

China's Strategic Narrative and Challenges: The Case of Poland*

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The rejuvenation of China's relations with Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland, receives more attention than ever. While China tends to take optimistic views about Chinese-Polish relations, Poland remains prudent over wishful anticipation. The extent to which China and Poland have consensus on understanding and developing their relations requires further investigation. From the perspective of a strategic narrative, this article examines whether Warsaw accepts Beijing's narratives of Chinese-Polish relations as a strategic partnership. The main hypothesis is that differences between Beijing and Warsaw in understanding the Chinese-Polish relations can neither be easily overcome nor ignored. The findings indicate that Poland partially welcomes China's suggestions by limiting its understanding and support towards Chinese-Polish strategic partnership merely to diplomatic and economic aspects.

Keywords: strategic narrative, China-Poland relations, strategic partnership.

Introduction

Since 1949 the China-Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) relationship has experienced ups and downs due to the changing landscape within and outside their borders. In 2012 China and 16 CEE countries held the first 16+1 Summit in Warsaw, signaling the rejuvenation of China-CEE relations that has been facilitated by recent cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the One Belt and One Road (OBOR) Initiative.¹ Meanwhile, China is also attempting to enhance bilateral relations with individual CEE countries, such as Poland, through high-level

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¹ For official information of 16+1 cooperation, see <http://www.china-ceec.org/chn/>. The BRI or the OBOR refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road, the two initiatives proposed by China in 2013 aiming at enhancing connectivity and cooperation between China and other countries in Asia, Europe and broader world in five types of connectivity such as policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people. For official information on the BRI, see <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/>.

visits and cooperation in fields including trade, investment, connectivity, finance and people-to-people dialogues. Chinese-Polish relations have been upgraded from long and stable friendly cooperation² in 1997² to a ‘friendly cooperative partnership’ in 2004³ to a strategic partnership (SP) in 2011⁴ and to a comprehensive strategic partnership (CSP) in 2016.⁵ Poland is one of China’s first strategic partners in CEE and the eighth partner in the European Union (EU). Chinese-Polish trade volume has increased significantly (see Table 1). Since 2005 Poland has been China’s largest trading partner in the region. China has become Poland’s second largest import country since 2015. By contrast, their mutual direct investment has much potential to rise. Until mid-2016, China’s foreign direct investment (FDI) in Poland remained only at EUR 0.462 trillion, much lower than those in Hungary (EUR 2.1 trillion) and Romania (EUR 0.741 trillion)⁶. Yet, China and Poland are trying to unlock the potential cooperation in such fields as connectivity, infrastructure and logistics through synthesizing their development plans with the OBOR initiative. One example is the Chengdu–Europe Express Rail, one line of China Railway Express, which strengthens economic ties between Chengdu and Lodz and other cities in Europe.⁷

Table 1. Polish-Chinese trade in period 2007–2016 (billion US dollars)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total Export-Import Volume	7.93	10.46	9.21	10.99	12.46	1.00	13.38	16.19	16.53	17.47
Exports to China	1.00	1.28	1.47	1.65	1.85	1.76	2.12	2.23	2.02	1.9
Imports from China	6.93	9.18	7.74	9.34	10.61	10.24	11.26	13.97	14.51	15.57
Poland’s trade deficits	5.93	7.90	6.26	7.70	8.76	8.48	9.14	11.74	12.50	13.66

Source: Ministry of Commerce of China. ‘国别报告’ (Country Report), Ministry of Commerce of China, <https://countryreport.mofcom.gov.cn/record/index110209.asp> (accessed on 30 September 2017).

² Joint Communique of the People’s Republic of China and Republic of Poland (Beijing, 17 November 1997).

³ Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and Republic of Poland (Warsaw, 8 June 2004).

⁴ Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and Republic of Poland on Establishing a Strategic Partnership (Beijing, 20 December 2011).

⁵ China-Poland Joint Statement on Establishing a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (Warsaw, 20 June 2016).

⁶ ‘中国在波兰的投资远低于预期’ (China’s Investment in Poland Far Lower Than Expected), Economic and Commercial Counsellor’s Office of the Embassy of China in Poland, <http://pl.mofcom.gov.cn/article/jmxw/201704/20170402560766.shtml> (accessed on 29 September 2017). China’s FDI in Poland seems tiny compared with that in Europe (10.69 trillion US dollars in 2016) and in the world (196.15 trillion US dollars in 2016). See ‘2016 年度中国对外直接投资统计公报’ (Statistical Bulletin China’s FDI 2016), <http://fec.mofcom.gov.cn/article/tjsj/tjgb/201709/20170902653690.shtml> (accessed on 29 September 2017).

⁷ ‘Silk Road to Expand Reach via Chengdu–Europe Express Rail’, *China Daily*, 17 November 2016, p. 6.

Whether Chinese-Polish relations may develop smoothly is a question open for debate. Noting the favorable atmosphere for cooperation, Chinese observers tend to take optimistic views about it, particularly in the economic fields. Yet European commentators would remain prudent over China's relationship with Poland and the CEE in general, given the differences between the two sides to which China has not paid sufficient attention.⁸ After all, since 1990 being integrated with the West has been the main priority of Poland's foreign policy, within which China has received much less attention until recent years. Moreover, Poland attaches importance to elevating its global profile and the promotion of democracy and human rights. Indeed, the two countries' ways of dealing with their common ground and differences may have great impact on their bilateral relations.

This article argues that it is essential to examine to what extent the two countries share consensus in understanding and developing their SP. Since the 1990s China has developed various partnerships with other states and non-state actors, which could be understood as strategically constructed and projected by China to explain its way of thinking and behavior to international audience in order to achieve a desired intention.⁹ Whether Poland understands its relations with China in the same sense of SP as what China's narrative suggest remains an unanswered question.

This article will firstly review academic literature on China-Poland relations in the context of China-CEE relations. Secondly, I will introduce a strategic narrative approach as an appealing analytical framework to direct our attention to the Polish government's level of discourse regarding China's narrative on their SP. Research design is also introduced on how to identify hints of Warsaw's response.¹⁰ Thirdly, an overview of China's narrative on SP illustrates general features, such as pragmatic orientation and top-down approach. Fourthly, the case of Poland includes China's narrative on its SP with Poland and the latter's governmental discourse on its SP with China. Given the scope of this article, the analysis focuses on most authoritative documents and websites to deepen our understanding of the typical discourse of the Polish government. Findings indicate the gaps between China and Poland in understanding their SP.

⁸ See more discuss in the next section.

⁹ Although there is no single standard category of China's partnership, various partnerships could be largely located according to their importance and closeness, from lower levels such as partnership (including cooperative partnership, comprehensive friendly cooperative partnership) to higher levels such as strategic partnership and comprehensive strategic partnership.

¹⁰ While this article generally concerns China-Poland relations during 1990–2017, it focuses on years since 2011 when China-Poland strategic partnership was announced.

Literature on Chinese-Polish relations

Compared with Chinese-EU relations, Chinese-CEE relations is a relatively newly-emerging topic within the English language academic literature.¹¹ Whilst there are comparative studies between China and individual CEE countries, little literature focuses on the relations between them. Countries such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia apparently try to balance political issues (such as human rights) and economic concerns in their relations with China to compete for economic benefits from cooperation with China.¹² It was documented that following the Eastern Opening policy, Hungary sought to enhance its relations with China through strong support for the 16+1 framework and the OBOR initiative.¹³ Some contended that cases of Hungary and the Czech Republic indicate that China's approach to the CEE may facilitate its growing economic and political influence in the region and constitute a challenge to Western influence.¹⁴ Yet, the implementation of China's initiatives such as the 16+1 cooperation and the OBOR is also confronted with challenges and obstacles within Europe and beyond it.¹⁵ When proposing cooperation plans, China has not sufficiently taken various situations in CEE into account nor finished consultation with the latter.¹⁶ CEE countries may differ in attitudes to China's investment in specific sectors due to their divergent domestic situations.¹⁷

¹¹ E.g. W. Song, *China's Relations with Central and Eastern Europe: From "Old Comrades" to New Partners*, London: Routledge, 2017; A. Vangeli, Anastas, 'China's Engagement with the Sixteen Countries of Central, East and Southeast Europe under the Belt and Road Initiative', *China & World Economy*, 2017, Vol. 25, No. 5, pp. 101–124; Besides, review articles and analysis on China and its relations with CEE countries are growing online, for instance, at the website of National Bank of Poland (www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl). Thanks reviewers for this note.

¹² E.g. R. Fürst, G. Pleschová, 'Czech and Slovak relations with China: Contenders for China's Favour', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2010, Vol. 62, No. 8, pp. 1363–1381; T. De Castro, J. Vlčková, P. Hnát, 'Trade and Investment Relations between the Czech Republic and China: The Czech Republic As A Gateway to the EU?' *Society and Economy*, 2017, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp. 481–499.

¹³ X. Chen (ed.), *How Hungary Perceives the Belt and Road Initiative and China-CEEC Cooperation*, Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2017; T. Matura, 'Hungary and China: Hopes and Reality', in M. Huotari, M. Otero-Iglesias, J. Seaman, A. Ekman (eds), *Mapping Europe-China Relations: A Bottom-Up Approach*, European Think Tank Network on China, 2015, pp. 41–45, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/302905221_Mapping_Europe-China_Relations_A_Bottom-Up_Approach (accessed on 9 December 2017).

¹⁴ B. Kowalski, 'China's Foreign Policy towards Central and Eastern Europe: The "16+1" Format in the South-South Cooperation Perspective. Cases of the Czech Republic and Hungary', *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2017, Vol. 1, No. 1.

¹⁵ E.g. B. Góralczyk, 'China's Interests in Centre and Eastern Europe: Enter the Dragon', *European Voice*, 2017, Vol. 16, pp. 153–162; J. Bartosiak, *Pacyfik i Eurazja. O wojnie (The Pacific and Eurasia. On War)*, Warsaw, 2016. Thanks reviewers for this note.

¹⁶ J. Szczudlik-Tatar, 'China's Charm Offensive in Central and Eastern Europe: The Implementation of Its "12 Measures" Strategy', *BULLETIN*, No. 106 (559), 4 October 2013, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/171360/Bulletin%20PISM%20no%20106%20\(559\),%204%20October%202013.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/171360/Bulletin%20PISM%20no%20106%20(559),%204%20October%202013.pdf) (accessed on 2 May 2017).

¹⁷ R. Turcsanyi, 'Central European Attitudes towards Chinese Energy Investments: The Cases of Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic', *Energy Policy*, 2017, Vol. 101, pp. 711–722.

In studies of Poland's foreign policy, China has received relatively less attention compared with the EU and US.¹⁸ Scholars from different disciplines such as sinology, political science and economics have discussed Chinese-Polish relations, concerning issues including history, culture, differences on political values, trade imbalance, gaps in developing local cooperation, and dividing Polish public discourse on the OBOR.¹⁹ Both the Polish government and the public seemingly welcome Chinese initiatives such as the OBOR only in modest and 'reactive' way.²⁰ Yet research on Chinese-Polish SP remains limited. Some from one of Poland's leading think tanks believe that this SP has involved intense dialogues but few tangible results, and needs 'real content' such as concrete cooperation projects rather than talks.²¹ Another paper ascribes its 'symbolic' feature to the 'disappointing' stance of the current Polish government, which seems to 'look Westwards only' and is 'incapable of scenario-thinking' in seizing cooperation opportunities with China.²²

In China, research on the CEE did not grow remarkably until the late 2000s.²³ While Chinese authors noted the challenges in Chinese-CEE relations, they generally prefer to underscore promising prospects for economic cooperation.²⁴ One recent volume

¹⁸ E.g. K. Longhurst, M. Zabarowski, *The New Atlanticist: Poland's Foreign and Security Policy Priorities*, Chatham House Papers 2008, Vol. 2, pp. 396–397; J. Kaminska, *Poland and EU Enlargement: Foreign Policy in Transformation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; M. Raś, 'Foreign and Security Policy in the Party Discourse in Poland: Main Features', *Revista UNISCI / UNISCI Journal*, 2017, Vol. 43, pp. 117–141.

¹⁹ E.g. B. Góralczyk, 'Polish Sinology—Reflection Paper', *Mongolian Journal of International Affairs*, 2015, Vol. 19, pp. 87–115; B. Góralczyk, M. Huashou, *Poland-China: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, Toruń Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2014; K. Palonka, 'Economic and Trade Relations between Poland and China Since 2004', *Asia Europe Journal*, 2010, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 369–378; B. Drelich-Skulska, S. Bobowski, A.H. Jankowiak, P. Skulski, 'China Trade Policy towards Central and Eastern Europe in the 21st Century, Example of Poland', *Folia Oeconomica Stetinensia*, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 149–174; L. Yang, X. Chen, L. Jiang, 'The Characteristics and Functions of International Friendship Cities of China – and Prospects of Local Cooperation in Sino-Poland Relations', in D. Mierzejewski, K. Żakowski (eds), *On Their Own Paths. Japan and China Responses to the Global and Regional Challenges*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2015, pp. 81–95; M. Lubina, 'From Geopolitical Chance to Security Threat: Polish Public Political Course on the One Belt One Road Initiative', *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, 2017, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 221–238.

²⁰ E.g. B. Góralczyk, 'The Chinese Are Coming to Poland', <https://financialobserver.eu/poland/the-chinese-are-coming-to-poland/> (accessed on 11 December 2017).

²¹ J. Szczudlik-Tatar, 'Poland-China Strategic Partnership: Waiting for More Results', *BULLETIN*, No. 106 (838), 19 November 2015, https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=20936 (accessed on 14 April 2017); A. Skorupska, J. Szczudlik-Tatar, 'Regional Cooperation Key to Polish–Chinese Strategic Partnership', *BULLETIN*, No. 25 (61), November 2014, https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=18741 (accessed on 14 April 2017).

²² J. Gorski, 'PRC's co-operation with Central and Eastern European countries in the context of the One Belt One Road initiative. The case of 2016 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the PRC and Poland', https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2837546 (accessed on 11 May 2017).

²³ See more in 黄平 (Huang Ping), '“一带一路”倡议背景下的中国与中东欧国家合作' (China-CEE Countries Cooperation in the Context of the OBOR initiative), *欧洲研究 (European Studies)*, 2015, No. 6, pp. 1–2.

²⁴ E.g. 刘作奎 (Liu Zuokui), '“一带一路”倡议背景下的“16+1 合作”' ("16+1" Cooperation in the Context of the OBOR initiative), *当代世界与社会主义 (Contemporary World and Socialism)*, 2016, No. 3, pp. 144–152; 朱晓中 (Zhu Xiaozhong), '中国—中东欧国家关系中需要注意的问题和几点建

has discussed Hungary's positive perceptions of China's approach to the CEE.²⁵ The Chinese also have optimistic views on the Chinese-Polish economic relations.²⁶ Yet in comparison to English literature, Chinese literature has also covered Chinese-Polish ties beyond the economic field, including history and recent development since the 1990s.²⁷ Recently, some authors (including few foreign authors) have published literature in Chinese on the China-Poland SP, an emerging research theme, concerning the opportunities and challenges in its development.²⁸ According to Chinese researchers, challenges may lie in Poland's domestic politics, differences between China and Poland in cultural tradition and political values, trade deficit and different international priorities.²⁹ Given the 'China threat' discourse that appeals to many of its opponents, the Polish government has to seek balance between value orientation and pragmatic cooperation with China.³⁰ Opportunities identified include enhancing Poland's independence and distinctiveness in Europe, developing a non-European

议' (Issues and suggestions on China-CEE Relations), *国家智库 (National Think Tank)*, 2015, Z1, pp. 150–154; 于军 (Yu Jun), '中国—中东欧国家合作机制现状与完善路径' (Present Situation and Paths in China-CEE Cooperation Mechanism), *国际问题研究 (International Studies)*, 2015, No. 02, pp. 112–126; 高歌 (Gao Ge) (ed.), *从“16+1”到“一带一路”合作发展共赢 (From “16+1” to “OBOR”: Cooperation, Development and Win-win)*, Beijing: 中国社会科学出版社 (China Social Sciences Publishing House), 2017.

²⁵ X. Chen (ed.), op.cit.

²⁶ E.g. 张迎红 (Zhang Yinghong), '波兰特别经济区的建设与中波合作的实施路径探讨' (Polish Special Economic Area Construction and China-Poland Cooperation Paths), *上海商学院学报 (Journal of Shanghai Business College)*, 2015, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 84–91; 姚玲 (Yao Ling), '新时期扩大中国对波兰投资合作的思考' (On extending Chinese Investment in Poland in New Era), *国际经济合作 (International Economic Cooperation)*, 2015, No. 1, pp. 24–30; 高潮 (Gao Chao), '“一带一路”建设中波兰的投资机遇' (Investment Opportunities in Poland in the Context of the OBOR Initiative), *中国对外贸易 (China International Trade)*, 2015, No. 8, pp. 84–85.

²⁷ E.g. 沈志华, & 李丹慧 (Shen Zhihua, Li Danhui), '1956 年的波兰危机与中波关系——来自中国的档案文献和内部报道' (1956 Polish Crisis and China-Poland Relations: Achieves and Media Coverage in China), *俄罗斯研究 (Russian Studies)*, 2006, No. 3, pp. 45–58; 于洪君 (Yu Hongjun), '携手共进, 推动中国与波兰和中东欧国家关系新发展' (Hand in Hand to Promote New Development of China's Relations with Poland and CEE), *当代世界 (Contemporary World)*, 2012, No. 7, pp. 10–11; 崔宏伟 (Cui Hongwei), '中波战略伙伴关系: 基础、问题及前景' (China-Poland Strategic Partnership: Basis, Issues and Prospect), *俄罗斯东欧中亚研究 (Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian Studies)*, 2013, No. 4, pp. 69–74; 刘作奎 & 卡塔里娜·高里克 (Liu Zuokui & Katarzyna Golik), '2015 年波兰宪法危机根源、前景及对中波关系影响分析' (The Roots and Prospects of 2015 Polish Constitution Crisis and its Impact on China-Poland Relations), *欧洲研究 (European Studies)*, 2016, No. 2, pp. 106–120; 刘作奎 & 鞠维伟 (Liu Zuokui & Ju Weiwei), '中国-波兰外交政策论坛: 进展、潜力与前瞻' (China-Poland Foreign Policy Forum: Development, Potential and Prospect), *欧洲研究 (European Studies)*, 2016, No. 4, pp. 151–154; 茅银辉 (Mao Yinhui), '波兰对外关系的变化及中波关系的机遇与挑战' (Changes in Polish Foreign Relations and Opportunities and Challenges in China-Poland Relations), *现代国际关系 (Modern International Relations)*, 2016, No. 6, pp. 57–64; 刘作奎 (Liu Zuokui), '波兰的外交政策走向与中波关系', *当代世界 (Contemporary World)*, 2016, No. 7, pp. 24–27.

²⁸ 于洪君 (Yu Hongjun), op.cit.; 崔宏伟 (Cui Hongwei), op. cit.; W. Pawlak, '中国和波兰——战略合作伙伴关系新篇章' (China and Poland: New Chapter of Strategic Cooperation Partnership), *上海商业 (Shanghai Business)*, 2012, No. 1, p. 10; P.S. Hryniewicz, '波兰—中国战略伙伴关系的建立与发展', Master Degree, Beijing University of International Studies, Beijing.

²⁹ 刘作奎 (Liu Zuokui), op.cit.; 茅银辉 (Mao Yinhui), op.cit.

³⁰ 刘作奎 (Liu Zuokui), op.cit.; 茅银辉 (Mao Yinhui), op.cit.

dimension and a more pragmatic attitude towards cooperation with the biggest economies (including China), which are partially driven by Poland's domestic politics, in particular its incumbent government.³¹ More importantly, these authors highlight China's role in encouraging Poland to extend pragmatic cooperation through alignment of development strategies within '16+1' and the OBOR initiative.³²

Although Chinese observers often take a balanced position on challenges and opportunities, they generally prefer an optimistic view on the prospect of a Chinese-Polish SP. They stress that extending pragmatic cooperation between the two and more bilateral dialogues may strengthen mutual trust and accordingly helps to surmount differences in ideologies, values and narrow world views.³³ This is not unusual for Chinese commentators in reviewing China's relations with the CEE and the EU in general. For instance, even in 2006 when the EU demonstrated tough positions towards China, Chinese scholars still believed that Chinese-EU relations sooner or later 'would be back on track, due to common interests'.³⁴

Yet, one key question is whether China and Poland understand their SP in the same way. Without answering this question, one may be prone to wishful thinking on the Chinese-Polish SP. While the Chinese tend to regard the China-Poland CSP as a commitment to this relationship that should not be disturbed by ideological differences, Polish observers consider the concept of the SP as empty and not well-defined rhetoric often used by China rather than common thinking between the two countries.³⁵ Indeed, even Chinese scholars have scarcely clearly defined the Chinese-Polish SP or systematically investigated it.³⁶ Moreover, in Chinese literature on the Chinese-Polish SP, theoretical perspectives remain vague. While some authors may be inspired by IR perspectives such as Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism, they scarcely explicitly justify their analysis by engaging with existing theoretical approaches in the West or in China. Lack of clearly-defined theoretical perspectives and research design may impede effective international dialogue among scholars on this topic. From strategic narrative perspective, this article focuses on whether Poland understands its relations with China in terms of SP which China proposed.

³¹ 刘作奎 & 卡塔里娜·高里克 (Liu Zuokui, Katarzyna Golik), op.cit.; 刘作奎 (Liu Zuokui), op.cit.; 茅银辉 (Mao Yinhui), op.cit.

³² 于洪君 (Yu Hongjun), op.cit.; 崔宏伟 (Cui Hongwei), op.cit.; 茅银辉 (Mao Yinhui), op.cit.

³³ 于洪君 (Yu Hongjun), op.cit.; 崔宏伟 (Cui Hongwei), op.cit.; 茅银辉 (Mao Yinhui), op.cit.

³⁴ See X.N. Song, 'Challenges and Opportunities in EU-China relations', in R. Vogt (ed.), *Europe and China: Strategic Partners or Rivals?*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012, p. 28.

³⁵ See more details in 刘作奎 & 鞠维伟 (Liu Zuokui, Ju Weiwei), op.cit.

³⁶ Few scholars like Liu Zuokui analyzed how Polish official documents mentioned China, see 刘作奎 (Liu Zuokui), op.cit.

Analytical framework and methodology

Since the end of Cold War, different lines of thought underline the ideational dimension of international relations, including the perspectives such as constructivism, soft power and norms diffusion. While capabilities or resources of ideational influence have been discussed, the effects of such soft capabilities receive little attention. Noting the failure of the soft power analysis to ‘effectively trace or measure its impact’, some proposed the concept of strategic narrative as ‘a new means to understand soft power’.³⁷ One definition of strategic narrative is ‘a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors’.³⁸ In pursuing its interests, an international player may employ material and non-material means, such as its narratives, to influence transnational audience or other players in understanding their own interests and identities, to shape behavior of international actors and influence the structure, politics and policies of the international system.³⁹ The component parts of a strategic narrative include character or actors, setting/environment/space, conflict or action, and resolutions or suggested resolutions.⁴⁰ Narratives may exist at three inter-linked levels: international system, national and issues.⁴¹ Strategic narrative involves processes from formation and projection to reception, in which media and communication play important roles.⁴² Recent studies have discussed the employment of strategic narrative by the EU, Germany and Italy.⁴³ For instance, some suggested that terms such as human security could be used as an ‘organizing frame’ through which the EU may be able to better bestow meaning to its foreign policy integration.⁴⁴ While China’s strategic narrative is a newly emerging topic,⁴⁵ few have focused on the reception of China’s strategic narrative of SP.

³⁷ L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon, B. O’Loughlin, ‘Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power’, *Media War & Conflict*, 2014, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 70–84.

³⁸ A. Miskimmon, B. O’Loughlin, L. Roselle, ‘Strategic Narratives: A Response’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 2015, No. 3, pp. 341–344.

³⁹ A. Miskimmon, B. O’Loughlin, L. Roselle, *Forging the world: strategic narratives and international relations*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2017.

⁴⁰ L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon, B. O’Loughlin, op.cit., pp. 75–76.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 76.

⁴² A. Miskimmon, B. O’Loughlin, L. Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order (Vol. 3)*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2014.

⁴³ J. Bain, N. Chaban, ‘An Emerging EU Strategic Narrative? Twitter Communication During the EU’s Sustainable Energy Week’, *Comparative European Politics*, 2017, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 135–155; F. Coticchia, C. De Simone, ‘The War That Wasn’t There? Italy’s “Peace Mission” in Afghanistan, Strategic Narratives and Public Opinion’, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2014, Vol. 290, No. 1, pp. 99–105; I. Hertner, A. Miskimmon, ‘Germany’s Strategic Narrative of the Eurozone Crisis’, *German Politics and Society*, 2014, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 42 ff.

⁴⁴ M. Kaldor, M. Martin, S. Selchow, ‘Human Security: A New Strategic Narrative for Europe’, *International Affairs*, 2007, Vol. 83, No. 2, pp. 273–288.

⁴⁵ J.H. Zeng, ‘Constructing A “New Type of Great Power Relations”: The State of Debate in China (1998–2014)’, *British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 2016, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 422–442.

This contribution concentrates on the reception of China's strategic narrative of the SP in Poland. In strategic narrative studies, analyzing reception requires efforts to 'identify whether audiences come to understand international affairs in those terms or in what ways they differ'.⁴⁶ The full examination of Polish audience may be a huge task far beyond the scope of this article,⁴⁷ which instead narrows its aim down to identify some observable hints of Polish governmental discourse. The main task here is to examine whether Warsaw understands Chinese-Polish relations within the scope of the SP and CSP or in other ways. Specifically, this study investigates how those terms appear in Polish governmental discourse (including their frequency, context and meaning), whether other terms also used, and whether response of Polish policy makers is positive or not (negative or neutral), and in which category (support, acquiescence protest, appropriation, etc) do their responses fall into.

This article adopts a mixed-method research design,⁴⁸ combining qualitative content analysis (QCA), process tracing and critical discourse analysis (CDA). It focuses on the years after 2011 up to 1 April 2017 to examine how Polish government accepted China's narrative of SP, covering two periods of Polish governments led by the Civic Platform (PO) (2011-2015) and the Law and Justice (PiS) (2015-present) respectively. The data sets include available texts from official documents on foreign policy and official websites of President, Prime Minister and Foreign Ministry. QCA is employed⁴⁹ to investigate whether key terms (such as SP and CSP) appear in official texts and to examine their context and meanings. Process tracing entails the comparison of PO and PiS to reveal the influence of partisan factors. Drawing on the approach represented by Norman Fairclough, texts are viewed as a part of social practice involving genres (ways of acting and interacting), discourses (ways of representing the world) and styles (ways of being, or constructing identities).⁵⁰ Accordingly, CDA involves examining the internal and external relations between texts, often concerning intertextuality, interdiscursivity and recontextualisation.⁵¹ Analysis of intertextuality means 'how texts draw upon,

J.H. Zeng, Y.F. Xiao, S. Breslin, 'Securing China's Core Interests: The State of the Debate in China', *International Affairs*, 2015, Vol. 91, No. 2, pp. 245–266; B. Anny, 'The Power of Language: Globalizing "the Chinese Dream"', *Fudan Journal of the Humanities & Social Sciences*, 2015, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 533–551; F. Hartig, 'Communicating China to the World: Confucius Institutes and China's Strategic Narratives', *Politics*, 2015, Vol. 35, No. 2–4, pp. 245–258.

⁴⁶ L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin, op.cit., p. 79.

⁴⁷ For Polish public discourse on China's OBOR initiative, see M. Lubina, op.cit.

⁴⁸ A mixed method design is required to better understand whether audiences accept the narratives. For more discussion, see L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin, op.cit., pp. 78–79.

⁴⁹ E.g. H.F. Hsieh, S.E. Shannon, 'Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis', *Qualitative Health Research*, 2005, Vol. 15, No. 9, pp. 1277–1288.

⁵⁰ N. Fairclough, *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 26.

⁵¹ See discussion in T. van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*, Cary: Oxford University Press, 2008.

incorporate, recontextualise and dialogue with other texts'.⁵² Interdiscursivity refers to mix of genres, discourses and styles in a text where they are articulated together.⁵³ Recontextualisation refers to 'the appropriation of elements of one social practice within another, placing the former within the context of the latter, and transforming it in particular ways in the process'.⁵⁴

Given that this study draws on Chinese, Polish and English sources, I did manual coding with careful attention to ensure correct and proper translation between languages. In order to reduce the information distortion through translation, I used original Chinese sources when examining Chinese texts, and English version of discourses on the Polish side whenever available.

SP as a strategic narrative

Although many authors have analyzed China's SP with the EU, United States (US) and other countries, there appears to be no single agreed definition on China's SP.⁵⁵ In fact, China's strategic narrative on its partnerships is based on its broader narratives regarding the international system and China's foreign policy.⁵⁶ As early as in the 1980s, the Chinese government stated that 'peace and development are the two major issues of today's world'.⁵⁷ This narratives on international relations serves as an anchor for China's narrative regarding its foreign policy, which basically pursues a peaceful, stable, and cooperative international environment for its domestic development.⁵⁸ A full discussion on China's SP may go beyond the scope of this article. Here, I focus on its two essential connotations.

The first is the pragmatic approach. The central tenet of China's partnerships is to seek pragmatic cooperation on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence while keeping differences or disputes in ideologies, political values and cultural traditions from hampering bilateral relations. This idea has its roots in China's

⁵² N. Fairclough, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 218.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ E.g. X.W. Gu, 'China and the United States – A Partnership in Search of A Strategic Basis', *International Politik*, 2002, Vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 7–16; R. Maher, 'The Elusive EU-China Strategic Partnership', *International Affairs*, 2016, Vol. 92, No. 4, pp. 959–976; L. Yu, 'China's Strategic Partnership with Latin America: A Fulcrum in China's Rise', *International Affairs*, 2015, Vol. 91, No. 5, pp. 1047–1068.

⁵⁶ For overview see 门洪华, & 刘笑阳 (Men Honghua, Liu Xiaoyang), '中国伙伴关系战略评估与展望' (Review and Forecast of China's Partnership Strategy), *世界经济与政治 (World Economics and Politics)*, 2015, No. 2, pp. 65–95.

⁵⁷ *中国的和平发展 (China's Peaceful Development)*, Beijing: 国务院新闻办公室 (The State Council Information Office), http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/ndhf/2011/Document/1000031/1000031_1.htm (accessed on 22 May 2017).

⁵⁸ E.g. 杨洁勉 (Yang Jiemian), '改革开放 30 年的中国外交和理论创新' (Innovation in China's Diplomacy and Theory in Three Decades of Reform and Opening-up), *国际问题研究 (International Studies)*, 2008, No. 6, pp. 6–11.

philosophical tradition regarding the world, where different peoples can live together peacefully, or simply put: 'peace while different' (和而不同).⁵⁹ In 2004, China's Premier Wen gave a typical definition on China's SP when he talked about Chinese-EU CSP as the cooperation covering many areas in long term which transcends ideological difference and social systems.⁶⁰ From China's perspective, these partnerships differ from traditional alliances such as the trans-Atlantic alliance which are based on similar political values or common security threats. On the contrary, as China's top leaders stressed, 'following the general principles of non-alignment to establish possibly many friendships and forge possibly many partnership networks across the world'.⁶¹

The second is the top-down approach in planning bilateral relations. This top-down approach involves firstly setting up a long term objective or a framework for the future by proposing concepts such as 'partnership' and later filling it by adding more concrete proposals or the discourse of prospects. China is strengthening its top-down approach by proposing more Chinese initiatives to shape its external relations. For instance, during the annual EU-China Summit in 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping for the first time met EU leaders and issued the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, the first document for medium and long term-agenda in this new relationship.

Yet there are also debates on China's partnerships in terms of definitions, categories or types and criteria to assess.⁶² The lack of clear and systematic definitions and classification of various partnerships by the Chinese government leaves room for divergence in understanding and often confusion. It has become apparent that the new ideas proposed by Chinese leaders for China's strategic narratives lack precise definition and have become subject to debates among scholars and observers on the exact meanings of the proposed terms.⁶³ Meanwhile, the top-down approach may invite further discussion and even confusion on concrete meanings and implications for the proposed framework. For instance, scholars have different understandings of the China-EU partnership.⁶⁴

Chinese-Polish relations: from SP to CSP

China tends to view Poland as an important CEE country. Since the 1990s, Poland and other CEE countries have experienced changes within and outside their borders. At least two challenges have existed in China-CEE relations. One is the differences

⁵⁹ 李杰 (Li Jie), '中国传统文化与中国外交理论建设' (Chinese Traditional Culture and Chinese Diplomatic Theoretical Construction), *外交评论 (Diplomacy Review)*, 2006, No. 92, pp. 36–40.

⁶⁰ X.N. Song, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

⁶¹ '中央外事工作会议在京举行' (Central Foreign Affairs Meeting in Beijing), *人民日报 (People's Daily)*, 30 November 2014.

⁶² 门洪华, 刘笑阳 (Men Honghua, Liu Xiaoyang), *op.cit.*

⁶³ J.H. Zeng, *op.cit.*; J.H. Zeng, Y.F. Xiao, S. Breslin, *op.cit.*

⁶⁴ E.g. R. Maher, *op.cit.*; P. Taneja, 'China-Europe Relations: The Limits of Strategic Partnership', *International Politics*, 2010, Vol. 47, No. 3–4, pp. 371–387.

in the political, social and economic situation between China and these countries. Another is the low level of bilateral relations. Since the mid-1990s, China has tried to develop bilateral pragmatic cooperation with individual CEE countries without being trapped or hindered by these differences.⁶⁵ In 2012 the Chinese government firstly proposed a new concept of CEE countries which comprised of 16 countries of the region.⁶⁶ Starting from this concept, China promoted the 16+1 framework to add a multilateral dimension to its relations with the 16 CEE countries. Meanwhile, China continues to develop its bilateral relations with each CEE country, which could be identified at different levels ranging from diplomatic relations to CSP (See Table 2). China seemingly views Poland, Hungary, Serbia and the Czech Republic as more important partners than other in the region. Through bilateral visits, summits and publications in these countries,⁶⁷ China is promoting its strategic narrative of SP to encourage pragmatic cooperation and the top-down approach. China's approach has received positive response from Viktor Orbán's Government in Hungary.⁶⁸ In May 2017, China and Hungary announced the upgrade of their relations to the comprehensive strategic partnership.⁶⁹ In spite of differing voices on China policy in the Czech government, Czech President Milos Zeman is inclined to take a pragmatic attitude towards Czech-Chinese relations, in contrast to his predecessors.⁷⁰

Table 2. Five levels of relations between China and CEE countries

Comprehensive strategic partnership	Poland, Hungary, Serbia
Strategic partnership	Czech Republic
Comprehensive friendly cooperative partnership	Romania, Bulgaria
comprehensive partnership	Croatia
Other relations	Other CEE Countries

Source: the official website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/> (accessed 15 on December 2017).

⁶⁵ In 1995 the former Chinese President Jiang Zemin announced four principles to promote pragmatic cooperation with CEE countries when he visited Budapest. See more in 朱晓中 (Zhu Xiaozhong), '中国—中东欧合作: 特点与改进方向' (China-CEE Cooperation: Features and Improvement Directions), *国际问题研究 (International Studies)*, 2017, No. 3, pp. 41–50.

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ For instance, Chinese President Xi Jinping published a signed article on leading Polish newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* under the title of 'Setting Sail for Full Speed Progress of China-Poland Friendship' on 17 June 2016, ahead of his state visit to the European country, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/17/c_135445947.htm (accessed on 25 January 2017).

⁶⁸ Hungary is the first CEE country which signed bilateral papers and established working mechanisms with China to promote the OBOR initiative. See more in X. Chen, op.cit.

⁶⁹ http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-05/13/content_5193408.htm (accessed on 12 December 2017).

⁷⁰ 刘作奎 (Liu Zuokui), *中国与捷克战略伙伴关系: 现状、前景、问题及对策 (The Strategic Partnership between China and Czech Republic: Status Quo, Prospects, Problems and Policy Suggestions)*, Beijing: 中国社会科学出版社 (China Social Sciences Publishing House), 2016, pp. 23–32.

Chinese leaders have expressed this pragmatic position in joint documents with Poland. The 2011 Joint Statement claimed that the two sides should 'transcend differences in social institutions and ideologies and respect and support each side's development route as well as interior and exterior policies based on domestic conditions'. The 2016 Joint Communiqué stressed the spirit of 'win-win cooperation'. In 2016 Chinese President Xi published one article in a Polish newspaper, claiming that the two states should 'accord each other understanding and support on issues of core interests and major concern'.⁷¹

China is encouraging more top-down elements in framing this bilateral relationship. As intensely reflected in President Xi's newspaper article in 2016, China tends to stress the importance of viewing this bilateral relationship from the 'strategic and long term perspective' to 'ensure steady and sound growth of Chinese-Polish relations in the coming years'.⁷² At the level of strategic and economic cooperation, China encourages the integration of development strategies between both countries, including bilateral cooperation planning, preparing major cooperation projects and early harvest on OBOR. In addition, as the name of CSP implies, China expects to develop relations in more fields such as people-to-people exchanges, culture, education, tourism and local cooperation in order to maintain friendship between young people.

China also stresses the international dimension of its CSP with Poland. In China's narrative, a good CSP with Poland should also be relevant on three levels: CEE, EU and the world. China views the CEE as the 'most promising area' in Europe⁷³ and Poland as one of the leading CEE countries.⁷⁴ Chinese-Polish CSP plays important symbolic roles in China's relations with the CEE as a whole. Furthermore, China views Poland as an important EU member state that should play a crucial role in integrating China's international initiatives with Europe. On the global level, China appreciates Poland's support for its initiatives in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and OBOR, since Poland is one of first CEE countries which joined the AIIB (Poland signed in 2015) and signed a MoU on the Belt and Road initiative with China during 4th 16+1 summit (November 2015).

Poland's perspective: findings

This section will present the most important findings, illustrated by key policy documents, such as the Polish Foreign Policy Priorities for 2012–2016,⁷⁵ Polish Foreign

⁷¹ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/17/c_135445947.htm (accessed on 25 January 2017).

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ '习近平同波兰总统杜达举行会晤' (Xi Jinping Met Polish President Duda), *新华社 (Xinhua News Agency)*, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-06/20/c_1119071755.htm (accessed on 11 December 2016).

⁷⁴ President Xi sees Poland as the bellwether of the CEECs, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/17/c_135445947.htm (accessed on 25 January 2017).

⁷⁵ This is a key document issued in March 2012 presenting the first multiannual strategy of Polish foreign and European policy since 1989. See <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/d31571cf-d24f-4479-af09-c9a46cc85cf6:JCR> (accessed on 22 March 2017).

Policy Strategy 2017–2021,⁷⁶ and the Annual Addresses by Polish Foreign Ministers presented to the Council of Ministers (2002-2018)⁷⁷ as well as relevant news posted on the official webs of Polish President and Prime Minister.

Key terms

Key terms such as SP and CSP are not as widely used in Polish official discourse to frame relations as in that of Chinese official discourse. Firstly, a delay can be seen from the bilateral announcement of the terms to their appearance in the Annual Addresses (see Table 3). For instance, when mentioning Chinese-Polish relations, Polish Foreign Ministers have not referred to the term SP until 2013, two years after that it was announced. In addition, the Polish Foreign Policy Priorities for 2012–2016 did not mention the Chinese-Polish SP, which had been announced five months prior. Furthermore, the term CSP, which was announced in 2016 in a bilateral document, has so far not appeared in Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017–2021 or the Annual Addresses during 2016–2018.

Table 3. The references to China-Poland relations in each side's official documents

	China	Poland
Before 2004	friendly cooperation	economic and trade partner (2002,2003)
2004-2010	friendly cooperative partnership	leading trade partner in Asia(2004) economic and trade partners(2006,2007) new power (2008, 2010), one of terrorism hit countries like Poland (2009),
2011-2015	strategic partnership	biggest business partner in Asia (2011) strategic partnership (2013-2015)
2016-	comprehensive strategic partnership	strategic partnership (2016,2017) principal partner in Asia (2018)

Source: author's own compilation. On the Chinese side, documents refer to its joint statements/communiqués with Poland. On the Polish side, documents refer to Annual Addresses (2002-2018).

Secondly, Polish policy makers did not frequently use the key terms. For instance, the Polish President's official website contains 27 news and galleries on Chinese-Polish relations (including 18 during 2011–2016), of which only eight explicitly refer to SP,

⁷⁶ This important document adopted by the Council of Ministers is to guide Polish foreign policy in the coming years. See <http://www.ms.gov.pl/resource/0c98c3b2-9c5d-4c42-8761-f7827134ee76:JCR> (accessed on 2 April 2018).

⁷⁷ These are the most important and systematic governmental texts on Polish foreign policy. The Addresses during 2002–2017 are available online at http://www.ms.gov.pl/en/foreign_policy/goals_of_foreign_policy/annual_address_2011/ (accessed on 2 April 2018).

and four to CSP.⁷⁸ The Polish Prime Minister's official website contain 88 news stories on China until March 2018, of which only two in 2017 explicitly refer to Chinese-Polish CSP.⁷⁹ The frequency with which the terms SP and CSP are used by Polish governmental websites to describe Chinese-Polish relations are much lower than those of the Chinese Central government's official website.⁸⁰ In addition, while the official website of China's Foreign Ministry (updated till January 2017) clearly referred to the Chinese-Polish CSP,⁸¹ its Polish counterpart only mentioned their political relations with China until 2012.⁸²

Third, Polish leaders also used other terms to describe Chinese-Polish relations (see Table 3). On the one hand, in the Annual Addresses, Polish Foreign Ministers began to explicitly use SP starting in 2013, in place of other terms such as the 'biggest business partner in Asia' (2011). This implies that to an extent the Polish government views SP as an alternative term in its official discourse to describe Chinese-Polish relations. On the other hand, Poland's top leaders tend to use other labels, such as [Poland's] 'pivotal partner' or 'natural, attractive and reliable' partner of China.⁸³

Frames

A discourses analysis of policy documents and online texts helps us understand how Poland perceives itself, how China is being represented and how interaction between them looks like. Poland evidently identifies itself as part of Europe and has adopted European perspective to present its foreign policy. The ideological dimension is not a major factor in Chinese-Polish relations, since ideological differences between the two countries does not seem to be a prime concern for Warsaw. For instance, the official webpage of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs states 'no disagreements in present

⁷⁸ www.president.pl/en/news. For the latest news mentioning CSP, see 'President sends congratulatory message to China's Xi Jinping', Saturday, 17 March 2018, <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,708,president-sends-congratulatory-message-to-chinas-xi-jinping.html> (accessed on 26 March 2018).

⁷⁹ 'Prime Minister Beata Szydło met with the chairman of the Chinese parliament', 13 July 2017, <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/aktualnosci/premier-beata-szydlo-spotkala-sie-z-przewodniczaczym-chinskiego-parlamentu.html> (accessed on 6 April 2018); 'Beata Szydło Prime Minister in Beijing: Poland Has High Expectations of the Project and Belt Road', 12 May 2017, <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/aktualnosci/premier-beata-szydlo-w-pekinie-polska-wiaze-duze-oczekiwania-z-projektem-pasa.html> (accessed on 6 April 2018).

⁸⁰ The official web of the State Council (in Chinese) contains over 1500 items on Poland, including about 200 items mentioning 'China-Poland Strategic Partnership'. See <http://www.gov.cn/> (accessed on 2 April 2018).

⁸¹ http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/oz_678770/1206_679012/1206x0_679014/ (accessed on 10 June 2017).

⁸² Future research may examine whether this is mainly due to technical reasons such as delay in updating that website.

⁸³ E.g. 'Prime Minister of Beata Szydło: We have many projects with China business, we would like to jointly implement', <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/aktualnosci/wizyta-przewodniczaczego-chinskiej-republiki-ludowej-w-polsce.html> (accessed on 2 April 2018). See more details in next paragraphs.

political relations and bilateral cooperation focuses on economy as well as cultural and academic exchanges'.⁸⁴ Although this is diplomatic rhetoric, it seemingly meets Chinese expectations for transcending differences and drawing attention to pragmatic cooperation.

A corpus analysis of 'China' as a key word in the Annual Addresses and Polish Foreign Policy Priorities for 2012–2016 and the Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017–2021 reveals its changing image in Polish foreign relations. China was represented in terms of geographical, international status relative to the EU and common policy of the EU. Firstly, China was viewed geographically as a country in Asia and the Pacific, a distant non-European state and market in the Far East and in Southern sphere to be covered in Poland's non-European dimension of foreign policy and Polish foreign economic policy.⁸⁵ Secondly, from the viewpoint of international status, China was noted in Annual Addresses as one of 'two supra-regional powers' in Asia, including India (2006), one of the rising 'new powers on the world stage' (2008 and 2010), a 'supra-regional power' and one of the 'non-European powers' (2013), one of the 'greatest world economies' and 'global power' (2015) alongside the US (2016 and 2017). Thirdly, Poland pursues joining and influencing the EU's external relations with China. China is regarded as a country cooperating with the EU (2002), being important to common European foreign policy (2008) and EU's SP and 'global engagement' (2011). For Poland, China is viewed as the 'biggest economic partner'⁸⁶ or 'principal partner' in Asia (2018). Yet the trade deficit between China and Poland is also mentioned (2007). Poland's relations with China are of importance for the success of its non-European policy (2015). The 2018 Address highlighted Poland's 'increasingly prominent role in cargo transport between China and Europe'.

Since 2013, the Addresses started to highlight the perspective of CEE and the 16+1 framework. Poland's perspective on Chinese-Polish relations also shifted. The 2014 Address explicitly spoke of the 'rejuvenation' of Chinese-Polish relations and China-CEE region relations and justified Poland's leading role in promoting cooperation by noting the increased Chinese investment in Poland. The 2015 Address linked the Chinese-Polish relations with enhancing the 16+1 mechanism and presenting more details on the political and economic benefits to justify Poland's plans and efforts to do so. The 2016 Address continued to situate Chinese-Polish relations 'also in the framework of 16+1 initiative', and anticipated that China's 'regional and global initiatives', such as the OBOR and the AIIB, would be beneficial for Poland's economy. The 2017 Address expressed confidence with Chinese-Polish relations through further cooperation in the 16+1 format, including through the Secretariat for Maritime Affairs based in Poland.

⁸⁴ http://www.mfa.gov.pl/en/foreign_policy/other_continents/asia_pacific/bilateral_cooperation/china_1.jsessionid=7D4646BF080F8B631189067606B1A09B.cmsap1p (accessed on 11 June 2017).

⁸⁵ See the Annual Addresses in 2002 and 2003, and the Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017–2021.

⁸⁶ See the Polish Foreign Policy Priorities for 2012–2016.

Warsaw seemingly differs from Beijing in understanding the nature of their SP. In China's discourse, its relations with Poland have already been updated as CSP since 2016, which, just as the name implies, should be 'comprehensive' in cooperation, ranging from building mutual political trust, practical cooperation, to traditional friendship and people-to-people ties.⁸⁷ In contrast, Warsaw would understand this SP/CSP as:

- China is viewed as a non-European emerging power and strategic partner of Poland in Asia alongside Japan, India and Korea.
- The centerpiece of the Chinese-Polish SP are economic ties. This SP is often mentioned in the context of, through the perspective of, and explained/justified immediately by highlighting economic concerns such as trade, markets, investments and business cooperation. For instance, bilateral presidential visits between China and Poland 'were momentous on a practical level, especially in economic terms'.⁸⁸
- This SP is generally linked to China-EU relations and recently to the 16+1 cooperation. Sometimes, it also bears significance at international and global levels.

Attitudes

The changing attitudes in Warsaw towards Chinese-Polish relations could be identified, from negative towards neutral and even positive. A typical example is the change towards framing Poland's external relations in the Annual Addresses. Against the background of 'rivalry on the global stage', China was once viewed as a rising non-European economy, which is in competition with European states (2005). Stating the possible 'worst-case scenario' of the EU and the West, the then-Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski was warned that 'Russia fills the void left by the West in the East; China fills the void in Asia' (2012), implying China as an assertive power which might threaten Europe. Attitudes towards China have recently begun to shift towards neutrality and on occasions are even positive. For instance, China was represented as one emerging economy in Asia, bringing challenges and opportunities to the EU, towards which Poland should influence EU policy to enhance cooperation mainly in the economic field.⁸⁹ The 2017 Address views China as an opportunity for Poland, particularly in the economic field. To express confidence in the future Chinese-Polish cooperation, that Address even quoted a Chinese saying: 'A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.' This is the first time a Polish Foreign Minister has quoted a Chinese saying since 2002, implying a favorable gesture towards China. While the 2018 Address noted the trade deficit between Poland and China, it stressed the prospects of Poland-China ties in trade, tourists and local cooperation, and Poland's important role in connecting Europe and China.

⁸⁷ http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-06/17/c_135445947.htm (accessed on 25 January 2017).

⁸⁸ See Annual Address in 2017.

⁸⁹ See the Polish Foreign Policy Priorities 2012–2016.

President Bronislaw Komorowski (2011–2015) and President Andrzej Duda (2015–present) seemingly share an understanding of and support for the Chinese-Polish SP or CSP in economic terms. In 2012 President Komorowski asked his government to ‘build a comprehensive strategy towards China to think about drawing benefits from Chinese development’.⁹⁰ When he summed up his term, he ‘listed China, Turkey and South Korea as some of the countries he had visited and with which Polish entrepreneurs had then signed contracts worth billions of zlotys’,⁹¹ implying that he understood the Chinese-Polish SP mainly in terms of economic cooperation. Similarly, President Duda also framed his first visit to China in November 2015 as ‘an important opportunity for meetings regarding economic matters’.⁹² Briefing on the Chinese top leader’s official visit to Poland in June 2016, his office announced the main topics as ‘opening the Chinese market to Polish products and the development of trade and infrastructure investments’.⁹³ At the press conference after the meeting, he described Chinese President Xi’s visit as having indicated ‘a clear intensification’ of Chinese-Polish relations ‘at the diplomatic and economic levels’.⁹⁴

Yet President Duda seemingly would brand China-Poland relation with his style. He has not adhered to using terms such as SP or CSP. For instance, in an interview with *China Daily*, one of China’s major newspapers, on the eve of Chinese President Xi’s official visit to Poland in 2016, Duda stressed the ‘long-lasting and fruitful partnerships’ between Polish companies and Chinese firms instead of mentioning the Chinese-Polish SP.⁹⁵ He welcomed China’s OBOR initiative and highlighted Poland’s geographical advantage in connecting China and Europe. In 2015, when he visited China, Duda identified Poland as ‘a serious partner and China’s door to Europe’⁹⁶ and ‘China’s important, key partner in Europe, a place from where Chinese economic influence will

⁹⁰ ‘Poland Needs Comprehensive Strategy Towards China’, 9 January 2012, <http://www.president.pl/en/president-komorowski/news/art,248,poland-needs-comprehensive-strategy-towards-china.html> (accessed on 25 May 2017).

⁹¹ ‘President Sums up His Term in Office’, 15 April 2015, <http://www.president.pl/en/president-komorowski/news/art,812,president-sums-up-his-term-in-office.html> (accessed on 25 May 2017).

⁹² ‘President Hopes For Continued Partnership With China’, Wednesday, 25 November 2015, <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,70,president-hopes-for-continued-partnership-with-china.html> (accessed on 25 May 2017).

⁹³ ‘Chinese Leader Pays Official Visit To Poland’, 19 June 2016, <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,189,chinese-leader-pays-official-visit-to-poland.html> (accessed on 28 May 2017).

⁹⁴ ‘President Duda Hopes Poland Will Become China’s Gateway To Europe’, 20 June 2016, <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,191,president-duda-hopes-poland-will-become-chinas-gateway-to-europe.html> (accessed on 28 May 2017).

⁹⁵ ‘President For “China Daily”: We Are Developing Fast; So Is China’, 20 June 2016, <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,192,president-for-china-daily-we-are-developing-fast-so-is-china.html> (accessed on 28 May 2017).

⁹⁶ ‘“We Hope For More Chinese Enterprise”’, 23 November 2015, <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,68,we-hope-for-more-chinese-enterprise.html> (accessed on 29 May 2017).

beam across the European Union',⁹⁷ and would hope a 'continued partnership with China'.⁹⁸ In 2016, after the announcement of the Chinese-Polish CSP, he told the press 'I hope that Poland will become a gateway to Europe for China, not only in symbolic terms, but primarily in actual economic terms, that joint investment projects will be carried out'.⁹⁹ He seemingly pays more attention to substantive cooperation through taking maximum advantage for Poland in Chinese-European economic relations than to rhetoric or symbolic terms to describe Chinese-Polish bilateral relations. For instance, he highlights the planned Central Transportation Port in central Poland which is important for Poland to combine China's OBOR initiative and the development of European infrastructure.¹⁰⁰ He has not attached as much significance to discerning the difference between SP and CSP as China when evaluating external relations.¹⁰¹

Concluding remarks

The above findings bring us hints of whether Poland understands its relations with China in terms of the SP. Firstly, on a rhetorical level there are three features – delay in using key terms, their low frequency of appearance, and alternative terms' appearance – implying Warsaw's limited endorsement of key terms such as SP or CSP. Secondly, Warsaw seemingly downplays ideological differences and highlights economic ties with China as the centerpiece of Chinese-Polish SP/CSP. Thirdly, while Warsaw holds more favorable attitudes towards China as an important international player than ever before, the current Polish government urges more substantive cooperation, particularly in the economic field, than rhetoric or symbolic gestures. Therefore, it would be too early to claim that Warsaw tends to accept China's narrative on their relations.

Warsaw's partial support of China's narrative on their relations implies its mixed position in developing relations with the latter. On the one hand, by limiting its major

⁹⁷ 'President Meets China's PM And Attends CEE-China Economic Summit', 24 November 2015, <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,69,president-meets-chinas-pm-and-attends-cee-china-economic-summit.html> (accessed on 29 May 2017).

⁹⁸ <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,70,president-hopes-for-continued-partnership-with-china.html> (accessed on 25 May 2017).

⁹⁹ <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,191,president-duda-hopes-poland-will-become-chinas-gateway-to-europe.html> (accessed on 28 May 2017).

¹⁰⁰ 'President for greater Polish presence at global sessions', Wednesday, 24 January 2018, <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,656,president-for-greater-polish-presence-at-global-sessions.html> (accessed on 2 April 2018); 'President to take part in Davos Economic Forum, Tuesday', 23 January 2018, <http://www.president.pl/en/news/art,655,president-to-take-part-in-davos-economic-forum.html> (accessed on 2 April 2018).

¹⁰¹ Beata Szydło, then Polish Premier adopts similar positions. For instance at the Belt and Road forum for international cooperation in Beijing, May 2017, her central message to international audience is that Poland will strengthen its economic relations with China. See Beata Szydło prime minister in Beijing: Poland considered as a serious economic partner, <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/aktualnosci/premier-beata-szydlo-w-pekinie-polska-brana-pod-uwage-jako-powazny-partner.html> (accessed on 26 May 2017).

concerns to diplomatic and economic aspects, Warsaw echoes Beijing's suggestions to develop pragmatic cooperation. China's pragmatism in its foreign policy tends to transcend ideological differences and encourage substantive cooperation, particularly in the economic field. To avoid irritating Beijing, Warsaw downplays the ideological differences between the two countries. More importantly, Poland's one prime concern is to boost its growth by extending economic relations with non-European countries. One leading Polish think tank concluded that the strategic partnership 'serves as an indispensable instrument for the implementation of economic cooperation, which is Poland's main priority in relations with China'.¹⁰² Therefore, both sides have consensus on pragmatic cooperation, particularly in economic field.

On the other hand, by limiting its understanding and support towards the Chinese-Polish SP/CSP merely to diplomatic and economic aspects, Warsaw demonstrates its hesitation and reluctance in accepting China's suggestion to increase top-down elements in defining their relations. Warsaw's prime concern with Beijing is economic cooperation, not closer political or security cooperation which Poland is pursuing with its European and Western allies. Even in the economic field, Warsaw urges more substantial meanings and tangible results of this relationship rather than symbolic labels in describing it. Therefore, Warsaw's understanding of the Chinese-Polish SP/CSP is not as 'comprehensive' and symbolic as what Beijing would expect following the top-down perspective.

Their asymmetrical interests and understandings of the SP reflect deep differences and gaps between Beijing and Warsaw which cannot be easily overcome or ignored. This is not surprising. Scholars have recognized the difficulty of narrowing down gaps between China and the EU in defining their strategic partnership.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, while China may not develop subtle approaches towards specific CEE countries, the latter adopt varied stances towards China. For instance, Budapest seemingly plays more active roles than Warsaw in taking the lead in supporting China's initiatives on 16+1 and the OBOR. In the past several years, the Czech Republic apparently experienced a more dramatic shift than Poland in preventing ideological and political differences from lifting its relations with China. Further research may investigate to what extent the case of Poland differs from other countries in the CEE and how the potential competition in strategic narratives between China and others such as the EU and US may influence the behavior of these countries.

Poland has much potential to play important roles in promoting substantial cooperation in the OBOR. Warsaw has demonstrated its ambition to lead the OBOR cooperation in infrastructure connectivity in the CEE, which is relatively more feasible area in all of five types of connectivity. President Duda has stressed that Poland should

¹⁰² J. Szczudlik-Tatar, 'China's Charm Offensive...', *op.cit.*; *idem*, 'Poland-China Strategic...', *op.cit.*; *idem*, 'Regional Cooperation Key...', *op.cit.*

¹⁰³ See X.N. Song, *op.cit.*, pp. 30–32.

be 'a gateway to the EU for China'. In particular, besides the existing Chengdu-Europe Express Rail through Lodz, Warsaw is planning the Central Transportation Port in central Poland to enhance Poland's status as the hub of the Silk Road in Europe. Poland can also promote the synthesis of the OBOR with the Three Seas Initiative and other projects to enhance cooperation among CEE countries in energy, transport and infrastructure development.¹⁰⁴ In addition, Poland's status in facilitating trade, financial and people-to-people ties between China and the CEE through 16+1 mechanisms is prominent as well. Comparatively, Warsaw's role in policy synthesis between China and the CEE in the OBOR is more modest due to its understanding of China-Poland CSP which is limited to economic and diplomatic aspects.

Within the framework of the CSP, China-Poland relationship is stable and developing. On one hand, their differences in defining the CSP are likely to impose constraints on their relations outside of economic field. Indeed, China-Poland ties remain obviously thin on issues such as security, European geopolitics and global governance. Besides, their differences in culture, political values and national interests can sometimes be stressed by some political actors, within and outside their borders, to distract governmental efforts to develop their CSP. Warsaw and Beijing need to find ways to better cope with obstacles in developing their relations. On the other hand, China and Poland are enhancing their relations through dialogues and cooperation. Their increasingly strengthened ties in economic, cultural and people-to-people sectors, from national to local, from bilateral to multilateral, serve the interests of both sides as both need international cooperation to better achieve vibrant social and economic growth, and their high standing in the world. In other words, the two do share common ground in pragmatic cooperation to boost their own economic and social development.

¹⁰⁴ See the Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017–2021, pp. 18–19.