Research article

Research on the presentation of the national image of China in the German magazine APuZ (2020 - 2023)

Jinfeng Wang[1]*

1.School of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Chongqing University, Chongqing 401331, China

*Corresponding author: Jinfeng Wang (Email: 20200849@stu.cqu.edu.cn)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the portrayal of China in the German Federal Centre for Political Education magazine APuZ ("Politics and Current Affairs" in German) from 2020 to 2023. The objective is to observe and describe the manner in which the magazine portrays the image of China. A targeted literature analysis reveals the multi-dimensional evolution trend and dynamic distribution of China's image in the magazine. The study revealed that the magazine presents a comprehensive portrayal of China's political, economic and cultural images, incorporating descriptions of China's policies and international positions from a traditional Western perspective. The content of the magazine reveals changes in the image of China from the perspective of German official media, as well as the diversity of Chinese perceptions among academics and intellectuals in the German-speaking world. In summary, China is depicted as a politically traditional emerging communist power, an economically globally connected and rapidly developing country, and a culturally rich and profound country. The study aims to provide new insights into the formation of China's image in Sino-German cross-cultural communication and to contribute to the existing academic literature on the subject.

Keywords: national image; intercultural studies; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte(APuZ)

Introduction

The concept of culture is inextricably linked to the realms of politics and economics. It is a reflection of the interaction between different civilisations and political economies. From a cross-cultural perspective, it embodies the impression and perspective of the receiver on the sender. Since the 21st century, China has become the world's second largest economy, and the phenomenon of the "rise of China" cannot be ignored in the global economic landscape. Against this background, the cross-cultural exchanges between China and Germany in the new era are becoming increasingly close and complex. The German magazine APuZ plays a unique role in shaping national images and conveying cultural values. It covers a wide range of topics, including politics, economics and culture, providing a multi-faceted perspective on Germany and the world. Its professional reports and analyses assist the German-speaking population in attaining a more profound comprehension of China and in constructing a multifaceted image of China, which is of considerable consequence for the advancement of Sino-European relations.

This study analyses the coverage of China in the magazine APuZ from 2020 to 2023, disclosing the cultural perceptions and attitudes of Germans towards China at different points in time, with a particular focus on changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. As an important publication in the field of political education, APuZ occupies a unique position in

interpreting China, enriching the understanding of China in German-speaking society and promoting the development of Sino-German cultural education.

The research questions are as follows: 1) What are the principal types of images of China presented in the magazine? 2) How are these images described? 3) What is the distribution of these images? A content analysis was conducted on the relevant articles in APuZ from 2020 to 2023. This analysis aimed to reveal the presentation of China in German-language media in different contexts. The research aims to provide insights into China's international image by comparing APuZ with China's image in international media through cross-cultural analysis.

Backgrounds

The German Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) is the current publisher of APuZ. The bpb has a long history of development and authority in the field of political propaganda. Since its establishment in 1918 as the Reich Central Office for Homeland Service (Die Reichszentrale für Heimatdienst), the organisation has undergone a number of changes and reorganisations, including the Second World War, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the advent of the new era of European integration. The organisation has undergone numerous changes and

reorganisations and is currently a vibrant and influential official political culture media entity within Germany and across Europe. The bpb has a considerable reach within Germany. Following the issuance of the "Decree on the Federal Agency for Civic Education" by the German Ministry of the Interior on 24 January 2001, the bpb underwent a transformation in its governance structure. Furthermore, the previous restrictions on political education measures for the German people, as outlined in the federal decree, were lifted. This implies that foreigners residing in Germany are also acknowledged as a target demographic for political education. In terms of content, the previous text's focus on topics such as social integration and immigration, the future of the welfare state and the social market economy, and violence in society has been expanded to include topics such as social integration and immigration, the future of the welfare state and the social market economy, and violence in society, which is sensitive to the timeliness of the content. Furthermore, the ascendance of China in the 21st century is a phenomenon that cannot be overlooked and is therefore widely reported and featured by the bpb.

In the context of cross-cultural understanding of identity, the series of "APuZ" magazines published by the Federal Centre for Political Education has played an important role in shaping the image of China in German-speaking countries and even in the EU. This is particularly evident in the case of the Sino-German relationship, which experienced a

period of one-way diplomacy during the Cold War in East Germany and then a leap to the new era of great power diplomacy. Concurrently, from the perspective of linguistic analysis of the German text, the dissemination and shaping of a country's image is inevitably influenced by language, as is the case with Germany and the Netherlands. The relationship between Germany and the Netherlands is characterised by geographical proximity on the one hand and cultural links on the other. These cultural links are partly due to the linguistic origins of the two countries. German and Dutch are closely related languages within the West Germanic language family. Furthermore, the two countries are in close proximity to one another. Conversely, the relationship between the two countries is also reflected in their disparate sizes and influence. This is particularly evident in the Dutch perception of their more powerful "big brother" to the east.[1]

The global dissemination of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in 2020 and its subsequent containment in 2023 have resulted in alterations to the perception of China in the context of Sino-German cross-cultural national image. These changes are inextricably linked to the mass vision represented by the German-language media, which in turn shapes the identity and cross-cultural understanding of the German-speaking

---

[1] Boonen, U. K., Wesche, J., & Awater, P. (2022): Nationalstereotype im Kulturvergleich: Deutschland im niederländischen und russischen Fremdsprachenunterricht an Schulen und Universitäten. In: Glottodidactica, 49(2). S. 20.

audience. The popularity of German online media is on the rise. The advent of social networking sites has led to the emergence of hundreds of platforms that employ diverse technologies and facilitate the convergence of disparate cultures on a multitude of topics.2 The central article series in the Federal Agency for Civic Education magazine series, entitled "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte," is dedicated to an examination of China's development and post-pandemic trends. As the primary focus of this study, it will assist researchers in providing an objective and comprehensive overview of the research on China's national image within this temporal framework.

Method

This study employs a combination of word frequency statistics and content presentation, complemented by discourse analysis and content analysis, to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the portrayal of China's political, economic, and cultural image in the APuZ series of magazines from 2020 to 2023. In terms of quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics and content analysis software are employed to conduct word frequency statistics and distribution analysis of articles. The frequency of specific

---

2 Demirçeviren, F. G. (2019): Der Einfluss Der Kultur Auf Die Motivation für Die Verwendung Von Social Media : Vergleichende Studie türkischer Und Deutscher schüler in Benutzung Von Instagram. Dissertation. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.S.1.

topics and issues is calculated in order to reveal the trend of positive and negative depictions of China's image.

The study collected the electronic and printed core publications of APuZ magazine from 2020 to 2023, as well as Chinese and foreign literature related to national image and cross-cultural communication. First-hand information was obtained by visiting the official website of APuZ magazine (bpb.de), and relevant academic materials were retrieved from databases such as CNKI, JSTOR, and Web of Science.

The research methods employed include: 1) Word frequency statistics: the identification and analysis of the most frequently occurring content indicators;

2) Content analysis: the classification and description of the elements of relevant articles, reviews and reports;

3) Cross-cultural analysis: the comparison of Chinese and German cultural differences and mutual perceptions. The aforementioned methods have been employed to comprehensively analyse and explain the construction and presentation of the image of China in the APuZ magazine. This analysis has demonstrated the significance and impact of this image on Sino-German relations.

Result

Political image

The political image of China in German culture is imbued with a certain charm. This is due to the fact that Germany was engaged in diplomatic relations with China during the so-called Celestial Empire period. Furthermore, the Celestial Empire played an important role in German social perception during the Qing Dynasty.3 This study employs a timeline analysis methodology in conjunction with statistical data to examine the representation of China's political image in APuZ from 2020 to 2023. The study of media technology and material culture is a collective endeavour that combines cultural studies and media studies.4 The objective of the analysis is to identify the evolution of China's image and the underlying patterns of its distribution. The term "national image" refers to the collective perception, evaluation, and emotion of a specific country within the international community. This study primarily concerns itself with the political, economic and cultural images of China.

In 2020, there were 38 instances of direct and strongly related expressions of China's political image in the Hongkong issue of the APuZ magazine. The frequency statistics demonstrate that the term "China" and its related vocabulary occupy a significant portion of the expression space. The

---

3 Fitzpatrick, M. P. (2019): Kowtowing before the Kaiser? Sino-German Relations in the Aftermath of the Boxer Uprising. In: The International History Review(3). S. 519.
4 Ernst, W. (2013): From Media History to Zeitkritik. In: Theory, Culture Society(6). S. 134.

expressions can be classified into three categories: The terms "authoritarian" and "communist" were each mentioned on 13 and 24 occasions, respectively. In addition, the term "threat" was mentioned on 16 occasions.

In 2021, the editorial collection on China (kompetenz) concentrated on the subject of China. The image of China has undergone a certain transformation, reflecting the changes in the global political and economic environment and China's changing role. A total of 33 direct and strongly related expressions can be identified, which can be summarised as follows: 1) The term "systemic opponent and partner" was mentioned on 13 occasions.

2) The term "great power" was mentioned on 10 occasions.

3) The term "dragon" or "empire" was mentioned on 8 occasions.

4) The term "communist" was mentioned on 19 occasions.

In 2022, the magazine China's New Silk Road dedicated an issue to examining the implications of China's "One Belt, One Road" strategy. A total of 35 direct or strongly related expressions of China's political image were identified, which can be divided into the following categories: 1) The term "global country" was mentioned 15 times; 2) The term

"cooperation" was mentioned 13 times; 3) The term "traditional image" was mentioned 10 times.

In 2023, the APuZ magazine published two core related magazines, "Deutsche Außenpolitik" and "China und seine Nachbarn," which focused on the positioning of China's image in diplomatic culture and relations with neighbouring countries. A total of 75 instances of the term "political image" were identified, which can be divided into the following categories: 1) Images of "threat" and "hegemony" were mentioned 26 times; 2) Images of military power were mentioned 19 times; 3) Images of tradition were mentioned 30 times.

The 2023 issue of the journal focuses on China's military image and its image of international cooperation. This has resulted in the creation of a new image of an ancient and powerful country, although traditional perceptions still exist.

Economy

The remarkable achievements of the Chinese economic model have prompted a notable intensification of research activities pertaining to China across the globe.[5]The study analysed the portrayal of China's economic image in the journal APuZ between 2020 and 2023. The

---

[5] Schmalz, S., Gräf, H., Köncke, P., & Schneidemesser, L. (2022): Umkämpfte Globalisierung: Amerikanische und europäische Reaktionen auf Chinas Aufstieg im Hochtechnologiebereich. In: Berliner Journal Für Soziologie, 32(3). S. 431.

analysis employed a dynamic statistical method of annual segmentation. During this period, there were 38 descriptions of the economic image, which was relatively low compared to the 271 descriptions of the political image and 52 descriptions of the cultural image.

In the 2020 issue of APuZ, the journal Hongkong, the Chinese economic image was presented 11 times. These portrayals were divided into two categories: the image of "dependence" (5 times) and the "communist" or "planned" economy (8 times). This reflects the German media's view of the Chinese economy in the early days of the epidemic.

In 2021, the image of the Chinese economy appeared 13 times in China (kompetenz), divided into "competitor" (10 times) and "global" (5 times). This demonstrates the German media's focus on Sino-German economic and trade exchanges and China's economic recovery.

In 2022, the image of the Chinese economy in "China's new silk road" was reduced to six instances, divided into "global" (four instances), "open and cooperative" (three instances) and "problematic" (two instances). This reflects the global influence of the Chinese economy in the post-epidemic era.

In 2023, the two issues of Deutsche Außenpolitik and China und seine Nachbarn, with a total of eight descriptions, are mainly divided into

"stability" (5 times) and "pressure" (4 times). This indicates the positioning of the Chinese economy in international diplomacy and relations with neighbouring countries.

The fundamental basis for the establishment of positive relations has consistently been the perception of a mutual economic benefit. Indeed, China represents Germany's most significant trading partner in Asia, and since 2016, it has also become the country's most important economic partner globally. Conversely, Germany is by far China's most significant economic partner in Europe.6 These analyses provide a foundation for further research into the representation of the Chinese economy in cross-cultural communication and for a more profound comprehension of the perceptions and attitudes of German society towards the Chinese economy in a multimedia format.

Cultural Images

The study analysed the portrayal of Chinese culture in the German magazine APuZ between 2020 and 2023. A total of 52 relevant expressions were identified. The cultures in question were primarily influenced by accounts, reports and pamphlets authored by Western travellers. Additionally, adventurers, traders, envoys, soldiers, and priests contributed to the dissemination of knowledge about foreign cultures

---

6 Biba, S. (2021): Ganging up on Trump? Sino-German Relations and the Problem with Soft Balancing against the USA. In: Journal of Chinese Political Science(prepublish). S. 6.

through their writings.7 In recent years, the rise of China's comprehensive national strength has attracted the attention of the German media to China's history and culture.

In the 2020 issue of the journal Hongkong, the image of Chinese culture was represented 13 times, divided into three categories: The German media presented Chinese culture in seven instances as a "nationalist" cultural image, six instances as a "political" or "forced education" cultural image, and four instances as an "unrecognised" image. This reflects the German media's views on the historical context of the amendments and the broader political and social landscape.

In 2021, the image of Chinese culture was referenced 26 times in China (kompetenz), representing a notable increase in comparison to the previous year. The three types of cultural images included: The phrase "Chinese studies saying goodbye to orchids" was used eight times, "dubious" academic internationalisation was mentioned ten times, and "cooperative" cultural images appeared twelve times. The cultural imprint of Chinese diplomacy has been the subject of investigation in cross-cultural image research, with image building representing a significant objective of Chinese foreign policy. Given the altruistic nature of humanitarian action, humanitarian diplomacy represents a valuable

---

7 Zhang, L. (2021): Heimat aus der Ferne Gesehen: China im Literarisch-Biografischen Werk in Deutschland Lebender Chinesen. Dissertation. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.S.19.

instrument for the construction of a positive international image.8 These instances demonstrate the impact of international assistance on media views during the pandemic.

In 2022, the image of Chinese culture was referenced on three occasions in "China's New Silk Road". These instances involved the cultural images of "narrative rights" and "dragons", which reflect the characteristics of the rise of Chinese culture in the world.

In 2023, the image of Chinese culture was represented on ten occasions in the journals Deutsche Außenpolitik and China und seine Nachbarn. A total of seven instances were identified in China und seine Nachbarn, with the remaining three instances occurring in Deutsche Außenpolitik. Four instances of the term "nationalist," seven instances of "historically and culturally influential," and four instances of "educationally concerned" reflect the positioning of Chinese culture in modern society and foreign diplomacy with neighbouring countries.
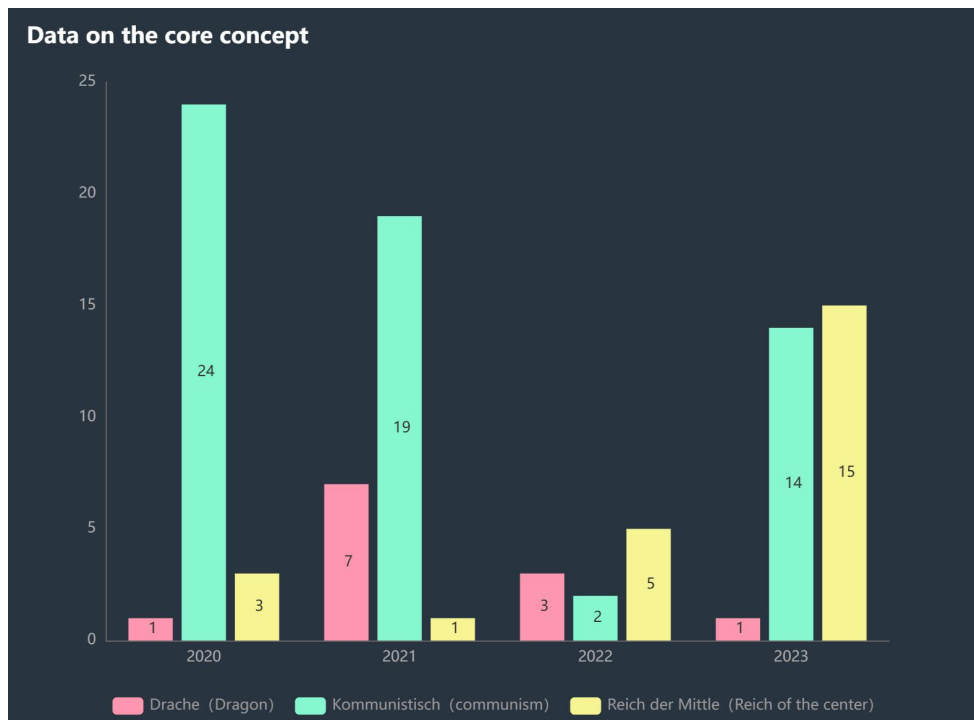
Discussion

The aforementioned data and classifications demonstrate the German media's attention to and position on the image of Chinese culture at different historical junctures.

---

8 Cook, A. D. B., & Gong, L. (2021): Humanitarian diplomacy as an instrument for China's image-building. In: Asian Journal of Comparative Politics(3). S. 238.

This study conducted a comprehensive review of literature and related documents to examine in depth the coverage of China's image by APuZ magazine from 2020 to 2023. The study found that APuZ paid the most attention to China's political image in the international arena, with an overall upward trend.

Specifically, in terms of political image, China's political reform policies and development trends as a global power have attracted the magazine's attention. Through coverage of the legal reform storm, border disputes and climate issues, the magazine has shaped the global power image of Chinese communism, using three traditional political images: "dragon", "central empire" and "communism". The data show that the overall volume of "dragon" related expressions is small and stable, "central empire" is on the rise, and the image of "communism" occupies a large share but is on a downward trend. These trends will continue to influence the cross-cultural shaping of China's political image.

Data on the core concept

|	2020	2021	2022	2023
Drache (Dragon)	1	7	3	1
Kommunistisch (communism)	24	19	2	14
Reich der Mittle (Reich of the center)	3	1	5	15

In terms of economic and cultural images, these two types of images account for 14% and 19.2% of the total textual description, respectively, which is less than the political image. The text analysis shows that the presentation style of the two types of images is strongly influenced by the political image. The cultural image is mainly influenced by Chinese history and traditional culture, which is relatively stable and shows uniqueness in cross-cultural communication. By comprehensively examining the image of China in the APuZ magazine from 2020 to 2023, we can understand the degree of acceptance and recognition of China's current political, economic and cultural development in German society. China's international communication strategy is particularly important in responding to these reports and external opinions. China is working hard to build and present a comprehensive and objective national image

through active international communication and diplomatic efforts. However, in the era of global information, balancing domestic policy goals with international image building and effectively managing and guiding international public opinion remains a challenge. The influence of China's image in the international arena involves multiple levels and fields, which is reflected in the editorial reports of APuZ magazine.

Conclusion

Total data for three image types
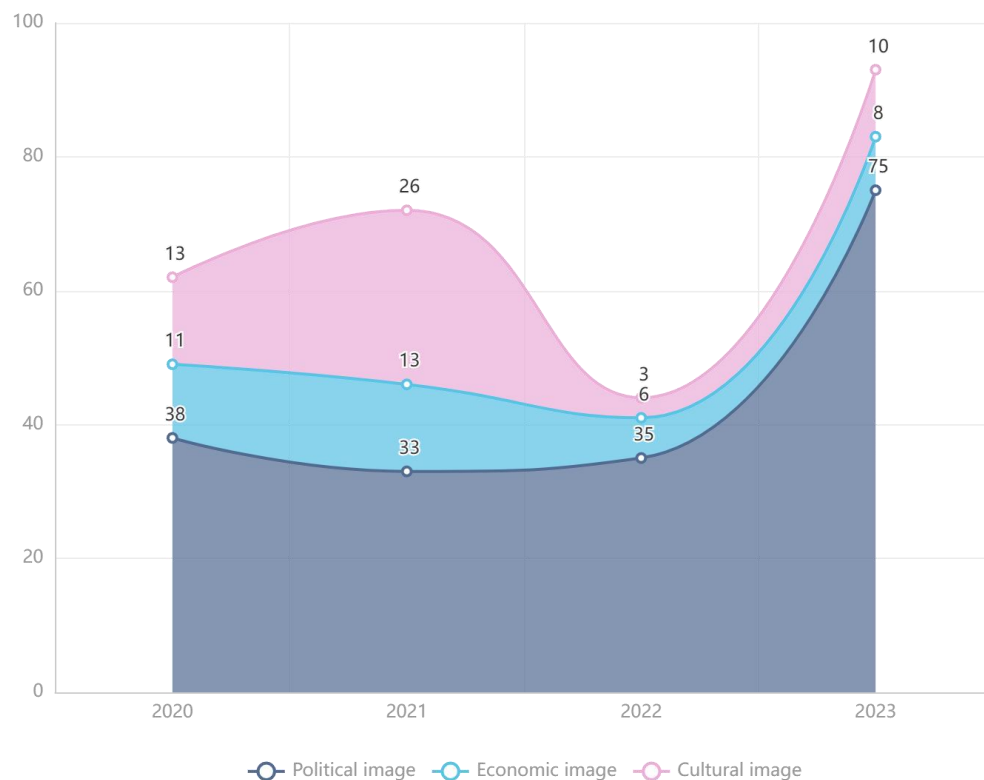
This article examines the portrayal of China in the German magazine APuZ between 2020 and 2023. It finds that the image of China is divided into three categories: political, economic and cultural. The political image accounts for the largest proportion and is on the rise, the economic image

is less frequent and tends to be stable, and the cultural image is stable but relatively small in number. In terms of politics, China is depicted as a global communist power. In economic terms, it is portrayed as a country undergoing rapid development and espousing a commitment to global cooperation. In cultural terms, it is described as a communist country with a long history.

Although APuZ may be biased, its multidimensional portrayal provides readers with a comprehensive display of China, reflecting the complexity and importance of China in the global context. China's influence in the international community is on the rise, particularly in Germany. Although China's evaluation in the post-epidemic era is positive in terms of science and technology, economy and cultural soft power, its image in German society still faces challenges, especially in cultural exchanges with the "Z" generation.

Overall, China has made progress in improving its image; however, there is still room for improvement in terms of cultural equality in cross-cultural communication. In the future, China aspires to make further advances in the realms of economics, technology, and cultural soft power. It also seeks to establish a solid foundation for long-term and stable cross-cultural communication between China and Germany by effectively addressing cultural barriers and improving its image. In the

coming years, China will be called upon to demonstrate its determination, sense of responsibility, wisdom and, above all, perseverance in order to establish its leadership role in global climate policy.9

This study establishes a foundation for further research on the construction and dissemination of the Chinese image in cross-cultural communication. Further research could analyse the Chinese image in different media, including German cable news websites, social media, television and film. This would facilitate a more profound comprehension of the Chinese image. In addition, the impact of media outlets such as the German-language edition of the Asia-Pacific Journal on the perceptions and attitudes of the Chinese population in German-speaking societies should be investigated, as well as the interplay between this influence and China's foreign policy and international image strategy. A comprehensive study of this process will provide new insights and empirical data that will inform the development of theories of cross-cultural communication between China and Germany, promote the development of scientific strategies for the image of China, and help the world to understand China more carefully.

---

9 Gao, X. (2018): China's Evolving Image in International Climate Negotiation: From Copenhagen to Paris. In: China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies(2). S. 27.

References

Biba, S. (2021): Ganging up on Trump? Sino-German Relations and the Problem with Soft Balancing against the USA. In: Journal of Chinese Political Science(prepublish). S. 1-1.

Boonen, U. K., Wesche, J., & Awater, P. (2022): Nationalstereotype im Kulturvergleich: Deutschland im niederländischen und russischen Fremdsprachenunterricht an Schulen und Universitäten. In: Glottodidactica, 49(2). S. 9-45.

Cook, A. D. B., & Gong, L. (2021): Humanitarian diplomacy as an instrument for China's image-building. In: Asian Journal of Comparative Politics(3). S. 238-252.

Demirçeviren, F. G. (2019): Der Einfluss Der Kultur Auf Die Motivation für Die Verwendung Von Social Media : Vergleichende Studie türkischer Und Deutscher schüler in Benutzung Von ınstagram. Dissertation. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Ernst, W. (2013): From Media History to Zeitkritik. In: Theory, Culture Society(6). S. 132-146.

Fitzpatrick, M. P. (2019): Kowtowing before the Kaiser? Sino-German Relations in the Aftermath of the Boxer Uprising. In: The International History Review(3). S. 513-538.

Gao, X. (2018): China's Evolving Image in International Climate Negotiation: From Copenhagen to Paris. In: China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies(2). S. 27.

Grönegräs, M., & De Cleen, B. (2023): Negotiating the boundaries of the politically sayable: populist radical right talk scandals in the German media. In: Critical Discourse Studies(6). S. 665-682.

Schmalz, S., Gräf, H., Köncke, P., & Schneidemesser, L. (2022): Umkämpfte Globalisierung: Amerikanische und europäische Reaktionen auf Chinas Aufstieg im Hochtechnologiebereich. In: Berliner Journal Für Soziologie, 32(3). S. 427-454.

Teschendorf, V. S. (2023): The German media as amplifier of the political agenda: The economic policy framing of European conflicts in times of COVID-19. In: European Journal of Communication(4). S. 345-362.

Wenning, L., & Liu, H. (2023): An Analysis of China's Image Construction Based on the Indexicality Principle. In: Journal of Political Science Research(2).

Zhang, L. (2021): Heimat aus der Ferne Gesehen: China im Literarisch-Biografischen Werk in Deutschland Lebender Chinesen. Dissertation. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/305191/hongkong/ (Stand: 26.2.2024)

https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/326894/china-kompetenz/(Stand:26.2.2024)

https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/chinas-neue-seidenstrassen-2022/(Stand:26.2.2024)

https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/china-und-seine-nachbarn-2023/(Stand:26.2.2024)

https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/deutsche-aussenpolitik-2023/(Stand:26.2.2024)