

China's Tourism from A European Perspective: an Examination of the Implementation Effects and Optimization Of China's Transit Visa-Free Policy

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ABSTRACT: This study examines China's transit visa exemption policy through agenda-setting theory. By analyzing the framing of European mainstream media reports and public commentary, it investigates how the policy is presented in European media and its public reception. The aim is to evaluate its transnational communication effectiveness and propose optimization pathways. Findings reveal that European media coverage exhibits diverse narrative tendencies, while public attitudes reflect both endorsement and skepticism. Although the policy receives positive feedback regarding convenience and appeal, it still faces multiple practical constraints, including payment barriers and service compatibility issues.

KEYWORDS: Transit visa-free, European perspective, Inbound tourism, Discourse analysis, Agenda setting, Tourism facilitation

I. INTRODUCTION

To further advance high-level opening-up, align with globalization trends, and enhance international tourism competitiveness, the Chinese government has continuously introduced and refined visa facilitation policies in recent years. Among these, the transit visa-free policy for selected countries stands out. After multiple refinements, this policy now permits eligible international travelers to enter designated urban areas without a visa and stay for up to 240 hours and engaged in short-term activities such as tourism, business, or family visits. The policy's effectiveness depends not only on domestic design and implementation but is also significantly influenced by the perception understanding, and attitudes of the international community, particularly in the regions and countries affected by the policy. As a major source market for Chinese tourism and a key global opinion leader, Europe's media and public interpretation and response to China's transit visa exemption policy are crucial not only for the policy's practical effectiveness but also as an important dimension for assessing its international acceptance and influence. Currently, systematic research analyzing the implementation outcomes of China's transit visa

exemption policy from a European perspective remains underdeveloped. In light of this, this paper aims to examine the policy's effectiveness and optimization pathways from a European viewpoint. The research will address the following questions: How do mainstream European media report on and interpret China's transit visa exemption policy? What stances and biases are reflected in their coverage? What are the feedback and evaluations from news recipients regarding this policy? To what extent do these perceptions and reactions influence the policy's actual effectiveness? By exploring these issues, this paper seeks to reveal the opportunities and challenges the policy faces in cross-border communication and reception, providing empirical evidence based on international feedback for further optimizing the visa facilitation system. This study integrates policy analysis and content analysis methodologies to construct a multidimensional evaluation framework. It seeks not only to broaden academic perspectives at the intersection of tourism policy and international communication but also to offer practical strategic recommendations for deepening people-to-people exchanges and policy adjustments between China and Europe.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on existing literature, research on China's transit visa exemption policy can be categorized into two main areas: domestic and international. The former focuses on the institutional evolution and optimization pathways of this policy at the central and local levels in China, primarily revolving around policy design, scope of application, evolutionary logic, and strategic orientation. For instance, Xu (2025)^[1] analyzes the institutional "upgrade" of China's transit visa exemption policy, examining the optimization logic behind its extension from 72/144 hours to 240 hours, and emphasizes its structural promotion of the cultural and tourism industry. Song et al. (2018) examined the implementation outcomes of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei policy, finding it significantly boosted inbound tourism volume in the short term but showed diminishing long-term effects due to policy limitations. In terms of research methodologies, scholars primarily employ quantitative analysis and case studies to evaluate policy outcomes. For instance, Zhang et al. (2023) utilize a Difference-in-Differences (DID) model to demonstrate that the policy effectively increased inbound tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings, identifying the "cost effect" as the dominant mechanism. Gu (2024) employed spatial DID to argue that while the policy shortened average tourist stays, it generated spatial spillover effects. Cai et al. (2024) contrasted entry data with case studies, highlighting challenges including heightened management complexity and cultural differences.

Another category focuses on overseas feedback and implementation outcomes, primarily concerning extended visa-free stays and expanded coverage (Xu, 2025), proposing enhanced supporting services (e.g., multilingual support, electronic applications) (Cai et al. 2024). However, existing research has paid limited attention to overseas markets' awareness and feedback regarding this policy, as well as its implementation effectiveness internationally. Studies examining this from perspectives such as international tourism consumer behavior, cross-cultural communication, and policy externalities remain particularly scarce. Although some researchers (Tang, R, 2021) have examined the impact of visa liberalization on tourist behavior in specific source countries, their research primarily focuses on the overall outbound travel patterns of source countries rather than specifically

addressing the acceptance and dissemination effectiveness of China's transit visa-free policy in overseas markets. Consequently, the existing research exhibits a notable absence of an overseas perspective, with insufficient attention paid to the genuine feedback generated by the transit visa-free policy in international media, tourism platforms, and foreign tourist groups. Given this, this paper proposes shifting the observational perspective to focus on the actual feedback and implementation effectiveness of China's transit visa exemption policy in overseas markets. Grounded in cross-cultural communication and cognitive contexts, and drawing on multi-source authentic data from overseas social media, tourism behavior data, and international news reports, this study delves into the policy's influence mechanisms and dissemination effects abroad. By systematically integrating sentiment analysis, behavioral trajectories, and media discourse, this study aims to objectively evaluate the policy's implementation outcomes in cross-cultural settings, thereby providing empirical evidence and theoretical support for subsequent policy optimization and international promotion strategies.

III. RESEARCH THEORIES AND METHODS

1. Overview of Discourse Analysis

As a theoretical and methodological framework examining the interplay between language, power, and ideology, discourse analysis provides a robust theoretical tool for interpreting how European media represent and construct China's visa-free transit policy. At its core, discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995), an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological system, asserts that language is not merely a transparent medium for conveying information, but rather a crucial practice for constructing social realities, power relations, and subject identities. Theoretically, discourse analysis draws from linguistics, sociology, philosophy, and other disciplines. Michel Foucault's theories on discourse, power, knowledge, and social norms established its foundational framework. Foucault argued that discourse functions not only as a tool for expressing thought but also as a vehicle for exercising power, shaping social cognition and behavioral norms through processes of classification, exclusion, and regulation. Building upon this, scholars representing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), such as Fairclough and Wodak (2014), further conceptualized discourse as a social practice, emphasizing its dialectical relationship with power structures and ideologies: discourse both reflects social reality and actively participates in its construction and reconfiguration. For this study, the theoretical core of discourse analysis reveals that we cannot view European media coverage of the visa-free transit policy as an objective reflection of Chinese policy. Instead, it should be understood as an active, selective, and even strategic discourse construction, interwoven with Europe's own identity anxieties, political interests, ideological biases, and complex perceptions of China's rise.

1.1 Applicability of Discourse Analysis in Research

Applying discourse analysis to examine European media coverage of China's transit visa-free policy demonstrates high applicability and explanatory power. When reporting on China, European media often fall into a discursive mechanism of "othering." This implies that China is frequently constructed in European media narratives as a "other" serving to contrast with Europe's self-image. Research indicates that EU media tends to portray China as a "systemic rival" that "challenges Europe" and "undermines international rules" (*Global Times* 2025). Against

this backdrop, China's transit visa-free policy is unlikely to be reported simply as a facilitative opening measure. Instead, it may be interpreted within the frameworks of geopolitical rivalry (e.g., the strategic intent of the Belt and Road Initiative), economic competition (e.g., vying for tourist resources), or human rights controversies (e.g., concerns over "human rights violations" highlighted in recent EU visa policy reforms). Discourse analysis, particularly critical discourse analysis and framing analysis, provides systematic methodological tools to uncover the categorizing labels, intertextual references, metaphors, and argumentative strategies employed in such reporting, thereby clarifying the underlying cognitive frameworks and presuppositions.

The EU's visa policy itself has become a tool of foreign policy and geopolitics. The EU's latest visa mechanism reform in 2025 explicitly cites "hybrid threats" (such as state-sponsored instrumentalization of migration) and "golden passports" as grounds for suspending visa-free access, reflecting internal security anxieties and value considerations within the EU. (*The European Times* 2025) When European media report on China's transit visa-free policy, this official political discourse and ideology inevitably permeates the coverage, forming a chain of intertextuality. Discourse analysis excels at capturing this intertextuality, tracing how official discourse is absorbed and reinterpreted by media, and how media discourse in turn influences policy debates and public opinion, thereby revealing the complex interplay between "language-power-ideology."

Discourse analysis rejects treating discourse as abstract text, emphasizing its nature as social practice. This means analyzing European media discourse must integrate its specific socio-historical context and potential social effects (such as shaping public perceptions of China or influencing EU policy toward China). Research indicates that China's visa-free policy has led to a significant increase in inbound tourists and reshaped China's image through tourists' spontaneous sharing. Discourse analysis can explore the following questions: How do European media present these "effects"? Do they ignore, downplay, or frame them within specific narratives? Such micro-level discourse practices serve as crucial intermediaries linking macro-level policies (China's transit visa-free policy) and macro-level social effects (China-EU relations).

Discourse analysis provides a practical analytic framework for this study: Lexical choice analysis examines high-frequency vocabulary and its emotional connotations in reports or audience feedback (e.g., whether media frame the visa exemption as an opening initiative or a strategic tool). Analysis of quoted statements examines selective sourcing in media coverage, whether outlets prioritize official statements, expert opinions, or critical voices to construct authority or critique. These methods enable systematic, empirical analysis of extensive media texts, ensuring scientific rigor and precision.

2.Overview of Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory was first proposed in 1972 by American communication scholars M.E. McCombs and Donald Shaw. (ME McCombs & Shaw 1972) Its core premise is that mass media selectively report on certain issues, thereby influencing the public's perception of their importance. While media cannot directly dictate what

the public thinks, they significantly influence what the public thinks about. This theory emphasizes the media's power in shaping the public agenda, by highlighting certain issues and downplaying others through reporting frequency, placement, and framing, thereby directing public attention. As the theory evolved, agenda-setting was further refined into two levels: the first level focuses on the transmission of issue salience, while the second level involves attribute agenda-setting, meaning the media not only sets the agenda but also influences public understanding and evaluation of an issue by emphasizing certain attributes or perspectives. Additionally, the "networked agenda-setting" (NAS) theory emphasizes that media can shape networks of connections between issues, further influencing the public's cognitive structures.

2.1 Applicability of Agenda-Setting Theory in Research

This study adopts a European media perspective, applying agenda-setting theory to examine whether coverage of China's visa-free transit policy exhibits bias, identify reporting priorities, and assess potential impacts on news recipients. Agenda-setting theory demonstrates high theoretical utility and explanatory power in this context.

In terms of topic selection and framing of prominent content, European media inevitably emphasize certain aspects when reporting on China's transit visa-free policy, such as economic motivations, the pandemic context, policy convenience, or geopolitical intentions, while overlooking others. By analyzing European media's reporting frequency, headline phrasing, and source citations, we can uncover how they shape the public prominence of the "China-related policy" narrative. Moreover, media outlets not only report the factual existence of the visa-free policy but also shape public perceptions of it through specific reporting angles. For instance, some media may emphasize the policy's temporary nature or limitations, while others highlight its openness and convenience. This framing of attributes directly influences reader's understanding of the policy itself and the formation of their attitudes toward it. Media agenda-setting also varies due to the influence of media outlets' positions and their underlying ideologies. Different media organizations may exhibit systematic variations in their coverage due to differences in political stance, audience demographics, and editorial policies. For instance, economic outlets might prioritize the policy's impact on trade and tourism, while political media focus more on its diplomatic intentions or geopolitical implications. Agenda-setting theory aids in identifying these differences and analyzing the ideological or national interest motivations underlying media agenda-setting.

3. Corpus Construction and Data Selection Criteria

To systematically examine the implementation outcomes and public perceptions of China's transit visa-free policy from a European perspective, this study constructed a multi-source heterogeneous corpus encompassing two text types: news reports and public comments. The timeframe spans from the policy's enactment (November 17, 2023) to July 2025.

Text selection was guided by two primary considerations: First, media authority and representativeness. This study systematically collected relevant reports from major European media outlets (e.g., Germany's *Die Zeit* and *Spiegel*,

the BBC, The Guardian, France's *Le Monde* etc.). These outlets not only cover major Western European countries geographically but also exhibit diversity in political stance, audience demographics, and distribution channels, enabling comprehensive capture of discourse construction and agenda-setting patterns regarding China's visa policy within European society. Second, the focus is on dynamic reactions following policy implementation. The corpus collection period was confined to the 72-hour visa-free transit policy implementation phase (starting November 17, 2023) through July 2025, encompassing the policy's initial trial stage and subsequent adjustments and expansions. Furthermore, to supplement mainstream media coverage and better observe market feedback, this study incorporates user-generated content (UGC) from travel information platforms (e.g., *Travel-Dealz*) and news website comment sections (e.g., *Die Zeit*). This approach also facilitates a more comprehensive reflection of the public's actual perceptions and emotional inclinations.

In summary, the corpus comprises two data categories: news reports encompassing multilingual texts in English, German, French, Spanish and Portuguese, systematically annotated with media attributes, publication dates, policy types, editorial stances, keywords, and sources; user comment data includes public reactions to relevant reports, processed through sentiment analysis (positive, negative, neutral) and keyword extraction, accompanied by corresponding value ratings.

Table 1: Media Sources and Number of Reports in News Corpus

Media Source	Source Country/Continent/Region	Number of Reports Collected
BBC News	Britain	1
Deutsche Wirtschaft Nachrichten	Germany	1
Die Zeit	Germany	1
EL MUNDO	Spain	1
Euronews	Europe	1
Frankfurter Allgemeine	Frankfurt, Germany	1
Le Monde	France	1
Politico Europe	Europe	2
Tagesschau	Germany	1
The Guardian	Britain	1
The Portugal News	Portugal	1
WirtschaftsWoche	Germany	1
Travel-Dealz	Germany	1
Total	\	14

This Study will integrate discourse analysis with agenda-setting theory. Through systematic coding and content analysis of the aforementioned corpus, it examines the narrative frameworks, emotional orientations, and issue

priorities employed by European media in reporting China's transit visa-free policy. It further explores the potential impact of such reporting on republic perception and tourism decision-making, ultimately providing empirical evidence and recommendations for policy optimization.

IV. OVERALL SITUATION OF NEWS COVERAGE

In the observed European media coverage of China's transit visa exemption policy, critical and skeptical content accounted for a relatively low proportion overall (approximately 7.14%)¹. However, its narrative frameworks and agenda-setting approaches hold significant analytical value. Taking France's *Le Monde* as an example, while the report does not deny the policy's inherent openness, it focuses on the more conflict-driven narrative logic of the gap between policy design and actual experience. For instance, *Le Monde*'s headline "Post-Pandemic China Faces Zero-Tourist Crisis" (*Le Monde* 2025) positions the visa-free policy within the broader context of "damaged national image" and "declining tourism appeal," implying the policy alone cannot reverse entrenched negative perceptions. From an agenda-setting perspective, such coverage exhibits clear thematic bias: rather than emphasizing the policy's substance, it indirectly shapes readers' perceptions of China's tourism facilitation measures by highlighting secondary issues like "payment system incompatibility" and "post-pandemic image concerns".

Another noteworthy category of coverage, exemplified by *The Guardian*, maintains a relatively neutral or positive stance overall while also mentioning issues like "payment inconveniences," presenting a composite impression. This reporting strategy reflects the complex role of media in transnational policy communication: acting both as information conveyors and meaning constructors. By selectively emphasizing certain issues, such as administrative efficiency, historical legacy problems, and practical difficulties faced by tourists, they subtly influence readers' overall judgments on visa-free policies and China's openness. Although most media outlets cite China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs or government announcements as sources, their interpretive and extended coverage tends to revert to topics of greater concern to domestic audiences, such as visa reciprocity, practical travel experiences, and geopolitical motivations.

This approach constructs a narrative of tension between "declarations of openness" and "real-world constraints"^[5]. While this approach to content may not constitute overt bias, it undeniably downplays the policy's positive aspects at the agenda level. Instead, it focuses more on implementation obstacles and external constraints, potentially affecting public expectations and trust in the policy's effectiveness.

Secondly, in European media coverage of China's visa-free transit policy, neutral content without explicit stances dominates, accounting for approximately 85.71%. Such reports typically focus on factual statements and

¹ In the corpus of European media reports on China's transit visa-free policy, 14 relevant articles were collected. Among them, 1 article (7.14%) explicitly expressed a positive stance, 1 article (7.14%) adopted a critical or skeptical attitude, while the remaining 12 articles (85.71%) did not demonstrate a clear position or stance.

information compilation, avoiding overt emotional bias or value judgments. Instead, they emphasize technical interpretations and institutional analyses of the policy itself. Specifically, outlets like *Politico Europe* and *Euronews*, frequently detail practical aspects such as eligible countries, permitted entry ports, duration calculation methods, and restricted transit purposes. Some reports also systematically review China's post-pandemic expansion of visa-free coverage, illustrating a policy evolution "from unilateral pilot programs to multi-country rollouts." For instance, one report clearly distinguishes between the 144-hour and 240-hour policies, emphasizing that the policy applies to tourism, business, transit, and other scenarios but cannot be used for employment or long-term residence, demonstrating a focus on the rigor of the rules. Such content tends toward "information delivery" rather than "opinion shaping" in its agenda setting, aiming to provide readers with clear, actionable policy guidance rather than steer them toward a specific stance. They typically cite official statements from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs or National Immigration Administration as sources, minimizing contextual analysis and speculative motives in their narrative structure while prioritizing objectivity and practicality. Nevertheless, media outlets subtly shape public perception of policies through selective emphasis and omission. For instance, highlighting "the policy's ongoing expansion" implies endorsement of China's opening-up process, while repeatedly specifying "excluded visa-free activities" underscores the policy's restrictive boundaries.

On the other hand, positive affirmation of the policy appears in only 7.14% of reports. Take *The Guardian's* January 22, 2025 article "China's economic need and soft diplomacy spur about-face on visa-free entry" (*The Guardian* 2025). The reporter not only enhanced narrative credibility through firsthand accounts comparing pre-, and post-visa-waiver entry experiences but also cited London School of Economics scholars to frame the policy within the theoretical framework of "mobility diplomacy", elucidating its strategic significance as a tool for expanding China's soft power and repairing its international image. Notably, the article cites data showing a 17% year-on-year increase in EU business travelers to China during Q4 2024, providing empirical support for the policy's effectiveness. This adds objectivity and persuasiveness beyond emotional resonance. Such reporting strategies imbue policies with human warmth while constructing positive cognitive frameworks through authoritative citations and data, demonstrating strong guidance in shaping public discourse.

V. ATTITUDES AND STANCES OF NEWS RECIPIENTS

For overseas public opinion analysis through reader comments, this study selected Germany's *Die Zeit* and the online travel information platform *Travel-Dealz*. as comment sources². These represent two distinct information channels—authoritative news media and a vertical travel information platform—enabling us to capture genuine reactions from overseas audiences with varying backgrounds and motivations. Based on user comment data from relevant reports on these two platforms, news recipients' attitudes toward China's tourism and visa-free transit policies exhibit complex and multidimensional stances. This study systematically examines recipients' attitudinal tendencies toward China's visa-free transit policy and tourism, along with their underlying cognitive structures,

² Comments from *Die Zeit*: 21 total; Comments from *Travel-Dealz*: 9 total

through sentiment polarity classification (positive, neutral, negative), keyword extraction, discourse analysis, and sentiment analysis of comment content.

Sentiment polarity classification results indicate that among the 30 valid comments, positive comments accounted for approximately 40% (12 comments), neutral comments for about 33% (10 comments), and negative comments for roughly 27% (8 comments). This distribution reflects the audience's attitudes exhibit distinct diversity.

Positive comments predominantly focused on favorable assessments of China's cultural appeal, diverse natural landscapes, and visa policy conveniences. Typical expressions included "*China ist eine Reise wert*" (China is worth a visit), "*faszinierendes Land*" (fascinating country) and "*visafrei ist unglaublich einfach*" (visa-free travel is incredibly convenient). These statements are often grounded in personal travel experiences, highlighting China's unique value as a tourist destination and reflecting the positive impact of policy adjustments in enhancing visit accessibility. For instance, one user explicitly noted, "*Thanks to the visa-free policy, entry has become exceptionally straightforward,*" demonstrating the direct influence of policy changes on audience perceptions. Positive comments tend to bolster persuasiveness through personal anecdotes and concrete examples, with multiple users citing their own travel experiences in China to substantiate their favorable assessments.

Neutral comments primarily address specific technical issues within China's tourism environment. Take "*bargeldloses Bezahlen mit WeChat*" (cashless payments via WeChat) (*Die Zeit* 2023) as an example: such reviews typically delve into the practical operational processes of payment methods such as identity verification procedures faced by overseas users, technical requirements for linking to Chinese bank accounts, and the real-world challenges short-term visitors encounter in adapting to payment systems. These reviews generally lack overt emotional bias, focusing primarily on factual statements that reflect an audience segment striving to maintain rational cognition during information processing. Their discourse characteristics emphasize concerns about functionality and procedural issues rather than value judgments.

Negative comments primarily center on political system differences, environmental quality issues, perceived health risks, and language communication barriers. Typical keywords include "*Klimakatastrophe*" (climate catastrophe) (*Die Zeit* 2023) and "*Luft in den Großstädten*" (air quality in major cities) (*Die Zeit* 2023). Such comments often convey negative sentiment through metaphors and irony, such as users expressing concerns about the environmental impact of long-haul flights with an ironic tone. Their discourse structures largely build upon the image of China long constructed by Western media, indicating that audience attitudes are influenced to some extent by broader narrative frameworks. While negative comments constitute a relatively small proportion, their discourse intensity is high, often employing emotional expressions to attract attention. This may amplify their impact in public discourse beyond their numerical representation.

On the other hand, keyword analysis reveals that high-frequency terms in comments fall into several categories.

First, country or region-related terms like “China,” “Taiwan,” “Shanghai,” “Peking,” and “Xian”. Second, policy or system-related terms such as “Visum” (visa), “Visafrei” (visa-free), “Demokratie” (democracy), and “Diktatur” (dictatorship). Third, terms related to travel experiences, such as “Reise” (travel), “verbotene Stadt” (Forbidden city), “Essen” (food), and “Kultur” (culture). Fourth, terms related to practical issues, such as “cashless payment,” “WeChat,” “Alipay,” “bank account,” “English proficiency,” and “air pollution.” These keywords not only reflect the focal points of news audiences’ attention but also reveal the diverse constructions of China’s tourism and image within their cognitive frameworks: encompassing cultural appeal and policy conveniences while also involving the negative impacts of external factors like politics, environment, and technology.

Content analysis further reveals that reader perspectives often stem from direct experiences or indirectly obtained information. These narratives not only reflect specific difficulties tourists encounter during actual travel but also expose systemic issues affecting the travel experience, primarily including:

First, barriers to accessing digital payments and financial services. Some comments highlight structural barriers international tourists face when using local payment tools, such as “cashless payments via WeChat require linking to a Chinese bank account.” This issue stems from the disconnect between China’s highly prevalent and dependent digital payment ecosystem and the international financial system. Consequently, international tourists encounter inconveniences in consumption scenarios, diminishing overall travel satisfaction.

Second, the issue of cumbersome procedures in transportation systems and public services. For instance, the comment “*Zug fahren ist aufwendiger; Tickets müssen am Schalter abgeholt werden*” (Train travel is more complicated, tickets must be collected at the counter) (Travel-Dealz 2024) indicates that despite China’s advanced transportation infrastructure, there remains room for improvement in ticketing processes and multilingual service support. Such inconveniences particularly impact independent travelers’ experiences, reflecting the need for enhanced compatibility with international user groups in public service design.

Third, significant language barriers exist. Analysis of visitor feedback reveals this issue primarily stems from the mismatch between the destination country’s dominant language (Chinese) and travelers’ native or internationally common languages (English). This manifests in limited English proficiency locally, constrained accuracy and availability of foreign-language signage in public services and commercial venues, and inconsistent reliability of auxiliary tools like machine translation. This issue extends beyond daily communication to areas like sign translation and service information access, restricting travelers’ autonomy, hindering cultural immersion, and negatively impacting the overall travel experience.

Fourth, digital service accessibility issues. Some users explicitly mentioned “*Google Dienste, WhatsApp, MSN, Line sind geblockt*” (Google services and common communication apps are blocked), indicating that internet access restrictions substantially impact tourists heavily reliant on international online services. This issue involves

conflicts between digital border management and international user habits, serving as a key factor affecting tourist connectivity and travel convenience.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study examines the transnational dissemination effects of China's visa-free transit policy, focusing on two core questions: How do European media report on this policy? How do media readers respond to it? Adopting a dual macro-micro perspective, this study systematically examined media orientations and public attitudes in policy dissemination through media coverage analysis and reader comment interpretation. Integrating discourse analysis, sentiment analysis, case studies, and quantitative methods, it provides insights into transnational policy communication patterns and policy optimization effectiveness.

Media coverage reveals that European outlets like Politico Europe and Euronews predominantly adopted neutral reporting styles (approximately 85.71%) when conveying information about China's visa-free transit policy. Critical or skeptical coverage accounted for about 7.14%, with a minority of positive reports. Media outlets like Politico Europe and Euronews focused on technical policy interpretation and information dissemination, detailing practical aspects such as eligible countries, permitted stay durations, and entry ports. They typically cited official sources from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Immigration Administration to minimize value judgments, emphasizing the function of information delivery and providing readers with clear, actionable policy guidance. Critical and skeptical coverage, though comprising only 7.14% (e.g., reports by France's *Le Monde*), highlighted the gap between policy intentions and practical experiences, emphasizing secondary issues like payment system incompatibility, thereby somewhat diminishing the policy's positive aspects. Positive coverage, though limited in proportion, holds significant strategic interpretive value. For instance, *The Guardian* positions the policy within the theoretical framework of "mobility diplomacy" (*The Guardian* 2024), combining the reporter's firsthand experience with data on increased EU business travel to China in Q4 2024. This approach lends the policy a human touch while constructing a positive cognitive framework. Overall, European media navigated dual roles as "fact-conveyers" and "meaning-makers," presenting differentiated narratives shaped by regional perspectives and audience concerns.

From a reader reception perspective, based on 30 valid reader comments from *Die Zeit* and the *Travel-Dealz* platform (sentiment analysis indicates approximately 40% positive, 33% neutral and 27% negative comments), readers' attitudes toward China's transit visa exemption policy exhibit a diverse pattern of "coexisting recognition and skepticism." Positive comments primarily highlight the policy's convenience and China's tourism value: They mention that "visa-free entry significantly simplifies the entry process" and affirm China's cultural and natural attractions with phrases like "China is worth visiting" and "a fascinating country," (*Travel-Dealz* 2024) reflecting the policy's positive impact on enhancing visit convenience and tourism appeal. Negative and neutral comments reveal issues requiring greater attention: First, barriers to digital payment access-international tourists must link WeChat Pay or Alipay, to Chinese bank cards, creating insufficient integration with the international financial system and hindering consumer convenience. Second, cumbersome transportation and public service processes,

e.g., train tickets requiring manual counter pickup, indicate inadequate compatibility with international user groups in public service design. Third, language communication limitations persist. While English services are widely available in China's tourism sector, support for non-English languages remains inadequate, hindering independent activities and cultural immersion for non-English-speaking visitors. Fourth, international internet services face restrictions, with common tools like Google and WhatsApp blocked, weakening visitor connectivity. These issues stem not only from individual experiences but also reflect areas requiring optimization in China's tourism services internationalization and policy implementation consistency.

To enhance policy effectiveness and international recognition, targeted and actionable solutions can be developed by addressing these challenges through two key dimensions: problem resolution and strengthening advantages:

Targeted Solutions to Core Reader Concerns. (1) Removing Barriers to Digital Payment Access On one hand, expand coverage scenarios for international payments. Scenic spots, key commercial districts, and star-rated hotels should deploy Visa, MasterCard, and other international card acceptance terminals. Entry hubs may establish payment service guidance stations to assist tourists in activating international card payment functions. On the other hand, optimize local payment usage pathways. WeChat Pay and Alipay, could introduce temporary overseas visitor payment accounts, allowing tourists to apply online with their passport and entry registration card. Account balances can be refunded via designated channels before departure. (2) Streamlining Transportation and Public Services. Ticket service models should be optimized. Signage systems at public transport hubs like airports and subways should display Chinese, English, and languages of major source countries (e.g., German and French for European tourists). Install multilingual service terminals at tourist information centers and hotel front desks, supporting real-time voice translation and providing attraction introductions, transportation guidance, and emergency assistance. Offer free app download guidance at entry ports while displaying app QR codes attractions and hotels for instant visitor support. (3) Bridge language communication gaps. Equip buses and taxis in tourist cities with English voice announcement systems. Organize training for scenic area guides and hotel staff in English and languages of major source countries to increase multilingual guide coverage. (4) Optimize international network services. First, launch exclusive network services for tourists. Collaborate with telecom operators to offer temporary international visitor data packages with access to essential overseas apps (e.g., Google Maps, WhatsApp) available for purchase upon entry with a passport. Second, provide free Wi-Fi at key locations.

Deepening Strategies in Recognized Areas of Strength. (1) Developing "Visa-Free + Cultural Theme Tours" Signature Products. Develop domestic themed itineraries tailored to European tourists' interests, with multilingual cultural guides providing in-depth historical and cultural insights. Collaborate with airlines and hotels to offer themed package deals including airfare, accommodation, admission tickets, and guided services, promoted through European travel platforms. Simultaneously, host events in major European cities featuring intangible cultural heritage displays, culinary experiences, and tourism promotions to attract local attention. Invite European travel bloggers and journalists to experience the cultural-themed itineraries. (2) Strengthen policy information dissemination. Regularly publish implementation details and updates of the visa-free policy, inviting media to on-site visits to understand policy execution and reduce misunderstandings caused by information asymmetry. Additionally, regularly release multilingual policy interpretations, travel guides, and FAQs; produce relevant short videos for dissemination via platforms like YouTube to enhance policy awareness and acceptance.

In summary, this study reveals the media narrative diversity and complex public attitudes surrounding China's

transit visa exemption policy in Europe through macro- and micro-level analysis. Future research could expand media sample sizes and commentary data scope, deepen analyses of attitude differences among readers across European countries, and provide more precise references for China's international communication strategies on open policies and tourism service globalization. This will help China build a more positive image of international openness.

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