

China's Narratives on Strategic Partnership and the Responses of Poland and Hungary

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The relations between Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) and China are apparently gaining momentum, with Greece joining their cooperation platform in April 2019. Some scholars have discussed the impact of China–CEEC cooperation on Europe and broader regions. Yet there is one basic question that deserves more attention, namely about how China and the CEEC themselves understand their relations. In recent years, China has established various partnerships with the CEEC, including comprehensive strategic partnerships (CSP) with Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Serbia. One question that remains unanswered is to what extent these countries and China understand CSPs in the same way. To address this question from the perspective of a strategic narrative, this article updates the case of Poland based on previous research, and presents the new case of Hungary. The findings indicate that the mixed responses of both Poland and Hungary regarding China's narrative about the CSP in each case reflect a limited consensus between them in defining and understanding their relations.

Keywords: strategic narrative, strategic partnership, China, Poland, Hungary

Introduction

The year 2019 was a special one for the relations between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC). It was the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and some of the CEEC, including Poland and Hungary. China has upgraded its relations with Poland, Hungary, and Serbia to comprehensive strategic partnerships (CSPs), the top ranking of China's bilateral relations with the CEEC.¹ China has also enhanced ties with the CEEC within the framework of China–CEEC cooperation since 2012 and the Belt and Road Initiative

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¹ From China's perspective, its relations with the CEEC are at various stages, from low levels such as ordinary diplomatic relations to high levels, such as a strategic partnership (SP) and a comprehensive strategic partnership (CSP).

(BRI) proposed in 2013. In April 2019, Greece joined the China–CEEC cooperation arrangement, lifting it from the 16+1 to the 17+1². Thus, China–CEEC ties are apparently gaining momentum. Observers focusing on these developments are prone to be optimistic about China–CEEC cooperation.

However, there are also good reasons for academic debate about China–CEEC ties. First, given the differences between China and the CEEC in many areas, including culture, political and social values, and economic and geopolitical conditions, how these differences will influence their cooperation remains an open question. Besides, given the differences among the CEEC, these countries probably differ in understanding their bilateral relations with China. Furthermore, the CEEC are facing influences from great powers, such as the European Union (EU), the United States (US), and Russia. In particular, since 2018, the Trump Administration has launched trade frictions with China, the EU, and other countries. The CEEC are facing challenges in keeping a balance between safeguarding their national interests and developing relations with different powers. Their choices depend heavily on how they define and compare their respective relations with the USA, the EU, China, and others. Thus, it is possible that while China attaches great significance to the CSP, the CEEC do not value the concept in the same way.

There is little literature on one basic research question: to what extent do China and the CEEC achieve consensus in defining and understanding their relations? It remains unclear whether they are on the same page when talking about the nature and scope of their relations. For example, earlier research involving a case study on Poland suggested that the Polish government differed from the Chinese government in its understanding of their CSP.³ Drawing on that previous research, this article aims to address this basic question from a strategic narrative perspective. It updates the case of Poland and adds the case of Hungary. From China’s perspective, the two countries are important due to their leading roles in China’s economic relations with the CEEC (see Table 1).⁴ Besides, they are two of only four CEEC which have CSPs with China.⁵ These two cases are promising in illustrating the unique situations of the two countries.⁶

² The China–CEEC cooperation was initially known as the 16+1, in which 16 refers to sixteen CEEC and 1 to China. For official information on the 17+1 cooperation, see: <http://www.china-ceec.org/>.

³ H. Yuan, ‘China’s strategic narrative and challenges: The case of Poland’, *Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations*, 2018, Vol. 54, No.2, pp. 121-142.

⁴ Nevertheless, compared with the EU, the CEEC as a whole remain relatively small in China’s economic ties with Europe.

⁵ If Greece is included in the CEEC, then there are four CEEC which have established a CSP with China: Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Serbia.

⁶ For instance, the ruling parties in both countries received warnings from the EU against violating shared values, such as the rule of law. The author is thankful to anonymous reviewers for pointing out this factor in research on the two countries. More details on the case selection of this study can be found in the section on Methodology.

Table 1. China's economic ties with the EU, Poland, and Hungary (million \$, 2017) as well as some common features of the Visegrad Group (V4) and the broader CEEC.

	EU	Poland	Hungary
Total Export–Import Volume	756,106.75	21,226.56	10,126.57
Exports to China	327,131.36	3,353.51	4,077.22
Imports from China	428,975.40	17,873.05	6,049.35
China's Turnover of contracted projects	9,316.17	9.66	33.90
Amount of foreign direct investment actually used in China	8,836.19	2.89	1.48

Source: Data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China. See: <http://data.stats.gov.cn/>.

Literature on the China–CEEC Relations

In the past decade, China and the CEEC countries began to recognize the increasing significance of each other in their own external relations⁷. The existing academic literature has mainly covered topics such as the history and current development of China–CEEC relations, from sub-national and national levels to higher levels such as the 17+1 cooperation, China–EU relations, and the BRI.⁸ One popular topic concerns economic issues such as trade, investment, infrastructure, and energy.⁹ Another

⁷ M. Kaczmarek and J. Jakóbski, 'China on Central-Eastern Europe: '16+1' as seen from Beijing', *OSW Commentary*, 2015, No. 166; J. Szczudlik and J. Szczudlik-Tatar, 'Coming out of the shadows: The Polish perspective on China–Central and Eastern Europe relations', *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, 2015, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 49-59.

⁸ J. Zofka, P. Vámos and S. Urbansky, 'Beyond the Kremlin's reach? Eastern Europe and China in the Cold War era', *Cold War History*, 2018, No. 3, pp. 251-256; M. K. Gnoinska, 'Promoting the 'China Way' of communism in Poland and beyond during the Sino-Soviet Split: The case of Kazimierz Mijal', *Cold War History*, 2018, No. 3, pp. 343-359; W. Song, 'China's Long March to Central and Eastern Europe', *European Review*, 2018, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 755-766; T. Kamiński, 'What are the factors behind the successful EU–China cooperation on the subnational level? Case study of the Lodzkie region in Poland', *Asia Europe Journal*, 2019, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 227-242; R. Fürst and G. Pleschová, 'Czech and Slovak relations with China: Contenders for China's favour', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2010, Vol. 62, No. 8, pp. 1363-1381; S. Zwart, *The limits of EU external relations focusing on the 16+1 initiative with the People's Republic of China*, BS thesis, University of Twente, 2019; Z. Liu, 'The role of Central and Eastern Europe in the building of silk road economic belt', *China International Studies*, 2014, No. 47, pp. 18-32; G. C. Dumitrescu, 'Central and Eastern European Countries focus on the silk road economic belt', *Global Economic Observer*, 2015, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 186-197; A. Vangeli, '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. In addition, there are books, reports, and working papers on the China–CEEC relations published by the China-CEE Institute. See: <https://china-cee.eu/working-paper/#>.

⁹ T. Matura, 'The Pattern of Chinese Investments in Central Europe', *International Journal of Business Insights & Transformation*, 2012, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 104-109; A. Élétő and Á. Szunomar, 'Chinese investment and trade-strengthening ties with Central and Eastern Europe', *International Journal of Business and Management*, 2016, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 24-48; A. Szunomár, A. McCaleb and X. Chen, 'Economic relations between China and Central and Eastern Europe: Trade and investment issues', in W. Song (ed.), *China's Relations with Central and Eastern Europe*, London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 48-65; T. Matura, 'China–CEE

topic relates to the motivations and impact of the China–CEEC cooperation.¹⁰ From the perspective of geopolitics, many European scholars tend to believe that the China–CEEC cooperation might have a negative impact on the EU and its western member states due to China’s regional diplomacy and the creation of divisions and even “Trojan horses” within the EU.¹¹ Yet case studies of Chinese firms’ investment in the CEEC have indicated that these firms are “more motivated by market access than by technology or management assistance”, or preferences for certain political regimes.¹² Therefore, if the China–CEEC cooperation is focused mainly within economic fields, it is possible to exaggerate a significant impact in the political and security dimensions, though an economic clout has the potential to turn into a political influence.

One basic question is about how China and individual CEEC understand their bilateral relations, in particular the CSP between China and some of the CEEC. The existing literature on the China–CEEC relations has paid insufficient attention to this question. Hypothetically, after all, it is possible that China and individual CEEC have not achieved a consensus in defining their relationship in terms of its nature, scope, and priorities. It is also possible that individual CEEC differ in understanding their bilateral relations with China. Thus, it would be questionable to presume that China and these countries have reached a consensus in defining their relations at the bilateral level and, consequently, to believe that their relations are strong enough to have a substantial impact on the EU.

While the existing literature in English has included some interesting discussions, the above question requires richer and more direct answers. Some studies have examined the Chinese changing perceptions of Central Europe¹³ and the China–CEEC relations

Trade, Investment and Politics’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2019, Vol. 71, No. 3, pp. 388-407; R. Q. Turcsányi, ‘Central European attitudes towards Chinese energy investments: The cases of Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic’, *Energy Policy*, 2017, Vol. 101, pp. 711-722; K. Palonka, ‘Economic and trade relations between Poland and China since 2004’, *Asia Europe Journal*, 2010, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 369-378; T. De Castro, J. Vlčková and 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.

¹⁰ A. McCaleb and Á. Szunomár, ‘Chinese foreign direct investment in central and Eastern Europe: An institutional perspective’, in J. Drahokoupil (ed.), *Chinese investment in Europe: Corporate strategies and labour relations*, Brussels: ETUI, 2017, pp. 121-140; E. Sali, ‘16+1 Initiative in China–EU Relations: ‘Golden Opportunity’ or ‘Divide and Rule’’, *China-CEE Institute Working Paper*, 2018, No. 25, pp. 1-12, https://china-cee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Work_paper-201825.pdf (accessed on 20 November 2019).

¹¹ G. Pleschová, ‘China’s engagement in Central and Eastern Europe: regional diplomacy in pursuit of China’s interests’, *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, 2015, Vol. 24, No. 03, pp. 15-25; R. Turcsányi, ‘Central and Eastern Europe’s courtship with China: Trojan horse within the EU’, European Institute for Asian Studies, *EU-Asia at a Glance*, January 2014; J. M. Pepe, ‘China’s Inroads into Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe: Implications for Germany and the EU’, *DGAP-Analyse*, 3, Berlin: Forschungsinstitut der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V., <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-56045-3> (accessed on 11 October 2019).

¹² W. Jacoby, ‘Different cases, different faces: Chinese investment in Central and Eastern Europe’, *Asia Europe Journal*, 2014, Vol. 12, No. 1-2, pp. 199-214.

¹³ R. Turcsányi, R. Qiaoan and Z. Kříž, *Coming from nowhere: the Chinese perception of the concept of Central Europe*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014.

transforming from “old comrades” to new partners.¹⁴ Some Chinese scholars tend to stress pragmatic cooperation in their partnerships.¹⁵ There are also studies on how the CEEC view China and their relations.¹⁶ While China proposed cooperation initiatives to Poland,¹⁷ the perception of China and its initiatives in Poland still depends partially on the substantial cooperation between these nations, including the Chengdu–Łódź rail connections.¹⁸ One study on Serbia's perceptions of China indicates that the latter is viewed as neither a threat nor an opportunity.¹⁹ Another article studied how Czech university students view the rise of China.²⁰

To date, the most relevant literature on the above basic question is a pioneering case study of Poland, which puts forward three key findings.²¹ The Polish government does not often use terms such as the SP or CSP in referencing its relations with China. The Polish government seemingly understands its CSP with China largely in the economic terms and it values substantial cooperation that benefits the Polish economy more than attaches symbolic labels to the China–Poland relations.

In China, academic literature on the China–CEEC relations mainly covers themes such as historical development, the 17+1 cooperation platform, economic and trade relations, and local cooperation.²² While there is some literature on strategic partnerships

¹⁴ W. Song (ed.), *China's Relations with Central and Eastern Europe: From 'Old Comrades' to New Partners*, London: Routledge, 2017.

¹⁵ Z. Liu, ‘The Pragmatic Cooperation between China and CEE: Characteristics, Problems and Policy Suggestions’, *Institute of European Studies Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, 2013, Vol. 7, No. 6, pp. 1-9.

¹⁶ See, for instance: X. Chen (ed.), *How the CEE citizens view China's development based on household survey*, China–CEE Institute Nonprofit Ltd, 2018; O. Ş. Monica, L. Costin, I. Cristina and I. RădulescuI, ‘Romanian Attitudes and Perceptions towards the 16+1 Cooperation Platform’, *China-CEE Institute Working Paper*, 2017, No. 6, pp. 1-13, https://mpr.aub.uni-muenchen.de/88005/1/MPPA_paper_88005.pdf (accessed on 19 November 2019).

¹⁷ J. Szczudlik-Tatar, ‘China's charm offensive in Central and Eastern Europe: The implementation of its “12 Measures” strategy’, *PISM Bulletin*, 2013, No. 106 (559).

¹⁸ J. Czerep, ‘Influence of the Łódź–Chengdu railway on the perception of 16+1 in Poland’, *China-CEE Institute Working Paper*, 2017, No. 5, pp. 1-8, https://china-cee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Work_paper-201705.pdf (accessed on 20 November 2019).

¹⁹ D. Pavličević, “China Threat” and “China Opportunity”: Politics of Dreams and Fears in China–Central and Eastern European Relations’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2018, Vol. 27, No. 113, pp. 688-702.

²⁰ Y. Chen and Y. Hao, ‘Czech perceptions of the rise of China: A survey among university students’, *Asia Europe Journal*, 2019, pp. 1-19, <https://xs.scihub.ltd/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-019-00542-6>.

²¹ H. Yuan, op. cit.

²² For recent literature, see e.g.: 孔寒冰, 韦冲霄 (K. Hanbing and W. Chongxiao), ‘中东欧研究的历史演变、特征及发展趋势——孔寒冰教授访谈’ (‘The history, features and trends of Central and Eastern European Studies’), 国际政治研究 (*International Politics Studies*), 2019, Vol. 40, No. 03, pp. 126-160, 166; 朱晓中 (Z. Xiaozhong), ‘中国中东欧合作: 特点与改进方向’ (‘Issues and suggestions on China–CEE Relations’), 国际问题研究 (*International Studies*), 2017, No. 3, pp. 41-50; 樺机 (T. Wu), ‘匈牙利“向东开放”对接中国一带一路’ (‘Hungarian Eastward Opening Docking with China's BRI’), 中国对外贸易 (*Chinese Foreign Trade*), 2019, No. 03, pp. 72-73; 姜琍 (J. Li), “16+1 合作”和“一带一路”框架内的中国与斯洛伐克经贸合作’ (‘16+1” cooperation and China-Slovakian economic and trade cooperation within the BRI’), 欧亚经济 (*Eurasian Economics*), 2019, No. 03, pp. 58-70, 126, 128; 叶夫根尼·坎迪拉罗夫, 王永香 (E. Kandilarov and W. Yongxiang), ‘中国–中东欧国家外交关系 40 年回顾: 成就、挑战与展望——基于保加利亚的视角’ (‘China and CEEC Relations in the Past 40 Years: Achievements, Challenges

between China and individual CEEC, such as Poland and Hungary,²³ few studies sufficiently investigate whether China and these countries understand their SCPs in the same way. Some have noted differences between elite and wider public views in Poland on the image of China.²⁴ One article discussed the potential for mobilizing the soft power of both China and Hungary in enhancing their relations, without an in-depth investigation of Hungarian perceptions.²⁵ Another paper presents the perspective of Serbia on the interaction between China and the EU within the BRI, without a sufficient discussion on Serbian understandings of its CSP with China.²⁶ Thus, there remains a question in Chinese literature about to what extent China and its CSPs – such as Poland, Hungary, and Serbia – understand their relations in the same way.

Meanwhile, in broader Chinese academic literature on China's external relations, China's international narrative did not receive much academic attention until 2009. Chinese scholars tend to adopt the perspective of power of discourse or discourse power (话语权) to discuss China's influence in telling stories, in particular stories of China, to international audiences. Journal articles on this topic increased markedly after the year 2016.²⁷ Recently, some authors have also published academic monographs and edited volumes on this topic.²⁸ The existing studies on this subject matter in China are

and Prospect – The Bulgarian point of view'), 西安交通大学学报(社会科学版) (*Xi'an Jiaotong University (Social Sciences)*), 2018, Vol. 38, No. 6, pp. 76-82; 徐刚 (X. Gang), '中国与中东欧国家地方合作:历程、现状与政策建议' ('Local cooperation of China-Central and Eastern European Countries: History, present and policy suggestions'), 欧亚经济 (*Eurasian Economic*), 2019, No. 03, pp. 71-87, 126, 128. In addition, there are reports and books from the China-CEEC Think Tanks Book Series published by the China Social Science Press in Beijing.

²³ 崔宏伟 (C. 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 (L. Zuikui et al. (eds.)), 中国和匈牙利的全面战略伙伴关系:历史、现状、前景及政策建议 (*China-Hungary comprehensive strategic partnership: past, present, prospects and policy suggestions*), 北京:中国社会科学出版社 (Beijing: China Social Science Press), 2018; 戴轶尘 (D. Yichen (ed.)), '一带一路' 国别研究报告 (波兰卷) (*The Belt and Road Country Studies (Poland)*), 北京:中国社会科学出版社 (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press), 2019.

²⁴ 孙贝芸 (S. Beiyun), '波兰的中国观和“一带一路”舆情' ('China and the Belt and Road Initiative: Views from Poland'), in 戴轶尘 (D. Yichen, (ed.)), '一带一路' 国别研究报告 (波兰卷) (*The Belt and Road Country Studies (Poland)*), 北京:中国社会科学出版社 (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press), 2019.

²⁵ 王秋萍 (W. Qiuping), '软实力视角下的中国和匈牙利' ('China and Hungary in the perspective of soft power'), 对外传播 (*Foreign Communication*), 2018, No. 02, pp. 60-62.

²⁶ 布拉尼斯拉夫·乔尔杰维奇, 严嘉琦 (B. Dordevic and Y. Jiaqi), '中国和欧盟在“一带一路” 战略框架下的政策协调:现状及前景——塞尔维亚的视角' ('Policy coordination between China and the EU within the BRI: Present and prospect – the perspective of Serbia'), 欧洲研究 (*European Studies*), 2015, Vol. 33, No. 06, pp. 28-32.

²⁷ In the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index, the most authoritative database in Chinese social sciences, the number of journal articles with 中国话语权 (*China's discourse power*) contained in titles was 3 in 2009, 0-2 during 2010-2015, 5 in 2016, 4 in 2017, 1 in 2018. See http://cssci.nju.edu.cn/ly_search_view.html?title=%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E8%AF%9D%E8%AF%AD%E6%9D%83+++1+++AND||&start_year=1998&end_year=2019&nian=&juan=&qi=&wx1=&wx2=&wzlx=&xkfl1=&jj=&pagenum=20&order_type=nian&order_px=DESC.

²⁸ For example, see: 吴瑛 (W. Ying), 中国话语权生产机制研究 (*Production Mechanism of China's Discourse Power*), 上海交通大学出版社 (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Press), 2014; 李慎明

mainly within the disciplines of international relations, international communication, and economics. While most of these studies focus on the challenges and problems which China is facing as well as on offering policy recommendations for the Chinese government, few have shed sufficient light on the theoretical foundations of the so-called discourse power. Furthermore, although the existing literature sometimes uses data from some global survey databases, such as the Pew Global Attitudes Survey, there are few thorough case studies focusing on the impact of Chinese narratives in specific regions and countries. To summarize, there is limited academic literature in China on China's narrative in the CEEC in particular and Europe in general.

Analytical Framework and Methodology

Analytical Framework

Drawing on previous research,²⁹ this contribution concentrates on the reception of China's strategic narrative of SP in Hungary and Poland. The concept of a strategic narrative has been proposed by Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O'Loughlin to signify "a new means to understand soft power" – given the weakness of the soft power analysis – to "effectively trace or measure its impact."³⁰ They defined a strategic narrative as "a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors."³¹ International players, particularly big powers, often employ non-material means, such as narratives, to influence transnational audience or other players in understanding their own interests and identities, and to shape the behavior of international actors and influence the structure, politics, and policies of the international system.³² A strategic narrative includes actors, setting/environment/space, conflict or action, and resolutions or suggested resolutions.³³ Narratives can exist at three interlinked levels: international system, national level, and with regard to issues.³⁴ Strategic narratives involve processes from formation and projection to reception, in which media and communication play important roles.³⁵ Some studies

(L. Shenming (ed.)), *中国话语权丛书 (Series on China's discourse power)*, 北京:社会科学文献出版社 (Beijing: Social Science Press), 2016.

²⁹ H. Yuan, *op. cit.*

³⁰ L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon and B. O'Loughlin, 'Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power', *Media War & Conflict*, 2014, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 70-84.

³¹ A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin and L. Roselle, 'Strategic Narratives: A Response', *Critical Studies on Security*, 2015, No. 3, pp. 341-344.

³² A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin and L. Roselle, *Forging the world: Strategic narratives and international relations*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2017.

³³ L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon and B. O'Loughlin, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

³⁵ A. Miskimmon, B. O'Loughlin and L. Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order (Vol. 3)*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2014.

have discussed the employment of strategic narratives by the EU, Russia, Germany, and Italy.³⁶ Recently, scholars have started to examine China's strategic narrative.³⁷

China's strategic narrative of SP is an integral part of its broader discourse on its external relations. Although there are debates on the definitions, categories, and criteria for assessing various existing SPs, two connotations of the SP are clear: pragmatic and top-down.³⁸ The first one refers to China's expectation to develop pragmatic cooperation with other countries without being trapped by differences in ideological or cultural backgrounds. The second one refers to China's approach to SP: firstly, proposing a long-term goal such as establishing a SP with another country and, subsequently, filling it with more details. These two connotations reflect a central idea of the SP through which China wants to convey that it prefers dialog to confrontation, and partnership to alliance. Once China and another country establish a SP, the Chinese government always uses this term to tag the relationship.

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."³⁹ The full examination of the audience in these countries might be a huge task far beyond the scope of this article, which instead narrows its aim down to identifying some observable hints of governmental discourse. The main task here is to examine whether the Hungarian and Polish governments understand their relations with China within the scope of SP and CSP, or in other ways. Specifically, this study investigates several questions about three levels of discourse: terms, frames, and attitudes. How do the terms such as CSP/SP appear in the governmental discourse on relations with China (including their frequency, context, and meaning)? Are other terms used to label relations with China? How do Poland and Hungary frame their relations with China? From which perspectives do Poland and Hungary view themselves, China, their relations with China, China-CEEC relations, and China-EU relations?

³⁶ J. Bain and 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; M. Kaldor, M. Martin and S. Selchow, 'Human Security: A New Strategic Narrative for Europe'. *International Affairs*, 2007, Vol. 83, No. 2, pp. 273-288; A. Miskimmon and B. O'Loughlin, 'Russia's Narratives of Global Order: Great Power Legacies in a Polycentric World', *Politics and Governance*, 2017, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 111-120; F. Cotichchia and 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 and A. Miskimmon, 'Germany's Strategic Narrative of the Eurozone Crisis', *German Politics and Society*, 2014, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 42+.

³⁷ 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; J. H. Zeng, Y. F. Xiao, and 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.

³⁸ H. Yuan, op. cit.

³⁹ L. Roselle, A. Miskimmon and B. O'Loughlin, op. cit., p. 79.

Are responses of policy makers in these countries positive or not (negative or neutral) to China's narrative, and within which category of response (support, acquiescence protest, appropriation, etc.) do they fall?

Methodology

As Poland and Hungary are important V4 members, each case is unique and important. The two cases are representative of the CEEC to some extent. Meanwhile, the comparison between Poland and Hungary might reveal important factors influencing the consensus-building.

Poland was one of China's first strategic partners in the CEEC and the eighth one in the EU. Since 2005, Poland has been China's largest trading partner in the CEEC. China has become Poland's second largest importing country since 2015. For China, Hungary is another important CEEC.⁴⁰ In 2003, Hungarian Prime Minister Medgyessy Peter visited Beijing and both authorities issued a Joint Statement, lifting their bilateral cooperative relations to a new level under the framework of "constructive partnership."⁴¹ In 2004, at the 55th anniversary of this bilateral relationship, Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Budapest and the two sides decided to establish a "friendly cooperation partnership" (or 中匈友好合作伙伴关系 in Chinese language) (see Table 2). In February 2014, Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán Viktor visited Beijing and announced the continued elevation of their bilateral relations.⁴² Hungary is interested in the BRI and the Budapest–Belgrade railway line project, one of the flagships of their cooperation within the BRI. In May 2017, Prime Minister Orbán Viktor and the Chinese leaders announced in Beijing the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP).⁴³ The two countries signed documents on this, including the MOU on BRI (2015), the Bilateral Cooperation Plan (2017), the MOU on Establishing the China–Hungary Cooperation Center (2019), and the Bilateral Action Plan on Digital Silk Road Cooperation (2019).⁴⁴

⁴⁰ See: Foreign Ministry of China, '中国同匈牙利的关系' ('China–Hungary relations'), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/oz_678770/1206_679858/sbgx_679862/t7169.shtml (accessed on 10 September 2019).

⁴¹ Government of China, '中华人民共和国政府和匈牙利共和国政府联合声明' ('Joint Communiqué of the People's Republic of China and Republic of Hungary'), http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2003/content_62404.htm (accessed on 21 September 2019).

⁴² 《中华人民共和国政府和匈牙利政府关于在新形势下深化双边合作的联合声明》, (2014年共同发表) ('Joint Communiqué of the People's Republic of China and Republic of Hungary on Deepening Bilateral Cooperation in the New Period'), 2014, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/0213/c1001-24354012.html> (accessed on 22 July 2019).

⁴³ '中华人民共和国和匈牙利关于建立全面战略伙伴关系的联合声明' (全文) ('Joint Communiqué of the People's Republic of China and Republic of Hungary on Establishing Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/1179_674909/t1461257.shtml (accessed on 22 July 2019).

⁴⁴ '第二届“一带一路”国际合作高峰论坛成果清单' ('The List of Achievements at the 2nd BRI Summit of International Cooperation'), 新华网 (*Xinhua Net*), 28 April 2019, <http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201904/28/WS5cc50ab7a3104842260b8d8e.html> (accessed on 21 July 2019).

Table 2. The external relations of Hungary and Poland

	Poland	Hungary
Relations with China before the CSP	SP (2011)	“friendly cooperation partnership” (2004)
Time of CSP with China	June 2016	May 2017
EU membership	Yes (2004)	Yes (2004)
NATO membership	Yes (1999)	Yes (1999)
Relations with the USA	“strategic cooperation” (2008), SP (2019)	

Source: data compiled by the author.

The research data draws mainly on the governmental discourse in China and the two countries, including policy papers, reports, documents, interview transcripts of top leaders, news, and posts available on official websites of these governments. The data from official websites of Poland and Hungary includes information in the original languages, which has been translated into English by the web browser of Google Chrome.⁴⁵ The author also conducted some interviews and conversations with diplomats of the two countries in China. Regarding Poland, this study draws on the design of a previous study⁴⁶ and as such it updates the data from April 2017 until October 2019. The analyzed data sets include available texts posted on the official websites of the Polish President, Prime Minister, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA),⁴⁷ and the Law and Justice [*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS)], the incumbent party in Poland (2015–present). Regarding Hungary, this research focuses on the years since 2010 when Viktor Orbán was the Hungarian Prime Minister (2010–2019). The data under analysis includes all texts related to China available on the website of the Hungarian Government, which has over 430 news, events, pictures, and videos posted from June 2014 to July 2019.⁴⁸ In addition, this article adopts the same mixed-method research design as in previous research, combining qualitative content analysis (QCA), process tracing, and critical discourse analysis (CDA).⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Google Chrome can automatically translate texts on the website from original language – such as Polish or Hungarian – into English. In this article, the translated versions of these texts are cited directly.

⁴⁶ H. Yuan, op. cit.

⁴⁷ From January 2019, the MFA of Poland has had a new website (www.gov.pl/diplomacy) and it provides information about the fields of Polish diplomatic activity.

⁴⁸ See: the Website of Hungary Government, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/search#category=all&-search=china> (accessed on 28 May 2019).

⁴⁹ See: H. Yuan, op. cit.

The Two Cases

Poland

The previous case study of Poland has the following findings.⁵⁰ Firstly, key terms – such as SP and CSP – were not widely used in the Polish official discourse to tag the China–Poland relations. In contrast, the Polish government often uses other terms to describe China, these being “a pivotal partner”, “an attractive and reliable partner”, and “a principal partner in Asia.” Secondly, Poland identifies itself as part of Europe and views China basically from the European perspective. In recent years, the Polish government has also viewed China through perspectives such as the China–CEEC cooperation and the BRI. It is important to note that the Polish government differs from the Chinese government in understanding the SP/CSP in that it stresses economic and diplomatic ties as the centerpiece of the relationship. Thirdly, the attitudes of the Polish government towards the China–Poland relations have been changing since 2018 from negative to neutral and even positive. Although the Polish leaders note the differences between the two countries, they also emphasize the necessity of seeking economic opportunities in light of China’s rapid development. They attach importance to enhanced China–CEEC cooperation and joining the BRI.

These findings remain robust as shown by the below data updated to October 2019. Firstly, in the Polish governmental discourse, the terms of CSP and SP are not popular as tags for the China–Poland relationship. Instead, Polish top officials tend to use other terms, e.g. “an important partner.” Secondly, the Polish government stresses economic ties as the pivot of the China–Poland relations. Thirdly, while the Polish leaders value the economic opportunities of this bilateral relationship, they also expect more balanced and reciprocal economic ties with China.

On the Polish President’s website, there is only one news item on President Andrzej Duda’s meeting with the Chinese officials in 2019. The piece of news is about the meeting with Wang Yi, the Councillor of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, in July. It reads:⁵¹

The talks concerned economic relations as well as cooperation in the UN Security Council. President Duda expressed his satisfaction with the good Polish-Chinese relations and stressed that Poland is very interested in bilateral relations with China.

⁵⁰ H. Yuan, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ The meeting of the President with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/art,1468,spotkanie-prezydenta-z-ministrem-spraw-zagranicznych-chinskiej-republiki-ludowej.html> (accessed on 2 October 2019).

That piece of news did not mention the CSP/SP. Indeed, as early as 2016 President Duda stressed economic diplomacy as one of the President's foreign policy priorities.⁵² The above news item demonstrates positive gestures of Poland towards China.

On the website of the Polish Prime Minister, there are two news items on China. One is about Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki participating in the Ninth China–CEEC Summit held in April 2019, where he also met with his Chinese counterpart.⁵³ That news reported:

The Prime Minister assessed the Summit as successful: “This is the right format, because the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have a similar approach to economic and investment policy, and on this basis our countries are negotiating with China”.

During the meeting with the Chinese Prime Minister, the head of government raised issues related to, among others “Polish cosmetics [sic], meat sector and industrial products. He also stressed that Poland is interested in attracting Chinese investors”.

While the title of that news item referred to the Summit as the “Business Forum of Central and Eastern Europe and China,” the Summit is actually a yearly Summit of China and CEEC leaders on cooperation in many fields, and as such offers much more than a business forum. That piece of news did not note the CSP/SP between China and Poland. Besides, it narrated the Summit as negotiations between sixteen CEEC on one side and China on the other side rather than demonstrating a cooperation process, as it is usually narrated in the Chinese discourse.

The other news item was related to Mateusz Morawiecki's meeting with Wang Yi in July.⁵⁴ It reported:

The visit of the Chinese minister Wang Yi to Poland takes place during the 70th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Poland and the PRC this year. For China, Poland is the most important partner in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and one of the most important Member States of the European Union.

Again, the text used “the most important partner” to label Poland, without noting the CSP/SP between the two countries.

On the website of the MFA of Poland, there is the Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz's speech on Poland's foreign policy in 2019. In that document, he did

⁵² ‘Economic diplomacy is one of the President's foreign policy priorities’, 10 July 2016, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/art,287,dyplomacja-gospodarcza-jednym-z-priorytetow-polityki-zagranicznej-prezydenta.html> (accessed on 2 October 2019).

⁵³ Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki during the VIII Summit of Central and Eastern Europe and China, 12 April 2019 <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/aktualnosci/premier-mateusz-morawiecki-podczas-viii-szczytu-panstw-europy-srodkowo.html> (accessed on 3 October 2019).

⁵⁴ ‘Meeting of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of China’, <https://www.premier.gov.pl/wydarzenia/aktualnosci/spotkanie-premiera-mateusza-morawieckiego-z-ministrem-spraw-zagranicznych.html> (accessed on 3 October 2019).

acknowledge Poland's strategic partnerships with China, Japan, and South Korea. He stressed that China was one of Poland's major partners in Asia and that "trade is the key to Poland–China cooperation."⁵⁵ There are two further news items on the China–Poland relations in 2019. One is on Jacek Czaputowicz's March meeting with Wang Chao, the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister, emphasizing that "Warsaw invariably considers Beijing as a very important partner."⁵⁶ That meeting was held as part of the sixth round of the Poland–China PRC Strategic Dialogue, which is reported as "one of the mechanisms of the Polish–Chinese strategic partnership."⁵⁷ The other news piece covered Wang Yi's visit to Warsaw in July, including meetings with Jacek Czaputowicz. It stated:

After the meeting of ministers, the Joint Conclusions were published, summarizing the second meeting of the Polish–Chinese Intergovernmental Committee. We appreciate Chinese declarations of readiness to take actions to build a more balanced and mutually beneficial economic partnership with Poland – emphasized Minister Czaputowicz during the meeting of both ministers with journalists.⁵⁸

The PiS Program 2019 also includes a commentary on the Polish foreign policy.⁵⁹ It stressed the need to strengthen Poland's position in the world and in the economic field in order to have a reciprocal cooperation with non-European countries, such as Japan, China, India, and Canada. It highlighted the role of the EU and the USA in Poland's foreign policy, without paying much attention to China. It did not mention the CSP/SP between China and Poland.

Interestingly, on the website of PiS, there is a transcript of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's interview from January 2018 with the portal wPolityce.pl. On Davos meetings and dealings with China's influence, the Premier said.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Information of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on Polish Foreign Policy Tasks in 2019, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/information-of-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-on-polish-foreign-policy-tasks-in-2019> (accessed on 14 October 2019).

⁵⁶ Wang Chao was the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of China. See: 'Talks about Polish–Chinese relations in Warsaw', <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/rozmowy-o-relacjach-polsko-chinskih-w-warszawie> (accessed on 2 October 2019).

⁵⁷ Ibid. The meeting was attended by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, namely Maciej Lang, and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, namely Wang Chao.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in Warsaw', <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/wizyta-ministra-spraw-zagranicznych-chinskiej-republiki-ludowej2> (accessed on 3 October 2019).

⁵⁹ The original text of the PiS Program 2019 (Law and Justice Program 2019) is in the Polish language. See: PiS Program 2019, <http://pis.org.pl/dokumenty> (accessed on 27 September 2019).

⁶⁰ The PiS party, 'Our dialog with Brussels and the defense of reforms are already recognized', 24 January 2018, <http://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/nasz-dialog-z-bruksela-i-obrona-reform-sa-juz-dostrzegane> (accessed on 27 September 2019).

President Donald Trump emphasizes “free trade but fair trade”... Look at our trade balance with China: we export goods for two billion dollars and we import for 24 billion dollars. So we have unbalanced trade with China in the proportion of 1 to 12. You can look for examples of such imbalance, I agree with President Trump here, this situation is not free trade and fair trade... We must look together for a fair trade between countries, that bad practices do not disturb trade. This is area number one in these conversations.

These new findings are also in line with broader observations based on the comparison of the Polish discourse on the relations with the USA and China. Although Poland has announced SPs with both China and the USA, it is important to recognize the differences between the two SPs. The biggest difference lies in the centerpieces of cooperation. The Poland–China CSP/SP remains based around areas of low politics such as the economic and diplomatic ties, without substantial points in security and defence fields. Poland and the USA have announced enhanced strategic cooperation since 2008. In 2019, they both pledged to strengthen and consolidate their strategic partnership.⁶¹ In the Poland–USA SP, cooperation is stressed in fields such as security and defence, energy security, trade, investments, research, and innovation. The Poland–USA SP is often emphasized in Polish governmental documents.⁶² The PiS Program 2019 also explicitly mentioned the “US as a military partner of Poland.”⁶³ Evidently, Poland has much more substantial cooperation with the USA than with China in the high-politics areas, such as security and defence issues, energy security, cybersecurity, 5G technology, and security.

Hungary

Terms

Key terms, such as CSP and SP, are not widely used in the Hungarian official discourse in labeling the China–Hungary relations. On the website of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, there is a list of Strategic Partnership Agreements. Yet the list includes enterprises rather than states. This list includes the Bank of China, which established a SP with Hungary on 23 January, 2017. Apparently, the Hungarian Government does not tend to use the terms of strategic partnership to label their intergovernmental relations with other states. On the official website of the Hungarian Government, only 7 out of over 430 texts on China explicitly

⁶¹ Joint declaration on the Polish-American strategic partnership, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/art,1131,prezydenci-polski-i-usa-podpisali-wspolna-deklaracje-o-partnerstwie-strategicznym.html> (accessed on 2 October 2019).

⁶² See, for instance, Information of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on Polish Foreign Policy Tasks in 2019, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/information-of-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-on-polish-foreign-policy-tasks-in-2019> (accessed on 14 October 2019).

⁶³ The original text of the PiS Program 2019 (Law and Justice Program 2019) is in the Polish language. See PiS Program 2019, <http://pis.org.pl/dokumenty> (accessed on 27 September 2019).

mention the CSP or SP.⁶⁴ Among the few exceptions are those on talks by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó. In May 2017, Péter Szijjártó told the public media in Beijing – following official talks headed by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán with the Chinese leaders – “[T]he Chinese Government has raised the Hungarian-Chinese bilateral cooperation to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership, which is the highest category possible in the Asian country.”⁶⁵ A few days later, he noted in Budapest that the Hungary–China cooperation “would be increased to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership, the highest category in China.”⁶⁶ At a press conference in October 2017, he noted again that “China and Hungary concluded a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement, and it is in Hungary’s interests to maintain close cooperation with one of the world’s strongest economies.”⁶⁷

Hypothetically, the two sides are more likely to express the celebration of their bilateral relations in formal terms at some important time points rather than on ordinary days. An important indicator is the official discourse at bilateral events in 2019, the 70th anniversary of the China–Hungary diplomatic relations. A news item on Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Beijing tour in April 2019 said that China “looks forward to working with Hungary to raise the comprehensive bilateral strategic partnership to a new level” and that Mr. Orbán would “nurture an extraordinary friendship with China.”⁶⁸ In that tour, Péter Szijjártó mentioned the China–Hungary relations “being raised to the level of comprehensive strategic partnership.”⁶⁹ In a statement to the Hungarian news agency MTI, following the meeting in Beijing on a bilateral five-point plan, Mr. Szijjártó explained that the two sides were to raise bilateral relations, “which were already raised to the level of comprehensive strategic partnership in 2017, to another dimension.”⁷⁰ Thus, the Hungarian leaders do use CSP/SP to tag the Hungary–China relations for Chinese audiences.

⁶⁴ See <https://www.kormany.hu/hu/kereses#category=all&search=china> (accessed on 2 October 2019).

⁶⁵ ‘The Hungarian-Chinese cooperation achieves the highest possible level’, 13 May 2017, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungarian-chinese-cooperation-achieves-highest-possible-level> (accessed on 23 September 2019).

⁶⁶ ‘Hungary’s Eastern Opening strategy is gaining in importance’, 23 May 2017, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungary-s-eastern-opening-strategy-is-gaining-in-importance> (accessed on 23 September 2019).

⁶⁷ ‘Agreement signed on the continued operation of a Chinese university in Hungary’, 31 October 2017, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/agreement-signed-on-the-continued-operation-of-a-chinese-university-in-hungary> (accessed on 23 September 2019).

⁶⁸ ‘Hungary is ready to promote the development of Europe–China relations’, 26 April 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/hungary-is-ready-to-promote-development-of-europe-china-relations> (accessed on 23 September 2019).

⁶⁹ ‘All conditions are given for the development of Hungarian-Chinese economic relations’, 27 April 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/all-conditions-are-given-for-the-development-of-hungarian-chinese-economic-relations> (accessed on 23 September 2019).

⁷⁰ ‘Péter Szijjártó and Chinese Foreign Minister agree on a five-point development plan’, 29 April 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/peter-szijjarto-and-chinese-foreign-minister-agree-on-five-point-development-plan> (accessed on 23 September 2019).

Yet in Hungary, neither Viktor Orbán nor Péter Szijjártó frequently used the term of CSP to label this relationship in celebrating this 70th anniversary. The news item concerning their meeting with visiting Chinese officials – including Li Zhanshu, the Chairman of People’s Congress of China, and Wang Yi, the Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister – almost did not mention the CSP/SP.⁷¹ The same is true for lower officials in Hungary when talking about the Hungary–China relations at the 70th anniversary.⁷² In contrast, when Wang Yi was in Budapest, he explicitly mentioned the “strategic partnership between Hungary and China.”⁷³ During the second session of the Chinese-Hungarian ‘One Belt, One Road’ working group in Budapest, Wang Yi said, “[S]ince the launch of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ strategy, Hungarian-Chinese relations have risen to the level of strategic partnership.”⁷⁴

The Hungarian officials used other terms more often than SP or CSP. For instance, in his visit to Beijing in 2014, Viktor Orbán said that Hungary and China enjoyed a long-lasting friendship and the bilateral cooperation boasts a high starting point with fruitful results. In 2019, he mentioned “the close friendship,”⁷⁵ “the friendship and reliable partnership.”⁷⁶ As Péter Szijjártó said in July 2019, “[T]oday, China is our number one trade partner outside the EU.”⁷⁷ One of his team members viewed China as “Hungary’s most important trade partner outside Europe.”⁷⁸

⁷¹ ‘Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met with Chairman of People’s Congress of China’, 24 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/prime-minister-viktor-orban-met-with-chairman-of-people-s-congress-of-china> (accessed on 2 October 2019).

⁷² See, for instance, what the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s State Secretary for Information and the International Representation of Hungary Tamás Menczer said on Monday in Budapest at the opening of the 4th China–CEE (Central and Eastern Europe) Cultural and Creative Industry Forum. See: ‘The Hungarian creative industry is expanding at an amazingly dynamic rate’, 3 June 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/the-hungarian-creative-industry-is-expanding-at-an-amazingly-dynamic-rate> (accessed on 3 October 2019).

⁷³ ‘Hungarian-Chinese relations have never been as good as they are today’, 15 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungarian-chinese-relations-have-never-been-as-good-as-they-are-today-> (accessed on 25 September 2019). See also: ‘New targets must be set in Hungarian-Chinese cooperation’, 15 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/new-targets-must-be-set-in-hungarian-chinese-cooperation> (accessed on 29 September 2019).

⁷⁴ ‘New targets must be set in Hungarian-Chinese cooperation’, 15 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/new-targets-must-be-set-in-hungarian-chinese-cooperation> (accessed on 27 September 2019).

⁷⁵ ‘Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met with Chairman of People’s Congress of China’, 24 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/prime-minister-viktor-orban-met-with-chairman-of-people-s-congress-of-china> (accessed on 2 October 2019).

⁷⁶ ‘70th anniversary of establishment of Hungarian-Chinese diplomatic relations is a significant event’, 15 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/70th-anniversary-of-establishment-of-hungarian-chinese-diplomatic-relations-is-a-significant-event> (accessed on 27 September 2019).

⁷⁷ ‘Hungarian-Chinese relations have never been as good as they are today’, 15 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungarian-chinese-relations-have-never-been-as-good-as-they-are-today> (accessed on 25 September 2019).

⁷⁸ ‘China is Hungary’s most important trade partner outside Europe’, 24 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/china-is-hungary-s-most-important-trade-partner-outside-europe> (accessed on 25 September 2019).

Frames

The foreign policy of Viktor Orbán's Government is organized within and outside Europe. His government tries to develop relations with both the West and the East. As a member of the EU and the NATO, Hungary is an ally of the USA and European countries, including Germany. Meanwhile, Orbán also has had an 'Eastward Opening' policy since 2010, which means seeking opportunities in the East, in particular economic opportunities with Russia and China. In 2015, he noted that China was one important partner of Hungary and one major country of the "Eastward Opening" policy.⁷⁹ As one recent news report indicated, his government seemingly seeks a balanced relationship with all leading world powers.⁸⁰ His government also supports a free global economy.⁸¹

His government strongly defends the Hungary–China cooperation. Orbán has stressed that as long as its Western neighbors and the EU as whole are developing economic relations with Russia and China because of economic interest, Hungary and the CEEC can "cooperate equally well with the Chinese."⁸² His government views economic ties with China as being in Hungarian and European interest. "The closest and most effective possible cooperation with China is in Europe's interests," Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó stated.⁸³ In 2015, Minister Péter Szijjártó said in Beijing that "it would be Europe's vested interest to improve its cooperation with China as swiftly as possible. If we fail to achieve this, we may be unable to make up for our competitive disadvantage." He stressed that both sides should do more for strategic partnership between the EU and China.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ '匈牙利总理欧尔班会见王毅' ('Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met with'), 人民网 (*people.cn*), <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0607/c70731-27114418.html> (accessed on 24 September 2019).

⁸⁰ 'Hungary maintains good relations with all leading powers of the world', 16 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/hungary-maintains-good-relations-with-all-leading-powers-of-the-world> (accessed on 25 September 2019).

⁸¹ 'Hungary has an interest in the global economy being as free and unrestricted as possible', 18 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungary-has-an-interest-in-the-global-economy-being-as-free-and-unrestricted-as-possible> (accessed on 23 September 2019)

⁸² 'Interview with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on the Kossuth Radio programme *Good morning, Hungary*', 19 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/interview-with-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-the-kossuth-radio-programme-good-morning-hungary20190519> (accessed on 22 September 2019). See also: 'Interview with Viktor Orbán in the German newspaper *Bild*', 24 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/interview-with-viktor-orban-in-the-german-newspaper-bild> (accessed on 22 September 2019); 'A message must be sent to Brussels that the Hungarians want change', 17 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/a-message-must-be-sent-to-brussels-that-the-hungarians-want-change> (accessed on 22 September 2019).

⁸³ 'Hungarian-Chinese relations have never been as good as they are today', 15 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungarian-chinese-relations-have-never-been-as-good-as-they-are-today-> (accessed on 25 September 2019).

⁸⁴ 'We should do more for strategic partnership between the EU and China', 3 September 2015, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/we-should-do-more-for-strategic-partnership-between-the-eu-and-china> (accessed on 8 September 2019).

This Government stresses Hungary's positive role in strengthening the China–Europe relations. Budapest has acknowledged that China considers Hungary a flagship in the Chinese–European relations.⁸⁵ In 2015, Minister Péter Szijjártó stated that “the priority objective of the sovereign Hungarian foreign policy will remain turning Hungary into the starting point and a regional centre of China’s European economic expansion.”⁸⁶ In 2019, he recalled that Hungary was the first EU member state to join the bilateral agreement linked to the BRI as “the foundation for a new Eurasian cooperation.”⁸⁷ He also stated that the 17+1 format cooperation “serves Hungarian, Central European, and European Union interests.” “It points to hypocrisy that accusations are being made with relation to this of breaking European unity, while no such accusations are made when Western leaders meet with Chinese leaders,” he said, adding that “we do not accept such double standards.”⁸⁸

Attitudes

The Orbán Government has been seemingly attaching more significance to China than it had done years ago. In 2014, there was a news report on the 65th anniversary of the China–Hungary relations, which released the main content of the Chinese Premier’s telegram of congratulations on this.⁸⁹ Although reporting the achievements of their bilateral trade, there was no particular news on the Hungary Government’s response to that anniversary.⁹⁰ In contrast, “Hungary and the United States are political allies,” as the title of a news report on Viktor Orbán’s speech at the silver jubilee event of the American Chamber of Commerce in Hungary read, explicitly signaling the role of the USA in Hungary’s external relations.⁹¹

⁸⁵ ‘Beijing considers Hungary a flagship in Chinese-European relations’, 30 October 2014, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/beijing-considers-hungary-a-bridgehead-in-chinese-european-relations> (accessed on 8 September 2019).

⁸⁶ ‘Hungary–China cooperation at its best’, 9 June 2015, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungary-china-cooperation-at-its-best> (accessed on 9 September 2019).

⁸⁷ ‘Hungarian-Chinese relations have never been as good as they are today’, 15 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungarian-chinese-relations-have-never-been-as-good-as-they-are-today-> (accessed on 25 September 2019).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ ‘Congratulations from China upon the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Hungary and China’, 7 October 2014, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/congratulations-from-china-upon-the-65th-anniversary-of-the-establishment-of-diplomatic-relations-between-hungary-and-china> (accessed on 9 September 2019).

⁹⁰ ‘Hungarian export to China may hit new record this year’, 8 September 2014, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungarian-export-to-china-may-hit-new-record-this-year> (accessed on 22 September 2019).

⁹¹ ‘Hungary and the United States are political allies’, 18 November 2014, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/hungary-and-the-united-states-are-political-allies> (accessed on 22 September 2019).

In December 2014, Viktor Orbán viewed the signing of an agreement on the construction of the Budapest–Belgrade rail line as a signal of reaching “the most important milestone of the cooperation between the EU and China.”⁹² Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó also maintained that “a close cooperation with China is Europe’s vital interest” and that “the Chinese-Hungarian cooperation is in line with this aspiration.”⁹³ The Hungarian Parliamentary State Secretary László Szabó said that: “[N]owadays a new international order is taking shape, in which China and the Asian countries are the future,” and that the aim of China’s ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative is to connect a rapidly developing Eastern Asia with the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, which is parallel with the goals of the Hungarian “Eastward Opening” policy.⁹⁴

In 2019, in a meeting with the Chinese leader in Budapest, Viktor Orbán

highlighted that he looks upon Chinese businesses operating in Hungary with great respect as they make a significant contribution to Hungary’s economic performance. He added that he greatly appreciates China’s efforts in international politics.

Mr Orbán has also said that he is a supporter of the Chinese President’s ambitious strategic plan to revive the silk road and that he wishes them all the very best with the implementation of that plan.⁹⁵

In May 2019, Orbán criticized the opinion among some Western countries that the rise of China is a danger. He said that according to the “Hungarian approach,” it is a “tremendous opportunity.”⁹⁶ Regarding the BRI, he said:

The more we participate in the expansion of the Silk Road, the sooner this investment pays off. What’s more, we are not business people at all. We do not have to think in the dimension of whether something will pay off in two days or how it will pay off

⁹² ‘Most important milestone of the EU–China cooperation reached’, 18 December 2014, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/most-important-milestone-of-the-eu-china-cooperation-reached> (accessed on 24 September 2019).

⁹³ ‘Europe’s interest is a close cooperation with China’, 18 December 2014, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/europe-s-interest-is-a-close-cooperation-with-china> (accessed on 24 September 2019).

⁹⁴ ‘China and the Asian countries are the future’, 4 May 2015, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/china-and-the-asian-countries-are-the-future> (accessed on 24 September 2019).

⁹⁵ ‘Prime Minister Viktor Orbán met with Chairman of People’s Congress of China’, 24 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/prime-minister-viktor-orban-met-with-chairman-of-people-s-congress-of-china> (accessed on 25 September 2019).

⁹⁶ ‘Viktor Orbán’s interview in the program *Good Morning Hungary* for the Radio Kossuth’, 5 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/viktor-orbans-interview-in-der-sendung-guten-morgen-ungarn-von-radio-kossuth-20190503> (accessed on 21 September 2019). See also: ‘Hungary has stopped migration by land, Salvini by sea’, 3 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/hungary-has-stopped-migration-by-land-salvini-by-sea> (accessed on 25 September 2019).

even faster. We must pay attention to what serves the interests of the Hungarian nation in the long term. And it serves the interests of the Hungarian nation when, in the case of transports approaching from the south, from China, from Hungary, the route passes through Hungary. Because we make money from it, we have revenue from it.

In May 2019, following talks with his Kyrgyzstani counterpart, Minister Péter Szijjártó said that “it is in Central Europe’s clear interests for the East and the West to be on good terms; an opportunity must be provided for rational dialogue and for Eurasian economic cooperation.” Speaking highly of the BRI as “currently the world’s largest economic development program, and one of the most important guarantors of free trade,” he said that “it is pointless to talk about global free trade without infrastructure, and the Chinese imitative strives to create precisely this condition.”⁹⁷

The Hungarian officials attach much significance to concrete cooperation projects, including the construction of the Budapest–Belgrade railway line – a flagship project of the China–CEEC cooperation – which connects the CEEC to “one of the most significant routes of world trade as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.”⁹⁸ “It has shown how Europe is able to cooperate with China, but equally how Central European countries are able to cooperate with one another,” another minister said.⁹⁹ Hungary also highly welcomes Chinese companies – including the tech giant Huawei – to join its economic development.¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

These two cases present details of Poland and Hungary in response to China’s narrative on the CSP in bilateral relations. Findings emerge at three levels of discourse – terms, frame, and attitude. Firstly, leaders of Poland and Hungary do not widely use the terms of CSP/SP in their governmental discourse to refer to bilateral relations with China. This finding is consistent with findings in the previous study into Poland.¹⁰¹ Sometimes, Polish and Hungarian officials do cite these terms in their discourse, i.e. when they meet Chinese officials or when they visit China or address a broader

⁹⁷ ‘East and West must be on good terms’, 3 May 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/east-and-west-must-be-on-good-terms> (accessed on 26 September 2019).

⁹⁸ ‘Construction of Budapest–Belgrade railway line could begin soon’, 7 June 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-for-national-economy/news/construction-of-budapest-belgrade-railway-line-could-begin-soon> (accessed on 26 September 2019).

⁹⁹ ‘Hungarian–Serbian–Chinese task force had talks in Belgrade about development of Budapest–Belgrade railway line’, 9 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-for-innovation-and-technology/news/hungarian-serbian-chinese-task-force-had-talks-in-belgrade-about-development-of-budapest-belgrade-railway-line> (accessed on 26 September 2019).

¹⁰⁰ ‘Huawei to also take part in training of Hungarian engineers of the future’, 1 July 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-for-innovation-and-technology/news/huawei-to-also-take-part-in-training-of-hungarian-engineers-of-the-future> (accessed on 21 August 2019).

¹⁰¹ H. Yuan, *op. cit.*

Chinese audience. In contrast, officials of Poland and Hungary often use other terms to label their relations with China, such as “important partnership” and “economic partnership” in the Polish official discourse, and “friendship” or “reliable partnership” in the Hungarian official discourse. Compared with China, the USA is much more frequently emphasized as a key SP in Polish governmental documents.

Secondly, compared with the Polish government, the Hungarian government adopts a more explicit frame on China. The Polish official discourse adopts a Polish and European perspective, from which the Poland–China relations are often viewed as relations between an EU member and non-European emerging market, with economic ties as the centerpiece. Accordingly, China is usually mentioned in a long list of Asian countries, including Japan, India, and South Korea. In contrast, the Hungarian government led by Viktor Orbán explicitly frames the Hungary–China relations in the Eastward Opening policy, which mainly targets Russia and China.¹⁰² Furthermore, Orbán and his colleagues explicitly regard the China–Hungary cooperation and the China–CEEC cooperation through the 17+1 framework as one component of the EU–China relations. This means that China's relations with Hungary and the CEEC are in line with the EU–China SP.

Thirdly, the Polish and Hungarian governments slightly differ in their attitudes to China's narrative. The former nation is prudently confining the Poland–China CSP to an economic context by stressing a reciprocal economic cooperation, fair trade, and more investment. In contrast, the latter country has shown more positive attitudes towards the Hungary–China relations in past years. Compared with the Polish government, the Hungarian government seemingly more actively defends the CSP with China and the BRI against various objections from Western European countries and the broader North Atlantic area.

These findings indicate that it would be too early to claim that these two countries tend to accept China's narrative on bilateral relations with them. This research highlights the differences between China as a strategic narrator and Poland and Hungary as recipients in understanding their relations. From China's perspective, the CSP ranks high in its category of bilateral relations with other countries. In China's existing bilateral relations with the CEEC, the CSP is obviously the highest level, which literally means comprehensive, strategic, and partnership-focused. This means that China tends to view its bilateral relations with Poland and Hungary as partnerships which are important and developing in various fields. However, as the above findings indicate, Poland and Hungary do not define their bilateral relations with China in the same way. Therefore, the mixed responses of both Poland and Hungary to China's narrative show the two countries' partial attention and support to China's discourse.

¹⁰² One of the Hungarian senior diplomats in China once mentioned that the Hungarian government often refers to its China policy as the ‘Eastward Opening’ policy.

These mixed responses indicate limited consensus between China and the two nations in defining and understanding their relations. It is of great significance for policy makers, practitioners, and scholars on both sides to be aware of this situation. The better development of the CSP requires more consensus-building among these countries. Consensus-building requires more attention to identifying both the common ground and differences in defining and reflecting on these relations. Progress in consensus-building would, in turn, help enhance mutual trust and promote cooperation, which is of special importance in the contemporary world filled with various uncertainties and challenges often associated with protectionism, unilateralism, and populism.

There are several recommendations as to the further research on this theme. The first one is to carefully examine how China, the EU, the USA, and Russia are framed in the governmental discourses of Poland and Hungary. The purpose would be to better control the background factors – such as linguistic patterns, styles, and habits – in forming these discourses through locating those powers in the whole spectrum of discourses. The second one is to investigate the reasons for limited consensus. One hypothesis to consider is that China and the two CEEC have not jointly defined their CSP/SP in sufficiently clear and explicit ways. Another way is to examine the external factors, including the influence of the EU and other powers.¹⁰³ The third one is to examine the causes of the differing responses of Poland and Hungary. One of the potential explanations to test is that Hungary is more active than Poland in stressing relations with China due to its more concrete cooperation with China in economic and connectivity projects, such as the Budapest–Belgrade railway. The fourth one is to cover more CEEC as case studies. For instance, both Greece and Serbia have the CSP with China as well. A comparison between the CSP/SP and other types of relations defined by China with the CEEC can also help generate deeper insights regarding the China–CEEC relations.

¹⁰³ See, for instance, M. Przychodniak, ‘The “EU effect”: How European Union influences state’s involvement in the “16+1” China-Central and Eastern European Countries (China–CEEC) Initiative’, *China-CEE Institute Working Paper*, 2018, No. 16, pp. 1-16, https://china-cee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Work_paper-201816.pdf (accessed on 16 November 2019).