

A Diachronic Transitivity Analysis on China Daily's Coverage of the 2018 and 2025 China-US Trade Disputes

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Abstract

This study conducts a diachronic transitivity analysis of China Daily's coverage of the 2018 and 2025 China-US trade disputes, focusing on material processes and Actor-Goal constructions. Findings show that material processes dominate, emphasizing tangible actions such as tariffs and negotiations. In 2018, China is portrayed as cooperative and responsible, while the US appears coercive; by 2025, the US emerges as the primary instigator, and China adopts a defensive-counteractive-constructive stance. Overall, the newspaper strategically frames national agency and accountability, reinforcing China's legitimacy and strategic image in international economic governance.

Keywords

China-US trade dispute; media discourse; transitivity analysis; systemic functional linguistics; Actor-Goal construction; China Daily

1. Introduction

The 2025 China-US trade dispute represents a significant escalation in the ongoing economic rivalry between the two superpowers. In early 2025, the US imposed tariffs on Chinese imports, rapidly increasing from 10% to 145% by April, prompting China to retaliate with tariffs of up to 125%. Although a May agreement temporarily eased tensions, reducing tariffs to 30% (US) and 10% (China), the episode highlights the volatility of bilateral relations and deepening structural decoupling in global trade. This conflict echoes the 2018 trade war, which began with US tariffs on \$340 billion of Chinese goods under Section 301, and China's countermeasures targeting key sectors, reflecting a broader strategic rivalry encompassing technology, supply chains, and geopolitical influence (Bown, 2021).

As the world's two largest economies, China-US trade dynamics constitute a major geopolitical and economic issue, attracting global attention. Media coverage, partic-

ularly by *China Daily* which is a leading Chinese English-language newspaper, shapes public perception of the dispute, yet few studies have examined its discourse using transitivity analysis—a framework from Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) that investigates who does what to whom, under what circumstances, and with what effects.

This study conducts a diachronic transitivity analysis of *China Daily*’s coverage of the 2018 and 2025 trade disputes, focusing on material processes and the construction of Actor and Goal. It addresses two questions: (1) What are the transitivity configurations in *China Daily*’s reporting of the China-US trade dispute in 2018 and 2025? (2) How does *China Daily* construct the roles of Actor and Goal in portraying the dispute across the two periods? By examining these representations, the study illuminates how media discourse shapes national narratives and public understanding of economic conflicts, contributing both to critical discourse studies and methodological innovation in diachronic linguistic analysis.

2. China-US Trade Dispute

2.1. Historical Context of China-US Trade Dispute

In the contemporary globalized economy, international trade is a central force in shaping the economic trajectories of nations. Among the most significant trade relationships is that between China and the United States, the two largest economies in the world. In recent years, this bilateral relationship has become increasingly contentious, particularly with the eruption of trade dispute.

The 2018 Sino-US trade dispute marked a sharp escalation, triggered by the Trump administration’s protectionist measures, starting with tariffs on washing machines and solar panels in January. In March, tariffs on steel (25%) and aluminum (10%) were imposed under Section 232, affecting allies more than China (Bown, 2021). The U.S. escalated the conflict with three rounds of Section 301 tariffs targeting Chinese tech practices, while China retaliated by hitting U.S. agriculture, especially soybeans (a 75% drop). The back-and-forth saw U.S. tariffs rise from 3.1% to 12%, and China’s tariffs increase from 8% to 18.3%, disrupting trade, global supply chains, and signaling a shift towards economic decoupling, despite a truce at the December 2018 G20 summit (Bown & Keynes, 2020).

The 2024-2025 trade war renewal was driven by a mix of economic, political, and strategic factors. The U.S. initially imposed tariffs on Chinese goods over trade imbalances, fentanyl trafficking, and protectionist goals. Starting in May 2024, tariffs on seven categories of Chinese imports were raised, with further hikes planned through 2026. In 2025, additional tariffs were introduced, justified by fentanyl concerns, and former President Trump declared “reciprocal tariffs,” initially at 34% but later escalating to 125%. China responded with countermeasures and deepened multilateral negotiations, particularly with the EU and Belt and Road Initiative nations. This complex dispute has wide-reaching implications for both nations and the

global economy.

2.2. Media Discourse and Ideological Representations

Given its significance, the Sino-US trade war has become a major focus of academic inquiry. In media discourse studies, scholars have examined how metaphors, framing, legitimacy, and ideological positioning shape public perceptions of the conflict. Metaphors play a particularly influential role. Western media often depict China as aggressive, framing the trade war as a “battle” or “war,” positioning China as unjust and the U.S. as victim or defender (Zhang & Forceville, 2020; Ma & Gao, 2020; Song & Wang, 2024; Wu et al., 2022). In contrast, Chinese media employ metaphors of cooperation and mutual benefit, portraying the conflict as a diplomatic issue rooted in dialogue and peace (Zhou & Liu, 2024). These contrasting constructions reflect broader ideological divides, reinforcing nationalistic or self-defensive narratives.

Framing is another key mechanism in ideological construction. Western media emphasize a struggle for global supremacy, highlighting economic warfare and confrontation (Liu & Hu, 2020; Zhang, 2021), whereas Chinese media foreground cooperation, stability, and win-win outcomes, consistent with a narrative of peaceful development (Xu & Lams, 2023; Zhuo & You, 2022).

Legitimacy underpins the moral authority of each nation’s stance. U.S. media justify tariffs as defensive measures, portraying the U.S. as a victim of China’s alleged unfair trade practices (Wu et al., 2022; Hu & Li, 2023). Conversely, Chinese media present their actions as necessary and defensive, casting the U.S. as the aggressor and legitimizing retaliatory tariffs (Yang & Shi, 2021). Both sides employ discourse strategies that affirm their own positions while delegitimizing the opponent, often through negative evaluations of trade practices.

Although these studies yield valuable insights, they remain largely macro-discursive. Less attention has been paid to the linguistic mechanisms by which such strategies are realized. Halliday’s transitivity system offers a finer-grained perspective, as it examines how processes and participants are constructed in discourse. Moreover, existing research is mainly synchronic; a diachronic approach can reveal how representations evolve with shifting geopolitical and domestic contexts. Against this backdrop, analyzing *China Daily*’s coverage of the 2018 and 2025 disputes provides a means to trace the discursive construction and reconfiguration of China’s national image over time. This study thus addresses these gaps through a transitivity-based diachronic analysis.

3. Transitivity System in Systemic Functional Grammar

In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), language is regarded as a social semiotic system, and grammar is conceptualized as a network of meaning-making resources rather than a set of prescriptive rules (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Within this framework, the transitivity system is a crucial component of the

ideational metafunction, which is responsible for representing human experience and the external world through linguistic choices. In essence, transitivity provides a means of analyzing “who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why” in a clause, thereby reflecting not only the structure of experience but also the underlying attitudes and ideologies of the speaker or writer.

3.1. Transitivity System

The transitivity system comprises three core elements: processes, participants, and circumstances. Processes are realized by verbs and denote different types of experiences; participants are entities involved in these processes, each taking specific semantic roles; and circumstances provide additional contextual information such as time, location, cause, or manner (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Together, these elements form the experiential meaning of clauses and constitute the primary resources for analyzing how social reality is discursively constructed.

Halliday (1994) and subsequent scholars identify six process types within the transitivity system: material, mental, relational, behavioral, verbal, and existential. Each process involves specific participants and circumstances, enabling a structured analysis of how experiences and events are construed through language. The material process describes actions or events, typically involving an Actor who performs an action and a Goal that is affected (Ma, 2020). The mental process reflects psychological experiences, with a Senser perceiving, feeling, or thinking about a Phenomenon. Relational processes capture relationships and attributes between entities, including attributive (Carrier–Attribute) and identifying (Identifier–Identified) types (Halliday, 2004; Ma, 2020). Verbal processes denote acts of saying or exchanging information, involving a Sayer, a Receiver, and the Verbiage itself (Halliday, 2004). Behavioral processes encompass physiological or behavioral actions, with the Behaver as the central participant, while existential processes indicate existence, typically realized through an Existent and expressions such as “there is” or “there are.” Overall, the transitivity system provides a powerful framework for understanding how language constructs reality, making it particularly useful for the analysis of news discourse.

3.2. Actor and Goal in Material Processes

Material processes are particularly salient in news discourse about international conflicts, as they encode tangible actions and the power relations underlying them. Material processes typically involve two central participant roles: the Actor, who performs the action, and the Goal, who is impacted by it (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). For instance, in the clause “The US imposed tariffs on Chinese goods”, the US functions as the Actor, while Chinese goods function as the Goal. Such configurations are instrumental in shaping how agency, responsibility, and victimhood are as-

signed in media discourse.

Focusing on Actor and Goal in material processes is especially relevant to the study of trade disputes, since these elements capture the dynamics of action and reaction central to economic conflicts. By analyzing how *China Daily* portrays the United States and China as Actors or Goals in the 2018 and 2025 trade disputes, this study reveals not only the linguistic construction of agency but also the ideological stance underlying the newspaper's reporting. This approach highlights how discourse choices contribute to framing China as an active initiator, a reactive respondent, or a cooperative partner across different stages of the conflict, thereby reflecting broader shifts in China's evolving position in global trade relations (Halliday & Matthiesen, 2014).

4. Data and Methods

The data for this study were sourced from the official *China Daily* news website using advanced search with the keywords "trade dispute" and "trade war." For the 2018 China-US trade dispute, four specific publication dates were selected—July 6, August 23, and September 24 in 2018, and May 10 in 2019—corresponding to major adjustments in relevant tariff policies. Ten highly relevant news articles from these dates were chosen to reflect the newspaper's coverage of key policy changes. For the 2025 trade dispute, the data collection period spans from April 1 to May 1, 2025, a period characterized by frequent tariff adjustments, and ten highly relevant news articles were selected.

Based on these selections, two corpora were constructed: the 2018 trade dispute corpus consisting of 10 texts (20,552 tokens, 19,059 word types), and the 2025 trade dispute corpus consisting of 10 texts (26,170 tokens, 24,475 word types). Together, these two corpora provide a representative sample of *China Daily*'s coverage of major trade conflicts between China and the United States in both 2018 and 2025, reflecting key moments when tariff policies were most actively adjusted.

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitatively, the corpora were analyzed using UAM Corpus Tool 6.2, with an annotation layer for the six process types. Automated classification of processes, participants, and circumstances was refined through manual verification, especially for identifying Actors and Goals in material processes. These participants were systematically organized in Excel for comparison across the two corpora. Qualitatively, statistical results and the manually compiled Actor-Goal datasets were interpreted to uncover representation patterns and shifts between 2018 and 2025. This integrated approach ensures both empirical rigor and interpretive depth, examining how *China Daily* constructs the roles of China, the US, and other entities in trade dispute reporting and how these representations evolve alongside changing tariff policies.

5. Findings

The present findings part systematically presents the results of a transitivity analysis of *China Daily's* coverage of the China-US trade disputes in 2018 and 2025. By examining both the overall transitivity configurations and the specific Actor-Goal constructions within material processes, this section aims to uncover how agency, responsibility, and discursive prominence are distributed across the discourse.

5.1. Transitivity Configurations

To understand how *China Daily* represents the China-US trade disputes in 2018 and 2025, the overall distributions of transitivity configurations were first examined using UAM Corpus Tool 6.2. This analysis focuses on the three main subsystems—participants, processes, and circumstances—together with the distributions of six process types.

As shown in the **Table 1**, participants consistently constitute the largest component of the transitivity system in both years (31.4% in 2018; 30.7% in 2025), while processes rank second, followed by circumstances and configurations. This pattern indicates that *China Daily's* coverage is heavily centered on the entities involved in the trade disputes, highlighting their prominence in the representation of economic actions and interactions.

Table 1. Overall Distribution of Transitivity System in 2018 and 2025 Coverage.

Year	Participants (N/%)	Processes (N/%)	Circumstances (N/%)	Total (N)
2018	817/31.4%	680/26.1%	546/20.9%	2,604
2015	934/30.7%	821/27.0%	590/19.4%	3,039

A closer inspection of process types further illustrates the discursive focus (**Table 2**). Across both periods, material processes overwhelmingly dominate, accounting for more than two-thirds of all processes (67.3% in 2018; 70.2% in 2025). This dominance indicates that the newspaper primarily constructs the trade disputes through tangible actions and economic measures, such as imposing tariffs, launching negotiations, and implementing policy changes. Relational processes form the second-largest category, increasing from 14.8% in 2018 to 17.3% in 2025, suggesting that the later coverage gives more weight to defining roles, relationships, and attributions among the parties involved. In contrast, verbal and mental processes are less frequent, reflecting a lower emphasis on reported speech or subjective evaluations. Existential processes remain marginal, while modal processes are absent.

Table 2. Distribution of Process Types in 2018 and 2025 Coverage

Year	Material (N/%)	Mental (N/%)	Verbal (N/%)	Relational (N/%)	Existential (N/%)	Modal (N/%)	Total (N)
2018	376/67.3%	40/7.2%	49/8.8%	83/14.8%	11/2.0%	0/0%	559
2015	483/70.2%	42/6.1%	38/5.5%	119/17.3%	6/0.9%	0/0%	688

The diachronic comparison highlights both continuity and subtle shifts. The persistence of material processes as the predominant process type, along with the consistent dominance of participants, demonstrates that *China Daily* represents the trade disputes largely as a sequence of concrete actions enacted by identifiable actors. At the same time, the slight increase in relational processes in 2025 suggests a gradual discursive shift towards more explicit construction of roles and relationships.

Importantly, the findings from transitivity configurations reveal that participants are most prominent within material processes, which account for the largest proportion of all process types. This observation naturally directs the focus of the next research question: to explore how participants, actor and goal, are represented specifically within material processes, providing a foundation for understanding the newspaper's portrayal of agency and responsibility in the trade disputes.

5.2. Transitivity Analysis of Actor and Goal

Focusing on Actor and Goal is crucial because they reveal how agency and responsibility are distributed in the discourse. In Systemic Functional Linguistics, Actors initiate actions, whereas Goals are the entities affected by these actions. Examining the Actor–Goal configurations in *China Daily* highlights which entities are foregrounded as decision-makers, how actions are directed, and how accountability is framed in the context of the China–US trade dispute. The diachronic comparison of 2018 and 2025 shows both shifts in prominence and changes in semantic orientation for China, the US, and other actors.

5.2.1. Actor Construction

In 2018, the distribution of Actors is relatively balanced. In **Table 3**, China-related Actors (32.6%) are framed as responsible and cooperative initiators, often projecting reform, openness, and global cooperation. In Example 1, China as Actor undertakes economic reform, while “*its growth*” is the Goal—this emphasizes China’s self-discipline and commitment to sustainable development. In Example 2, China acts as the negotiator, with “*the China–EU Investment Agreement*” as Goal, highlighting China’s active involvement in multilateral diplomacy. Similarly, in Example 3, China initiates global cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, with “*deeper cooperation*” as the Goal, foregrounding its role as a constructive global partner.

1) *It (China) (Actor) must ... further carry out its supply-side structural reforms to make its growth (Goal) more efficient and resilient.*

2) *China (Actor) will work with the European Union (EU) to expedite the negotia-*

tions on the China-EU Investment Agreement (Goal).

3) *China (Actor) will promote deeper cooperation (Goal) under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative based on the principles of consultation, cooperation and benefit for all.*

By contrast, US-related Actors (36.8%) are framed as coercive and unilateral. In Example 4, the Trump administration's trade predation functions as Actor, while "international supply chains and value chains" are the Goals disrupted by its "trade predation," underscoring the US as a source of instability. Example 5 further shows the US as Actor, imposing "tariffs" as Goal on "Chinese goods worth \$34 billion", presenting America as the aggressor in trade disputes.

4) *The Trump administration's trade predation (Actor) will only serve to disrupt international supply chains and value chains (Goal).*

5) *The US (Actor) imposed tariffs (Goal) on Chinese goods worth \$34 billion.* Thus, in 2018, *China Daily* constructs China as a cooperative and responsible actor, while the US is positioned as the unilateral instigator of disruption.

Table 3. The distribution of Actor and Goals in 2018 and 2025 Coverage.

Category	2018 Actor (%)	2025 Actor (%)	2018 Goal (%)	2025 Goal (%)
US-related	36.8	42.8	16.7	18.4
China-related	32.6	20.4	10.6	6.4
Third Party	30.6	36.8	72.7	75.2

By 2025, US-related Actors rise to 42.79%, surpassing China-related Actors at 20.40%, with third-party Actors remaining substantial at 36.82% (see Table 3). This increase foregrounds the US as the principal instigator of conflict and places greater responsibility on American actions. In Example 6, the US administration is the Actor imposing punitive tariffs, with "China" as the Goal, reinforcing the coercive role of the US. In Example 7, the US again appears as Actor, violating "fundamental market and economic law" (Goal), positioning the US as destabilizer of global norms.

6) *The US administration (Actor) has kept hinting these days, despite the exorbitant punitive tariffs it has levied on China (Goal),*

7) *It (the US) (Actor) not only violates fundamental market and economic law (Goal) that are based on free trade and market competition,*

Meanwhile, China's proportion as Actor decreases, but its semantic role shifts from primarily cooperative to strategically counteractive. Example 8 shows China as Actor vowing to "take reciprocal countermeasures" (Goal), which represents a more assertive and defensive stance. This indicates that although China is less frequently positioned as Actor, when it is, the emphasis is on agency, resilience, and discursive authority.

8) *It (China) (Actor) will "resolutely take reciprocal countermeasures" (Goal) should that happen.....*

This diachronic shift suggests a change in *China Daily*'s discursive strategy: the US is increasingly portrayed as bearing the main responsibility for escalating tensions,

while China's reduced but more assertive Actor role reflects its enhanced discursive power and capacity to define legitimate responses.

5.2.2. Goal Construction and Semantic Orientation

While overall Goal distribution remains dominated by third parties (2018: 72.7%; 2025: 75.2%; **Table 3**), the more revealing pattern for image construction is which Goals are selected when China or the US functions as Actor. In 2018, when China acts, the Goals foreground sovereignty protection, reform, and multilateral stability—projecting a defensive-cooperative profile. Example 9 frames “national dignity and core interests” as the Goal of China's action, indexing sovereignty maintenance; Example 10 selects “deepening reform and widening opening-up” as Goal, encoding self-improvement and openness; Example 11 identifies “safeguard the multilateral economic system” as Goal, casting China as a custodian of global order.

9) China (Actor) is firmly committed to safeguarding its national dignity and core interests (Goal).

10) China (Actor) is firmly committed to deepening reform and widening opening-up (Goal).

11) China (Actor) must join hands with other countries to safeguard the multilateral economic system (Goal).

When the US acts in 2018, the Goals are constituted by relational and systemic objects—bilateral trade ties, international supply chains, and the global economy—which are portrayed as being harmed by US initiatives. Thus, Example 12 configures “bilateral trade ties” as the affected Goal of US actions, and Example 13 presents supply chains, the global economy, and enterprises/consumers as Goals undergoing damage. These Actor-Goal pairings allocate responsibility to the US for broad, extra-territorial consequences.

12) Although the US actions (Actor) have cast a shadow over bilateral trade ties,

13) The Trump administration's trade predation (Actor) will only serve to disrupt international supply chains and value chains (Goal), battering the global economy (Goal), and victimizing enterprises and consumers around the world (Goal), including the US.

By 2025, China's Goals shift toward a “defensive-counteractive-constructive” orientation. Example 14 selects “necessary countermeasures”, “legitimate rights” and interests” and “international fairness and justice” as the Goal of China's countermeasures, recoding defense in juridical and normative terms; Example 15 targets “its desire to deepen ties with the world's largest trading bloc” as Goal, signaling agenda-setting in external alignment; Example 16 makes “fair dialogue” the Goal, positioning China as a procedural norm entrepreneur. These choices elevate China's discursive authority, from steward of stability to shaper of rules and remedies.

14) China (Actor) has taken necessary countermeasures (Goal) in order to defend its legitimate rights and interests and international fairness and justice (Goal).

15) *Beijing (Actor) has repeatedly expressed its desire to deepen ties with the world's largest trading bloc (Goal).*

16) *China (Actor) urges fair dialogue (Goal), not threats, to resolve trade dispute with US*

US-related Goals reflects a dual orientation. On the one hand, the US is represented as coercive and norm-violating: in Example 17, the Goals are the “rules-based multilateral trading system” and the “stability of the global economic order”, both of which are depicted as undermined or disrupted by US behavior. On the other hand, the discourse also highlights unintended domestic repercussions: Example 18 configures the US itself as the Goal of its own tariff policy, suggesting a self-inflicted dimension of harm. This duality portrays the United States not only as a destabilizer of international norms but also as a victim of its own coercive strategies, thereby reinforcing its accountability for both global disorder and internal economic costs.

17) *Such behavior (US as Actor) undermines the rules-based multilateral trading system and disrupts the stability of the global economic order (Goals).*

18) *It is the US itself (Goal) that will primarily bear the brunt of its tariff policy (US as Actor).*

The diachronic analysis of China Daily's coverage reveals a significant reconfiguration of Actor–Goal relations between 2018 and 2025. First, the proportion of US-related Actors rises markedly, accompanied by increasingly coercive and interventionist Goals, which discursively constructs the United States as the principal instigator of trade tensions and foregrounds its accountability for the escalation of conflict. Second, although China's frequency as Actor declines, its semantic orientation undergoes a notable transformation: from predominantly cooperative and reform-oriented in 2018 to counteractive yet constructive in 2025. This shift reflects China's enhanced discursive authority, positioning it as both a defender of sovereignty and a proactive contributor to global governance. Collectively, these patterns indicate that China Daily strategically reshapes agency and responsibility over time, amplifying the United States' culpability while consolidating China's image as a resilient and authoritative actor within the international trade order.

6. Discussion

The diachronic transitivity analysis of China Daily's coverage of the China-US trade disputes reveals a nuanced evolution in the newspaper's discursive construction of agency, responsibility, and global consequences. Across both 2018 and 2025, the predominance of material processes underscores a consistent focus on tangible actions, such as tariffs, negotiations, and policy implementation. This emphasis reflects a journalistic strategy that foregrounds observable economic measures, situating accountability within identifiable actors, and aligning with the study's objective of uncovering how agency is represented in media discourse.

Significantly, the distribution of Actors and Goals indicates a marked shift in the por-

trayal of the primary agents of the conflict. In 2018, China and the US were relatively balanced in actor prominence, with China depicted as a cooperative and responsible participant engaging in negotiations and safeguarding national interests. By 2025, the US emerges as the dominant Actor, reflecting intensified interventionist measures and the newspaper's discursive strategy to position the US as the principal instigator of trade tensions. Correspondingly, China's representation evolves from a defensive-cooperative stance to a defensive-counteractive-constructive posture, emphasizing strategic responses, reciprocal measures, and proactive engagement in multilateral forums. These shifts illustrate that China Daily's coverage is not merely descriptive but strategically frames national agency and responsibility, thereby reinforcing China's legitimacy and projecting an image of rational, measured statecraft in the context of escalating bilateral tensions.

Moreover, the analysis of Goals highlights an increasing awareness of systemic and global impacts. Third-party Goals consistently dominate, reflecting the collateral effects of trade disputes on international markets, financial institutions, and global economic stability. By 2025, abstract and non-state entities—such as economic globalization, financial market volatility, and structural interdependence—appear as both Actors and Goals, signaling a discursive expansion from bilateral state-centered narratives to global systemic concerns. This expansion demonstrates that China Daily situates the China-US dispute within a broader economic and geopolitical framework, emphasizing interconnectedness and the far-reaching consequences of unilateral actions.

Overall, these patterns suggest that China Daily strategically frames the China-US trade disputes by foregrounding the US as the primary instigator while portraying China as a responsible yet proactive actor. The increasing attention to systemic and non-state actors situates bilateral tensions within a global economic context, highlighting the broader consequences of trade actions. This discursive shift reflects both evolving geopolitical realities and the newspaper's effort to reinforce China's image as rational, cooperative, and strategically engaged in international economic governance.

7. Conclusion

The China-US trade disputes of 2018 and 2025 occurred within a context of escalating strategic rivalry, encompassing tariffs, technology competition, and global supply chain tensions. This study's diachronic transitivity analysis of China Daily reveals how media discourse reflects and shapes perceptions of this complex conflict. Material processes dominate the coverage, highlighting concrete economic actions, while Actor-Goal constructions show a shift: the United States increasingly emerges as the primary instigator, and China transitions from a defensive-cooperative to a defensive-counteractive-constructive stance, signaling proactive engagement and strategic responses. The prominence of third-party and systemic actors underscores the

broader global and economic consequences, situating bilateral tensions within a wider international framework. Overall, China Daily frames the disputes to reinforce China's legitimacy and project rational, responsible statecraft in a volatile global trade environment.

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