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HYBRID WARFARE THREAT

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**MASTER'S PROGRAMS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
FACULTY OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
JENDERAL ACHMAD YANI UNIVERSITY**

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China's Dual Identity and Its Discourse Toward the Eu's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism: A Constructivist Analysis (2021-2024)

Joshua Kharizestha Evangelize Syauta

Jenderal Achmad Yani University

The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) affects China's export interests and provides a stage for identity performance in policy discourse. This article examines how China's dual identity—as a developing country and as a responsible major power—structures its assessment of CBAM and its implied responses. Using qualitative content analysis with a MIC-mini coding scheme, the study analyzes 41 elite and semi-mass texts and translates four variables (Self, Other, Valence, Action) into comparable indicators, including the Identity Salience Index (ISI), Average Valence Score (AVS), and Action Orientation (AOR), under a 60 percent dominance rule. Findings show stronger responsible major power framing in 2023, a persistently negative tone that becomes more legal and procedural, and action signals that shift from protest toward technical coordination. Developing country references persist, preserving flexibility between equity claims and rule-shaping. The study offers a replicable way to quantify identity in discourse and to link identity emphasis to tone and implied action.

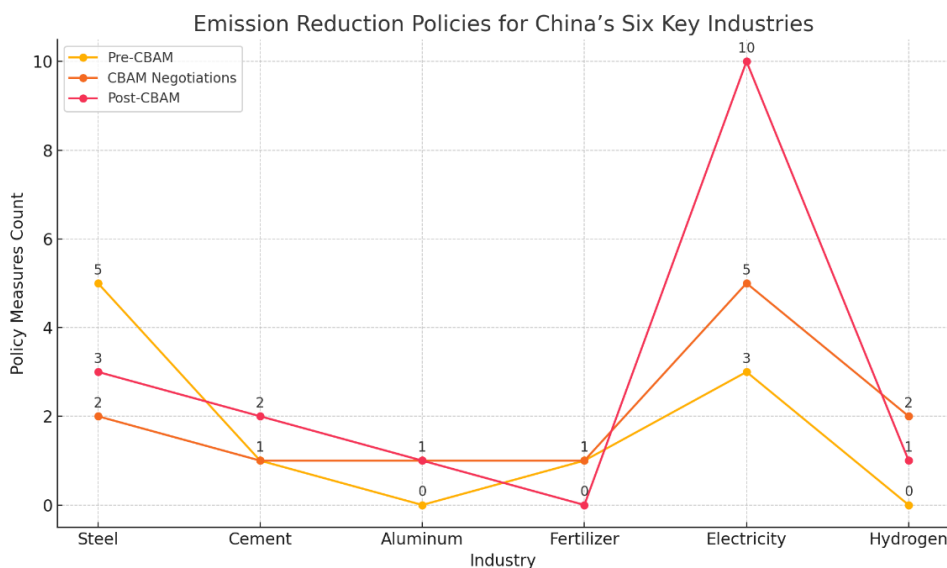
Keywords: *China; dual identity; policy discourse; action orientation*

Introduction

“If it can change, then there will be hope” — Evan, 2025.

The European Union’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) links import charges to embedded emissions and is now part of EU customs law. The core regulation was adopted in 2023; a reporting-only transitional phase began on 1 October 2023; and financial obligations are scheduled to follow.¹² For China, CBAM is not only a technical instrument but also a stage where the government must defend market access while presenting a coherent self-image to international audiences. This article examines how China’s dual identity—as a developing country and as a responsible major power—structures its discourse and policy preferences toward the EU’s CBAM in 2021–2024.

Figure 1: Emission Reduction Policies for China’s Six Key Industries



Source: Geng et al. 2025, Fig. 8; visual adapted by author

Figure 1 summarizes China’s domestic decarbonization measures across six CBAM-relevant industries in three periods: pre-CBAM, the negotiation phase in 2021–

¹ European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Regulation (EU) 2023/956 of 10 May 2023 establishing a carbon border adjustment mechanism, *Official Journal of the European Union*, May 16, 2023.

² European Commission, Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/1773 of 17 August 2023 on transitional reporting and the CBAM Registry.

2022, and the post-announcement period. The concentration of activity in electricity, with smaller shifts in fertilizer and steel, suggests selective adjustment at home while external criticism of CBAM continues.³ This juxtaposition makes identity a useful analytic entry point.

Constructivist theory holds that state identities shape interests and define which actions are seen as appropriate.⁴ In China's case, a developing-country script foregrounds equity and distributive fairness, while a responsible-major-power script emphasizes stewardship, credibility, and engagement with multilateral rules. These scripts are performed situationally and can be combined. The former legitimates resistance to perceived extraterritorial effects or disguised protectionism; the latter sustains claims to leadership in climate governance.

Beyond the two scripts emphasized here, China is often portrayed as a green-technology powerhouse—specifically dominant in renewable deployment and increasingly active in shaping technical standards. This facet can reinforce a responsible-major-power performance by supplying material credibility for rule-shaping claims. It can also complicate CBAM politics by positioning China not only as a rule-taker but also as an aspiring rule-maker in carbon accounting and industrial decarbonization.⁵⁶

The study analyzes elite and semi-mass Chinese texts on CBAM across 2021–2024. Identity is operationalized with a compact, replicable coding approach that converts discourse into comparable indicators. Full operational details are provided in the Methodology section.⁷ The premise is straightforward: China's CBAM discourse is best read as a calibrated performance that toggles between the two identity scripts rather than a linear shift from rejection to cooperation.

This design complements work that explains opposition to CBAM mainly through material exposure or institutional variables. By measuring when and how identity emphases change, and by linking those shifts to tone and implied action, the article provides year-on-year evidence of discursive calibration. The guiding question is:

³ Ruiyu Geng et al., “The Impact of the EU’s CBAM on China’s Carbon Emission Policy,” *Climate* 13, no. 1 (2025): e10005, fig. 8.

⁴ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391–425.

⁵ International Energy Agency. (2022). *Solar PV global supply chains*. Paris: IEA.

⁶ Rühlig, T. N. (2020). *Technical standardisation, China and the future international order: A European perspective*. Berlin: Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

⁷ Ted Hopf and Bentley B. Allan, *Making Identity Count: Building a National Identity Database* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

How, and to what extent, does China’s dual identity shape its discourse and policy preferences toward the EU’s CBAM during 2021–2024?

Methodology

This study uses qualitative content analysis with a structured identity-coding instrument adapted from the Making Identity Count approach. The goal is to convert China’s CBAM discourse into reproducible indicators of identity emphasis, tone, and implied action.⁸

The corpus comprises 41 documents selected to capture official and agenda-setting voices without redundancy. Elite sources include ministry press briefings, joint statements, leadership speeches, and state-affiliated think-tank papers. Semi-mass sources include central party newspapers and key English-language outlets that act as public-diplomacy amplifiers. Selection criteria were: direct relevance to CBAM, attributable Chinese authorship or institutional voice, and sufficient textual density for coding.

Table 1: Document Corpus Distribution by Source and Year (2021-2024)

Source Type	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Elite	6	6	6	4	22
Semi-mass	5	5	6	3	19
Total	11	11	12	7	41

Source: Author’s compilation of elite & semi-mass texts (2021-24 corpus)

The unit of analysis is the excerpt at the sentence or short-paragraph level. Each excerpt is coded on four variables:

- SELF: Developing Country (DC) or Responsible Major Power (RMP) indicators in how China presents itself.
- OTHER: Role ascribed to the EU, categorized as Partner, Competitor, or Rule-breaker.
- Valence → CBAM: Sentiment toward CBAM coded as +1, 0, or -1.

⁸ Ibid.

- Action: Implied policy orientation on an ordinal scale where higher values indicate more engagement. Exact categories used in this study are shown in Table 2.

The coder applied a dominance rule of at least 60 percent. When multiple cues were present, the majority cue determined the code for that excerpt in SELF, Valence, and Action. Ambiguous excerpts were left uncoded on the relevant variable.

Table 2: MIC Coding Variables and Analytical Rationale

Variable	Coding Options	Mandarin Cue Examples
SELF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing Country (DC) • Responsible Major Power (RMP) • SELF_MULTI = TRUE (if both identities appear in a single text) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “中国是最大的发展中国家” • “坚持共同但有区别的责任” • “中国展现大国担当” • “积极参与全球气候治理”
OTHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner (1) • Competitor (2) • Rule-breaker (3) • None (0) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “欧盟是我们重要的合作伙伴” • “与欧盟存在竞争关系” • “单边主义” • “气候保护主义” • “碳殖民主义”
Valence → CBAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • +1 = Positive • 0 = Neutral • -1 = Negative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive: “中国欢迎欧盟的绿色转型” • Neutral: “中国正在评估CBAM的影响” • Negative: “CBAM违反世贸规则” • “人为设置绿色贸易壁垒”
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 = Reject • 2 = Negotiate • 3 = Co-operate • 4 = Alternative Proposal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reject: “坚决反对碳边境税” • Negotiate: “中欧应通过对话解决分歧” • Cooperate: “中欧将共同推进气候治理”

Variable	Coding Options	Mandarin Cue Examples
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative Proposal: “推动建立公平合理的碳市场机制”

Source: Author’s elaboration, adapted from the Making Identity Count (MIC) framework

To summarize patterns across the corpus, the following indices are calculated:

Table 3: Index formula

Index	Mathematical expression	Interpretation
Identity Saliency Index (ISI)	$ISI = 1 + \frac{n_{RMP} - n_{DC}}{n_{RMP} + n_{DC}}$	Shows whether Responsible-Major-Power (RMP) identity or Developing-Country (DC) identity dominates. Values < 1 signal a DC tilt; values > 1 signal an RMP tilt.
Average Valence Score (AVS)	$AVS = \frac{1}{N} \sum_i Valence_i$	Mean emotional tone across all statements, ranging from -1 (negative) to +1 (positive).
Proportion of Negative Valence (PropNeg)	$PropNeg = \frac{\text{count}(Valence = -1)}{N}$	Share of statements that are explicitly negative.
Average Action Orientation (AOR)	$AOR = \frac{1}{N} \sum_i ActionCode_i$	Mean level of policy response, where higher codes reflect stronger or more forward-leaning actions.

Source: Author’s calculations, MIC-mini dataset

Legend

- n_{RMP} : Number of excerpts framing China as a Responsible Major Power.

- nDC : Number of excerpts framing China as a Developing Country.
- N : Total number of coded excerpts or paragraphs in the dataset.
- $Valence_i$: Sentiment score of excerpt i ($-1 =$ negative, $0 =$ neutral, $+1 =$ positive).
count($Valence=-1$): Total excerpts with negative valence.
- $ActionCode_i$: Coded strength of action in excerpt i (e.g., $0 =$ none, $1 =$ reject, $2 =$ negotiate, $3 =$ co-operate).

Reliability is addressed through a three-step procedure. First, a short calibration is conducted on a small set of excerpts to finalize cue lists and lock the codebook before the main coding pass. Second, a blind recode of a stratified subsample—that includes both elite and semi-mass sources—is carried out without access to prior labels. Third, percent agreement and Cohen’s kappa are calculated for SELF, OTHER, Valence, and Action, and κ is interpreted using standard benchmarks.⁹ All disagreements are recorded in an adjudication memo; the relevant cue definitions are clarified where necessary; and the final dataset is corrected to limit coder drift. Throughout the process, an audit trail is maintained so that all coding decisions are traceable.

Validity is handled through theory alignment, corpus balance, and transparency. Construct validity is ensured by mapping core identity claims and role conceptions directly to operational cues in the codebook. Content validity is maintained by applying clear inclusion and exclusion rules and by balancing elite and semi-mass sources to avoid over-representation of any single channel. Face validity is supported by coder memos that document difficult cases and the reasoning for final labels. As a robustness check, sensitivity around the 60 percent dominance threshold is tested, and any material changes are reported in the Results section. All materials required for replication—including the codebook, cue lists, and adjudication notes—are preserved.

The full dataset, codebook, and reliability test results are preserved and openly accessible at:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/16zE3dRuUJ6ItEbHW3106Lzl5scWC_QmT/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=115462312708092708918&rtpof=true&sd=true

To maintain analytical parsimony, this study focuses on two primary identity scripts—China as a Developing Country and as a Responsible Major Power. Discursive

⁹ J. Richard Landis and Gary G. Koch, “The Measurement of Observer Agreement for Categorical Data,” *Biometrics* 33, no. 1 (1977): 159–174.

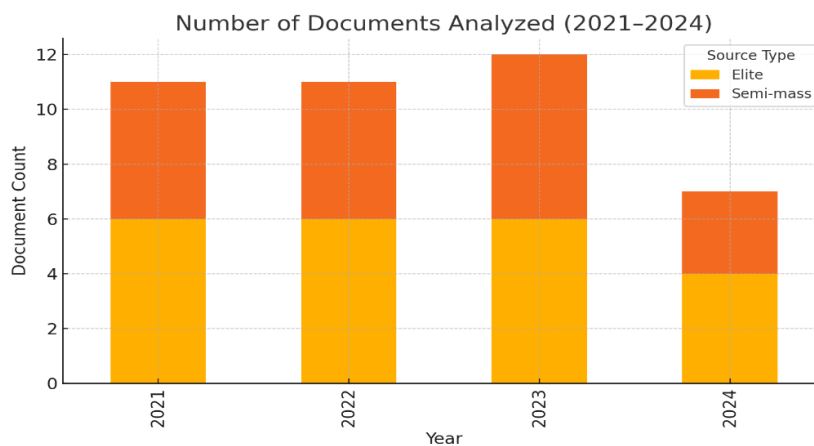
cues related to green-technology leadership—such as references to standard-setting, technological cooperation, or emissions-measurement templates—are interpreted as facets of the Responsible Major Power script rather than as a distinct identity category. This choice reflects the study’s aim to capture dominant and recurring role conceptions without over-fragmenting the identity repertoire.

In addition, the inclusion of both elite and semi-mass sources is not treated as discursive noise but as analytically meaningful. Semi-mass outlets function as amplification channels through which officially sanctioned signals are stabilized, disseminated, and made legible to multiple audiences. This design allows the analysis to assess not only elite articulation but also how identity-consistent signals are reproduced across China’s broader communicative environment.

Discussion

Overview

Figure 2. Corpus overview and discourse landscape



Source: Author’s corpus log (2021-24)

Official statements were first compiled into a chronological timeline from the issuing authorities’ primary portals. Eligible items included ministry press conferences and readouts, leadership speeches, regulations and policy notices, and think-tank papers released under ministerial or commission auspices. For each document, the title, issuing body, canonical URL, document type, and publisher timestamp were recorded. When parallel Chinese and English versions existed, the Chinese original served as the reference text, and the English version was consulted for clarity checks. Duplicate postings across

portals were collapsed to a single record under the issuing authority. Syndicated reprints and brief news flashes without substantive content were excluded to keep the timeline authoritative and analytically useful.

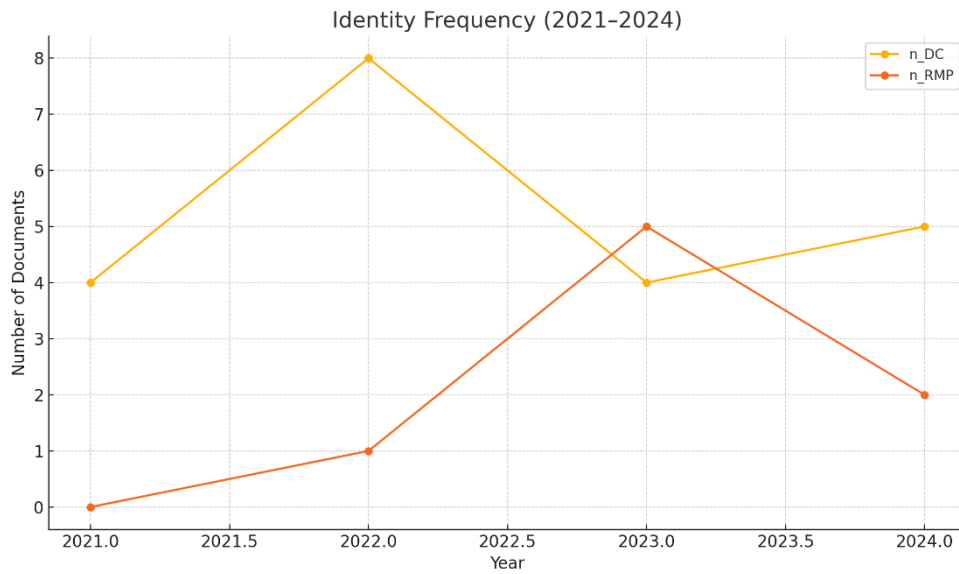
The timeline then served as the anchor for balancing the corpus with semi-mass discourse. For each cluster of official statements, contemporaneous coverage and commentary were sampled from agenda-setting outlets to capture diffusion and reframing outside the narrow official channel. Selection prioritized original bylines and site-of-record pages and filtered out agency wire copy or mirror posts. To avoid over-representation, the sample limited the number of texts per outlet within a cluster and sought diversity across genres and audiences.

This balancing emphasized outlets that structure China's public discourse. People's Daily and Xinhua provide the Party line and the national wire. Global Times amplifies elite cues with sharper language that often travels internationally. Qiushi codifies ideological framing and clarifies preferred formulations. China Daily in English targets foreign readers and translates core positions into legal and procedural narratives. Semi-official policy briefs from iGDP, CASS, and comparable institutes bridge political messaging and implementable options. Together, the official timeline and the semi-mass sample produce a corpus that reflects both authoritative signals and their public amplification, which is the landscape visualized in Figure 2.

Identity Salience

Identity emphasis shifts across the corpus. The Identity Salience Index (ISI) starts at 0.00 in 2021, then moves above 1 from 2022 onward (1.14 in 2022, 1.56 in 2023, 1.20 in 2024). This indicates a clear tilt toward responsible-major-power framings after the first year, with the strongest tilt in 2023.

Figure 3: Identity Frequency in China's CBAM Discourse (2021-2024)



Source: Author’s coding results, MIC-mini (n = 41)

Key quantitative takeaways: References to the Responsible Major Power identity climbed from 1 in 2022 to 5 in 2023, signaling a bid to shape climate rules rather than seek exemption as a developing country (see Table 4: n_RMP). The tone stayed negative throughout, but from 2022 the rhetoric became more procedural and legalistic (see Figure 4 and Table 4: AVS < 0 each year). Action Orientation (AOR) moved from protest toward engagement, peaking at 2.17 in 2023 when criticism coexisted with technical proposals and WTO consultations (see Table 4: AOR). Developing-country cues never disappeared, which indicates identity duality remains available as a strategic resource (see Figure 3: n_DC never falls to zero).

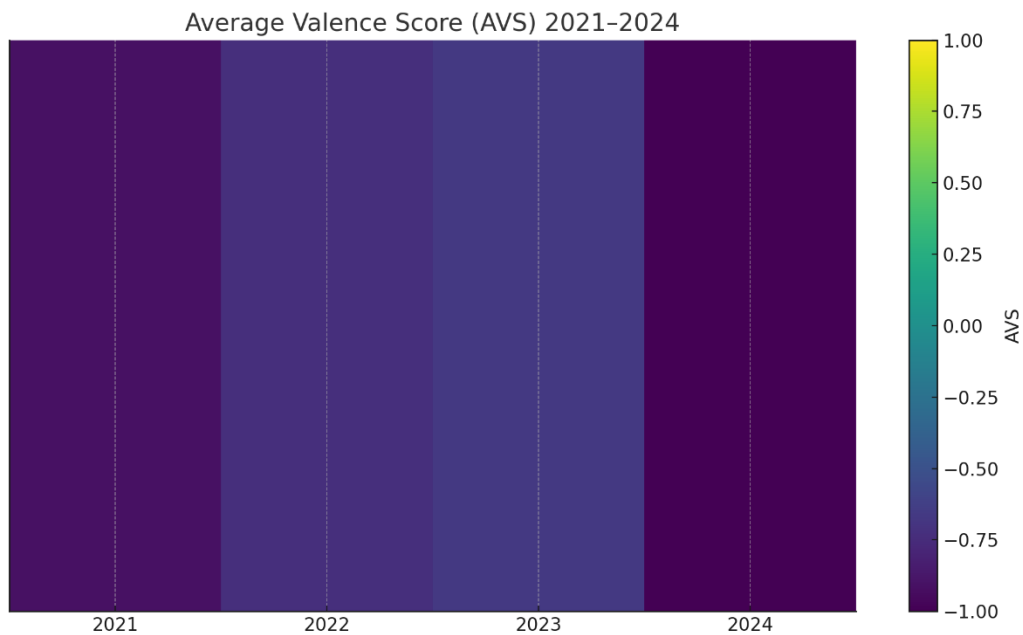
Table 4: Cross-Year Metric Snapshot (2021-2024)

Indicator	2021	2022	2023	2024
n_DC	4	8	4	5
n_RMP	0	1	5	2
ISI ¹	0.00	1.14	1.56	1.20
AVS	-0.91	-0.73	-0.67	-1.00
AOR	0.82	1.36	2.17	2.00

Source: Author’s calculations, MIC-mini dataset (2021-24)

Valence

Figure 4: Average Valence Score (AVS) of China's CBAM Discourse



Source: Author's sentiment scores, MIC-mini (2021-24)

Although the register is persistently critical, its content shifts over time. In 2022 the negative tone begins to rely less on moral condemnation and more on legal and procedural claims, including references to WTO consistency and extraterritorial effects. The dip in negativity in 2023 (AVS -0.67 in Table 4) aligns with this procedural turn, as texts devote more space to arguing defects in design and implementation rather than questioning intent. By 2024 the evaluative stance hardens (AVS -1.00 in Figure 4), even as the vocabulary remains largely legalistic.

It is important to read AVS alongside the action indicator. A negative AVS reflects the evaluative language toward CBAM specifically, not toward EU relations in general, and it does not preclude forward-leaning behavior. As shown in the Action Orientation discussion and Table 4, texts can maintain a negative tone while simultaneously signaling engagement through references to consultations, verification templates, and other technical processes. This decoupling between tone and implied action is a core feature of the discourse captured here.

Action Orientation

The Action Orientation (AOR) summarizes how texts signal intended behavior, using an ordinal code in which higher values indicate more engagement. In this corpus the sequence rises from 0.82 to 1.36, peaks at 2.17 in 2023, then settles at 2.00 in 2024. Read substantively, this marks a movement from rejection-leaning signals toward negotiation and practical coordination, while the overall register remains critical. The exact values are reported in Table 4 (row “AOR”).

Higher AOR scores reflect a shift in the implied playbook. Lower codes center on outright refusal, warnings of retaliation, or blanket condemnations of CBAM. Mid-range codes emphasize legal contestation, invitations to dialogue with the EU, and appeals to multilateral forums to adjust design details. Upper-range codes foreground concrete engagement such as working-level consultations, technical alignment on measurement and reporting, and proposals to coordinate sectoral transitions.

A key feature is the decoupling of tone and behavior. AVS remains below zero across the corpus, yet action signals become more forward-leaning, indicating a strategy that protects equity claims for domestic and global audiences while seeking to shape implementation in practice. In channel terms, elite outlets introduce the language of coordination and legal-procedural engagement, and semi-mass or semi-official venues amplify these cues with references to consultations, expert dialogues, and technical workstreams. This pairing of principled criticism with operational signals is what the AOR metric captures, and it is visible alongside the other indicators summarized in Table 4.

For transparency, the intra-coder reliability summary is reported below. It lists percent agreement and Cohen’s kappa for SELF, OTHER, Valence, and Action, plus the overall figure.

Table 5: Intra-Coder Reliability

Variable	Matches	% Agreement	Approx. κ	Interpretation
SELF	14 / 16	87.5%	≈ 0.78	Substantial
OTHER	16 / 16	100%	1.00	Perfect
Valence	15 / 16	93.8%	≈ 0.82	Almost perfect
Action	15 / 16	93.8%	≈ 0.91	Almost perfect
TOTAL	60 / 64	93.75%	≈ 0.88 (pooled)	Almost perfect

Source: Author’s calculations (intra-coder recode subsample, MIC-mini dataset)

As shown in Table 5, an intra-coder reliability check was conducted on a stratified subsample of 16 documents (about 39% of the 41-document corpus), balanced by year and source type with four documents per year. After a two-week wash-out period the same coder reapplied the MIC-mini scheme. Table 5 reports 60 of 64 variable-level judgments matching the original labels, yielding 93.75% agreement and a pooled Cohen's $\kappa \approx 0.88$, which Landis and Koch classify as almost perfect. By variable, OTHER = 100% ($\kappa = 1.00$), Action = 93.8% ($\kappa \approx 0.91$), Valence = 93.8% ($\kappa \approx 0.82$), and SELF = 87.5% ($\kappa \approx 0.78$; substantial). The four discrepancies summarized in Table 5 (two in SELF, one in Valence, one in Action) reflect nuanced interpretive differences rather than systematic error. Since overall reliability exceeds the common 0.60 threshold for single-coder studies, the coding can be considered stable and methodologically sound.

Alternative explanation: signaling

An alternative interpretation is that China's CBAM discourse reflects strategic signaling rather than identity performance, facilitated by the party-state's capacity to discipline public communication. If CBAM rhetoric were primarily a bargaining strategy, we would expect evaluative framing to converge toward a more positive tone as procedural engagement deepens. The findings, however, show a different pattern: while action orientation increasingly shifts toward engagement, coordination, and technical participation, evaluative framing remains consistently negative. This combination is more consistent with a dual identity repertoire in which critical discourse sustains legitimacy with domestic and Global South audiences, while procedural engagement advances implementation-oriented interests. Rather than ruling out signaling entirely, the evidence suggests that signaling operates through selectively activated identity-based role scripts rather than purely instrumental rhetoric.

Conclusion

China's response to the EU's CBAM reads as a managed balance between two usable identities. Developing-country framing sustains equity claims and domestic legitimacy, while responsible-major-power framing enables legal and procedural engagement. The indicators in the paper show a decoupling of tone and behavior: language remains critical, yet the implied playbook becomes more practical, moving from protest toward coordination.

The pivotal year is 2023. Table 4 records the strongest tilt toward the responsible-major-power script that year and the peak AOR = 2.17, while Figure 3 shows the jump in responsible-major-power references and Figure 4 confirms that tone stays negative even as process-oriented arguments expand. This inflection aligns with the prior policy activity visible in Figure 1, where domestic decarbonization efforts concentrate in key sectors. Read together, these patterns suggest a two-level adjustment: CBAM is resisted discursively on fairness grounds, yet implementation is quietly shaped through legal and technical channels.

This study does not deny the presence of strategic signaling in China's CBAM discourse; rather, it shows that signaling operates through an identity-based repertoire in which critical evaluation and procedural engagement coexist. Future research could extend this framework by testing whether green-technology leadership constitutes a distinct identity script or remains embedded within the Responsible Major Power role across different climate governance arenas.

The practical implication is clear: Progress is most likely through legal-procedural avenues and technical workstreams on measurement, reporting, and verification, as well as sectoral roadmaps that limit trade friction. For China, pairing equity rhetoric with concrete proposals strengthens credibility while preserving developing-country solidarity. Coding stability supports these inferences, with reliability documented in Table 5.

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