Covid_19? What has U.S. hidden from the world public .. - @POTUS We can't wait to tackle the pandemic. The science is undeniable. Please invite the WHO experts to investigate Fort Detrick for the origin tracing of #COVID19.
Topic 38 <i>Cold War mentality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RT @XHNews: An enduring solution would be for major countries to respect each other, reject the Cold War mentality, refrain from bloc conf... - The U.S. rhetoric and actions have reminded the world, worryingly, of a new Cold War. Yet the countries in the World cannot afford a Cold War 2.0 and will firmly oppose it. - Expansion of NATO is a vital cause of what's happening in Ukraine. In Thomas Friedman, an American scholar's opinion, the U.S. and NATO aren't Innocent in the crisis... - RT @CGMeifangZhang: Chinese FM: Military bloc is a Cold War vestige. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, NATO should have been con...

F. STM REGRESSION ANALYSIS

As these three topics are characterized by aggressive rhetoric, models based on these topics are used to test the other main hypothesis (**H2**), which predicted more aggressive rhetoric in more individualistic countries. For each model, the dependent variable is the prevalence of a given topic. The baseline model for each topic, Models 1, 3, and 5, examines the effects of individualism and the other independent variables without the interaction effects, as opposed to the conditional effects models, and adds the interaction terms to the regression model for Models 2, 4, and 6.

Table 4. Structural topic model regression results

AGGRESSIVE TOPIC MODELS						
	Topic #32	Topic #32	Topic #34	Topic #34	Topic #38	Topic #38
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Individualism	0.0001*** (0.00001)	0.001*** (0.0001)	0.0001*** (0.00001)	-0.0001 (0.0001)	0.0001*** (0.00001)	0.0003 (0.0002)
Democracy	-0.001*** (0.00004)	-0.0004 (0.0001)	-0.0003*** (0.00004)	-0.0004 (0.0001)	-0.001*** (0.00004)	0.00001 (0.0001)
Wealth	0.00001 (0.0003)	0.010*** (0.001)	-0.002*** (0.0003)	0.002 (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.0004)	0.004** (0.001)
Access to Internet	-0.005*** (0.0004)	-0.016*** (0.001)	-0.0005 (0.0004)	-0.004** (0.001)	0.007*** (0.0004)	-0.003 (0.001)
Population	-0.002*** (0.0001)	-0.003*** (0.0003)	-0.001*** (0.0001)	-0.003*** (0.0003)	0.0003 (0.0001)	-0.002*** (0.0003)
IDV x Democracy		-0.00002** (0.00000)		0.00001 (0.00000)		-0.00001 (0.00000)
IDV x Wealth		-0.0002*** (0.00002)		-0.0001 (0.00002)		-0.0002*** (0.00002)
IDV x Internet		0.0002*** (0.00002)		-0.00001 (0.00003)		0.0002*** (0.00003)
IDV x Population		0.00002** (0.00001)		0.00004*** (0.00001)		0.00004*** (0.00001)
Constant	0.078*** (0.003)	0.032** (0.008)	0.059*** (0.004)	0.073*** (0.009)	0.040*** (0.004)	0.032* (0.010)
Observations	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000
MAE	0.013	0.012	0.014	0.013	0.016	0.016
RMSE	0.021	0.021	0.023	0.023	0.025	0.025
AIC	-245,396	-245,717	-236,225	-236,482	-225,637	-225,801
BIC	-245,331	-245,620	-236,164	-236,384	-225,575	-225,706
Log Likelihood	122,703.804	122,870.385	118,119.660	118,251.401	112,825.698	112,912.489

Note:

*p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

G. STM RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Table 4 reports the results of estimating effects on the categorized topics that depict aggressive rhetoric based on independent variables given by the I-C cultural variation of the host country, including democracy, wealth, access to the Internet, and population. I consider two approaches for each topic model: assessment of the main effects of each variable and the interaction term effect of each independent variable with cultural individualism.

The result of estimating each of the approaches shows that the first approach on the main effect, Models 1, 3, and 5, has a positive and highly statistically significant (at 99% confidence level), supporting the second hypothesis (**H2**) that aggressive rhetoric is more likely in more individualistic countries. Interestingly, the other variables show statistically significant results, although they vary among each topic. Topic 32, which is the Taiwan issue, shows a negative and highly statistically significant relationship with a 99% confidence level for democracy and access to the Internet. On the other hand, Topic 34, the Covid-19 issue, shows negative and highly statistically significant results for democracy and wealth. Meanwhile, the Cold War mentality, Topic 38, reveals a highly statistically significant and positive result for Internet access while negative results for democracy and wealth.

Looking at the interaction effect of individualism with the other independent variables, it is evident that each topic produces different results but with highly statistically significant coefficients. Topic 32 reveals that the effect of individualism becomes more negative with greater wealth and increased democracy, while the effect of individualism becomes more positive with higher Internet access. Topic 34 shows a positive impact for the combined effects of individualism and population. Topic 38 shows a negative effect resulting from the interaction of individualism with wealth, but a positive effect for the interactions between individualism and Internet access and population. Hence, these models generally do not provide support for **H2a**, as the effect of individualistic culture was not found to increase with democracy or wealth in any of three selected topics.

Examining topic prevalence (the proportion of documents devoted to a given topic) using Model 4, the visualization in Figure 4 shows how cultural individualism influenced the utilization of aggressive rhetoric. Presented in this graph are the estimates of the effects of individualistic culture on the prevalence of the three selected topics, which are Taiwan (Topic 32), COVID-19 origins (Topic 34), and Cold War mentality (Topic 38). It indicates the consistency of the findings that the inferred topics for aggressive rhetoric were more frequently used in countries that are more culturally individualistic. All of them have the same pattern in which there is a substantial increase of aggressiveness among these words that are typically deployed in individualistic countries, providing evidence in support of the second hypothesis (H2).

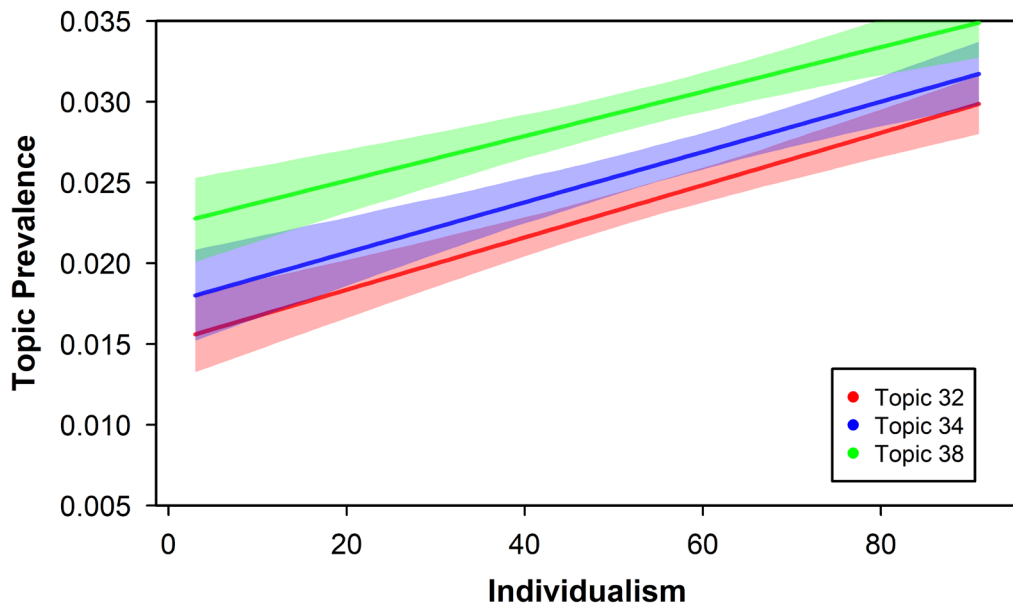


Figure 4. Relationship between topic prevalence and cultural individualism.

V. CONCLUSION

Wolf warrior diplomacy is increasingly becoming recognized as a strategy used by PRC diplomats to communicate China's "good story" and defend its national interest in international affairs. The study presented here aimed to contextualize and quantify wolf warrior diplomacy, a concept which has been widely used by foreign media and analysts who initially coined term, but which lacks clear definition, making it prone to subjective interpretation. This study has focused on the role of culture as a selective identity in shaping China's position in global affairs. Using Twitter messages collected from PRC diplomats' official accounts, this study uses text analysis based on word counts from existing lexicons and structural topic modeling to predict how the prevalence of wolf warrior rhetoric is related to the characteristics of the intended audience in the host country, especially in states with highly individualistic cultures.

The evidence shows that China, through its PRC diplomats, employs wolf warrior-style rhetoric by first adjusting its own identity to different kinds of audiences, particularly in relation to the host country's cultural orientation. Analyzing China's foreign policy behavior through the lens of cultural differences across countries offers a different perspective on China's rationale behind selecting target audiences for its wolf warrior rhetoric. The results show that the aggressive rhetorical behavior characterizing wolf warrior-style diplomacy is utilized more frequently in more individualistic countries. The statistical analysis also demonstrates that different country-based factors, including democracy, wealth, and access to the Internet, affect online rhetoric and influence the employment of the wolf warrior strategy.

These findings have important implications for contextualizing wolf warrior diplomacy through an evidence-based approach. This evidence shows that the selection of target audiences is a strategic move approved by the Chinese government, as indicated by the varying rhetorical actions taken by its diplomats. Beyond the baseline finding that wolf warrior-style rhetoric more often targets individualistic countries, the interaction between individualistic countries with rich and democratic societies may indicate that the PRC diplomats particularly targeted these kinds of countries to achieve their desired effects.

With the recent geopolitical conflicts related to China, this dynamic makes a great deal of sense, and seeing how it is applied to social media by Chinese diplomats provides further evidence of its validity.

This study recognizes a variety of implications related to the different perceptions of the world in regards to wolf warrior diplomacy. The role of PRC diplomats in shaping diplomatic discourse in international affairs is reflected in how the government used rhetoric to shape the information environment. Leveraging China's foreign policy, the rhetorical behavior used in its narratives shows the evolving diplomacy applied by China to directly influence foreign public perceptions of its role as a rising power on the global stage. With this concept, China is able to build its image as an important player, commanding its recognition and confidently stepping away from a passive to an active role in the international realm. It is important to note both the combative and selective nature of the online behavior employed by PRC diplomats. From the perspective of the broader information environment, wolf warrior diplomats can be seen as strategic influencers operationalizing their tactics toward specific target audiences.

Examining the empirical complexities of wolf warrior diplomacy provides the beginning of a distinct interpretation of this concept. Understanding the PRC's selection of target countries by examining the link between rhetoric and a country's cultural and national characteristics adds to our understanding of the dynamics of China's public diplomacy. Future research could further explore several interesting concepts. One of these is the independent variables' measurement, of which only a narrow subset of host countries' national characteristics was recorded. Additional variables could be evaluated for further analysis, especially in an era of continuously evolving technology. As this study focused on individualism-collectivism as the key form of cultural variation across countries, future research could illuminate additional dimensions of cultural variation and their interactions to determine the intended audience in a more specific manner. While this study examined only the PRC diplomats' official Twitter accounts, which are part of China's external propaganda mechanisms for projecting its image and managing international opinion, future research could also look across additional online platforms. Analysis of other components involved in wolf warrior diplomacy and expanding the data

set would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how this strategy is employed and achieved.

On the other hand, the study presented here provides important indicators for host countries regarding the likelihood of their being targets of wolf warrior–style rhetoric. Researching this area from a different perspective and presenting claims with data-driven evidence provides valuable guidance and learning opportunities essential to the public and policymakers. Host countries should be aware of and attentive to how PRC diplomats leverage cultural differences and utilize this strategy to expand their influence. This can be useful for policymakers and foreign policy advisers as they formulate policies to counter this kind of diplomacy. To fully appreciate wolf warrior diplomacy, one must recognize the complexity of how it operates and influences the public in host countries.

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