

# A Cognitive Discourse Study of the US's Cognition of China in Sino-American Strategic Competition

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Received: September 2, 2023      Accepted: October 27, 2023      Online Published: November 2, 2023

doi:10.5430/sass.v9n1p1      URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/sass.v9n1p1>

## Abstract

Since the US initiated the strategic competition with China, many scholars are attracted by this topic. Although they have studied it from many aspects, few noticed the importance of the US's cognition of China and gave it a comprehensive and scientific study. By using non-classical taxonomic structures of categorization theories in cognitive linguistics, and distribution of capabilities among units, interaction between units, and interactions between unit and security complexes in theories of international relations, this article studies the US's cognition of China in Sino-American strategic competition from the perspective of cognitive discourse study. After analyzing the non-classical categories the US uses to recognize China in *United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021*, this article discovers that the US regards China's approaching capability has threatened its hegemony; the US possesses a complex categorizing model, and arrogant and anxious mentalities; the gaps between the US and China are being narrowed; the US's domestic political structure has flaws; the US cannot contain China alone, but it has strong international integrating abilities to do so. Compared with traditional international relations study, this study not only deepens our understanding of the US's cognition of China by disclosing its categorizing model on China and its mentalities, but also establishes a scientific, objective, convenient, and feasible operation paradigm for international relations study by integrating the methods of discourse analysis and international system analysis. The future study can explore the impacts on East Asian security of the US's cognition of China with the help of security theories in international relations.

**Keywords:** US's cognition of China, categorization, Sino-American strategic competition, *United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021*, international system

## 1. Introduction

After China and the US entered the era of strategic competition, Sino-American relations have deteriorated sharply. Because both countries are superpowers that can affect the "security" (Jackson & Sørensen, 2013: 5) of the world, this deterioration has attracted attentions all over the world. In academic cycle, the scholars' focuses are mainly on the following aspects. (1) Some are interested in the competition's nature. Zhang (2021: 1) argues that "while there are differences in the China policies of the three (Obama, Trump, and Biden) administrations, their commonalities and continuities are salient. Structural realism, especially offensive realism and dynamic neorealism, thus offers important insights into the future direction of Sino-US relations". After examining the competition with the two core features of the Cold War, i.e., "ideological confrontation and proxy war", Zhang & Xu (2021: 321) regard it is more suitable to use "Porous Curtain" rather than "new Cold War" to describe it. (2) Some pay their attentions to its levels and fields. Tidwell (2021: 103) regards "[w]hile US-PRC strategic competition occurs primarily at the national level, the subnational level plays an important role in terms of creating opportunities for influence and advancing the strategic interests". After examining the competition between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Build Back Better World, Zhao (2021: 248) reveals "the nuanced dynamics and characteristics of US-China strategic competition in the context of the digital era" and argues that "international development should not be a zero-sum game in which developing countries ... must choose between China and the US". (3) Some scholars' interests lie in its influences on security. Liu & Sun (2021) thinks "a rising China's adherence to strategic hedging in the partially hierarchical system (of East Asia) can not only effectively moderate its dilemma of rising powers, but also help prevent China and the U.S. from being

trapped into the Soviet-U.S. bloc confrontation in the Cold War era". Therefore, the strategic hedging pattern "is likely to be sustained in East Asia in the coming decade" (127). Lin (2021) discovers that "many neighbor countries have undergone significant adjustments in their policies towards China, leading to a series of security situation changes around China". Therefore, in the near future "China would face more complex and graver surrounding environment" (50). (4) Others are concerned about policies to reduce the risks. Dunn (2021: 1) suggests that to mitigate the risks of strategic competition, "[m]ulti-tiered strategic dialogue ... should form the foundation of such a process. That dialogue should be followed by exploration of more specific risk mitigation approaches and associated measures". Although these studies are helpful to understand the competition's nature, its levels and fields, its influences on regional security, and possible ways to reduce the risks, almost all of them failed to touch on the more basic question, i.e., the US's cognition of China. After searching major databases such as Project MUSE, JSTOR, World Library and CNKI, it is discovered that till now only a few articles have discussed the US's cognition of China. Combating the US's tightened policy on China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC (2022) lists 21 falsehoods in US perceptions of China. Xu & Li (2023) focus on the source of the US's change of cognition of China, regarding China's advancement in science and technology "significantly affect the American public's threat perception of China" (66). After reviewing the US's diplomatic policies after the Cold War, Yue (2023) discovers that the "schema deduction" mechanism helps the US policy-makers successively "keep pursuing the consistency of US value system in making China policy" (157) ... These studies contribute a lot to our understanding of the US's cognition of China, yet all of them have ignored the US's programmatic document to initiate the strategic competition, *United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021*. In this act, the US makes a comprehensive comment on China, including the most important fields, i.e., "military", "political", "economic", "societal", and "ecological" (Buzan, 2007: 119). When the US comments China, it mainly uses the direct evaluative comments, and its way of categorizing China has its unique features ... Thus, this act presents itself as an ideal site to investigate the US's cognition of China, especially its categorizing model on China. Considering these factors, this article plans to study the US's cognition of China by using this act as the material.

## 2. Method

After examining *United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021*, it is discovered that it contains abundant discourses the US uses to recognize China, within which the US's typical way of thinking is categorization. Thus, this article plans to study the US's cognition of China from the perspective of cognitive discourse analysis by using the theory of categorization.

Categorization is the "mental process" (Ungerer & Schmid, 2006: 8) of classification, and categories are its products. In history, the dominant categorization theory is the classical theory: categories "were assumed to be abstract containers, with things either inside or outside the category. Things were assumed to be in the same category if and only if they had certain properties in common" (Lakoff, 1987: 215). This view is the result of transcendental speculation and is not based on empirical evidence. Therefore, it cannot be regarded as a scientific theory or even an empirical hypothesis.

With the empirical study on categories, the classical theory has been challenged by many disciplines. Modern categorization theory based on empirical evidence consists of idealized cognitive models (ICMs), levels of categorization, and prototypes. Categorization is carried out with the help of "idealized cognitive models" (68), which refer to "all the stored cognitive representations that belong to a certain field" (Ungerer & Schmid, 2006: 49) and have five types: "image-schematic", "propositional", "metaphoric", "metonymic", and "symbolic". The propositional ICMs include seven common sub-types: "the simple proposition", "the scenario" (script), "the feature-bundle structure", "classical taxonomic structure" (classical category structure), "radial category structure", "graded categories", and "graded propositions" (Lakoff, 1987: 284-288). Categorization operates on both horizontal and vertical dimensions. While the horizontal operation examines a category's internal organizing mode, the vertical operation examines its accommodating ability, i.e., the graded arrangement of things from the most abstract to the most concrete. Usually there are "superordinate level", "basic level", and "subordinate level" (Evans, 2007: 10). The basic level is "where we perceive the most obvious differences between the organisms and objects of the world", and "where the largest amount of information about an item can be obtained with the least cognitive effort" (Ungerer & Schmid, 2006: 70-71). While the subordinate level is more specific and detailed than the basic level, the superordinate level is more abstract and general than it. Categories conforming to the classical theory are organized by the classical taxonomic structure: "[E]ach classical taxonomy is ... a hierarchical structure of classical categories ... Each higher-level category contains all of its lower level categories. At each level, the categories are nonoverlapping" (Lakoff, 1987: 287). Those not conforming to the classical theory are organized by other ICMs.

With the help of the ICMs, this article can extract dozens of categories the US uses to recognize China from the

discourses in *United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021*. Among these categories, there are 18 non-classical taxonomic structure categories: (1) the impact of China's national policies, (2) China's goal of ensuring its global economic advantage, (3) the status quo of China's human rights, (4) China's goal of reshaping the international order, (5) the CPC's possible behaviors, (6) the Chinese companies' behavior, (7) the CPC's behavior in influencing the world, (8) the goals China achieved by utilizing Hong Kong, (9) the contents of China's external publicity, (10) Sino-American interaction, (11) China's public diplomacy, (12) the items China promotes in other countries, (13) China's influence on the US-Canada alliance, (14) China's behavior in the Middle East and North Africa, (15) China's interactions with countries around the South China Sea, (16) China's strategy of expanding its influences in international organizations, (17) China's interaction with Africa, and (18) China's interaction with international organizations. (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), (8), and (9) are the US's cognition of China's capability, (10) is its cognition of Sino-American interaction, and (11), (12), (13), (14), (15), (16), (17), and (18) are its cognition of the interactions between China and different security complexes. According to the modes of hierarchical organization, they can be roughly divided into four kinds: mode 1—(1), (2), (3), (11), (12), (13), and (14); mode 2—(4), (5), (6), (10), (15), and (16); mode 3—(7), (8), and (9); and mode 4—(17) and (18).

Under the perspective of cognitive discourse analysis, by using levels of categorization theory to analyze the non-classical taxonomic structure categories that reflect the US's cognition of China relevant with China's safety, i.e., "distribution of capabilities" (Waltz, 1979: 97) in "the international system" (Waltz, 1979: 79-80; Buzan, 2007: 131; Cui, 2006: 64), the Sino-American interaction, and the interactions between China and various "security complexes" (Buzan, 1983: 106), this article first studies the US's cognition of China with itself as the reference. On this basis, this article then explores the US's categorizing model and mentalities. Finally, this article gives a new interpretation on China and the US in the international system by consulting its categorizing model and mentalities. The study of the US's cognition of China in Sino-American strategic competition from the perspective of cognitive discourse analysis can overcome the shortcomings of traditional research, such as ignoring texts, lacking paradigms, and making subjective appraisals, and make up for the traditional research's lack of operability in the analysis of discourses.

### 3. Results

This part studies the US's cognition of China with itself as the reference in the international system. Considering the international system's three parts, i.e., units, units interaction, and interactions between units and the system or security complexes, and each mode of hierarchical organization, this article chooses discourses (1), (7), (10), and (17) for analysis.

#### 3.1 China's Capability

Among the chosen discourses, (1) and (7) are relevant with the US's cognition of China's capability in the international system.

(1) The current policies being pursued by the PRC—

(A) threaten the future character of the international order and are shaping the rules, norms, and institutions that govern relations among states;

(B) will put at risk the ability of the United States to secure its national interest; and

(C) will put at risk the future peace, prosperity, and freedom of the international community in the coming decades. (US Congress, 2021: 715)

Discourse (1) is the US's cognition of the impact of China's national policies. The two semantically non-overlapping elements (1-A-a) "threatening ..." and (1-A-b) "are shaping ..." constitute a classical taxonomic structure superordinate category (also a subcategory) (1-A) "the current impact of China's national policies on the international community". Putting (1-A-a) and (1-A-b) into the "container" (Lakoff, 1987: 272) of (1-A), the US wants to express that although influencing the international community in different ways, both (1-A-a) and (1-A-b) play the role of changing the international structure and replacing the old international order with a new one.

The "graphemics" (Wales, 2011: 194) of discourse (1) shows that the US has upgraded element (1-B-a) "will put at risk the ability of the United States ..." to the same level of its superordinate category (also a subcategory) (1-B) "will put at risk the future peace ... of the international community ...". In doing so, the US wants to express that China's national policy will harm not only the interests of the international community, but also those of the US.

(1-A) is the initial state, (1-B) and the upgraded (1-B-a) are intermediate events, and the unspoken and more terrible ultimate impact (1-C) is the final state. (1-A), (1-B) and (1-B-a), and (1-C) constitute “the scenario” (Lakoff, 1987: 285-286) structure category (1) “the impact of China’s national policies”. The gradually increasing negative impacts of the three stages signal that the US believes that China will only plunge the US and the international community into war, depression, and slavery step by step.

The analysis shows that the US has already viewed China as the main challenger, who is shaking its hegemony and replacing the existing international order with a new one, and regarded its own capability was weakened by China.

(7) In this section, the term “malign influence” with respect to the Chinese Communist Party should be construed to include acts conducted by the Chinese Communist Party or entities acting on its behalf that—

(A) undermine a free and open international order;

(B) advance an alternative, repressive international order ...;

(C) undermine the national security or sovereignty of the United States or other countries; or

(D) undermine the economic security of the United States or other countries, including by promoting corruption. (US Congress, 2021: 770-771)

Discourse (7) is the US’s cognition of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP’s) behavior in influencing the world. The US first upgrades element (7-A-a1) “undermine the economic security ...” to the same level of its superordinate category (also a second-level subcategory) (7-A-a) “undermine the national security ...” and the second-level subcategory (7-A-b) “undermine a free ...”. Element (7-A-a1), and the two second-level subcategories (7-A-a1) and (7-A-a2) together form a first-level subcategory (7-A) “undermining the status quo of the world”. The US then upgrades the contents of the first-level subcategory (7-A), i.e., element (7-A-a1), and two second-level subcategories (7-A-a) and (7-A-b), to the same level of the first-level subcategory (7-B) “advance ...”. In doing so, the US wants to express that the CCP is not only undermining the national security of the US and other countries, and the existing international order, but also the economic security of the US and other countries. In addition, it is establishing a new autocratic and repressive international order.

The upgraded element (7-A-a1), the upgraded two second-level subcategories (7-A-a) and (7-A-b), and the first-level subcategory (7-B) finally form category (7) “the CCP’s behavior in influencing the world”. By juxtaposing and putting them into the container of (7), the US wants to express that although these behaviors are totally different, they will definitely lead the world into depression.

The analysis shows that in the US’s eyes, its international political influence, economic strength, military power, and international leadership are weakened by China; China’s rise has threatened the US’s international hegemony, the international order it established, and its national security, including economic security.

### 3.2 Sino-American Interaction

Among the chosen discourses, discourse (10) is relevant with the US’s cognition of Sino-American interaction, which consists of China’s behavior, the US’s countermeasure, and the result.

(10) The sanctions and other restrictions authorized and mandated by Congress address a range of malign PRC behaviour, including—

(A) **intellectual property theft;**

(B) **cyber-related economic espionage;**

(C) repression of ethnic minorities;

(D) **other human rights abuses;**

(E) abuses of the international trading system;

(F) illicit assistance to and trade with the Government of North Korea; and

(G) drug trafficking, including trafficking in fentanyl and opioids. (US Congress, 2021: 855)

The US gives no detailed description of China’s concrete behaviors, but only lists and evaluates them. “[m]align” is the US’s general judgment on China’s behavior. When recognizes the first-level subcategory (10-A) “China’s concrete behaviors”, the US upgrades elements (10-A-a1) “repression of ethnic minorities” and (10-A-a2) “other human rights

abuses”, which originally belong to the second-level subcategory (10-A-a) “human rights abuses”, and (10-A-b1) “intellectual property theft” and (10-A-b2) “cyber-related economic espionage”, which originally belong to the second-level subcategory (10-A-b) “information theft”, to the same level of the three second-level subcategories (10-A-c) “abuses of the international trading system”, (10-A-d) “illegal assistance to ...”, and (10-A-e) “drug trafficking ...”. By highlighting (10-A-a-1), (10-A-1-2), (10-A-b-1), and (10-A-b-2), the US believes that the two second-level subcategories (10-A-a) and (10-A-b) are too abstract, wanting to express that China has committed many crimes harming the interests of Chinese citizens, the US, and the international community. It can be inferred that in the US’s eyes, while its economic and technological advantages are no longer obvious, China’s domestic politics is stable, and its achievements in economy, science, and technology are remarkable, the new trade system advocated by China is welcomed by many countries, and its relationship with North Korea is harmonious; China’s these advantages have seriously weakened the US’s leading position in the world. Therefore, the US has to damage China’s image and hinder its rise in various ways.

Elements (10-B-a1) “sanctions” and (10-B-a2) “other restrictions”, and (10-B-b1) “authorized” and (10-B-b2) “mandated” constitute two second-level classical taxonomic structure subcategories (10-B-a) “the US’s ways to counter China” and (10-B-b) “the US’s procedure to counter China”, respectively. In doing so, the US wants to express that its ways to counter China are flexible and diverse, and its procedure is legal and rightful. The two second-level subcategories (10-B-a) and (10-B-b) then form a first-level subcategory (10-B) “the US’s countermeasure on China”. By putting (10-B-a) and (10-B-b) into the container of (10-B), the US wants to express that its ways and procedure to counter China are completely correct. It can be inferred that in the US’s eyes, the advantage of its capability in the international system is no longer obvious, and China’s capability is approaching itself, making the whole US restless and anxious.

The first-level subcategory (10-C) “address a range of ...” is the US’s cognition of the result of Sino-American interaction. The US believes that it has achieved the expected result in this round of interaction, and the interaction result is of great experience values. Obviously, the US believes that it has advantages in Sino-American competition and is confident to force China to yield.

The three first-level subcategories (10-A), (10-B), and (10-C) finally form the scenario structure category (10) “the Sino-American interaction”. The three stages are as follows: the initial state—China harms the interests of Chinese citizens, the US, and the international community; intermediate event—the US counters China in the right ways and rightful procedure; the final state—the US achieves the expected result. The US clearly wants to convey to all parties that China will only fail if it challenges itself, and that it can contain China and maintain its hegemony.

### 3.3 The Interactions Between China and Different Security Complexes

Among the chosen discourses, discourse (17) is relevant with the US’s cognition of China’s interactions with different security complexes.

(17) The Secretary of State shall ... submit ... a report that assesses the nature and impact of Chinese political, economic, and security sector activity in Africa, and its impacts on United States strategic interests, including—

- (A) the amount and impact of direct investment, loans, development financing, oil-for-loans deal, and other preferential trading arrangements;
- (B) the involvement of Chinese state-owned enterprises in Africa;
- (C) the amount of African debt held by the People’s Republic of China;
- (D) the involvement of Chinese private security, technology and media companies in Africa;
- (E) the scale and impact of PRC arms sales to African countries;
- (F) the scope of Chinese investment in and control of African energy resources and minerals critical for emerging and foundational technologies;
- (G) an analysis of the linkages between Beijing’s aid and assistance to African countries and African countries supporting PRC geopolitical goals in international fora;
- (H) the methods, tools, and tactics used to facilitate illegal and corrupt activity, including trade in counterfeit and illicit goods, to include smuggled extractive resources and wildlife products, from Africa to China;
- (I) the methods and techniques that China uses to exert undue influence on African governments and facilitate corrupt activity in Africa, and to influence African multilateral organizations; and

(J) *an analysis* of **the soft power, cultural** and **educational activities** by the PRC and CCP to seek to expand influence in Africa. (US Congress, 2021: 1015-1017)

Discourse (17) is the US's cognition of China's interaction with Africa. The US doesn't mention Africa's constraints on China, but only directly or indirectly points out China's ways of influencing Africa, which consist of its behaviors, its strategies, the known results, and the unknown results. In discourse (17), items (A), (B), (C), (D), (E), and (F) are relevant with the unknown results; items (H) and (I), the unknown strategies; item (G), the analysis of the relationships between the behaviors and the known results; item (J), the analysis of the known strategies. The interactive process can be analyzed as follows:

When recognizes (17-B-a) "the behaviors of China's influence on Africa", the US conceals ten third-level subcategories (17-B-a1) "China invests directly in Africa ...", (17-B-a2) "Chinese state-owned enterprises involve in Africa", (17-B-a3) "China holds African debt", (17-B-a4) "Chinese private ... companies involve in Africa", (17-B-a5) "China sells weapons to African countries", (17-B-a6) "China invests in African energy resources and minerals", (17-B-a7) "China aids and assists African countries", (17-B-a8) "China facilitates illegal and corrupt activity ...", (17-B-a9) "China exerts undue influences on African governments ...", and (17-B-a10) "China seeks to expand influence in Africa", which originally belong to the second-level subcategory (17-B-a) "the behaviors of China's influence on Africa", in the relevant discourses in the form of "logical presupposition" (Keenan, 1971: 45-46). The ten logical presuppositions contain the US's cognition of the behaviors of China's influence on Africa as follows: China deceives, manipulates, and corrupts African governments and multilateral organizations, carrying out predatory economic activities, its selfish and greedy behaviors violate African and the international laws, and its purpose is to control the whole Africa. That the US conceals China's behaviors of influencing Africa has two main reasons: first, it believes that these behaviors are less important than the contents expressed in the discourses; second, it is inconvenient to express them directly.

When recognizes (17-B-b) "China's strategies of influencing Africa", the US upgrades (17-B-b10-a) "cultural activities" and (17-B-b10-b) "educational activities" to the same level of its superordinate category (also a third-level subcategory) (17-B-b10) "soft power", which is under the second-level subcategory (17-B-b) "China's strategies of influencing Africa". "[c]ultural activities" and "educational activities" are semantically overlapping graded categories for each other. That the US classifies them in this way shows that it does not know the details of China's influence on Africa with its soft power strategy. Therefore, the US is making up facts here, with the purpose of making African countries suspect China and undermine Sino-African cooperation. In doing so, the US wants to express that China deceives, controls, and assimilates Africa not only with its soft power strategy, but also with educational and cultural activities.

By mixing the third-level subcategory (17-B-a10) "China seeks to expand influence in Africa", which originally belongs to the second-level subcategory (17-B-a) "China's behaviors of influencing Africa", with the third-level subcategory (17-B-b10) "soft power", which originally belongs to the second-level subcategory (17-B-b) "China's strategies of influencing Africa", and its upgraded elements (17-B-b10-a) "cultural activities" and (17-B-b10-b) "educational activities", the US forms a second-level subcategory (17-B-[a10+b10]) "China's behaviors and strategies of expanding its influence in Africa". At this moment, the US is not very clear about China's behaviors and strategies of expanding its influence in Africa. Therefore, it mixes the third-level subcategory (17-B-a10) with another third-level category (17-B-b10), and its already upgraded elements (17-B-b10-a) and (17-B-b10-b), and reluctantly expresses that China has already expanded its influence in Africa.

When recognizes the result of China's interaction with Africa, the US upgrades the third-level subcategories (17-C-a1) "the amount and impact of direct investment", (17-C-a2) "the involvement of Chinese state-owned enterprises in Africa", (17-C-a3) "the amount of African debt held by the People's Republic of China", (17-C-a4) "the involvement of Chinese private ... companies in Africa", and (17-C-a5) "the scale and impact of PRC arms sales to African countries", which originally belong to the second-level subcategory (17-C-a) "the unknown results of China's influence on Africa", and the third-level subcategory (17-C-b7) "African countries supporting PRC ...", which originally belongs to the second-level subcategory (17-C-b) "the known results of China's influence on Africa", to the level of their second-level subcategories, respectively. By highlighting (17-C-a1), (17-C-a2), (17-C-a3), (17-C-a4), (17-C-a5), and (17-C-b7), the US believes that the two second-level subcategories (17-C-a) and (17-C-b) are too abstract, wanting to express that China has achieved a lot in interacting with Africa.

By mixing the third-level subcategory (17-C-a6) "the scope of Chinese investment in ... African energy resources and minerals", which originally belongs to the second-level subcategory (17-C-a) "the unknown results of China's influence on Africa", and the third-level subcategory (17-C-b6) "control of African energy resources and minerals", which originally belongs to the second-level subcategory (17-C-b) "the known results of China's influence on Africa",

the US forms the second-level subcategory (17-C-[a6+b6]) “the known and unknown results of China’s investment in African energy resources and minerals”. At this moment, the US hasn’t fully mastered the details of China’s investment in African energy resources and minerals, but just wants to express that China has deeply involved in it.

Subcategories (17-B-a1), (17-B-a2), etc., (17-C-a1), (17-C-a2), etc., and (17-C-b1), (17-C-b2), etc. originally belong to the second-level subcategories (17-B-a) “the behaviors of China’s expansion of influence in Africa”, (17-C-a) “the unknown results of China’s influence on Africa”, and (17-C-b) “the known results of China’s influence on Africa”, respectively. Now all of them are upgraded from the third-level to the second-level. The US then mixes the second-level subcategory (17-B-[a10+b10]) “the behaviors and strategies of China’s expansion of influence in Africa” and the upgraded subcategories (17-B-a1), (17-B-a2), etc., with the second-level subcategory (17-C-[a6+b6]) “the known and unknown results of China’s investment in African energy resources and minerals”, and the upgraded subcategories (17-C-a1), (17-C-a2), etc., and (17-C-b1), (17-C-b2), etc., to form many first-level subcategories, such as ([17-B-a1]+[17-C-a1]), ({17-B-a6}+{17-C-[a6+b6]}), ({17-B-[a10+b10]}+{17-C-a10}), etc. This further shows that the US does not know much about China’s interaction with Africa.

The US finally uses all these first-level subcategories to form a classical taxonomic structure category (17) “the US’s cognition of the ways and results of China’s interaction with Africa”. Despite possessing limited information at this moment, by placing these first-level subcategories into the container of (17), the US still tries to express that although extremely inappropriate, China’s strategies are very efficient and it has already successfully controlled the political, economic, military, cultural, and ideological life of African countries to some extent, which has greatly impacted the existing international system. Obviously, the US believes that due to its past ignorance and mistakes, China has successfully replaced itself in Africa.

The US’s cognition of China with itself as the reference in the above discourses can be summed up as follows: (a) The US’s international political influence, image, and leadership are decreasing, and its economic, technological, and military advantages are no longer obvious, its hegemony and the international system dominated by itself are being challenged by China, and its economic and national securities are being threatened, due to its own mistakes, it has lost some traditional spheres of influence, including Africa. (b) China’s domestic politics is very stable, its global political, economic, scientific, and technological influences are constantly expanding, its international image and leadership are rapidly improving, its relationship with North Korea is harmonious, and it has successfully controlled Africa. (c) By comparing China and the US in the international system, the US believes that although China is in the ascendant period, its capability is still inferior to itself, and as long as it counters China immediately and corrects the previous mistakes, it can win the strategic competition.

#### 4. Discussion

Based on the US’s cognition of China with itself as the reference, this section first summarizes the US’s categorizing model on China and analyzes its mentalities, then gives a new interpretation on the US and China in the international system by consulting its categorizing model and mentalities, and finally compares the differences of the US and this article’s cognition of the two countries, and points out their possible influences on East Asian Security.

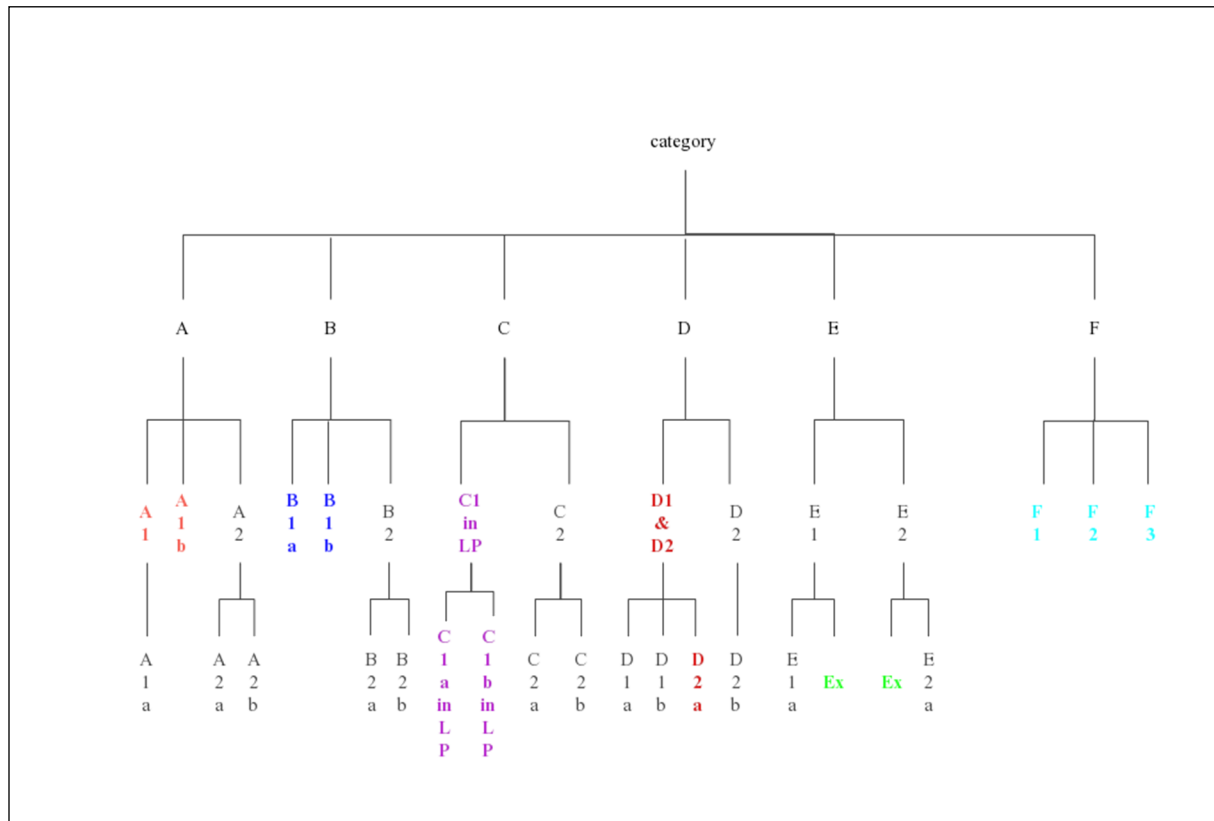
Although this article divides the US’s non-classical taxonomic structure categories into four modes, yet as the analysis shows, different categories in the same mode still have some differences in their hierarchical organization, such as discourse (1) in mode 1. Nevertheless, discourse (1) relies on two completely different and indivisible modules: upgrading the elements of a subcategory, and arranging these elements and its subcategory on the same level; arranging the first-level subcategories chronologically to form a scenario structure superordinate category. Therefore, the key matter is to further search for such modules. After examining the above analysis, it is discovered that the US mainly uses six modules with non-classical taxonomic structure (see Figure 1), which together constitute the US’s covert categorizing model on China:

In Figure 1, A, B, etc. belong to first-level subcategories; A1, A1b, etc., second-level subcategories or elements upgraded to the second-level; A1a, A2a, etc., elements under the second-level subcategories.

Module 1: Upgrading element A1b in subcategory A1 to the same level of A1. In doing so, the US wants to foreground element A1b while emphasizes subcategory A1.

In discourse (1), the US upgrades “will put at risk the ability of the United States ...” (A1b) to the same level of “will put at risk the future peace ... of the international community ...” (A1). This shows that in the US’s eyes, (a) it enjoys the equal status as the international community and is unlimited by the latter’s laws and regulations, (b) the international community can be used as an important tool to counter China, and (c) China’s capability in the

international system has already become very strong and the US presently has no ability to contain China only by itself.



**Figure 1.** The US’s Categorizing Model on China

In discourse (7), the US upgrades “undermine the economic security ...” (A1b) to the same level of “undermine the national security ...” (A). This shows that in the US’s eyes, (a) attacking China on undermining the national security or sovereignty of the US and other countries can make all sectors of the US and other countries fight against China, and economic security is the most important aspect to tingle their nerves, and (b) China’s capability, especially its economic capability, is constantly improving, while that of the US is not as strong as before. In order to contain China, the US can only slander China with these means.

In discourse (17), the US upgrades “cultural activities” (A1b) and “educational activities” (A1c) to the same level of “the soft power” (A1). This shows that in the US’s eyes, (a) attacking China’s assimilation of Africa with soft power strategies is an important means to alert African countries to guard against China, and cultural and educational activities are the most effective soft power strategies used by China, and (b) China’s ideological propoganda in Africa is very successful and the US has almost lost its ideological influence in Africa.

Module 2: Ignoring the existence of subcategory B1 and upgrading its element B1a, which originally belongs to B1, to the same level of subcategory B2. At this moment, the US believes that subcategory B1 is too abstract, and its element B1a is as concrete as subcategory B2, which is easier to attract the attention of the “addressee” (Wales, 2001: 6) and help the US achieve its purpose.

In discourse (7), the US downplays “undermine the status quo of the world” (B1), and upgrades the already upgraded element “undermine the economic security ...” (B1a), and the two subcategories “undermine the national security ...” (B1b) and “undermine a free ...” (B1c) to the same level of “advance ...” (B2). Compared with “undermine the status quo of the world”, its subcategories “undermine the economic security ...”, “undermine the national security ...”, and “undermine a free ...” are easier to attract all sectors of the US and other countries’ attentions, and urge the US and the international community to abandon their differences and jointly resist China.

In discourse (10), the US downplays “information theft” (B1) and “human rights abuses” (B1’), and upgrades their elements “intellectual property theft” (B1a) and “cyber-related economic espionage” (B1b), and “repression of ethnic



minorities” (B1a’) and “other human rights abuses” (B1b’) to the same level of “abuses of the international trading system” (B2), “illicit assistance to ...” (B3), and “drug trafficking ...” (B4). Compared with “human rights abuses”, “repression of ethnic minorities” and “other human rights abuses” are easier to arouse the international community’s anger and urge other countries to isolate China. Compared with “information theft”, “intellectual property theft” and “cyber-related economic espionage” are easier to attract the major financial groups’ attentions and urge them to support the competition with China.

In discourse (17), the US downplays “the unknown results of China’s influence on Africa” (B1), and upgrades “the amount and impact of direct investment” (B1a), “the involvement of Chinese state-owned enterprises in Africa” (B1b), “the amount of African debt held by the People’s Republic of China” (B1c), “the involvement of Chinese private ... companies in Africa” (B1d), and “the scale and impact of PRC arms sales to African countries” (B1e) to the same level of “the known results of China’s influence on Africa” (B2). Also in discourse (17), the US downplays “the known results of China’s influence on Africa” (B1), and upgrades “African countries supporting PRC ...” (B1a’) to the same level of “the unknown results of China’s influence on Africa” (B2). Compared with “the unknown results of China’s influence on Africa” and “the known results of China’s influence on Africa”, “the amount and impact of direct investment”, “the involvement of Chinese state-owned enterprises in Africa”, “the amount of African debt held by the People’s Republic of China”, “the involvement of Chinese private ... companies in Africa”, “the scale and impact of PRC arms sales to African countries”, and “African countries supporting PRC ...” are more specific and detailed, which can press the President, the US Congress, and the major financial groups having trade relations with Africa to support the bill. The proposers’ behavior of trying to list the limited known results of Sino-African interaction also shows that the US is trying to remedy its fault now.

The US’s behavior of downplaying subcategories and upgrading the level of their elements in discourses (7), (10), and (17) shows that in the US’s eyes, (a) China’s international political influence, as well as its technological, economic, ideological, and military advantages are approaching the US, while the advantages of the US’s counterparts are being narrowed by China, and (b) the US is skillful in integrating resources from the international community, and is good at using allies, partners, and the international community to achieve its goals.

Module 3: hiding subcategory C1 and its element C1a in the logical presupposition of the relevant discourse. At this moment, subcategory C1 and its element C1a are most probably relevant with China’s behaviors. Compared with China’s behaviors, the US cares more about their results.

In discourse (17), the US hides “the behaviors of China’s influence on Africa” (C1) in “the results of China’s influence on Africa”, i.e., “China invests directly in Africa ...” (C1a), “Chinese state-owned enterprises involve in Africa” (C1b), “China holds African debt” (C1c), “Chinese private ... companies involve in Africa” (C1d), “China sells weapons to African countries” (C1e), “China invests in African energy resources and minerals” (C1f), “China aids and assists African countries” (C1g), “China facilitates illegal and corrupt activity ...” (C1h), “China exerts undue influences on African governments ...” (C1i), and “China seeks to expand influence in Africa” (C1j) are hidden in the discourses relevant with “the results of China’s influence on Africa”.

Module 4: Mixing element D2a in subcategory D2 with element D1a in subcategory D1 to form subcategory D1 & D2. At this moment, the US has a chaotic and illogical mind, incorrectly categorizing the relevant objects.

In discourse (17), the US mixes the element “seek to expand the influence in Africa” (D1a’) in “the behaviors of China’s influence on Africa” (D1’) with the subcategory “the soft power” (D2a’) in “China’s strategies of influencing Africa” (D2’), and its upgraded elements “cultural activities” and “educational activities” to form the subcategory “the behaviors and strategies of China’s expansion of influence in Africa” (D1’ & D2’). Also in discourse (17), the US mixes “the scope of Chinese investment in ... African energy resources and minerals” (D1a”) in “the unknown results of China’s influence on Africa” (D1”) with “control of African energy resources and minerals” (D2a”) in “the known results of China’s influence on Africa” (D2”) to form “the known and unknown results of China’s investment in African energy resources and minerals” (D1” & D2”). In the same discourse, the US also mixes elements in “the behaviors of China’s influence on Africa” (D1) with their corresponding elements in “the results of China’s influence on Africa” (D2) to form many categories (D1 & D2).

In discourse (17), the US pays special attention to the results of China’s behaviors and incorrectly categorizes the relevant objects, which show that it has made the mistake of neglecting Sino-African interaction for a long time. On the one hand, the proposers’ behavior of concealing China’s actions is related to the fact that the US hasn’t mastered sufficient information, on the other hand, they are also covering up the relevant departments’ mistakes. The domestic political structure is defined “first, according to the principle by which it is ordered; second, by specification of the functions of formally differentiated units; and third, by the distribution of capabilities across those units” (Waltz, 1979:

82). That the US has neglected China's interaction with Africa for a long time and is unwilling to admit its fault now indicates that its domestic political structure has its own flaws: either its organizational principles are defective, or the functions of some departments are vague, or the power of the intelligence department is weakened. Therefore, it can be concluded that China's diplomacy in Africa has been very successful at least in the past decade while the US's global political influence is declining.

Module 5: Putting element Ex in subcategories E1 and E2 simultaneously. At this moment, the US has a vague understanding of category E, being unable to clearly demarcate subcategories E1 and E2's boundary.

In discourse (17), the US places an element (Ex) under the subcategories "cultural activities" (E1) and "educational activities" (E2). This shows that (a) the US is not clear about China's "soft power" (E) strategy in Africa, and (b) the US is despairing to see China's soft power diplomacy has succeeded in Africa, wanting to make up the Neo-colonial story to damage Sino-African cooperation.

Module 6: Studying category F with the "diachronic" (de Saussure, 1983: 81) method and arranging its subcategories F1, F2, and F3 according to the scenario ICM. At this moment, the US has made a careful study on category F, clearly knowing its developing trend.

In discourse (1), the US infers the impact of China's national policy (F) from the current impact (F1), the future impact (F2), and the final impact (F3) chronologically. In discourse (10), the US examines the interaction between China and the US from the initial state (F1), the intermediate event (F2), and the end state (F3). This shows that (a) the US has conducted detailed research on some important fields involving China and may have formed an effective plan to counter China, (b) because of China's strong developing momentum and capability in the international system, the US has indeed viewed China as the main competitor, and (c) the US has strong think tanks and efficient research teams to aid its competition with China.

In addition to the six modules, the US also uses the classical taxonomic structure to categorize China, i.e., putting two groups of semantically non-overlapping elements A1a and A1b, and A2a and A2b under their superordinate categories A1 and A2, respectively, and then putting the two semantically non-overlapping categories A1 and A2 under category A. At this moment, the US is familiar with category A, but is not as familiar as with category F in module 6. For example, in discourse (10), the US first uses "sanctions" (A1a) and "other restrictions" (A1b), and "authorized" (A2a) and "mandated" (A2b) to form two subcategories "the US's ways to counter China" (A1) and "the US's procedure to counter China" (A2), and then uses the two subcategories (A1) and (A2) to form the category "the US's countermeasures on China" (A).

In most cases, the US uses the classical taxonomic structure to categorize China, but when has special purposes, it would adopt these six modules. To highlight some information, the US would use modules 1 and 2; to hide some information, it would use module 3; with incomplete information but to make clear the relevant contents, it would use modules 4 and 5; with sufficient information and to give special attention to an area, it would use module 6. Although attacks China on many subjects in many fields, the US's ways of organizing categories are based on the six modules and classical taxonomic structure. For example, in discourse (17) it uses all modules and classical taxonomic structure except module 6. The six modules and the classical taxonomic structure together form the US's covert categorizing model on China.

Based on this model and the US's mentalities in recognizing China, this article can give a new interpretation on China and the US in the international system: China's development momentum is very strong, its capability in the international system, including its political, economic, scientific, technological, ideological, and military capabilities, is approaching the US, and its public diplomacy has made remarkable achievement in Africa. Compared with China, the US's counterparts of capability in the international system are not as strong as before, and due to its policy mistakes, it has lost its control of Africa. Presently the US has no better strategies to curb China's rise, except slandering China with fictitious facts, nor does it have the capability to contain China alone. However, the US is skillful in integrating resources from the international community, is good at using allies, partners, and the international community to achieve its goals. It also has strong think tanks and efficient research teams, which are its advantages in Sino-American competition.

The US and this article's cognition of China and the US in the international system can be further compared as follows: When recognizes the US, except cognition of its countermeasures against China and its combined national capability are different, the two perspectives' cognition of its other aspects is basically the same. When recognizes China, the two perspectives' cognition of all aspects is basically the same. That the US is over-confident with its countering ways and procedure, and regards it can win Sino-American competition is not based on facts. Therefore, they are irrational

“affectual” and “traditional” (Weber, 1968: 25) social actions, and is relevant with the subjective “perceptual factors” (Buzan, 1983: 215), which no doubt will encourage the US’s arrogance and may make it do something to endanger the East Asian security.

## 5 Conclusion

By analyzing the non-classical taxonomic structure categories extracted from the discourses relevant with the US’s cognition of China in *United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021*, this article discovers that (a) the US believes that China’s increasing capability in the international system has already impacted the existing international system and threatened its own hegemony, (b) the US has a special categorizing model on China, and its mentalities are arrogant and anxious, (c) the US’s political, economic, technological, ideological, and military advantages are no longer obvious compared with those of China, (d) its domestic political structure has its own flaws, and (d) although the US has no ability to contain China alone, it has a strong ability to integrate resources from the international community. Compared with traditional international relations study, this article not only deepens our understanding of the US’s cognition of China by revealing its categorizing model on China and its mentalities, but also establishes a scientific, objective, convenient, and feasible operation paradigm for international relations study by successfully integrating the methods of discourse analysis and international system analysis.

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### **Acknowledgments**

Not applicable.

### **Authors contributions**

Dr. Bin ZHOU was responsible for the whole process of this article.

### **Funding**

Not applicable.

### **Competing interests**

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### **Informed consent**

Obtained.

### **Ethics approval**

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

### **Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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