Agenda setting of Chinese Traditional Festivals in Chinese English-language Newspaper: A Content analysis of *China Daily*, 2011-2023

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Abstract

China Daily, as the leading English-language newspaper in China, plays an important role in promoting Chinese traditional festival culture to the world. The main objective of this study is to analyze the agenda setting of the articles about Chinese traditional festivals in *China Daily* from 2011 to 2023, and examine whether there are significant differences between different time periods in agenda setting. Based on the agenda setting theory, content analysis was used to study articles in *China Daily*. The coverage from 2011 to 2023 is divided into three time periods, and they were compared to examine whether there are significant differences between them in issue agenda setting and attribute agenda setting. The research results show that in issue agenda setting, with the development of time, the topics of politics and technology, as well as the reports on foreign regions and the world show an increasing trend. In attribute agenda setting, the proportions of the front page, long articles with more than 1,000 words, the types of news, and the presentation form of words and pictures coexisting all show an obvious increasing trend. Articles of Chinese traditional festivals in *China Daily* show significant differences in three different time periods at both issue agenda setting and attribute agenda setting levels, indicating *China Daily* has paid increasing attention to Chinese traditional festivals and made more and more efforts to promote Chinese traditional festivals to the world.

Keywords: Chinese traditional festivals, content analysis, agenda setting, *China Daily*

1. Introduction

Chinese traditional festivals embody the national spirit and national sentiments of the Chinese nation, carry the cultural connotation and ideological essence of the Chinese nation, and have many functions such as enriching life, rallying people's hearts, inheriting culture, promoting economic development, and promoting social harmony. Traditional festivals not only witness the outstanding continuity, innovation, unity, inclusiveness, and peace of Chinese civilization, but also promote the enduring and continuous inheritance of Chinese civilization (Zhang, 2024).

China is one of the countries with the most festivals in the world. According to China Intangible Cultural Heritage Network (2025), Spring Festival, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Double Seventh Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Double Ninth Festival, etc. were included in the first batch of List of Representative Items of National Intangible Cultural Heritage (the folk customs category) in 2006. Especially, Dragon Boat Festival was included in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009, and Chinese Lunar New Year was selected into the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2024 (China Intangible Cultural Heritage Network, 2025). Among all these traditional festivals, the national statutory holidays include the only four festivals: Spring Festival (also known as Chinese New Year), Qingming Festival (also known as Tomb Sweeping Festival), Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival (State Council, 2024). These four traditional festivals are rich in profound cultural connotations and are regarded as the four most important traditional festivals in China.

In recent years, with the improvement of material living standards, people's demand for spiritual and cultural life has grown rapidly, and traditional festivals have received more and more attention and concern from all sectors of society. In 2017, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the

"Opinions on Implementing the Project for the Inheritance and Development of China's Excellent Traditional Culture", pointing out that the theme activities of our festivals should be in-depth developed, implementing of the Chinese traditional festival revitalization project, enriching the cultural connotations of traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival, Lantern Festival, Qingming Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Qixi Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, Double Ninth Festival, and forming new festival customs (CPC Central Committee and State Council, 2017).

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chinese President Xi Jinping has made a series of important statements and major arrangements on international communication work. To show one country's good image, the medias' international communication abilities need be to promoted, telling Chinese stories, spreading China's voice and showing real, stereo, comprehensive China to the world (Xueershixi, 2021). It is necessary to show the profound Chinese civilization to the international community, and constantly deepen the world's cognition and understanding of China (Xueershixi, 2021). Ministry of Culture (2016) issued "The Belt and Road" Cultural Development Action Plan (2016-2020). The plan pointed out that countries and regions along the "Belt and Road" will be encouraged to actively participate in cultural exchanges and cooperation, promote Chinese culture to "go out", and expand the international influence of Chinese culture. Creating "Happy Chinese New Year" and other key brands and expanding the scale of communications of Chinese New Year culture in countries and regions along "The Belt and Road" route has been included in the plan.

A survey report named "A Survey of Overseas Recognition on Chinese Discourse" (2018) released by China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration, showed that in the top 100 Chinese words in the cognition ranking, traditional Chinese festivals such as Chinese New Year, also called Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, etc., are all on the list. This means the global people have deepened the participation of Chinese traditional cultures (CNR News, 2018). Especially Chinese New Year, as the most important traditional festival in China, has become the best symbol of China's soft power and gradually become a worldwide festival. According to China News, Chinese New Year activities have entered nearly 200 countries and regions around the world. Nearly 20 countries such as Vietnam, North Korea, South Korea, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Canada, USA, African Mauritius, etc., have listed Chinese New Year as a legal festival in the whole country or some cities (China News Service, 2021).

In 2025, the Central Propaganda Department asked all localities and relevant departments to further promote the revitalization of traditional festivals, inherit and develop China's excellent traditional culture, explore and explain the cultural connotation of festivals, strengthen research, dissemination and promotion, and promote the formation of new festival customs. Taking the successful application of the "Spring Festival" for World Heritage as an opportunity, traditional festivals should be organized to go global and promote exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations. (Xinhua News Agency, 2025)

Chinese traditional festivals are important carriers of China's excellent traditional culture and vividly reflect the values and spiritual pursuits of the Chinese nation, so they are very good topics for Chinese media to tell Chinese stories, spread Chinese voice and build China's national image to the world. As one of the main official English media, *China Daily* plays an important role in spreading the culture of Chinese traditional festivals. *China Daily* was founded on June 1, 1981, and it is the first national English daily newspaper to be distributed globally after the founding of the People's Republic of China. After 40 years of development, it has formed a global, segmented, multilingual, and all-media communication system, with a circulation of about 700,000 copies and a total number of all-media users exceeding 350 million (Xinhua News Agency, 2021). As Chinese President Xi Jinping said in his congratulatory letter on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the founding of *China Daily*, that over the past 40 years, *China Daily* has leveraged its own advantages to actively promote China's reform and development, and played an important role in telling China's story well and spreading China's voice (Xinhua News Agency, 2021).

2. Literature Review

Agenda setting is an important way for mass media to influence society. This theory was originally proposed by Walter Lippmann in 1922 (Lippmann, 2017), who pointed out that the world people live in the world which consists of two environments: objective environment and pseudo-environment. The media mediates between "the world outside" and "the pictures in our heads." The media provides information, which is termed as a pseudo-environment by Lippmann and it is a major component of our "the pictures in our heads" (Takeshita, 2013).

In 1964, Bernard Cohen proposed a discussion, the media cannot tell people "what to think" for most of the time, but they can successfully tell readers "what to think about" seriously (Cohen, 2015). This important exposition provides inspiration for the agenda settings.

In 1972, McCombs and Shaw (1972) published the article named "The agenda-setting function of mass media". In the article, they combined empirical research on the 1968 presidential election process in the Chappell area and revealed a clear correlation between the agenda provided by the Chappell media and the agenda that voters cared about, which

supported Cohen's point of view and formally proposed and verified the agenda setting hypothesis, the agenda setting theory was officially proposed, and it pointed out that the public media set the agenda for the political movement, which affects the significant degree of political events. This finding shows that to a large extent, important events considered by the media can become important events for the public, and the media has a great positive influence on public perception (McCombs, 1997). The underlying assumption is that the more the coverage, the greater the value or importance (Coleman et al.,2009). This stage of agenda setting theory is called "issue agenda setting", also known as "first level agenda setting". In 1997, McCombs and Estrada (1997) discussed the first and second levels of the agenda settings, and proposed that the media not only tells us "what to think", but also tells us "how to think". The first level of agenda setting theory, that is, the media can tell the public "what to think", this is the traditional agenda settings, also known as the "issue agenda settings".

McCombs calls the mechanism by which attribute salience is transferred from media setting to audience perception "attribute agenda setting", also known as the "second-level agenda setting" (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey,1997). The second level of the agenda settings, that is, the tendency of media reports can affect the public's cognition and attitude. When mass media reports on objects, they often assign them various attributes and convey the "dominant attributes" of the object to the audience by highlighting certain specific attributes, thereby influencing the audience's understanding of the nature of the object. The discovery of "attribute agenda setting" makes people understand that the media is not only successful at telling the audience "what to think", but it is also effective at telling the audience "how to think". In other words, the media uses the agenda setting not only positively affects the public's judgment on the importance of the issue, but also positively affects the public's value judgment on the attribute of the issue. The discovery of the "attribute agenda-setting" effect further expands the application scope of agenda-setting theory and opens up a new situation for exploring the media's agenda-setting effect in terms of attitudes, opinions, and behaviors.

Since the agenda setting theory was officially proposed, it has attracted much attention from the academic community and has also been verified by many scholars. To this day, after more than 50 years of development, the hypothesis born in the era of traditional mass media has been continuously verified and improved by generations of communication scholars, and has gradually formed a theory generally recognized by the academic community, and it has also become one of the most widely discussed and influential theories in the communication academic community (Han, 2020). The theoretical connotation of agenda setting is no longer limited to early political campaigns. After expansion, agenda setting now refers to more general topics such as social events and public issues. In this study, agenda-setting theory is applied to the coverage of Chinese traditional festivals in *China Daily* to explore the communication methods and changes of Chinese mainstream media on the coverage of Chinese traditional culture in the international communication.

3. Research Objective and Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to examine news coverage of four Chinese traditional festivals in the leading English-language newspaper *China Daily* from 2011to 2023 and explore the changing trends at different time periods. This study particularly focused on agenda setting of *China Daily* for the four traditional Chinese festivals to examine that weather there are significant differences between different periods. In order to achieve the main objective, this study is aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How did *China Daily* set the issue agenda for the coverage of four Chinese traditional festivals from 2011 to 2023?

RQ2: How did *China Daily* set the attribute agenda for the coverage of four Chinese traditional festivals from 2011 to 2023?

RQ3: What is the difference between different time periods in agenda setting of the coverage of four Chinese traditional festivals in *China Daily* from 2011 to 2023?

4. Methodology

This study mainly analyzes the news coverage of four major Chinese traditional festivals published by *China Daily* between 2011 and 2023. The research method used in this study is mainly quantitative content analysis.

4.1 Data Collection

The reason for choosing *China Daily* as research sample media in this study is because *China Daily* is the most informative national English-language newspapers in China. *China Daily*, launched in 1981, has grown to become the nation's leading English-language newspaper. With a combined print, online and mobile readership of more than 350 million, it serves a vital role in telling the world about China, providing valuable insight into the world's second-largest economy. Consequently, it is quoted more often by overseas media than any other Chinese publication (*China Daily*,

n.d.). *China Daily* Global Edition was launched on January 2, 2019 along with the website, app and social media account. The global edition has a circulation of 300,000, printed in 33 centers all over the globe and covering high-end readers in 63 countries and regions (*China Daily*, n.d.).

Four major Chinese traditional festivals are selected as the study objective, which are Chinese New Year, Tomb Sweeping Festival, Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival. The reason for choosing the research period from 2011 to 2023 is that, 2011 is the first year after *China Daily* carried out the largest revision and expansion since it was founded in 1981, and 2023 is the latest time for analysis to examine the current reports. Since the research object and the four major traditional Chinese festivals occur on specific dates, this study takes samples in terms of the dates. The selected date range is the day of the festival, one day before and two days after the festival, that is, a total of four days for per festival are selected in each year as samples. If the publication is suspended during a holiday or weekend, the date closest to the festival date is selected.

Research samples were acquired from the database of *China Daily* E-paper on the website of *China Daily*, chinadaily.com.cn, which content is synchronized with the print version of this newspaper. After database retrieval, manual screening was conducted, and relevant news articles were read one by one according to certain standards. Finally, a total of 618 news articles closely related to the theme of Chinese traditional festivals were confirmed as the research samples.

4.2 Coding Procedure

According to the agenda setting theory, the analysis of the media's agenda setting for a certain event can be conducted from two aspects: issue agenda setting and attribute agenda setting. In this study, the unit of analysis in the content analysis is an entire article. Based on the agenda setting theory, the following encoding categories are established.

4.2.1 Coverage Topic

Main topic of the article refers to which aspect of content is mainly covered in this news article. According to the text content of the news articles, the main topics are set as (1) politics; or (2) economy; or (3) culture; or (4) society; or (5) ecology (6) technology; or (7) travel.

4.2.2 Coverage Area

The coverage area is the area where the news facts occurred in the article. After reading the full text of the article carefully and repeatedly, coverage area of an article can be determined as (1) Chinese mainland; or (2) Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan; or (3) Asia; or (4) America; or (5) Europe; or (6) Africa; or (7) Oceania; or (8) World.

4.2.3 Published Page

Published page is a measure of how important the issue is in the media. The importance of an issue can be inferred from the published page the media place. In this research, variables in this category are set as (1) front-page; or (2) other-page.

4.2.4 Word Count of the Article

Word count of the article refers to the length of a news article. Based on the actual length of the articles, variables in this category are set as (1) less than 500; or (2) 500-1000; or (3) 1000-2000; or (4) more than 2000.

4.2.5 Type of the News Story

After reading the full text of the article carefully and repeatedly, several types of news stories are found, and variables in this category are set as (1) news; or (2) comment; or (3) feature; or (4) picture; or (5) other.

4.2.6 Presentation Form of the Article

Presentation form in this study refers to the medium forms which is used to construct news texts by journalists when producing news content. Based on the actual news articles of this study, variables in this category are set as (1) words; or (2) words and picture; or (3) picture.

4.2.7 Periods

From the year 2011 to the year 2023, it is divided into three periods in this study. The first period is from 2011 to 2015, the second period is from 2016 to 2020, and the third period is from 2021 to 2023. So, variables are set in this category as (1) 2011-2015; or (2) 2016-2020; or (3) 2021-2023.

4.3 Reliability and Data Analysis

In this research, two coders code the samples independently after training, and 10% of the sample articles, that is 62 news articles, were extracted for inter-coder reliability test. All variables had a Cohen's Kappa coefficient above 0.90, which means good reliability. The data were analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences)

Statistics version 27, a computer software program. Data analysis in this study involves descriptive statistics, Chi-Square test and ANOVA test which are used to test the data.

5. Results

5.1 First Level Agenda Setting: Issue Agenda Setting

5.1.1 Quantity Statistics For The Overall Samples

This study collected samples from four days around the four festivals, with a total of 618 news reports. Among the 618 articles, distribution of amount of these news articles in every year is shown in Figure 1.
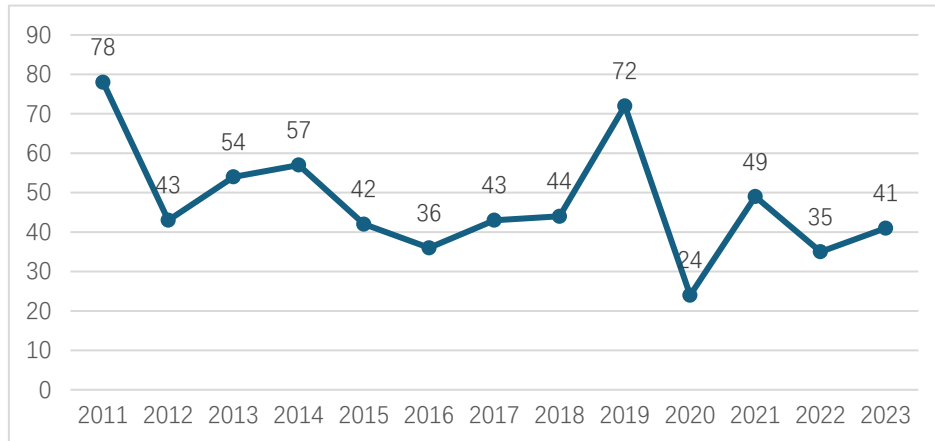
Figure 1. Quantity distribution of articles every year in *China Daily*, 2011-2023

Figure1 listed the quantity of articles in each year by *China Daily* from 2011 to 2023, providing basic data for the following further analysis. From the data, it can be seen that the number of reports on four Chinese traditional festivals in *China Daily* fluctuated in different years.

Table 1. Quantity distribution of articles in *China Daily*, 2011-2023

Periods	Quantity	Average annual quantity
2011-2015	274	54.8
2016-2020	219	43.8
2021-2023	125	41.7
Total	618	47.5

Table1 listed the quantity of articles in three periods in *China Daily*. Comparing data of the three different time periods, the average annual quantity of reports is not much different, showing a slightly decreasing trend.

5.1.2 Analysis of Differences in coverage Topics Between Three Periods

Table 2: Chi-square test results of coverage topics in *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

Topics	Period (%)			Total	χ^2	p
	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-2023			
Politics	2(0.7)	10(4.6)	10(8.0)	22(3.6)		
Economy	35(12.8)	20(9.1	17(13.6)	72(11.7)		
Culture	148(54.0)	103(47.0	54(43.2)	305(49.4)		
Society	41(15.0)	31(14.2)	18(14.4)	90(14.6)	26.181	0.010*
Ecology	7(2.6)	11(5.0)	1(0.8)	19(3.1)		
Technology	7(2.6)	7(3.2)	6(4.8)	20(3.2)		
Travel	34(12.4)	37(16.9)	19(15.2)	90(14.6)		
Total	274	219	125	618		

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01

Chi-square test is used to study the difference relationship (independence) between the periods and the topics, and it can be seen from Table 2 that the samples of different periods show significant differences for the item of coverage topics (p<0.05).
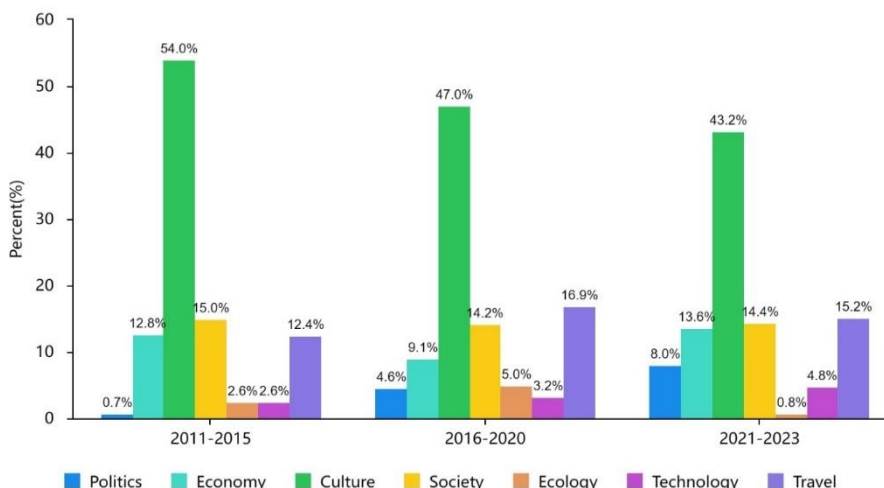
Figure 2. Topics of articles in *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

As shown in the Figure 2, in the three time periods, the topic of culture accounts for the largest proportion of reports, followed by economy, society and travel topics, while the topics of politics, ecology and technology account for a smaller proportion. For reports on the topic of politics, the proportions in the three periods show an increasing trend over time. For the topic of economy, the proportion of this period 2016-2020 is smaller than the other two periods. For the topic of culture, the proportions in the three periods show a decreasing trend over time. The proportions of reports on the topic of society have no obvious changes in all three periods. There are significantly more reports on the topic of ecology in the 2016-2020 time period than in the other two time periods. Reports on the topic of technology accounts for less than 5% in all the three periods, but show an increasing trend over time. For reports on the topic of travel, there is little change in the three periods.

In short, with the development of time, the topics of politics and technology show an increasing trend, the topics of culture show a decreasing trend, and the proportion of other topics changes little or does not change regularly.

5.1.3 Analysis of Differences in Coverage Areas Between Three Periods

Table 3. Chi-square test analysis results of coverage areas in *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

Areas	Periods (%)			Total	χ^2	p
	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-2023			
Chinese mainland	253(92.3)	192(87.7)	108(86.4)	553(89.5)		
Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	2(1.6)	2(0.3)		
Asia	0(0.0)	3(1.4)	4(3.2)	7(1.1)		
America	5(1.8)	5(2.3)	4(3.2)	14(2.3)		
Europe	4(1.5)	6(2.7)	3(2.4)	13(2.1)	25.673	0.028*
Africa	3(1.1)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3(0.5)		
Oceania	1(0.4)	3(1.4)	0(0.0)	4(0.7)		
World	8(2.9)	10(4.6)	4(3.2)	22(3.6)		
Total	274	219	125	618		

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

Chi-square test is used to study the difference relationship (independence) between periods and areas, and it can be seen from Table 3, different periods samples show significant differences for the area items ($p<0.05$).

As shown in Figure 3, there are significant regional differences in the coverage of four Chinese traditional festivals in the three periods, and the areas included in each period are not exactly the same. Reports on Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan only appear in the third period 2021-2023, with only two articles. The proportions of reports on Asia and America in the three periods show an increasing trend over time. For reports on Europe, the proportions in the three periods did not show regular changing trend. Only three articles on Africa appeared in the first period 2011-2015, and there are no reports on Africa in the following two periods. Reports on Oceania, only a few, appeared in the first two periods. Reports on the world account for a larger proportion than other areas except Chinese mainland, but the proportions in the three periods are all below 5%.

Generally speaking, reports on Chinese mainland account for an absolute advantage, all at around 90%, with the development of time, reports on foreign regions and the world show an increasing trend, while the proportion of reports on Chinese mainland shows a decreasing trend.
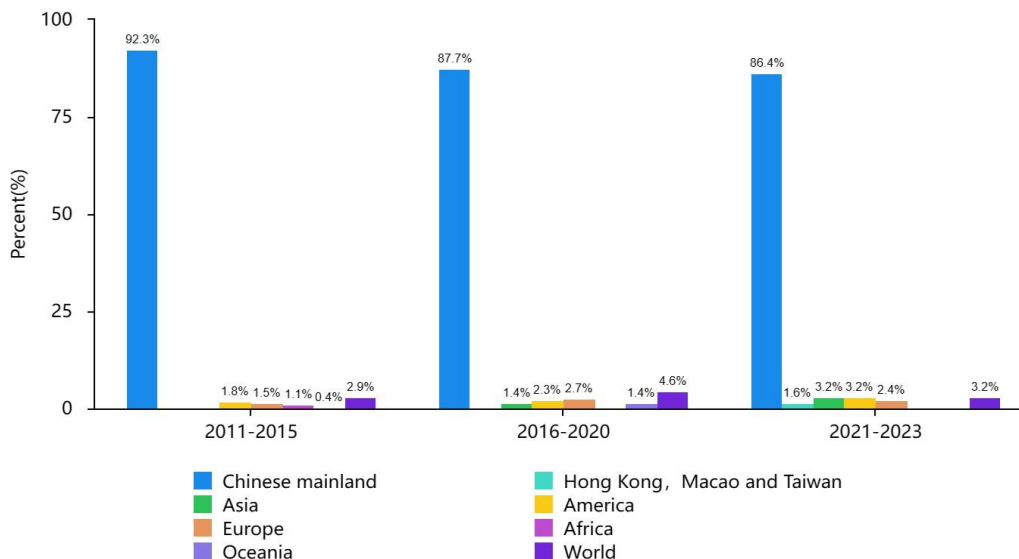

Figure 3. Coverage areas in *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

5.2 Second Level Agenda Setting: Attribute Agenda Setting

5.2.1 Average Annual Amount of the Three Periods

Table 4. Average annual amount of three periods in *China Daily,* 2011-2023

Period	Sample size	Average value	Standard deviation	*F*	*p*
2011-2015	5	54.8	14.6		
2016-2020	5	43.8	17.7	0.996	0.403
2021-2023	3	41.7	7.0		
Total	13	47.5	14.8		

* *p<0.05*   ** *p<0.01*

As it can be seen from Table 4, the analysis of variance is used to study the difference between period and average annual amount, and it can be seen that the samples of different periods do not show significance for all of them for average annual amount ($p>0.05$), which means that the samples of different periods are for average annual amount showed consistency and no differences.
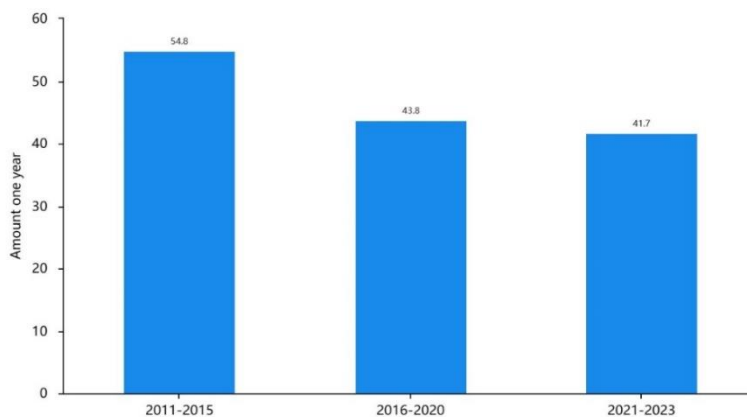
Figure 4. Average annual amounts of articles of three periods in *China Daily*, 2011-2023

As shown in Figure 4, the average annual amount in the three periods is 54.8, 43.8 and 41.7 respectively, showing a decreasing trend, but the difference is not significant.

In summary, it can be seen that there is no significant difference in the amount one year of the samples in different periods.

5.2.2 Analysis of Differences in Published Pages Between Three Periods

Table 5. Chi-square test analysis results of published pages on *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

Page	Periods (%)			Total	χ^2	p
	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-2023			
Front page	30(11.0)	46(21.0)	33(26.4)	109(17.6)		
Other page	244(89.1)	173(79.0)	92(73.6)	509(82.4)	16.754	0.000**
Total	274	219	125	618		

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01

Chi-square test is used to study the difference between periods and pages. From Table 5, it can be seen that and samples in different periods show significant differences for the item of page (p<0.05).
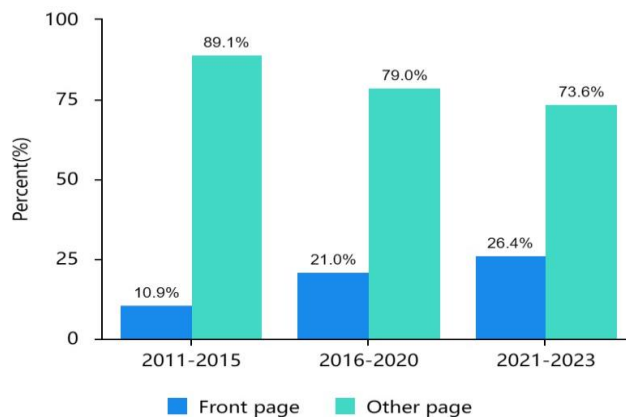
Figure 5. Published pages of the articles on *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

As shown in Figure 5, in news coverage of the three periods, the proportions of the front page show a clear increasing trend over time, while the proportions of the other page show a clear decreasing trend over time.

5.2.3 Analysis of Differences in Word Count Between Three Periods

Table 6. Chi-square test results of word count of articles in *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

Word count	Periods (%)			Total	χ^2	p
	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-2023			
Less than 500	127(46.4)	110(50.2)	39(31.2)	276(44.7)		
500-1000	113(41.2)	78(35.6)	61(48.8)	252(40.8)		
1000-2000	33(12.0)	29(13.2)	24(19.2)	86(13.9)	14.076	0.029*
More than 2000	1(0.4)	2(0.9)	1(0.8)	4(0.7)		
Total	274	219	125	618		

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01

Chi-square test is used to study the relationship (independence) between periods and word count, and from Table 6 it can be seen, there are significant differences in the word count between different periods(*p*<0.05).
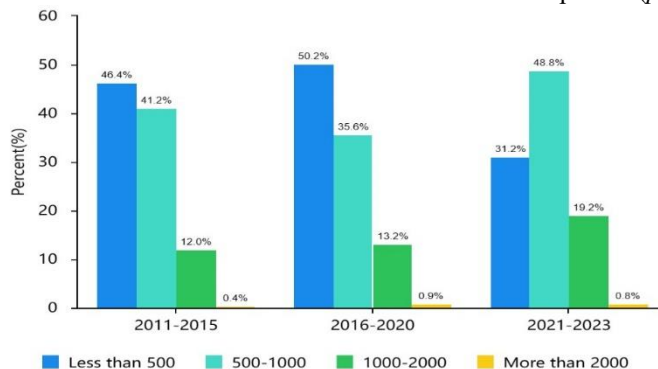

Figure 6. Word count of articles in *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

As shown in Figure 6, among the reports in the three time periods, the largest proportion of word count are articles with less than 500 words, followed by articles with between 500 and 1,000 words. In the third time period 2021-2023, the proportion of articles under 500 words is significantly smaller than the previous two time periods, the proportion of articles between 500 and 1000 is significantly larger than that in the first two time periods. In the three time periods, the proportion of articles with a word count of 1,000-2,000 is relatively small, less than 20%, but with the development of time, articles with more than 1,000 words show an obvious increasing trend.

5.2.4 Analysis of Differences in Types of Articles Between Three Periods

Table 7. Chi-square test results of types of articles in *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

Types	Periods (%)			Total	χ^2	p
	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-2023			
News	30(11.0)	51(23.3)	47(37.6)	128(20.7)		
Feature	198(72.3)	138(63.0)	67(53.6)	403(65.2)		
Comment	29(10.6)	17(7.8)	5(4.0)	51(8.3)	48.728	0.000**
Picture	9(3.3)	12(5.5)	6(4.8)	27(4.4)		
Other	8(2.9)	1(0.5)	0(0.0)	9(1.5)		
Total	274	219	125	618		

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

Chi-square test is used to study the difference relationship (independence) between periods and article types, and from Table 7 it can be seen that the samples of different Periods show significant differences for all types ($p<0.05$).

As shown in Figure 7, in the reports of all the three time periods, the article types mainly include four types. Feature is the main type in the three time periods, followed by news and comments, and pictures and other types occupy the smallest proportion. With the development of time, the proportions of feature, comment and other types show a decreasing trend, while news shows an increasing trend.
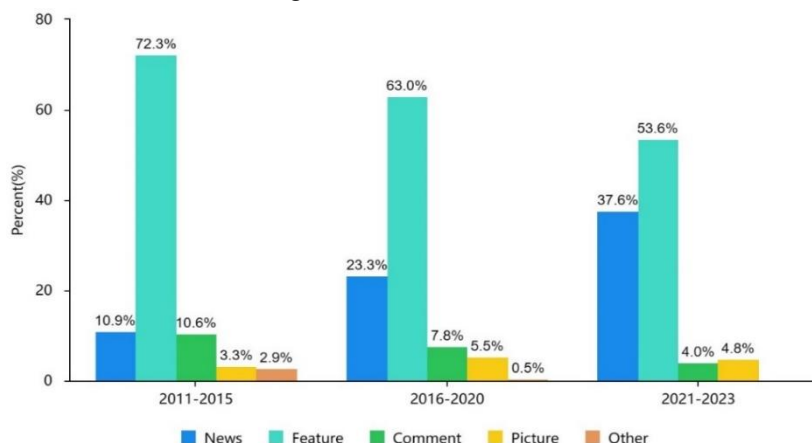

Figure 7. Types of articles in *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

5.2.5 Analysis of Differences in Presentation Forms Between Three Periods

Table 8. Chi-square test results of presentation forms of articles in *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

Presentation forms	Periods (%)			Total	χ^2	p
	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-2023			
Words	83(30.3)	49(22.4)	14(11.2)	146(23.6)		
Words and pictures	182(66.4)	158(72.2)	105(84.0)	445(72.0)	18.561	0.001**
Pictures	9(3.3)	12(5.5)	6(4.8)	27(4.4)		
Total	274	219	125	618		

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$

Chi-square test is used to study the difference (independence) between periods and presentation forms, and from Table 8 it can be seen that the samples of different periods show significant differences ($p<0.05$) for all presentation forms.
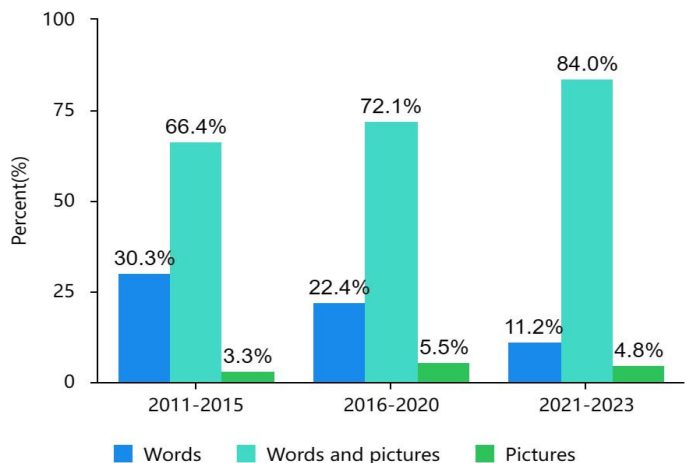
Figure 8. Presentation forms of articles in *China Daily* in three periods, 2011-2023

As shown in Figure 8, the presentation forms of the articles in the three time periods are mainly words and pictures, followed by words, and picture reports account for a small proportion, less than 10%. In the three time periods, the proportions of words show a decreasing trend with the development of time, and the presentations form of words and pictures coexisting show an increasing trend with the development of time. The proportions of pictures show no obvious changes.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, a content analysis of the coverage of Chinese traditional festivals on *China Daily* from 2011 to 2023 was conducted. This study examined the issue agenda setting and attribute agenda setting in the news coverage of Chinese traditional festivals in *China Daily* from 2011 to 2023. Issue agenda setting was examined from two aspects, including coverage topics and coverage areas; attribute agenda setting was examined from five aspects, including amount, published pages, word count, types, and presentation forms of the sample articles. The research results show that the coverage of Chinese traditional festivals in *China Daily* showed significant differences in both issue agenda setting and attribute agenda setting in different time periods. This means that over time, there have been significant changes in the agenda setting of the coverage of Chinese traditional festivals in *China Daily* from 2011 to 2023.

In issue agenda setting, in terms of coverage topics, the topic of culture has always accounted for the largest proportion in the coverage of Chinese traditional festivals in *China Daily*, with an emphasis on the cultural connotations and characteristics of traditional Chinese festivals, deepening the world's understanding and cognition of China's cultural image. With the development of time, the topics of politics and technology have gradually increased, which show that *China Daily* is paying more and more attention to the participation of Chinese excellent traditional culture in political and cultural diplomacy activities in cross-cultural communication. The dissemination of Chinese traditional festival culture has also been increasingly integrated with scientific and technological development. In terms of coverage areas, reports on Chinese mainland account for an absolute advantage, but with the development of time, the proportion reports on other regions in the world showed an increasing trend, while the proportion of reports on Chinese mainland showed a decreasing trend. This means that *China Daily* is gradually increasing its coverage of the participation or perception of Chinese traditional festivals of other countries or regions in the world, and is further highlighting the influence of Chinese traditional festival culture around the world.

In attribute agenda setting, first, in terms of the average annual amount, there is no significant difference in the amount of the samples in different periods. In terms of published pages, in the news coverage of the three periods, the proportion of the front pages show an obvious increasing trend over time, while the proportion of the other pages show an obvious decreasing trend over time. Among the reports in the three time periods, with the development of time, the proportion of long articles with more than 1,000 words shows an obvious increasing trend. All these changes mean that *China Daily* is paying more and more attention to the value of Chinese traditional festivals and is increasingly highlighting the significance of Chinese traditional festivals. In terms of article types, in the reports of all the three time periods, feature is the main type in the three time periods, followed by news and comments, and pictures and other types occupy the smallest proportion. With the development of time, the proportions of news show an increasing trend. The news here refers to relatively objective and time-sensitive hard news. One of the reasons is related to the increasing proportion of political topics mentioned above. In terms of presentation forms, in the three time periods, with the development of time, the proportions of words-only show a decreasing trend, while the presentations form of words and

pictures coexisting show an increasing trend. This shows that *China Daily* is increasingly inclined to diversify their forms of expression on the coverage of Chinese traditional festivals.

In short, judging from the changes in the agenda setting of the news coverage of Chinese traditional festivals on *China Daily* over the past decade, these changes reflect the continuous efforts and improvements made by *China Daily* in the international dissemination of Chinese traditional culture. As a national mainstream media, this is also a response to the nation's policies to promote Chinese excellent traditional culture to the world.

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations. First, the study only includes one Chinese English news media, which can only explain the reporting of this media. The sample only involves some dates close to the festival date, and does not include reports on other dates that are not during the festival. Therefore, the conclusions of this study cannot represent the overall situation of the international communication of Chinese traditional festivals. Since the first two time periods include 5 years, and the third time period only includes 3 years, the number of years in the three time periods is not equal. In addition, there are some special time periods that may also affect the sample presentation. For example, the reports on the Chinese traditional culture may be more during the Olympic Games, while the number of reports in the years during the epidemic is relatively small. Regarding to the research method, the number of categories set for content analysis is relatively small, which cannot fully reflect the agenda setting of *China Daily*. Despite these limitations, this study provides useful findings, presenting the characteristics of *China Daily*'s coverage of four major Chinese traditional festivals during the four days around the festival date, as well as its changing trends over the past decade. This study provides reference for further research on the dissemination of China's excellent traditional culture by Chinese mainstream media in international communication and how to build a more real and comprehensive image of China in international community.

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