



THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SILK ROAD

SINO-EUROPEAN RELATIONS IN TIMES
OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

SIMON F. TÄUBER

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For further information please contact

mail@simon-taeuber.com

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BY

SIMON F. TÄUBER



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND BUSINESS – GLOBAL STUDIES

SUPERVISION BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LAUST SCHOUBORG, PHD

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Front Matters



Acknowledgements

Go at it boldly, and you'll find unexpected forces closing round you and coming to your aid.

– *Basil King*

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Abstract

The work investigates normative contestation of primary institutions in contemporary relations between China, as a member of a narrowly defined East Asian regional international society, and states or actors from within a European regional international society - namely, the EU as an actor, and Germany and Italy as member states. It is firmly rooted within English School theory and focuses on the primary institutions of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market (Economy). In its analysis, the work draws on English School theory and the notion of "polysemy of primary institutions" (Costa-Buranelli 2015) – in the sense of regional context-specific framing – to identify differing and contesting interpretations of primary institutions. Normative contestation is understood as a central element of the process of regionalisation of international society, in the sense of (wilfully) differing interpretation of a primary institution in a regional context. The main interest is in how this contestation manifested in contemporary Sino-EU, Sino-German, and Sino-Italian discourse. This investigation aims at advancing the regional agenda of the English School generally, and the understanding of normative contestation between actors from different regional international societies specifically, while also delivering policy-making relevant insights on the nature of Sino-European discourse in times of the BRI, and on the contemporary understanding of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market (Economy) respectively. And further, it deploys a variation of discourse tracing to guide the analysis of normative contestation in Sino-European discourse since the beginning of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 and identify turning points and defining themes. The data sources used are e.g. strategy documents, foreign policy documents, joint communiqués or statements and speeches by statespersons.

This work argues for three phases since the inception of the BRI each characterised by specific themes around which normative contestation manifested and a different role of the BRI in discourse. They are *Anno BRI: Xi era begins (2013-2015)*, *Chinese and European Strategic Currents (2015-2016)* and *Facing Variegated European Winds (2017-2019)*. Normative contestation is identified in differing forms and around different themes in all phases, and in all relations under investigation.



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List of Abbreviations

AA	Federal Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
BMWi	Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy
BPA	Federal Press Office of the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Germany
BRD	Federal Republic of Germany
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
DIIS	Danish Institute for International Studies
DT	discourse tracing
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union (as actor)
EU28	the 28 member states of the European Union
EUCO	European Council
FM	foreign minister
FMGER	Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany
FMITA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Italy
FMPRC	Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GER	Germany
GIS	global international society
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission
IAA	International Academy of Astronautics
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITA	Italy
MCPRC	Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China
MEF	Minister of Economic Affairs and Energy of the Federal Republic of Germany
MERICCS	Mercator Institute for China Studies
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MSR	21st Century Maritime Silk Road
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
OBOR	One Belt One Road
PEC	President of the European Commission
PI	primary institution
PRC	People's Republic of China
RIS	regional international society
SREB	Silk Road Economic Belt
SRF	Silk Road Fund
The Council	Council of the European Union
UN	United Nations
WQ	Working Question
WTO	World Trade Organisation



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Part I



Chapter One

Introduction

In 2017, The Atlantic published an article titled *What Happens If China Makes First Contact?* (Andersen 2017). It put the China's completion of the world's largest radio dish to search for extra-terrestrial intelligence and its endeavour to build a space station on the dark side of the moon into context with the defunding of the previous programmes for the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence. The most prominent of so-called "post-detection protocols" is the *Draft Declaration of Principles Concerning the Sending of Communications to Extraterrestrial Intelligence*, by the International Academy of Astronautics. It calls for a UNGA decision on whether to communicate, and if so, what the content of a message should be all the while ensuring that it is "sent on behalf of all Humankind, rather than from individual States" (IAA 1989) and that it "reflect[s] a careful concern for the broad interests and well-being of Humanity" (ibid). However, the declaration has not been signed into law and is non-binding. It is thus unclear how China – and any other state – would act in case of First Contact.

While the thought experiment might seem far-fetched, the underlying questions are more relevant today, given the much proclaimed "Rise of China" (Aggarwal and Newland 2015; Breslin 2018; Buzan 2018), and have direct consequences for modern-day study of international relations (IR): What narrative would extra-terrestrials get to hear about the history of the planet and humanity, about the present dominant order on earth? Which principal norms and constitutive institutions would be conveyed as the carrying ones, the ones that provide order from the anarchic state of international relations?

Over the past decades, China has closed the gap to the West in economic, scientific and technological terms with impressive speed. Steadily increasing EU foreign direct investments (FDI) in China rose to 132.3 bn Euro in 2017 from marginal levels in the year 2000 – Chinese FDI in the EU only started picking up in the earlier 2010s and matched the EU's FDI by end of 2017 at 131.9bn Euro (Hanemann and Huotari 2018). The closing of the gap is not to be understated – a look into scientific outcomes and contributions illustrates a rapid rise in Chinese contributions to all major fields of science and, above all, prospects of a dawning Chinese leadership in many (*The Economist* 2019). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) unveiled in 2013 underlines this view further, aiming to intensify trade connections of the world with China and strengthen its role in global infrastructure development. A strategy initiated in 2015 and strongly related to technological leadership is "Made in China 2025", which aims at restructuring global value chains in a way to reposition China in a key position – one which was previously occupied by a Western-corporate bloc (Wübbecke et al. 2016). And beyond, China has revisited and restructured its relations over the past decade with other states not just in East and South Asia, but around the planet and by doing



so repositioned itself within international society on a global level – to what end remains to be seen. So, what indeed, if China made contact first, today, before the West?

An extensive state-of-the-art literature review shows that most of the research on China's development and the BRI in particular is concerned with economic cooperation, geopolitics and structures of power from both realist and liberal IR perspectives. From these viewpoints, the BRI and China's contemporary global strategy can be perceived as a threat similar to an expanding state or as providing opportunities for new cooperation and trade (Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso 2018). This provides grounds for deployment of other theoretical perspectives in the study of the BRI and contemporary Sino-EU relations.

The purpose of this work is to investigate normative contestation between China and the European Union (EU) in times of the Belt and Road Initiative. The emphasis is on the contemporary relations between the China and the EU, and the member-states Germany and Italy. The importance of also analysing EU member states (EU28) in the context of the BRI is given by the EU's only partial integration and the operative core of the BRI – namely that of foreign FDI and infrastructure development – falling largely into EU member state jurisdiction. The choice to investigate Germany and Italy as two of the 28 EU member states is argued for with both their economic relevance to China and their geographic importance to the BRI. In it, Germany serves as a nodal point for land-based railway connection and Italy as a bridgehead for the maritime routes.

The work is firmly grounded within the theoretical framework of the English School theory of international relations (ES) and conducts an interpretivist study of normative contestation in the discourse between the aforementioned actors since the announcement of the BRI in 2013. One of the central elements of the ES is international society; states that share norms, rules and institutions become part of such an international society (Buzan 2014). It is not a society of individual human beings, but a society of states shaped by its social or primary institutions (PIs) - “deep and relatively durable social practices” (ibid, 16) or “patterned practices, ideas and norms/rules” (Schouenborg 2012, 45). The original proposed set of social institutions consists of Balance of Power, International Law, Diplomacy, War and Great Power Management (Bull 1977). Drawing on the toolbox of the ES, namely the notion of international society and its social or PIs, allows to investigate the respectively differing ideas, interpretations of norms and related practices that shape the contemporary relations of China and Europe. Or differently, how China might be reconfiguring the normative fabric of global politics in specific world regions (Callahan 2016; Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso 2018; Abdenur and Levaggi 2018).



Central puzzle and research design

The central puzzle of this work revolves around normative contestation of international society's PIs between China and Europe respectively:

In what ways are **China and the EU, Germany and Italy** respectively **contesting or promoting rivalling interpretations of the Sovereignty, International Law and the Market (Economy)** as primary institutions of international society in times of the Belt and Road Initiative?

This work argues that it is insufficient to regard the period since the commencement of the BRI “as one” but required to consider the temporality of when certain statements or positions were communicated. And respective responses to those are seen as crucial for tapping into the discourse trajectory. In this context, normative contestation is understood as differing interpretations of PIs, opposition to the respectively other's interpretations thereof, or to practices relating to these PIs. This relates to the theoretical basis for this project, the ES, and more specifically the debate on PIs in the process of regionalisation of international society, i.e. differing interpretations of PIs in different parts or regions of the world (Buzan and Zhang 2014c; Schouenborg 2014; Costa-Buranelli 2015; Stivachtis 2015; Y. Zhang 2015; Spandler 2019). Among these PIs, the focus is on Sovereignty, International Law and the Market (Economy), as these can be seen as the (predominant) primary of international society on a global level, with differing degrees of universality and increasing number of (regional) interpretations (Costa-Buranelli 2015). In addressing this puzzle, the work is guided by several working questions (WQs). Their purpose is to guide the analysis of discourse between China and the EU, Germany and Italy respectively and aid to investigate how normative contestation manifested in Sino-European discourse since the beginning of the BRI. In a way, the working questions break down the central puzzle into three spheres that can be addressed separately: One, the temporal unfolding of discourse and normative contestation. Two, the defining themes and use of language in discourse and contestation. And three, the role of the BRI in relation to normative contestation, and responses and reactions to it by the EU, Germany and Italy respectively:

WQ1: What is the **temporal unfolding of Sino-European discourse** and normative contestation of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market in it since the introduction of the BRI in 2013? Which are the **key events or turning points** in respective discourse and relations?

WQ2: What are the **defining themes that normative contestation manifests around** in discourse between China and the EU, Germany and Italy? How do **themes and language of normative contestation evolve** over the investigated period?

WQ3: What **role does the BRI** play in the actors' relations, and **how is it related to normative contestation** between China and the EU, Germany and Italy?

For the benefit of a coherent narrative and readability, these questions are not dedicated separate sections but serve as underlying guidelines and are continuously woven into the analysis presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six. They require different evidence and need to be approached differently regarding methodology – this is outlined in Chapter Three. The resulting research design for this work is as below:

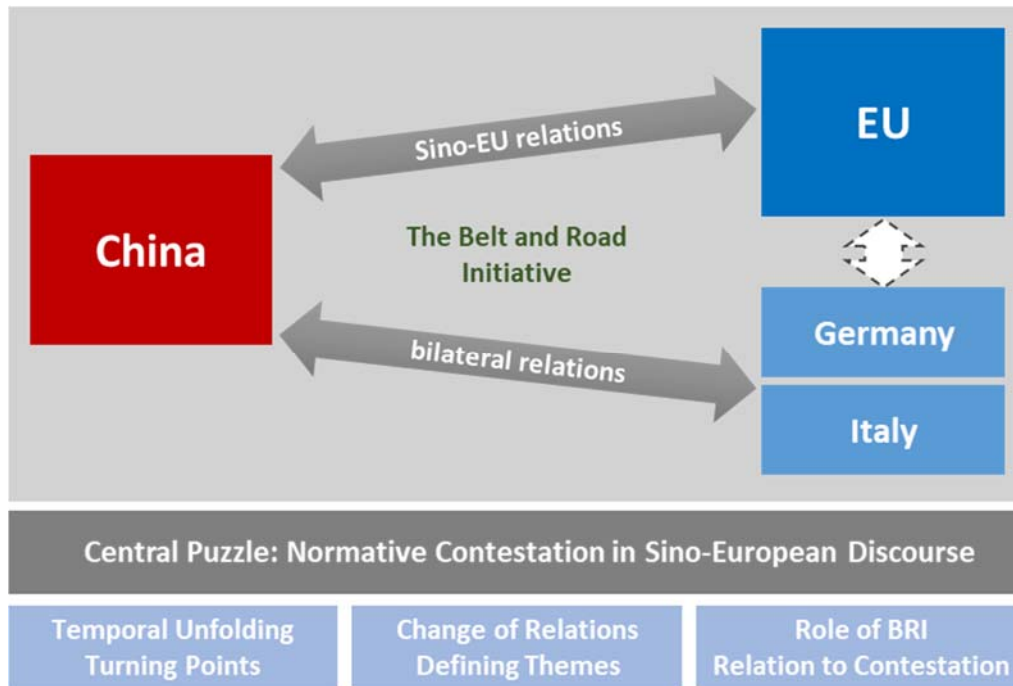


Figure 1: Research design for Sino-European discourse

In the study of normative contestation regarding Sovereignty, International Law and the Market, this work draws on previous research on how to analyse differing interpretations of PIs (Costa-Buranelli 2015; Lasmar, Zahreddine, and Gribel Lage 2015; Beer 2015; Buzan and Lawson 2014; Schouenborg 2012). This operationalisation of the English School toolbox is outlined in Chapter Three. The theoretical framework is methodologically complemented by a variation of discourse tracing (DT) which allows to trace the temporal unfolding of discourse between states, and statespersons. Doing so uncovers turning points in discourse that indicate transformation of the nature of discourse and the themes that define it (LeGreco and Tracy 2009; Spandler 2019). Emphasising the aspect of temporality – i.e. when statements were made and how – enables the analysis to compare ways of normative contestation over the investigated period. This in turn allows to investigate possible change in both normative contestation and the respective understanding of PIs and related practices. And lastly, the question for the BRI and its role in discourse is posed to shed light on how it is perceived and responded by the EU, Germany, and Italy, in different stages of its development. These further questions enable this work to establish a coherent narrative around normative contestation in Sino-European discourse between 2013 and 2019, as there are several (bilateral) events and milestones to align the DT with.

Relevance of the work

As shown in the review of the state-of-the art in the following chapter; the predominant literature on the BRI employs liberal and realist perspectives, focusing on geopolitical, economic and financial impact of the project on countries along the to-be-reconstructed Silk Road. This work takes an ES approach and thus adds to the study of the BRI from an interregional perspective emphasising political and normative aspects. It further contributes to the understanding and taking stock of contemporary



Sino-European relations, and in particular, the actors' respective conceptions of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market (Economy) as predominant PIs on a global level. The chosen research design aims to shed light on the ways of normative contestation between China and the EU, Germany, and Italy – and how it possibly transformed over time since the inception of the BRI in 2013. This investigation contributes to the study of interacting international actors from different regional international societies (RISs) and allows to address the impact of normative contestation between such on order and predominant normative understanding on a global level. These contributions aim at advancing the regional agenda of the English School generally, and at the understanding of normative contestation between actors from different RISs specifically. Or differently, finding answers to the question of what happens when actors from different RIS meet.

The project also provides policy-making relevant insights regarding the recent development of Sino-European relations. The work aims to uncover contemporary interpretations of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market of China, the EU, Germany and Italy, and in what ways and under which themes they clash. And further, what role the BRI as an increasingly global framework or policy plays in both Sino-European discourse but also in normative contestation. These insights are considered beneficial for both understanding and responding both European and Chinese contemporary foreign policy in context.

Structure of the work

Part I of this work deals with the central puzzle, theoretical framework and methodology.

Chapter Two begins with a review of the state-of-the-art regarding the BRI which highlights the need for the deployment of other theoretical perspectives in the study of the BRI. The chapter then outlines the theoretical foundations of this work by clarifying core concepts of the ES which are used as analytical framework; i.e. international society and PIs. Further, the understanding of normative contestation for this work is outlined, and the PIs of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market briefly elaborated on.

Chapter Three explicates the analytical framework for this work. It further introduces DT and presents methodological considerations regarding the variation deployed within this work. Then, methodology is brought into context with the theoretical frame work laid out in Chapter Two. A brief review of how social or PIs can be “read” is conducted and considerations regarding data sources and their collection are made. The chapter closes by outlining the step-wise research process.

Within *Part II*, the analysis is presented in three chapters corresponding to the argued for three phases in Sino-European discourse in times of the BRI.

Chapter Four presents the analysis of the phase *Anno BRI: Xi era begins* that begins in late 2013 with the announcement of the BRI and ends in early 2015. The emphasis is on China's repositioning at the beginning of Xi's presidency and the differing interpretations of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market.



Chapter Five investigates the second phase *Chinese and European Strategic Currents* which begins with the publication of an elaborate strategy paper on the BRI. The chapter analyses normative contestation manifesting differently in discourse between China and the EU, Germany and Italy. And further, sheds light on the arrival of the BRI in Sino-European discourse as a theme of cooperation.

Chapter Six subsequently analyses the third phase *Facing Variegated European Headwinds* which begins with sharp criticism of foreign investments in Europe in spring 2017. It contrasts Sino-Italian discourse to that between China and the EU, and Germany among a variety of themes. And lastly, it deals with the BRI having become a subject of contestation itself rather than a projection screen for standing normative contestation.

Chapter Seven briefly concludes this work by presenting a summary of findings regarding the central puzzle and the guiding WQs. The chapter closes with final reflections regarding the findings of this work.

The Belt and Road Initiative

In fall 2013, during a visit in Kazakhstan President Xi Jinping first proposed what is now known as the BRI. During the following year, China planned out the global strategy and underwent negotiations with several neighbouring countries among the historic Silk Road (Tian 2015). The formulated strategy named *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road* was presented in March 2015 by President Xi, setting the cornerstone for years to come (NDRC, FMPC, and MCPC 2015). At this point, an extension of the Silk Road beyond its historical dimensions is hinted at already. Xi Jinping became the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China in late 2012 and President of the People's Republic of China in March 2013, thereby succeeding Hu Jintao who had held the offices for the previous decade. The BRI is at the core of Xi's Presidency, which turned into a life-long one in 2018 with the changes to the Chinese constitution abolishing term limits for the President of the PRC (Xinhua 2018; Wei 2018). The trajectory for the contemporary change that China is undergoing relates back to the 1980s, when China started opening to the rest of the world under Deng Xiaoping. Today, the BRI aims "to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas" (NDRC, FMPC, and MCPC 2015). Besides its old name *One Belt One Road*¹, it is also known as the *Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road* in a Central and Eastern European context. The *Silk Road Economic Belt* (SREB) refers to the land-based routes from China to Europe, the Middle East and South East Asia, while the *Maritime Silk Road* (MSR) includes the sea-passages from China to Europe and into the South Pacific meaning mainly Australia and New Zealand. From such, the initial geographic scope of the BRI becomes clear:

¹ Formerly known as One Belt One Road. Renamed to BRI in to avoid confusion about the number of corridors (Bērziņa-Čerenkova 2016).

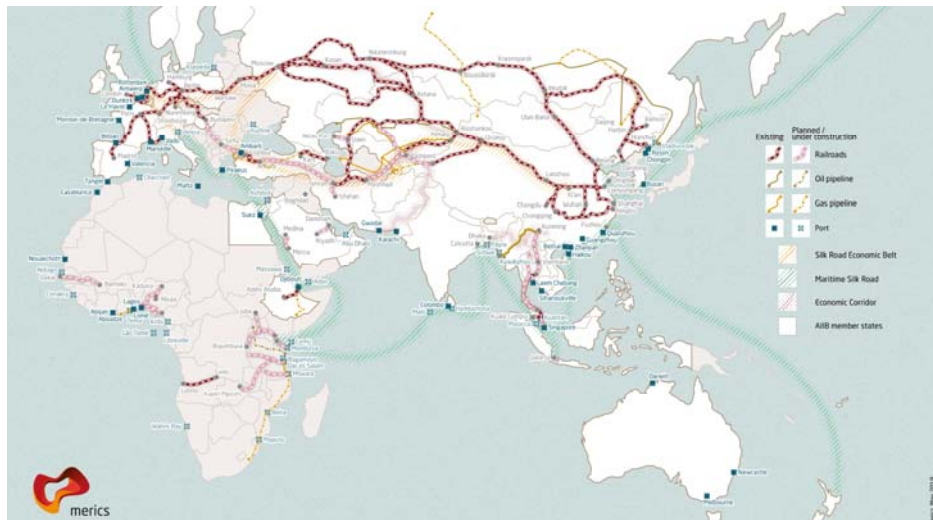


Figure 2: Eurasian-African-Oceanian extent of the BRI as of 2018²

In the meantime, the BRI has been extended beyond the historical dimensions of the Silk Road to include the South American continent and Central America, with the regional international organisation *Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños* as the main point of contact (FMPRC 2017c). The initial strategy paper on the BRI mentions six so-called “international economic co-operation corridors” in which projects of different character will be conducted around five spheres of cooperation to increase connectivity between China and the regions. Namely “policy coordination”, “facilities connectivity”, “trade and investment”, “financial integration” and “people-to-people bonds” (NDRC, FMPRC, and MCPRC 2015). Two organisations are to be highlighted: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is a multilateral development bank established in 2015 under the direction of China with the aim to facilitate infrastructural development and investment within its self-defined region (AIIB 2018a). Of its member voting power, 75 percent is concentrated in what the bank defines as regional members and the remainder among non-regional members. With 26.6%, China holds by far the largest global share of votes. (AIIB 2018b). The Silk Road Fund (SRF) is a private limited fund with a budget of 40bn USD and 100bn CNY (14.5bn USD) and has four stakeholders; the China Development bank with 5%, the Export Import Bank of China and the China Investment Corporation with both 15%, and the State Administration of Foreign Exchange with 65% of stakes (SRF n.d.) and “[...] it has no intention to become a multilateral development institution” (SRF n.d.). The idea behind the fund is to provide multi-currency funding for development projects within the general scope of the BRI.

In May 2017, the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF) was held in Beijing to discuss cooperation, agreements and financing of proposed projects along the respective routes and corridors among the BRI (Xi 2017a; Xinhua 2017). It was a global gathering in the sense of the word: Among the attendees were delegations of 56 foreign states on both ministerial but also heads-of-state level, as well as the UN Secretary General, the World Bank President, the Managing Director of the IMF, the

² (adapted from Eder 2018)



Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum and the Director General of the WTO (The Diplomat 2017).

The BRI is China's bid for cooperation globally in a variety of spheres and also in different (power) relations. It presents a professionalisation of Chinese global activity and showcases how contemporary China utilises the Market on a global level. For example, through extensive FDI and infrastructure development globally and setting up lending institutions like the SRF and the AIIB complying with International Law. While at the same time its own interpretation of Sovereignty in the sense of non-interference in domestic affairs. Given the dire need for investment and infrastructure development in many of the countries participating in the BRI and cooperating with China under the framework, one could question the consistency of such an interpretation between the national and regional or global level.



Chapter Two

Theoretical framework: English School

State-of-the-art

Since the beginning of the BRI in 2013, it has received considerable attention, both in media and academia alike. Perspectives have been the BRI's implications for the US and its global role. But also, implications for the EU as the other end of the historical silk road and the space between China and the EU; the countries along the *Silk Road Economic Belt* and the *21st Century Maritime Silk Road*. Several recent projects have produced substantial literature on the BRI and contemporary Chinese foreign relations associated with it. They mainly focused on geopolitical and economic dimensions for the regions and countries along the *SREB* and the *MSR* (Mayer 2017; Erslev Andersen et al. 2017; Yu Cheng, Lilei Song, and Lihe Huang 2018; W. Zhang, Alon, and Lattemann 2018). This review of the state-of-the-art reveals that most of the existing literature on the BRI emphasises (political) economic and geopolitical themes and addresses it from predominantly liberal and realist perspectives. These perspectives respectively frame the BRI and China's rise between two opposing poles – as a threat that expanding states pose, or as a market and cooperation potential for trade and investment (Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso 2018). This work regards this as a central gap and heeds the call by some scholars to diversify the theoretical approaches to the BRI. It deploys the toolbox of the ES to study how differing ideas and norms and normative contestation manifest in Sino-European discourse. In doing so, this work contributes to the debate on international society at a sub-global level and interacting actors from different regions. And beyond, the BRI specifically has only been addressed regarding a Sino-Central Asian context (Costa-Buranelli 2018), which presents a major gap within the ES that this work contributes to. In the following, an overview of the state-of-the-art regarding the BRI is given, and the main themes and proposed gaps are pointed out. Further, the benefit of the ES in addressing the gaps is highlighted and the main concepts used in this work's theoretical framework are presented.

Europe, as China's major trade partner outside Asia, has been addressed focused mainly on (economic) cooperation and friction between them (Casarini 2015; Holslag 2015; Herrero and Xu 2017; Szunomár 2018; Paulo 2018; Corre 2018; García-Herrero et al. 2017). Poland, as a country case study, has received special attention (Bajor 2018, 2; Musiałkowska 2018; Górski 2018). But also, other regions and countries have been addressed recently – e.g. possible response from an African context (Kodzi 2018; Jian 2018a; Demissie 2018; Hodzi 2018), the in or out of Afghanistan (Marton 2018), the impact of the China-Pakistan corridor for Pakistan itself (Irshad 2015), the inclusion of New Zealand as a small state (Lin 2018). One recurring theme within research on the BRI is that of FDI. This has been the core of an ongoing research project



investigating Chinese FDI in member-states of the EU (Hanemann and Huotari 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018; Seaman et al. 2017). The respective larger research projects have also addressed targeted questions such as for example that of applicable laws for the MSR (G. Zhang and Long 2018), but also the level of development of countries participating in the BRI (Hu, Pan, and Wu 2018).

Authors do point out that the BRI is not simply an economic project fostering inter-regional cooperation, but indeed has implications for geopolitics and global power structures (Sárvári and Szeidovitz 2018; Jian 2018b; Lairson 2018) and (national) security in the respective regions (Jiang, Tonami, and Fejerskov 2016; Erslev Andersen et al. 2017). The implications of the BRI with regard to power and leadership on a global level have also been addressed with respect to e.g. interdependence (Lairson 2018; Schortgen 2018; Godement et al. 2018), and also with regard to power in Sino-EU relations (Godement and Vasselier 2017). The question of the arctic circle and passage as the *Polar Silk Road* has also received attention in relation to the BRI, in particular also for Sino-EU relations (Bertelsen and Su 2018; Sørensen 2018). And further, the role of competing ideologies, i.e. democracy and Chinese socialism, and ideas and political values have been taken up in the context of the BRI (Rühlig et al. 2018; Shi-Kupfer et al. 2017; Shi 2015; Bang 2017). In this respect, this work goes beyond only the study of political values (Rühlig et al. 2018), and also beyond the sole study of ideology in contemporary Chinese politics (Shi-Kupfer et al. 2017). The implications of the Maritime Silk Road for Europe (Duchâtel and Duplaix 2018; Godement et al. 2017) and specifically Italian perspectives on the BRI (Fardella and Prodi 2017) have also been addressed, again with a focus on economic relevance of the BRI. The member state case of this work, Germany, has been addressed under the scope of its governments expectations towards the BRI (Röhr 2018). Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso (2018) analyse the role of language in context of the BRI from a social constructivist perspective and base their framework on a criticism on the predominant realist and liberal framework in BRI research:

Neither perspective can shed light on the conceptual challenges that Chinese proposals present for world politics, assuming instead that China either wants to cooperate (the liberal argument) or conquer (the realist argument). Neither can accommodate the possibility that China's rise may not only alter the world's distribution of power, but may also reconfigure the way that global politics work. (Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso 2018, 4)

Callahan (2016) analyses Chinese foreign policy from a constructivist viewpoint, focusing on ideational debates within the discourse “to understand how Beijing has integrated ideas, institutions, and behaviour for a new grand strategy as a norm-maker” (13). He argues that China has achieved an integration of development and security, forging a network in Chinese interest which is guided by Chinese values and points out that “realist and liberal IR theory have a hard time making sense of ‘development-security’ policy’s combination of engagement and coercion – each theory demands that one aspect [of] the development-security dynamic actually defines the other” (13). This argument supports Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso’s criticism of realist and liberal frameworks in investigating the BRI.

The review of the state-of-the-art shows that the existing debate on the BRI and the EU is predominantly concerned with dimensions of economic cooperation and opportunities, as well as power structures and geopolitics – and thus, the review



provides arguments to investigate how China, paraphrasing Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso, reconfigures the normative fabric of global politics in a specific world region (Callahan 2016; Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso 2018; Abdenur and Levaggi 2018).

It is precisely this normative fabric that is at the heart of the ES and which makes it so suitable for studying the contemporary relations between China and Europe in times of the BRI. It is not concerned with power politics, rational choice or class struggle, but with “the social dialectics of the desire to create a modicum of both order and justice beyond the level of the state” (Buzan 2014, 26). What the ES offers is a framework emphasising the social (structure) in interstate relations – “a social theoretic approach in this sense, in which action reflects the ideas, cultural contexts, identities, and shared understandings of individual and state actors” (Green 2014, 1). In other words, as a framework, it allows to study the “patterned practices, ideas and norms/rules” (Schouenborg 2012, 45) that states agree on when forming a (regional) international society. Comparing the ES framework to a Wendtian constructivist perspective, it “gives a much more fine-grained picture of interstate society” (Buzan 2014, 35). And adopting it provides this work with the means, and language, to analyse the ways in which actors from different parts of the world, with different values and norms, contest the respectively others’ conceptions of PIs.

Another benefit to point out is the methodological preference and tradition among ES scholars, which illustrates the usefulness of the ES to this work - there is a focus on empirical research. Cornelia Navari describes ES scholars aptly:

They become immersed in diplomatic records, memoirs, and newspapers. They spend time in international institutions, listening to what international civil servants say and to what they think they are doing. They reflect on the meaning of diplomatic action and on the precepts behind that action. (Navari 2014, 213)



English School: The International Society approach

The purpose of this part of the work is to provide a clear understanding and definitional basis of the underlying theoretical framework that is deployed. In the following, the concepts and toolset of the ES are outlined, and references to the pillars of ES and contemporary debates are given. The PIs of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market are introduced, also in context of European and East Asian RISs. Further, considerations are made as to how normative contestation to be is understood in the context of this research.

International society and its primary and secondary institutions

The English School and its scholars are, broadly speaking, concerned with the study of order in world politics and pose the question what it is that structures the relations between states (Bull 1977). Several concepts have been developed within the ES that serve as a toolset in the study of international relations. One of the elements at the heart of ES theory is the notion of international society which states can form between them:

A society of states (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions. (Bull 1977, 13, sic)

A close reading of Bull provides the basis for understanding what international society is – several states, aware of similar or shared interests and values, forming relations based on mutually agreed and adopted rules and norms. This international society exists, following the debate within the ES, on a global, all-encompassing level and also on regional levels (Buzan and Schouenborg 2018). The concepts of global international society and RISs are introduced in detail at a later stage in this section. Within an international society, states as actors become aware of relations between each other; an international society is characterised by a higher degree of deep interstate cooperation which is grounded in common institutions. This principal concept has prevailed in contemporary ES scholarship:

International society ... is about the institutionalization of mutual interest and identity among states and puts the *creation and maintenance of shared norms, rules and institutions* at the centre of IR theory. The basic idea of international society is quite simple: just as human beings as individuals live in societies which they both shape and are shaped by, so also states live in an international society which they shape and are shaped by. (Buzan 2014, 12–13, emphasis added)

Following these thoughts means that states sharing norms, rules, and institutions become part of one international society. And while this is in many ways similar to humans forming a (civil) society, international society is not a society of individual human beings, but a society of states shaped by its PIs - “deep and relatively durable social practices” (Buzan 2014, 16). The notion of PIs in the context of international society requires more attention – just as international society is at the heart of the ES, so are its PIs. As a first step, it is necessary to clarify what an institution means in the context of international society and within the language of the ES.



This work adopts the proposed linguistic and conceptual distinction between PIs – as the common set of shared norms, rules and institutions of international society – and secondary institutions – as international organisations, e.g. United Nations, a parliament, or a supreme court (Buzan 2014). Consequently, when referring to institutions in the following, the notion of PIs is meant. There is no standardised terminology among ES scholars, and in the case of PIs they are also referred to as “common institutions” (Bull 1977), “social institutions” (Schouenborg 2017), and “constitutive principles” or “fundamental institutions” (Knudsen 2019b). However, they all relate to the same notion of PIs.

The relationship between primary and secondary institutions - i.e. the international organisations – has also received increased attention in recent times (Knudsen and Navari 2019; Spandler 2019), where e.g. Knudsen emphasises the reciprocal relation and impact of primary and secondary institutions (Knudsen 2013; Navari 2019). Moreover, Spandler points to the centrality of practice as intermediary between primary and secondary institutions regarding their change and transformation and introduces the notion of normative arguing in that context (Spandler 2015, 2019).

The original set of PIs includes Balance of Power, International Law, Diplomacy, War and Great Power Management (Bull 1977). It has since then been extended in an extensive ongoing debate – summarised in-depth by Buzan (2014) – to also include the notions Sovereignty, Nationalism, Human Equality and the Market (Wight 1978, 2002; James 1986, 1999; Mayall 1990, 2013; Holsti 2002, 2004; Jackson 2003; Buzan 2004; Schouenborg 2011). A status quo of classical, emerging and contested PIs on a global level with reference to Buzan and Schouenborg (2018) is as follows:

Classical (global) PIs		Emerging and contested PIs
Balance of Power		Democracy
International Law	<i>Bull's P5</i>	Human Rights
Diplomacy		Environmental Stewardship
War		International Sanctions
Great Power Management		
Sovereignty		
Territoriality		
Nationalism		
Human Equality		
Development		
The Market		

Table 1: Contemporary (global) primary institutions³

Environmental Stewardship (Falkner and Buzan 2019) and International Sanctions (Wilson and Yao 2019) as the latest propositions illustrate that the debate on PIs is still evolving. It is these institutions that are considered a cornerstone of the English School by both the classical writers and following generations of scholars (Knudsen 2019b). They are defined or described as “made up of patterned practices, ideas and norms/rules” (Schouenborg 2012, 45) or “deep and relatively durable social practices in the sense of being evolved rather than designed” (Buzan 2014, 16–17). To better understand what international society’s PIs are, the question of their purpose provides valuable insight. They can be seen as the scholarly framing of reference for legitimate state behaviour and have a constitutive function for both states within an international society:

³ (own illustration drawing on Buzan and Schouenborg 2018)



These practices must not only be shared among the members of international society but also *be seen among them as legitimate behaviour*. Primary institutions are thus about the shared identity of the members of international society. *They are constitutive of both states and international society, in that they define not only the basic character of states but also their patterns of legitimate behaviour* in relation to each other, as well as the criteria for membership of international society.” (Buzan 2014, emphasis added)

And further, PIs, as a legitimacy framework for state behaviour, enable the realisation of goals which states have when entering into an international society – a Lockean contract of sorts: “preservation of the system and society of states itself”, “maintaining the independence or external sovereignty of individual states”, “peace in the sense of the absence of war among member states of international society as the normal condition of their relationship” and the “common goals of all social life: limitation of violence resulting in death or bodily harm, the keeping of promises and the stabilisation of possession by rules of property”(Bull 1977).

There is a long-standing debate within the ES between a solidarist and a pluralist shadings of international society (Bull 1966; Buzan 2014; Bain 2014; Knudsen 2019a). The salient difference is, concisely put, that “[a] pluralist international society builds on a rather thin and weak basis of shared norms and values” (Ahrens 2019, 266) and that “a thicker basis of shared norms and values underpins a solidarist international society, in which the universalisation of ideas beyond national borders becomes possible and desirable” (ibid). In a pluralist international society, the norms of non-intervention and respect for national (internal/domestic) Sovereignty are paramount, bearers of rights and duties are states alone, and humanitarian intervention and universal human rights consequently regarded problematic (Knudsen 2019a, 177). In contradistinction to that, a solidarist conception of international society ascribes rights and duties related to International Law also to individuals, and Sovereignty is more relational to e.g. global governance in the sense of the UN, or the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) (ibid). This differentiation impacts not only the perception and practice of PIs by states and in RISs. It also plays into interstate relations when actors promote contesting interpretations of PIs: “solidarisation implies a reinterpretation of national sovereignty in terms of a distinct and more far-reaching definition of responsibilities and duties of states towards each other and vis-à-vis individuals inside and outside their own territories” (Ahrens 2019, 266). The notion of solidarisation of international society, and its limitations, in the sense of promoting the aforementioned interpretation of Sovereignty and related practices is skilfully captured by Ahrens and Diez on the example of the EU (2015). The concepts of both solidarism and pluralism in international and RISs, and the differing conceptions of and practices related to PIs are especially relevant for the analysis of normative contestation in this work.

Within this work, the analysis of normative contestation in Sino-European discourse is concerned with differing conceptions PIs of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market. On the one hand, this is argued for with their centrality of Sovereignty and International Law for the concept of international society generally – one is arguably what makes a state and the other the codification of agreed-upon rules and shared ideas – and, on the other hand, the relevance of all three mentioned institutions for international society on a global level, where actors from different regions interact.



Following Costa-Buranelli, these PIs of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market (Economy) are regarded as the predominant institutions of international society on a global level, with continuous reinterpretation in regional contexts (Costa-Buranelli 2015). In the following, a brief introduction to their theorisation within the ES:

Sovereignty as the “defining quality of states” (Buzan 2004, 178) refers to the notion that states do not accept a higher authority in conducting its affairs, it also represents a fundamental attribute to determine membership in (regional) international society (Costa-Buranelli 2015). And further, one will want to bear in mind the differing conceptions of Sovereignty from solidarist and pluralist perspectives indicated earlier. That is to say that with individuals as holders of rights and duties, HR becomes a focal point regarding a solidarist interpretation of Sovereignty (Ahrens 2019). The promotion of global, universal HR is considered a central practice related to solidarist interpretations of Sovereignty (Ahrens and Diez 2015; Ahrens 2019). Whereas a pluralist conception of Sovereignty emphasises its related practices of non-intervention, territorial integrity and self-determination (Knudsen 2019a).

International Law is regarded as “the bedrock institution on which the idea of international society stands or falls” (Mayall 2000, 94). It is the “Volume of Sacred Law” of international society in the sense that within International Law, the agreed upon norms and rules are codified so that they can serve as the reference for determining legitimate state behaviour and legitimacy in international relations for all members. In doing so, they aim “to preserve order, maintain stability and achieve coexistence in the international system” (Costa-Buranelli 2015, 499). The UN charter and the UN Security Council (UNSC) are central to this codification of common institutions on a global level (Schmidt 2019), while on a sub-global level, in the sense of regionalisms, there exist further treaties and secondary organisations related to International Law such as e.g. in the (solidarist) European legal system and the ECJ (Lasmar, Zahreddine, and Gribel Lage 2015).

The Market (Economy) can be seen as the economic part of an operating system of contemporary international society which, with the help of secondary institutions like the WTO and the IMF, governs hegemonic stability and the liberalisation of international trade and finance globally (Buzan 2004, 2014). Historically, it is a primary institution of the Western-core, but in times of modernity and globalisation it has also been adopted in regions formerly governed by mercantilist or state socialist approaches to economy and trade (Buzan and Lawson 2014; Buzan 2014). This work follows Buzan’s (2004, 2014) notion of the Market and treats Trade as a derivative of or part of the Market, and not as its own primary institution as Palmujoki (2019). The centrality of the WTO regime and the varying practices in trade negotiations around the world, such as e.g. non-discrimination and reciprocity that Palmujoki illustrates, are, however, highly relevant for the analysis of normative contestation within the spheres of the Market in this work. Further norms and practices related to the institution of the Market are e.g. “freedom of markets, encouragement of private property, regulation of prices according to market rules and retrenchment of the state from the wider economic activity” (Costa-Buranelli 2015, 499).



Global and regional levels of international society

Within the ES, the notion of international society is used in different contexts, namely as global international society (GIS) and in different parts of the world at regional levels – regional international society. The idea of international society existing on a global level stems from Bull and Watson (1984) who argued for an expansion of what emerged as European international society after the treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Within the ES, “[...] there is a general consensus that during the nineteenth century the Westphalian form of international society, or at least the core set of mainly Western states representing it, became globally dominant” (Buzan and Schouenborg 2018, 16). In the latest turn of theorising GIS, Buzan and Schouenborg (2018) point to “an unhelpful propensity towards equating the West with the global” (219) within the ES and conclude by defining GIS in a way “that the global now refers to the composite of all global social relations ... and does not implicitly or explicitly privilege one part of these” (ibid). This work aligns its understanding of international society on a global level with this definition and adopts GIS as an all-encompassing global. However, GIS and the debate of its strengthening or weakening in contemporary times are not at the centre of this work. Moreover, the main theme lies with the regionalisation of international society, or international society on a regional level. And while potential findings could possibly prove to enhance one side of the strengthening-weakening of GIS debate, this is outside the scope of this work. What is in scope is an analysis of how actors from different RIS communicate and contest differing interpretations and related practices of PIs. The study of international society at the sub-global level has been of particular interest to contemporary ES scholars: the regional turn within the ES in the 2000s led to a focus on RISs (Buzan 2004; Hurrell 2007; Stivachtis 2014) and investigations on their respective sets and understanding of PIs, e.g. the Middle-East (Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez 2009), Scandinavia (Schouenborg 2012), Latin America (Merke 2011, 2014), Central Asia (Kaczmarek 2014), East Asia (Y. Zhang 2014), and Europe (Stivachtis and Webber 2011). The concept of RIS has been debated within the ES since the beginning of the regional turn and several relevant arguments are presented in the following to clarify how it can be understood:

Regional international society is a kind of international society which exists at the sub-global level. It means it is a constitutive part of the global level but it is also distinct from it. Regional international societies have the character of second-order societies and are formed by or within a region. (Karmazin et al. 2014, 13)

Buzan and Zhang argue that to identify a RIS and distinguish it from the global level “one can track the differences in their primary institutions, which are the building blocks of international societies and which define their social structure” (2014d, 7). An overview of PIs globally is provided by Buzan and Sunay (2007) and was recently put into contemporary context on the debate of global international society and regions (Costa-Buranelli 2019). The BRI specifically has only been addressed in the context of Sino-Central Asian relations (Costa Buranelli 2018), presenting a major gap within the body of the ES. Further themes include the post-Cold War expansion of the EU and thus of the European RIS (Stivachtis and Webber 2011), the larger debate on Europe as a normative power and the impact of the European RIS’ solidarist understanding of



PIs on a global level and through that, also within other regions (Diez 2005; Manners 2006; Diez and Manners 2007; Ahrens and Diez 2015; Ahrens 2019), as well as a transformation of understanding of PIs within contemporary European RIS (Diez, Manners, and Whitman 2011).

Similarly, the East Asian regional international society has received attention in recent years (Y. Zhang 2014, 2015). Themes include its historic development and extent (F. Zhang 2014), its contemporary form and the role of culture (Kang 2014), its relations to global international society (Khong 2014; Goh 2014). The rise of China, regionally and globally, has also been considered in the ongoing debate on the extent of East Asian regional international society (Buzan and Zhang 2014b, 2014a; Y. Zhang 2014, 2015) and Buzan provides thorough analysis of how China relates to social institutions of a global international society generally (Buzan 2018).

For the purpose of this work, RIS is to be understood as an international society at the sub-global level, consisting of states within a specific geographical region. And within such a regional context, PIs are considered as having a common and distinctly differentiated meaning. In the analysis, this understanding is complemented by the role of language and what Costa-Buranelli (2015) calls the “polysemy of institutions” (503). He introduced the concept of polysemy in relation to their “constant renegotiation, redefinition and reformulation” (500) in regional contexts, pointing to different but similar definitions and interpretations. Drawing on Wittgenstein and Neufeld, Costa-Buranelli states:

In other words, ‘meaning is usage’ in ES terms refers to how an institution is interpreted, understood and put into practice by an actor within its system of reference. *The word (institution) has that specific meaning (understanding) because the context (social structure) creates and requires the conditions for that specific use (practice).* (Costa-Buranelli 2015, sic)

The subsequent application of his interpretivist take on the philosophy of language to the institution of Sovereignty in the EU, post-Soviet region and ASEAN – during the same time period – allows for a comparison of polysemic definitions of the same PI within different regions and RISs (ibid). In its analysis of normative contestation in Sino-European relations in times of the BRI, this work deploys the same interpretive approach as Costa-Buranelli puts forward.

For the purpose of this work, normative contestation is understood as a central element of the process of regionalisation of international society; i.e. (wilful) reinterpretation of PIs as required by a respective regional context. The analysis focuses on normative contestation in the sense of the promotion of differing interpretations of PIs or opposition to the respectively other’s interpretations or related practices. This relates to the theoretical basis of this project, the ES, and more specifically the debate on PIs in the process of regionalisation of international society, i.e. differing interpretations of PIs in different parts or regions of the world (Buzan and Zhang 2014c; Schouenborg 2014; Costa-Buranelli 2015; Stivachtis 2015; Y. Zhang 2015; Spandler 2019).

In this work, the EU is considered a regional international society with common values and PIs. Considering that the pooling of member states’ Sovereignty and their partial integration in legal, economic and more recently foreign policy and security terms, the EU is treated as a global actor itself. Here, the focus is on its executive



branch, namely the European Commission (EC) and the special role which the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) holds regarding European foreign policy in relation to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) as a de-facto Diplomatic Corps of the European Union. The two selected member-states, Germany and Italy, are as members of the EU also considered members of the European RIS (ERIS), and as states also considered global actors (Diez, Manners, and Whitman 2011; Ahrens and Diez 2015; Ahrens 2019). The People's Republic of China is seen as a member – arguably the dominant one – of a narrowly defined East Asian RIS and as state also considered a global actor (Buzan and Zhang 2014c). Here, a predominant view is the interpretation of Sovereignty in absolute internal terms, emphasising non-intervention (Buzan and Zhang 2014a; Y. Zhang 2015; Costa-Buranelli 2019).

There is precedent for the study of normative change and contestation from an ES perspective: Brasch-Kristensen (2016) studied the recognition between RISs on the example of EU, ASEAN and SADC relations. Spandler fleshed out the relation between primary and secondary institution, specifically for the EU and ASEAN, under the pretext of normative arguing (2015, 2019b, 2019b), and Knudsen addresses normative change, or change of PIs within international organisations (Knudsen 2019b). It is within this sub-field of ES that his work positions itself by contributing to the study of interacting, overlaying, and mutually influencing RISs. Moreover, how normative contestation takes shape in the discourse between actors from within these RISs. And further, the work adds to the analysis of the BRI as a project and global strategy with foreign policy implications from an ES perspective.

Theoretical framework

Summarising, the theoretical framework for this work is firmly rooted within the ES and draws on its core concepts of international society and PIs. In studying Sino-European relations, the underlying assumption is that of the respective actors coming from different RISs. The implication of this is that their interpretations and practices related to PIs present on a global level differ to various degrees (Karmazin et al. 2014; Costa-Buranelli 2014; Buzan and Zhang 2014a). Within the canon of the ES, this is regarded as the process of regionalisation of international society (Costa-Buranelli 2015). The work studies normative contestation regarding Sovereignty, International Law and the Market in contemporary discourse between China and the EU, Germany and Italy. Normative contestation in this work is understood as the promotion of differing conceptions and the voicing of criticism towards respectively differing interpretations of PIs and differing related practices. These differing interpretations are analysed with respect to solidarist and pluralist perspectives (Ahrens 2019; Knudsen 2019a) And further, with respect regional contexts in the sense of European and East Asian RISs and the respective practice of PIs on these sub-global levels (Diez, Manners, and Whitman 2011; Ahrens and Diez 2015; Buzan and Zhang 2014a; Y. Zhang 2014; Buzan 2018). It is here, where the concept of polysemy is deployed; the meaning of a direct reference to PIs depends on the speaker and context (Costa-Buranelli 2015).



Chapter Three

Analytical framework: Studying normative contestation in discourse

This chapter outlines the analytical framework for this work. It begins with considerations on methodology. To an ES scholar, this might appear as an uncommon step– yet, this work intends to forestall common address criticism towards the ES and its theorists by providing transparency regarding the methodological basis for this work (Navari 2014). After explicating the deployed variation of DT, the chapter acquaints the reader with the three-step research process drawing on examples from preceding works within the ES as well as the context of this work. The chapter closes by elaborating how the analysis is presented in three phases of Sino-European discourse in Part II of this work.

Considerations on Methodology: Discourse Tracing

In Chapter Two, the theoretical framework for this work was outlined – it is firmly rooted within the ES and adopts an interpretivist framework to investigate normative contestation manifesting in Sino-European discourse in times of the BRI. This work’s methodological approach draws on the method of DT proposed by LeGreco and Tracy (2009). DT is particularly suited to analyse discourse across several levels of abstraction enshrined in different sources with regard to the actors’ motivations and interpretations – it “illustrates the interaction of different texts and practices, in order to make sense of how actors discursively manage power and transformation” (ibid, 1523). The idea of DT is to be understood as “[following] the use of language and text across time and context” (ibid, 1531), which makes it so useful for the purposes of this work: Investigating how normative contestation manifests in Sino-European discourse around specific themes at a specific time allows to assign “timestamps” to relevant statements and formulations. This makes it possible to compare the ways of normative contestation – e.g. arguments and themes, phrasing and language – over time, and possibly find change in its ways. And further, from this, the analysis can shed light on when and in what context turning points in both interstate relations and in the themes of normative contestation come to the fore. The relevance of temporality in discourse is acknowledged also by ES scholars – Costa-Buranelli draws on Little (2000) in arguing for the polysemy of institutions in the sense of multiple meanings existing at the same time:

... it is possible to *draw on the language used* in a given international society in order to *identify and then understand* the significance of the interests, values, rules and institutions that prevail in a particular place and *at a particular point in time*. It is presupposed, moreover, that *these features vary considerably* from one international society to another but this can *only be appreciated* through an investigation of the language used by statesmen when they are engaged in the *practices that define a given international society*. (as cited in Costa-Buranelli 2015, 504 sic)



This view illustrates two points relevant for the methodology of this work. First, the existence polysemy of institutions in the sense of co-existence of differing interpretations related practices. And second, the relevance of temporality, i.e. that a statement by statespersons is to be regarded at the interpretation or practice at a specific moment, arguably implying that at a different point in time the interpretation or practice can be transformed. In relation to this, Spandler proves DT to be a suitable method for ES research projects in his recent work on “how the discourses on organizational innovation were shaped by and in turn shaped changes in the regional primary institutions” (2019b, 6) in the context of the EU and ASEAN. He sees its strength in “combining elements of process tracing and its focus on social mechanisms with methods that reconstruct the gradual institutionalization of normative claims out of discursive struggles” (41). His variation of DT emphasises the practice of normative arguing and the ways of reciprocal pollinations, and not on social mechanisms. In this work, a similar variation of DT is deployed and combined with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two. Namely, the notion of regionalisation of international society, between solidarist and pluralist poles, and the resulting polysemic nature of its institutions. This approach enables the study of normative contestation of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market in Sino-European discourse by establishing a time-coded narrative that relates statements and practice to the thematical and temporal context. In other words, deploying DT allows to pinpoint explicit turning points in discourse, and possibly relation, between the China and the EU, Germany and Italy, while highlighting the ways in which normative contestation manifests in the same.

Temporal unfolding of discourse: Data sources and selection

DT helps structuring and guiding the analysis and reconstruction of discourse in the order in which it occurred – “this approach emphasizes the chronological sequence of discursive interventions” (Spandler 2019, 41). The application of a rigorous step-wise process for explorative reading and gathering of sources, followed by selecting those relevant for the investigation of normative contestation and application of the same structured questions to all sources (LeGreco and Tracy 2009, 1523) guarantees consistency in the selection of the entire data set and minimises bias. This first step of the analysis is concerned with gathering data sources from different levels of discourse, ordering the same chronologically and conducting an explorative reading within the gathered sources. The selected data sources are then brought into the correct temporal order, which yields a timeline of discourse between China, and the EU, Germany and Italy in times of the BRI. This relates to WQ1 of this work in the sense that the temporal unfolding of discourse and normative contestation can be established with respect to key events and turning points:

WQ1: What is the **temporal unfolding of Sino-European discourse** and normative contestation of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market in it since the introduction of the BRI in 2013? Which are the **key events or turning points** in respective discourse and relations?

One conscious delimitation of this work is the respective degree of depth on a micro level of discourse. Given the timeframe available for this work and its limited extent in



pages, the choice is made to ensure coverage of the entire period of investigation over extended depth on micro level discourse (LeGreco and Tracy 2009, 1519). The macro level is understood in the sense of Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) as “broader social narratives and systems of enduring thought” (as cited in LeGreco and Tracy 2009, 1519), and the meso level of discourse is understood as the sphere “*between* local experiences and larger structures” (1520, sic). The emphasis on sources from macro and meso levels is further justified by their general accessibility in comparison to e.g. non-recorded remarks at press conferences that require presence of the researcher to be captured, or statements to journalists in “passing by”. These sources would represent the micro level of relevant discourse in this work’s context. Further, for reasons of feasibility, the methodologic framework deployed in this work does not include (elite) interviews which would be a prime source type for micro level of discourse. The latter is a choice of delimitation to ensure a workable scope for the work at hand. The general approach to the investigation of Sino-European relations and meeting actors from different RIS would, however, benefit from such a micro level analysis, as it allowed to gain insight into the very personal and subjective views of individual diplomats and statespersons; a “look behind the scenes” as Brasch-Kristensen (2016) and Costa-Buranelli (2015) demonstrate. As for respective types of data sources, in his work on polysemy of PIs Costa-Buranelli (2015) analyses official foreign policy documents such as e.g. the EU’s external action strategy, remarks by statespersons and high representatives, as well as EU to UN recommendations. He also considers news media coverage of certain events and statements. In a similar way, Spandler (2019) analyses documents issued by organisational actors, such as the EU and ASEAN, as well as statements made by (ranking) statespersons. For this work, the main sources for empirical evidence are documents and speeches in a variety of forms that capture the discourse between China, the EU, Germany, and Italy in times of the BRI. These range from core strategic papers, reports and speeches issued unilaterally – e.g. China’s policy on the EU and vice versa (FMPC 2014a; EC and Mogherini 2016b; EC 2019b) – to joint communications or declarations, issued bi- or multilaterally – e.g. proceedings of consultations between China and Italy, Germany and the EU (FMITA and FMPC 2013; GER and PRC 2014; EC and PRC 2015). Regarding the EU specifically, preference is given to sources originating from the EU’s executive branch and its foreign policy framework – i.e. the EC, the HR/VP, the CFSP and the EEAS – since these arguably represent the EU’s position as a global actor. As opposed to e.g. the European Foreign Affairs Council or the European Council (EUCO), which are staffed with ranking statespersons of the EU28 member-states arguably bringing in elements of their member state interest. This EU-internal contestation is not part of the research, hence the argued delimitation in sources. Statements made by the (office of the) President of the EUCO are taken into account, considering her/him not holding a national office in the EU28 and being the general representative of the European Union.⁴ Data sources are collected and analysed for the period from

⁴ See Article 15 of the Lisbon Treaty: “*The President of the European Council shall, at his level and in that capacity, ensure the external representation of the Union on issues concerning its common foreign and security policy, without prejudice to the powers of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The President of the European Council shall not hold a national office.*” (EU 2007)



September 2013, when the BRI was announced, to March 2019, when Italy formally joined the BRI.

This work emphasises on the exchange between statespersons rather than studying e.g. media coverage and civil society reactions to the BRI. These exchanges – the accessible part of it, leaving closed-door diplomatic relations out of the scope – take place in a partially formalised manner. For example, on a governmental level there are the China-Italy Joint Government Committee and the German-Chinese Intergovernmental Consultations, and the China-EU/EU-China Summit. Relevant statements can also be found at other occasions such as e.g. the *Hamburg Summit: China meets Europe* where high-ranking EU officials, heads of states, cabinet members and executives from the private sector exchange views on Sino-European, but also Sino-German relations in particular (Steinmeier 2014; Liu 2016; Katainen 2016). Examples of the mentioned actor-specific, unilateral statements are taken from meetings of e.g. the UNGA, the WEF, and the UNSC (Wang 2013; Li 2013; UNSC 2015). The selection of sources aims to balance between unilateral and joint sources, as well as between the respective actors under investigation.

Identifying normative contestation: Reading primary institutions

In a second step, this work analyses the content of the selected and ordered data sources in a structured way. DT suggests a thorough reading of sources along the established timeline which allows to uncover both turning points and respective defining themes in discourse (LeGreco and Tracy 2009, 1529). After establishing the empirical basis for the analysis in the first step, the analysis is guided by WQ2 and WQ3 respectively to analyse its content regarding evidence of normative contestation between China and the EU, Germany and Italy.

WQ2: What are the **defining themes that normative contestation manifests around** in discourse between China and the EU, Germany and Italy? How do **themes and language of normative contestation evolve** over the investigated period?

WQ3: What **role does the BRI** play in the actors' relations, and **how is it related to normative contestation** between China and the EU, Germany and Italy?

These questions are rigorously applied to the selected data sources. In combination with the theoretical framework, this ensures equal treatment of the entirety of the empirical basis. Both the explorative reading in step one and the close reading in this second step are supported by qualitative coding, tracing relevant evidence within the discourse. And, in identifying crucial developments and defining moments in Sino-European relations. To ensure overview and consistency in this second analytic step, the software NVivo 12 Pro is used as a central storage and reader to highlight and save, i.e., relevant statements and communications.

In its study of PIs within the empirical basis – “reading primary institutions” – this work follows the methodological emphasis of the ES and “the importance of empirical research as opposed to grand theorizing” (Navari 2014, 213). This empirical focus shows within ES work by e.g. the researchers' immersion in “diplomatic records, memoirs and newspapers” (213) and analyses of statements and actions by civil servants or statespersons, with the aim of uncovering “the self-conceptions of the



actors who are participating in the processes that constitute international life” (213). Consequently, the data sources are analysed to find and select data in the form of e.g. phrases, formulations or entire passages that evince differing interpretations, or respective contestation, of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market and their related differing practices. This procedure allows “to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (Bowen 2009, 27) regarding the respective PIs and the central puzzle. As an example, Spandler (2019) draws on the statement of a political leader to illustrate how normative arguing manifested in South East Asian discourse shortly after WWII:

The polities of the periphery thus claimed primary institutions that had previously applied only to the core of international society in order to overturn the stratified structure of international society and to achieve the status of a legitimate actor. Using this strategy, Indonesian political leader Sukarno declared in October 1945:

‘Indonesians will never understand why it is, for instance, wrong for the Germans to rule Holland [under wartime occupation] if it is right for the Dutch to rule Indonesia. In either case the right to rule rests on pure force and not on the sanction of the populations.’ (cited in Klose 2015, p. 51)

(Spandler 2019, 67)

And Costa-Buranelli (2015), quotes several EU28 foreign ministers in his analysis regarding different interpretations of Sovereignty and the role of R2P

The declarations of some of the representatives are enlightening in pointing at the similarities of the principles of the R2P and sovereignty as intended in the EU. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Per Stig Møller, stated that:

‘It is a cause for *concern* that we have witnessed the resurgence of the notion of *respect for national sovereignty as a justification for inaction and paralysis in international affairs.*’

According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, Dimitrij Rupel,

‘We should continue to *review the concept of sovereignty*. Many fear that the erosion of sovereignty provides grounds for interfering in state internal affairs. Indeed, the potential for misuse is real. [...] At the same time, the *sovereignty of states must be understood in the context of contemporary reality.* [...] We regard this as a *conceptual breakthrough.*’

(Costa-Buranelli 2015, 507, sic)

In alignment with Spandler’s usage of DT, the work thus combines insights on PIs from ES framework – see Chapter Two – with empirical findings generated by the research itself in step one and two, which Spandler references as “functional heuristics” (2019, 39). It is here where the interpretivist approach of this work comes into play as the elicitation of meaning regarding PIs “inevitably involves a degree of subjective judgement” (ibid, 39). Or, in other words, the coding of sources is conducted in an explorative manner with the aim of identifying direct and indirect references which present regional interpretation and related practices of PIs; shedding light on the polysemy of these institutions (Costa-Buranelli 2015).

Combining temporality and normative contestation: three phases

The third and last step represents the combination of insights gained in steps one and two. Namely, combining the temporal unfolding of discourse and normative contestation with the source-based analysis regarding evidence of normative

contestation in discourse. Or differently, to reflect on the evidence for normative contestation in temporal and thematic context with the aim of finding structure.

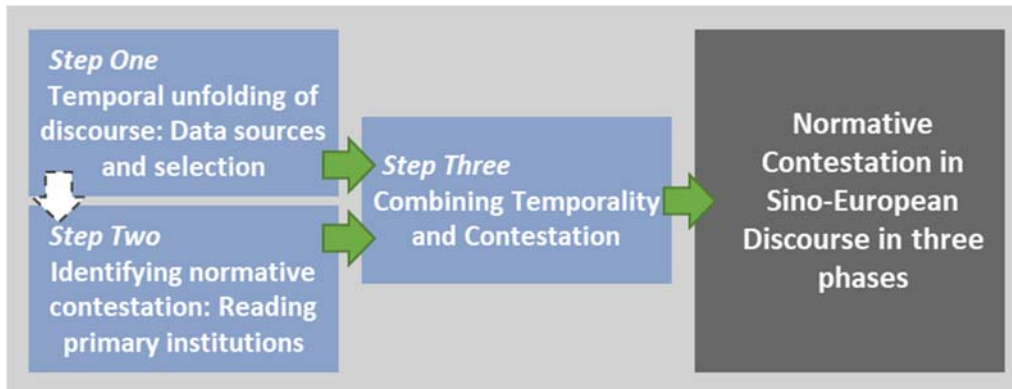


Figure 3: Analytical framework for normative contestation in discourse

In Part II of this work, the analysis of normative contestation between China and the EU, Germany, and Italy is presented. The respective chapters aim to provide answers to the WQs, and thus the central puzzle. Recalling the explicated emphasis on temporality of the deployed analytical frame work, the analysis and empirical evidence for normative contestation are presented in a chronological way. The resulting narrative captures the exchange and discourse and uncovers several defining moments as well as main themes shaping interstate relations between the actors under investigation. Based on the third step of the analysis, the work suggests that Sino-European relations have had two significant turning points in the investigated period. Thus, the work argues for three phases with differing characteristics in Sino-European relations since the beginning of the BRI in 2013. And that they are perceivable in all China-EU, Sino-German and Sino-Italian relations, although with different emphasises and outcomes. These phases are subsequently referred to as *Anno BRI: Xi Era begins* (2013-2015), *Chinese and European Strategic Currents* (2015-2016) and *Facing Variegated European Winds* (2016-2019) and dedicated a chapter each. The chapters briefly outline the temporal unfolding and key events before presenting selected empirical evidence deemed relevant for determining main themes, and how interpretations Sovereignty, International Law and the Market, and related practices, were conveyed and contested in Sino-European discourse.

Part II

Chapter Four

Anno BRI: Xi Era Begins

This first phase, *Anno BRI: Xi Era Begins*, began with speeches by high-ranking Chinese statespersons in fall 2013 that outlined the contemporary Chinese position globally, but also specifically regarding China’s interpretation and practice of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market (Economy). Following these, there were consultations between China and the Italian government, and the EU. In the earlier, the emphasis was on the welcoming of Chinese investment in Italy. The China-EU Summit produced a strategy until 2020 on respective relations showing few friction points. The predominant theme here, and in Sino-European relations generally, was that of negotiating an investment agreement and resolving differences regarding opportunities foreign operators. China addressed these matters in its updated EU Policy Paper. It revealed differing expectations and demands regarding timeline for investment agreements, and Chinese emphasis on FTA. At the UNGA in late 2014, FM Wang Yi reiterated, contesting European views, how China interpreted International Law. The bilateral exchanges and a debate on the role and meaning of the UN Charter, the respective interpretations of Sovereignty, International Law and the role of HR highlighted the substantive disagreements at the time. In this first phase, the responses to China’s repositioning from the EU and Germany appeared closely aligned, while Italy did not actively criticise Chinese Market related practices and utilised a softer tone in its criticism of the HR situation in China.

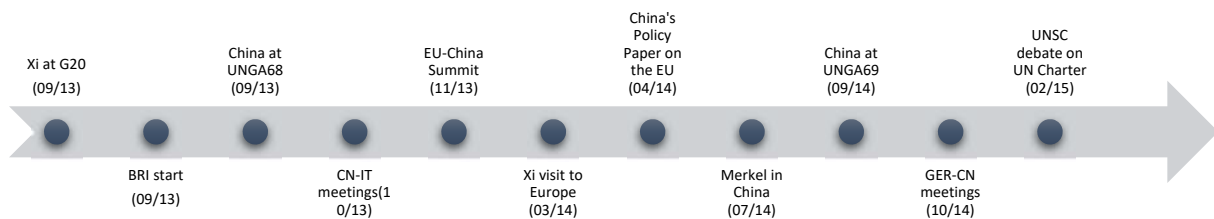


Figure 4: Timeline of first phase – 2013 to 2015

Chinese perspectives on the Market and Sovereignty

In September 2013, President Xi Jinping gave a speech outlining China’s contemporary vision for development during his presidency. A key message conveyed at the G20 Summit was that of China, as a developing country, undergoing “structural reform on economy, politics, culture, society, and ecological civilization” (FMPRC 2013). And regarding China’s economic reform, i.e. practices related to the Market, Xi made further remarks:

China will *strengthen the market system construction*, advance the structural reform on macroeconomic regulation and control, taxation, finance, investment, administrative system and other fields, and *give full play to the basic role of the market in resource allocation*. (FMPRC 2013a, emphasis added)



Knowing that, among others, the EU imposes anti-dumping measures on what it deems non-market economies (NME) allows to understand Xi's emphasis on this matter in context. The promise to increase the influence of the "invisible hand" (Xi 2014a, 128), the Market, as opposing force to the "visible hand" (ibid, 128), the government, in a way contested the main argument of the EU's basic anti-dumping regulation by declaring that China committed to a market economic regime and the global rules of trade.

Speaking the following day at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan, Xi first presented to the world – though not on the world stage – the BRI. He equated the growing relations between China and Eurasia over the past two decades with the "ancient Silk Road [gaining] fresh vitality" (Xi 2013) and continued outlining the initial vision of the BRI:

To forge closer economic ties, deepen cooperation and expand development space in the Eurasian region, *we should take an innovative approach and jointly build an 'economic belt along the Silk Road'*. This will be a great undertaking benefitting the people of all countries along the route. *To turn this into a reality, we may start with work in individual areas and link them up over time to cover the whole region.* (Xi 2013, emphasis added)

In this context, Xi also explicated the Chinese understanding of Sovereignty as absolute in internal and foreign affairs:

We respect the *development paths and domestic and foreign policies chosen independently by the people of every country*. We will *in no circumstances interfere* in the internal affairs of Central Asian countries. We *do not seek to dominate regional affairs* or establish any sphere of influence. (Xi 2013).

The emphasis on self-determination in relation to also the choice of development path, and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs is considered, recalling the theoretical framework, as pluralist interpretation and practice of Sovereignty.

Chinese Foreign Minister (FM) Wang Yi's remarks at the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) further outlined China's contemporary interpretation of Sovereignty and International Law. He stated that Deng Xiaoping's doctrine of China never seeking hegemony remained China's "unchanging commitment and conviction" (Wang 2013) and explained that "[w]e are committed to working with others to establish a new type of international relations based on win-win cooperation and seek peaceful resolution of international and regional disputes" (ibid). Wang made China's practice of Sovereignty clear by stating that "we will, under whatever circumstances, firmly safeguard China's Sovereignty and territorial integrity and resolutely uphold China's legitimate and lawful rights and interests" (ibid). Moreover, he explicated China's perception of International Law enshrined in the UN Charter in the context of Sovereignty:

It is our consistent position that the purposes and principles of the *Charter of the United Nations form the cornerstone* of current international relations and provide safeguards for world peace and stability. *Respecting national sovereignty and opposing interference in internal affairs*, safeguarding peace and opposing aggression, and promoting equality and opposing power politics - *these important principles must be observed.* (ibid, emphasis added)

At the World Economic Forum (WEF), Premier Li Keqiang, made further remarks regarding the reform of China's economic system and Market related practices. He



stated that China had “endeavored to develop a mixed economy, relaxed market access ..., encouraged more investment of the non-public sector, and provided greater space for business of various ownerships” (Li 2013).

Altogether, these statements arguably expressed China’s contemporary self-conception and provided a positioning on how Sovereignty, International Law and the Market were interpreted by the new Chinese leadership. The presented reform plans were tripartite – a look inward to reform and restructure, a look around in Central and East Asia for increased cooperation, and a look above, or beyond, the regional level spelling out how China, under Xi intended to relate to the global level.

European responses to China’s reform plans

Following these various speeches, the China Italy Joint Government Committee took place in October and allowed for insights on Sino-Italian relations at the time. Both the cooperation targets outlined in the joint communique between China and Italy, and the press release by the Italian Foreign Ministry (MFA) indicated a close relationship with little contestation regarding differing views on Sovereignty, International Law or Market Economy. The relation between China and Italy appeared amicable at time with expressed desire for closer (economic) cooperation. FM Wang styled Italy as “bridge to Europe” (FMITA 2013) and stated that “China considers Italy one of its most important partners, and a positive force in encouraging relations between China and Europe” (ibid). Italian FM Emma Bonino addressed the, in her words, significant difference in FDI between China and Italy. She contrasted Italy’s 11bn USD to China’s 1bn USD in investment in Italy, and pointed out that “it is up to Italy to do its part and we are preparing to do so through Destination Italia” (FMITA 2013) which “renders our country more favourable to Italian and foreign investments” (ibid). The predominant theme here was one of explicit interest in increased Chinese investment in Italy and arguably Italy’s promise to take measures enabling China to balance the mentioned economic asymmetries. One theme of continuous contestation in Sino-European relations was, and is, that of HR practice in the context Sovereignty. Here, the phrasing “principles of equality and mutual respect” (FMITA and FMPRC 2013) appeared relevant regarding article 21 of the joint communique, which mentions agreement “on the advisability of developing exchanges and collaboration between the European Union and China in matters of human rights” (ibid). In a way, this kept a discursive space open which accommodated both the differing and conflicting perspectives on HR as universal, or not. No demands from either side to change or adapt the respective views on HR could be identified in the discourse. Lastly, the summit proceedings did neither give immediate reference to the BRI or the MSR, nor to Italy’s strategic relevance for the maritime routes.

In contrast to Sino-Italian discourse, the emphasis in China-EU discourse was on differing views regarding market access and foreign investment. Ahead of the China-EU Summit in November 2013, EC President José Manuel Barroso stated that “[l]aunching investment agreement negotiations will be a new chapter in our work, boosting jobs and growth in ours’ economies.” (EC 2013a). In a press release, the EC declared:



Such a deal would be the EU's first ever stand-alone investment agreement and aim to enhance investment flows *by reducing barriers to investing in China, by improving the protection of mutual investments and by providing European investors with better access to the Chinese market* with more legal certainty. (EC 2013a, emphasis added)

And, in a memo, put forward that “[i]nvestment agreement negotiations between the EU and China, to be launched at the summit, will aim to lead to improved investment protection and market access for both sides” (EC 2013b). The joint communique titled *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* (EC and PRC 2013) contained few points of friction regarding the respectively differing views of Sovereignty apart from the renewed emphasis on disagreement regarding HR practices. The document clarified the agreed roadmap for cooperation in different spheres and centrally addressed the agenda for trade and investment negotiations in the sense that the parties agreed to foster “their trade and investment relationship towards 2020 in a spirit of mutual benefit, by promoting open, transparent markets and a level-playing field” (EC and PRC 2013, 5). Friction in the spheres of trade and investment found expression in relation to the agreement to “[n]egotiate and conclude a comprehensive EU-China Investment Agreement that covers issues of interest to either side, including investment protection and market access”(ibid, 5) which could yield “progressive liberalisation of investment and the elimination of restrictions for investors to each other's market”(ibid, 5) and lead to “a deep and comprehensive FTA, as a longer term perspective”(ibid, 5). At a press conference at the end of the summit, Barroso put it stated that “[i]n Europe we are reforming our social market economy” (Barroso 2013b). He added further insightful remarks later the same day at the China-EU Business Summit:

We feel encouraged by the recent decisions here in China to pursue a series *of economic and social reforms* that would further open China's economy and *give greater role to market forces*. Deep and ambitious reforms will support sustainable growth in China, contribute to *upgrading the economy and give more opportunities for private economic operators in China, Chinese and also foreign operators*. (Barroso 2013a, emphasis added)

The recurring emphasis of private operators in an economy on part of the EU arguably pointed to one of the differing interests – contested Market related practices – that the joint document also mentioned. Barroso arguably alluded to this when he stated that under investment agreement “[c]ompanies operating in Europe and China would be able to work on a more level playing field – *regardless of their origin or ownership structure*” (ibid). This differing in European and Chinese approaches to the role the state or government in economy was also visible when looking at the ownership structure of Chinese investments in Europe:

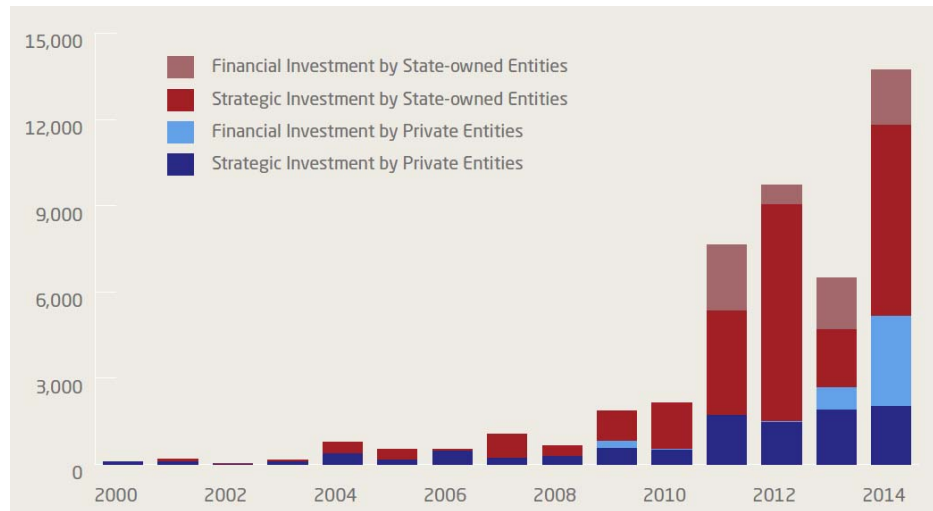


Figure 5: Chinese FDI in the EU28 by Investor Type in mn Euro⁵

And further, invoking Costa-Buranelli’s (2015) work on polysemy of institutions, even though it is a joint communique, that does not mean that there is agreement in the interpretation or practice of terms such as “open & transparent markets” and “level playing field”. Indeed, based on the so far conducted analysis of Sino-European discourse, this work argues that there is disagreement on them. China on the one hand had pointed out clearly it had chosen what it termed “socialism with Chinese characteristics” as its development path, which included “the visible hand” (Xi 2014a, 128) i.e. the government in its economy. And the EU on the other hand, as Barroso put it, social market economy – or differently, a liberal market economy with in comparison reduced involvement of the state in the economy and different Market related practices regarding private operators. Thus, a “level playing field” needs to be seen before a backdrop of fundamentally differing economic systems.

The normative contestation between China and the EU on HR practices and the responsibility to protect (R2P) individual freedom found expression in the words of President of the European Council (EUCO) Van Rompuy at the Summit’s press conference:

A word on human rights. The protection of human rights and fundamental freedom is at the core of the existence of the EU itself and constitutes an important part of our exchange with all our partners. There is no doubt that through lifting millions of people from poverty China has made key contributions in this field. ... We discussed today questions related to the protection of minorities and freedom of expression especially on defenders of human rights and I expressed our concerns. (Van Rompuy 2013, emphasis added)

This expression of the EU’s self-conception as a promoter of fundamental, or universal, HR and the voiced criticism towards China, can be seen substantive disagreement with Chinese practice. And further, with reference to Ahrens and Diez (2015), arguably an example of solidarising tendencies in the EU’s approach to China.

And lastly, asking the question of what then is missing in the discourse at this point, one arrives at a central element of the BRI – infrastructure development and trade connectivity. The initiatives under *II:IV Transport and infrastructure* (EC and PRC 2013, 8), however, did not reference the BRI framework or any of the, at this point already, established language of *SREB and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road*. The

⁵ (Hanemann and Huotari 2015)



document remained of generalist nature calling to “[s]trengthen cooperation in developing smart, upgraded and fully interconnected infrastructure systems” (ibid) and to “[a]ctively explore models of infrastructure cooperation, including project bonds, project shareholding, joint contracting and co-financing, and further coordinate the cooperation among China, the EU and its Member States in the above-mentioned fields” (ibid).

China on Europe: Contesting solidarisation

In March 2014, President Xi travelled to Europe. At the German Körber Foundation, Xi reiterated that the underlying policy of China’s political system was that it “does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, and will never seek hegemony or expansion” (Xi 2014b). And while this could arguably be regarded as a further reference to China’s understanding and practice of Sovereignty, Xi found more frank words as to how serious this was to be taken:

At the same time, China will firmly uphold its sovereignty, security, and development interests. No country should expect China to swallow the bitter fruit that undermines its sovereignty, security and development interests. (Xi 2014b)

Xi further stated that “[t]he overarching goal is to improve and develop the socialist system with Chinese characteristics” (2014b), thus providing an insight into China’s systemic self-perception standing in contrast to a social or liberal market economy and solidarist tendencies on a global level.

At UNESCO headquarters in Paris, Xi outlined what is further on referred to as the civilisation-difference argument. It is a three-point argument which starts with the presupposition that “civilizations have come in different colors” (Xi 2014c), continues that “[a]ll human civilizations are equal in terms of value” (ibid), and thus “[n]o one civilization can be judged superior to another” (ibid). The final point is their inclusiveness in the sense that “[c]opying other civilizations mechanically or blindly is like cutting one’s toes just to fit his shoes, which is not only impossible but also highly detrimental” (ibid). This work argues that the civilisation-difference argument is at the core of how China contests solidarist tendencies. For example, the promotion of HR or liberal perceptions of Market Economy and the (minor) role of the state. This argument is demonstrated throughout all chapters of this second part.

During his visit to Europe in 2014, Xi also met with Barroso and Van Rompuy, for which he had one further topic with him – the BRI:

In view of the great potential to improve their transport relations, both sides decided to develop *synergies between China’s “Silk Road Economic Belt” initiative and EU policies* and jointly to *explore common initiatives along these lines.*(Xi, Van Rompuy, and Barroso 2014, emphasis added)

This first mention in EU discourse of the BRI came at a timely point, as part of the state visit to Germany was the celebration of the YuXinOu freight train which Xi and Germany’s Federal Minister of Economy (MEF) Sigmar Gabriel oversaw. It is arguably at this point, March 2014, that the BRI figuratively and literally reached Germany and thus the EU.



While China had significantly increased its FDI in Europe in recent years (Hanemann and Huotari 2015, 2016), the latest policy on the EU dated back to 2003. Following Xi's visit to Europe, China published an updated policy on the EU. It presented the Chinese contemporary strategy and perception of Sino-European relations at the time, and stated “[w]ith no fundamental conflict of interests, China and the EU have far more agreement than differences” (FMPRC 2014a). Yet, there were differences, and arguably fundamental ones in Sino-European relations at the time. For example, the policy paper presented a differing emphasis than the EU regarding the ongoing investment agreement negotiations, as China advocated to “[a]ctively advance negotiations of an investment agreement between China and the EU and strive *to achieve an agreement as soon as possible* to facilitate two-way investment. *Start as soon as possible joint feasibility study on a China-EU FTA*” (ibid, emphasis added). While this does not present a normative contestation in the previously shown sense, it is obvious that the respective parties have differing policy goals in mind at the time – an extensive investment agreement ensuring market access and (IP) legal certainty on the one hand, and a fully-fledged FTA on the other, the Chinese end. And further, the civilisation-difference argument highlighted at the example of the speech at UNESCO headquarters was emphasised in this new policy document, too. Under the pretext of “harmony without uniformity” (ibid), China argued yet again that it was the civilisational differences in many spheres and growing competition that led to frictions:

China stands ready to work with the EU to bring the two major civilizations in the East and West closer and *set an example of different civilizations seeking harmony without uniformity*, promoting diversity, learning from each other and enjoying common prosperity.

Given the differences in history, cultural tradition, political system and stage of economic development as well as the increasing competition between China and the EU in some sectors in recent years, *the two sides have disagreements and frictions on issues of value such as human rights as well as economic and trade issues.* (ibid, emphasis added)

The bluntness regarding the themes of normative contestation is almost refreshing, as there was no courteous way of formulating of differing views deployed here as it is in other places. China cut to the chase and named HR and issues related to the Market as such contested themes between the EU and itself and framed them as the result of different civilisations and growing competition. The theme of HR was further linked to related practices of Sovereignty, i.e. “[t]he Chinese side is *ready to continue human rights dialogue* with the EU *based on the principles of mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs*” (ibid, emphasis added). The perception that this was a demand communicated to the EU becomes clear from the following statement made in the policy document:

The EU side should attach equal importance to all forms of human rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development, *view China's human rights situation in an objective and fair manner, stop using individual cases to interfere in China's judicial sovereignty and internal affairs*, and to create a good atmosphere for human rights dialogue and cooperation between the two sides. (ibid, emphasis added)

China further made demands towards the EU in the context of certain (political) disagreements. For example, that “[p]olitical figures of Taiwan should not be allowed to visit the EU or its member states under any pretext” (ibid), and “[t]he EU side should properly handle Tibet-related issues based on the principle of respecting China's



Sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and non-interference in China's internal affairs” (ibid). This work considers this a distinct form of wilful normative contestation in discourse in the sense that China here directly addressed the EU with reference to differing practices regarding HR and insisted on adherence to non-interference in its “judicial and internal affairs”(ibid). This conception of Sovereignty is considered in line with the argument brought forward by Costa-Buranelli (2015), that ASEAN states had, of which China is one, “adopted sovereignty to mean non-interference and ultimate legal authority on a given territorial domain” (509). And with reference to Ahrens and Diez (2015), these remarks could be understood as examples for the limits of solidarisation of international society on a global level, and also in Sino-European relations.

The friction between Chinese and European conceptions of Sovereignty and the promotion of HR in explicit relation to an understanding of International Law found expression in China’s position paper for the 69th Session of the UNGA:

It is the goal of all countries to achieve the rule of law at the national and international levels. At the national level, countries are entitled to independently choose the models of rule of law that suit their national conditions. Countries with different models of rule of law should learn from each other and seek common development in a spirit of mutual respect and inclusiveness. (FMPRC 2014b)

Recalling the third point of the civilisation-difference argument, i.e. inclusiveness, reveals that the same was deployed here when China stated that there were different models of rule of law in different countries which were to be respected. Whereas at the international level, similar to the definition found in the joint declaration between President Xi and Chancellor Merkel (GER and PRC 2014), “it is necessary to uphold the authority of the UN Charter, and strictly abide by universally recognized principles of international law such as sovereign equality and non-interference in others' affairs” (FMPRC 2014b). This is considered further evidence of a pluralist understanding of Sovereignty. The remarks of Wang added to this reading:

We should treat each other as equals. The principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity must be upheld. The pursuit by different countries of economic and social development must be respected. Their right to independently choose their own social systems and development paths must be safeguarded. (Wang 2014a)

What this meant for practices related to Sovereignty, International Law and the Market is perceivable from an article titled *China, a Staunch Defender and Builder of International Law* in the FM’s name:

In international legislation, it is important to reflect countries' concerns in a balanced manner and to resist the attempt to make the rules of certain countries as "international rules", and their standards "international standards". (Wang 2014b)

This arguably relates to earlier indicated resistance to, or contestation of, solidarising tendencies in Sino-European relations. And further, the EU and its member states’ persistence on the promotion of universal HR as well as specific criticism of the (domestic) Market regime in China at the time.

Differing conceptions of primary institutions

In October 2014, the third Germany China Intergovernmental Consultations were held in Germany. In contrast to all previous and following encounters (BPA 2011, 2012, 2016a, 2018b), no joint declaration was issued at this occasion. At a press conference following the talks, Merkel and Li Keqiang pointed to an aligned action plan to further German-Chinese cooperation which was agreed upon at the meeting, but not published. At the Forum for Economic and Technological Cooperation parallel to the consultations, Merkel pointed out the importance of non-discrimination of both German and Chinese companies in the partnering countries respectively. She further stated that this was the status quo in Germany and “... how important it is for German companies to also within the Chinese market have fair competitive opportunities and legal certainty” (Merkel 2014, translation added). And further, at the Hamburg Summit following the consultations, German FM Walter Steinmeier remarked that a recurring theme in the mentioned action plan was equality, and that rules of the game applied to all involved. He mentioned protection of intellectual property, transparent public tenders, and said that the parties wanted to reconcile their respectively differing interests (Steinmeier 2014). Both statements showcase that the frictions regarding differing Market-related practices present at a China-EU level also played a key role in Sino-German relations at the time. With joint statements as diplomatic indicators for substantial agreement, the lack of a statement and the statements by German representatives arguably contribute to the conception that there were substantive disagreements at the time.

At the Hamburg Summit running parallel, President of the European Parliament (EP) Martin Schulz commented that “[t]he support of the European Parliament for the conclusion of the investment agreement will be necessary” (Schulz 2014) and assured that the EP “will be looking to ensure that issues such as social responsibility, environmental and social standards, intellectual property, and data protection are addressed appropriately” (ibid). He ended his speech acknowledging fundamental differences in the respective developmental approaches and brought forward a concise contestation of China’s position on HR that illustrated a European perception of Sovereignty and International Law:

In many instances this [differences in approach] is normal. There is no one size which fits all.

There are however basic rights and conditions which, at one point or another, all people will aspire to and consider fundamental.

These include all sorts of *social and political rights and of course human rights.*

It’s well known that the European Union and China disagree in some of these areas. This is not new.

But just because it is nothing new does not mean that I and others should stop raising our concerns.

I raise these concerns not only because I believe firmly in the individual person and their rights, but also because for a governance system to be sustainable in the long run, people need to know that they can aspire and that there is a body of rights which brings important protection and fairness. (Schulz 2014, emphasis added)

In his speech, Li replied with the civilisation-difference argument saying that “[w]hile China advocates ‘harmony without uniformity’, the EU stands for ‘unity in diversity’” (Li 2014). He stated that “[t]he establishment of a China-EU free trade area will be a



significant step for upgrading two-way trade, and the two sides may launch feasibility studies on it at an earlier date” (ibid) and that “we [China and the EU] should take bilateral investment onto the ‘fast track’. Investment cooperation is the manifestation of the strategic nature of China-EU relations” (ibid), emphasising the points made in China’s new policy on the EU mentioned before.

After his visit to Germany, Li travelled to Italy for talks with Italian Premier Matteo Renzi the Italian Government. At a press conference, Renzi stated that “at this moment the attention of Chinese investors is very strong for our country and we are very happy about it” (Canale25 2014, translation added). The predominant theme in Sino-Italian discourse proved to be the welcoming of further Chinese investment in Italy, in line with the communication at the consultations in late 2013. The Sino-Italian discourse at the time did not show substantive disagreement on Sovereignty, International Law or the Market and respectively differing practices.

The exchanges in the fall of 2014 were able to highlight the differing ways of normative contestation in Sino-German and Sino-Italian discourse especially regarding related practices of the Market. The respective statements at the UNSC 7389th session on the rule of law highlighted the core and nature of normative contestation at this time between China, the EU and member states in relation to Sovereignty and International Law. With China chairing the Security Council for the month, FM Wang opened the debate by putting forward China’s reading of the content and role of the UN Charter, and how it defined the UN:

The UN Charter affirms the strong determination of the international community to prevent war and maintain lasting peace. At the outset, the Charter defines the purposes of the United Nations as maintaining international peace and security, which embodies the world’s deep reflection over the two world wars and the great yearning of all countries to be free of war, fear and want. (Wang 2015a, emphasis added)

As in other statements before, the emphasis was on the “principles of sovereign equality, non-interference in internal affairs and respect for territorial integrity” (ibid) as the Charter’s main content. However, the terms emphasised and the UN Charter itself are subject to the same notion of polysemy that, following Costa-Buranelli (2015), PIs are affected by in regional contexts as the responses to Wang showed. The EU representative spoke first, and made it very clear that the EU had a different reading of the preamble and the UN Charter:

But preventing future wars was not the only undertaking of the signatories of the Charter 70 years ago. The very same preambular passage of the Charter also stresses their determination to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small; In its very first paragraphs, the Charter thus defined the three pillars of this Organization: peace and security, human rights, and development. (Mayr-Harting 2015)

This represented an open contestation of the portrayed Chinese reading of the UN Charter and the one-dimensional role of the UNSC, as “the European Union also believes that the Security Council has its own specific responsibilities with regard to the other two pillars” (Mayr-Harting 2015), i.e. HR and development:

The European Union and its member States believe that the Council can in particular make its own key contribution to the protection of fundamental human rights as one of the core purposes of the United Nations. (Mayr-Harting 2015)



The German Envoy followed and stated that “Germany aligns itself with the statement just made by the representative of the European Union” (Braun 2015). He supported the case for HR by claiming that “[t]here is also a growing understanding that human rights should know no borders and that those responsible for the most egregious violations must be held accountable” (ibid). In contrast, the Italian’s Inigo Lambertini made a very different argument. While stating that, like Germany, “Italy aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union” (2015), she also made use of the points of the civilisation-difference argument highlighted earlier:

In the same spirit, Italy promotes respect for human rights – a key priority of our foreign policy – *with an inclusive and balanced approach, taking into account all of the different positions.* (Lambertini 2015)

Summary

In this first phase, the dominant theme in Sino-European discourse was the beginning of negotiations for an investment agreement between China and the EU. And the prospect of an FTA regarding which China and the EU put forward different expectations regarding the timeline of implementation. The main areas of normative contestation identified were those of HR in relation to Sovereignty, and differing practices related the Market in the spheres of e.g. market access, public procurement policies and legal certainty for foreign enterprises. Here, the EU’s stance was aligned with the principles of a liberal economic regime. Whereas China referred to its chosen approach as “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Xi 2014a), as a mixed economy with both markets and the government regulating demand and supply. China reiterated persistently that it had chosen its own development path and that the world was to respect this. A central way of actively contesting differing European interpretations of Sovereignty, International Law in discursive practice deployed by China is founded in what this work terms civilisation-difference argument. This practice, in combination with a pluralist reading of Sovereignty, was how China promoted and discursively legitimised its own interpretations of the PIs under investigation. The EU, and Germany, on the other hand argued from its own perspective for the importance of freedom of speech and HR in relation to both Sovereignty and International Law as enshrined in the UN Charter. This dynamic in discourse is considered a manifestation of what Ahrens and Diez refer to when investigating “solidarisation and its limits” (2015, 341). The analysis revealed a stark contrast between Sino-German and Sino-Italian discourse. While Italy emphasised the prospects of increased Chinese investments in Italy, the encounters between Germany and China were focused more on matters of principles and practices related to the Market; i.e. market access, legal certainty. This is not to say that there was no Chinese investment in Germany at the time, as there was (Hanemann and Huotari 2015), but to argue that the discourse between China and Germany, and China and Italy was different in nature and emphasis. And further, while Germany argued in line with the EU on the matter of Sovereignty and HR, Italy adopted the cultural-difference argument in this context towards the end of this phase. And lastly, while the BRI had entered Sino-European discourse in spring 2014, it played no specific role for normative contestation between China and the EU, Germany or Italy.

Chapter Five

Chinese and European Strategic Currents

This second phase, *Chinese and European Strategic Currents*, began with the release of a detailed whitepaper on the BRI by China. The subsequent setup of an *EU-China Connectivity Platform* marked the beginning of the BRI as central theme in Sino-European discourse. Consultations between China and Germany, and Italy, dealt with the BRI as opportunity for cooperation, while discussing synergies between the Chinese *Made in China 2025* and European *Industry 4.0* (global) value chain strategies. Contestation emerged between Germany and China in 2016 in relation to China's acquiring German robotics market leader KUKA and the conflictual involvement of MEF Gabriel in the matter. The *EU Global Strategy* (EC and Mogherini 2016a) adopted in June 2016 arguably set the course for global EU in the following years. However, the *Elements for a new EU Strategy on China* (EC and Mogherini 2016b) publication is considered more relevant for the work and hand, as it dealt specifically with China. Thus, this chapter further draws on this document to highlight the EU's perception of and positioning to China at the time. A defining theme here was that of European cohesion and unity, both in international relations and in dealing with China specifically.

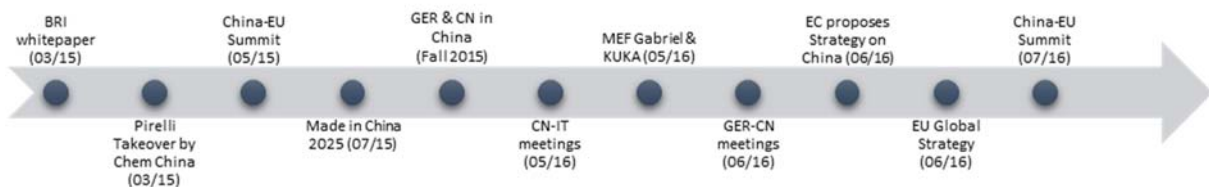


Figure 6: Timeline of second phase – 2015 to 2016

This Chapter Five begins by introducing China's more detailed vision of the BRI. It further shows how the BRI as a theme entered Sino-European discourse and how it was perceived and reacted to by the EU, Germany and Italy in differing ways. Moreover, it is argued that previously existing normative contestation continued between the respective actors, particularly regarding China's (over)capacity in steel production and Chinese strategic investment in European technology leaders.

China and the EU discuss the BRI

In its whitepaper on the BRI, China outlined the BRI's different corridors and strategic areas for cooperation mentioned in the introduction of this work, as well as the role of its own regions (NDRC, FMPC, and MCPC 2015). China's narrative for the BRI coined the term *Silk Road Spirit*, standing for "peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit" (ibid). Here, the



notion of polysemy is considered relevant. This work argues that these terms, on the one hand, invoked the civilisation-difference argument:

The Initiative is *harmonious and inclusive*. It advocates tolerance among civilizations, respects the *paths and modes of development* chosen by different countries, and supports *dialogues among different civilizations* on the principles of seeking common ground while shelving differences and drawing on each other's strengths, so that all countries can coexist in peace for common prosperity. (ibid, emphasis added)

And on the other, that they represented China's "terms of affiliation" for the BRI. While the BRI was described as "open to all countries, and international and regional organisations" (ibid) with the overall aim of "[promoting] the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas" (ibid), China also stated, arguably demanded, the following:

They [countries along the Belt and Road] *should promote* policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds as their five major goals ... (ibid, emphasis added)

These were the five core areas for cooperation mentioned earlier, and these, too, must be seen in context. For example, against the backdrop of Chinese interpretations of the Market (Economy) highlighted in the previous chapter, i.e. the role of the government in it:

The Initiative follows market operation. It will abide by market rules and international norms, give play to the *decisive role of the market in resource allocation* and the primary role of enterprises, and *let the governments perform their due functions*. (ibid, emphasis added)

It is based on this, that this work suggests that the BRI's founding principles were closely aligned with China's specific conceptions of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market Economy introduced in Chapter Five. Namely, not a solidarist but pluralist interpretation and practice of Sovereignty with emphasis on self-determination in development. And further, an interpretation of the Market not as a liberal or social market economy, but in the context of what China terms socialist market economy – "Letting the market play the decisive role in allocating resources and letting the government better perform its functions are not contradictory. It does not mean that the market can replace the government's functions, nor vice versa" (Xi 2014a, 129).

The China-EU Summit in June 2015 illustrated the EU's reaction to the detailed BRI strategy. At the joint press conference of the China-EU Summit, EUCO President Donald Tusk made the EU's position on Tibet and Western China clear:

I expressed our concerns on freedom of expression and association in China, including the situation of the persons belonging to minorities such as Tibetans and Uighurs. In that context, I have encouraged China to resume a meaningful dialogue with the Dalai Lama's representatives. (Tusk 2015)

This is considered as normative contestation regarding differing practices related to Sovereignty, but also the EU's contention with the Chinese interpretation of rule of law relating to International Law. However, the new and arguably dominant theme was that of the BRI which took a central place in the joint communication:

Both sides confirmed their strong interest in each other's flagship initiatives, namely the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" (The Belt and Road Initiative) and the Investment Plan for Europe. Leaders decided to support synergies between these initiatives, ... (EC and PRC 2015)



The stated agreement over synergies and cooperation went beyond a mere mention of mutual commitment. It referred to concrete measures and goals and led to the *EU-China Connectivity Platform* as mechanism for planning out the linkages between the respective initiatives in detail. The differing practices regarding foreign investment and intellectual property are seen as related to respective interpretations of the Market Economy. The centrality of these themes was arguably perceivable here: “China and the EU view the ongoing investment agreement negotiations as one of the most important issues in China-EU bilateral economic and trade relations” (ibid), and that “[t]he priority for the negotiating teams is now to seek convergence on the scope of the Agreement and establish a joint text by the end of 2015” (ibid).

The BRI continued as central theme in EC President Juncker’s remarks at the China-EU Business Summit, where he expressed the EU’s perception of the BRI at the time:

We see the project as an open hand, an invitation to connect China and Europe better than ever before. ... The ambition of our response should be equal to the scope of the project itself. A first step is the connectivity platform we will launch today. It will allow us to combine forces – uniting the expertise and strength of our companies to develop high quality infrastructure, create new jobs in Europe, China and Asia, and build bridges between our two continents along the old silk road. (EC 2015, emphasis added)

His statement arguably underscored that the EU perceived the BRI as an opportunity for strengthening Sino-European relations. Juncker also made a reference to the “scope of the project itself” (ibid), indicating the EU’s awareness of BRI’s thematic scope and geographic extent proposed by China in early 2015. He further voiced criticism regarding unequal opportunities for European investors. Drawing on the theoretical framework, this is regarded as wilful normative contestation of differing practices related to the Market in the sense that the EU perceived the conditions for foreign investment present in China at the time as not on equal footing:

*And we must generate opportunities for each other at both ends of those bridges. On the European side, there is the European Fund for Strategic Investment. During the crisis, investment in Europe fell off a cliff. ... At the heart of our response is the Fund. Europe is back in business; China is welcome to invest.
On the Chinese side there must be a level playing field for European investors. ...
But you know that our companies continue to tell us that the business atmosphere is deteriorating. That is why it is important to address this. (EC 2015, emphasis added)*

His criticism did not include a direct reference to or contestation of the BRI itself. And regarding HR practices, Juncker stated briefly that “the European Union places a very high value on human rights. But I don't want to lecture China on human rights” (ibid, which alluded to the continuous theme of differing views of HR. Wang responded by emphasising the (economic) potential of cooperation, irrespective of the difference in political systems:

Together, China and EU member states account for 1/4 of the world's population and 1/3 of the global economy. Interaction of the two markets certainly generates considerable energy. China and Europe may be different in terms of the political system and guiding principle. But given Europe's long tradition of commercial diplomacy, there are many areas where the two sides can have practical cooperation. (Wang 2015b)

Such cooperation as part of the BRI would, according to Wang, be focused on joint infrastructure development and arising opportunities for cooperation in equipment manufacturing. Here, he made a remark which is perceived as a further example of a polysemic interpretation of the Market. Wang assured that “[s]uch cooperation will



certainly follow the rule of market economy and the principles of ‘company-led, commercially-based cooperation, public participation and government support’ ...” (ibid). On the one hand, this highlighted the Chinese interpretation of opening its economy as well as including social responsibilities in infrastructure development. And on the other, it arguably also pointed to the Chinese notion of the “visible hand” (Xi 2014a, 128) in the market economy when invoking the government.

These examples show that that the disagreement and contestation regarding practices of Sovereignty, International Law and specifically the Market were present though not predominant in discourse at the time. This work further argues that at this point, the BRI was not subject to contention directly, but seen as an opportunity from an EU perspective.

Italy’s response to the BRI

At the 2016 China-Italy Joint Government Committee, Italy continued with its previously highlighted line of communication of welcoming intensified investment in Italy, and also promoted the BRI as opportunity for Sino-Italian cooperation:

Italy is also determined to *attract an increasing flow of investments* and promote Italian know-how in the transport and infrastructure sector, *particularly in relation to the Chinese plan to build a new Silk Road* through the other transit countries of Europe and Asia. (FMITA 2016, emphasis added)

At the meeting’s press conference, FM Paolo Gentiloni added to this when he expressed the hope for more investment, also in relation to the BRI:

We hope that this trend [growing economic and business cooperation] that has made Italy the second European country to receive Chinese investments after the UK, *we hope that this trend will translate into increasing investments*, also of an industrial nature. New important opportunities for economic cooperation may derive from the Chinese One Belt initiative One Road which aims to increase both maritime and terrestrial connectivity of Asia and Europe. (FMITA 2016b, translation added)

The response from Wang was focused on furthering Sino-Italian cooperation in “three major strategic alignments, namely the docking of China’s Belt and Road Initiative and the development strategies of Italy, the docking of ‘Made in China 2025’ and Italy’s ‘Industry 4.0’” (FMPRC 2016a). He further expressed that China “welcomes Italy’s proactive participation in the construction of the Belt and Road” (FMPRC 2016c) and “appreciates the active support and participation of the Italian side in the construction of the Belt and Road initiative” (FMPRC 2016b).

These statements demonstrate that Italy did, as in the previous phase, focus on amicable exchanges with China. And it is also worth highlighting that criticism, or contestation, of market access or punitive measures on part of the EU were not present in this exchange between the governments. In Sino-Italian discourse, the emphasis was on the possible benefit of the BRI and Chinese investment in Italy, and the BRI was neither subject to contention nor a projection screen for normative contestation at the time.

Sino-German relations: KUKA and the BRI

The news of a bid by Chinese Midea for the German KUKA corporation, technology leader in robotics, made landfall in May and June 2016. Midea eventually acquired a 94.5% stake. The outspokenness by German MEF Gabriel, arguably intervention, stood in stark contrast to the Italian response regarding ChemChina's acquisition of Pirelli in spring 2015. At the time of bidding, the Italian MEF Federica Guidi made a statement in which she welcomed the investment:

The entry into the share capital of Pirelli by China Chemical is an operation that concerns a private company and, therefore, the Government is not entitled to intervene. That said, any transaction that aims to consolidate and render even more national industrial competitive excellence is absolutely acceptable, just as is the case with Pirelli. (MISE 2015 translation added)

When questioned about KUKA at a press conference in May 2016, Gabriel responded by clarifying that it was important to not make the debate about nationality, i.e. China, but about unequal practices regarding know-how transfer, and added:

And of course, I would find it appropriate if there was at least an alternative offer from Germany, or Europe. So that it can then be decided by the owners which of the offers is - for the companies that have the intent of disposition, but also for the future of the German industrial base - the ultimately better one. (BMW 2016a, translation added)

Gabriel elaborated that the options at hand were limited to talking, and that he regarded the Foreign Trade and Payments Act (AWG) a blunt sword. He further explicated that the AWG allowed for prohibition of investments that touched on German security interests, but that for “normal investments that have nothing to do with the security interest of the [Federal] Republic ..., in an open market economy, the legislature has no means to prevent that, ...” (ibid, translation added). And, acknowledging that there was some concern on part of the German government regarding targeted bids for leading German companies, and substantive disagreements with China over the manner of know-how transfers, he stated:

You know that the debate whether we are of the opinion that China can receive market economy status is tied also to that [know-how transfer]. I have said that every market economy, that conducts itself like a market economy, can receive such. One cannot declare a state-led economy [Staatswirtschaft] to be a market economy. Those are the areas of conflict we have. (ibid, translation added)

In June, Gabriel voiced the question of how Europe as, in his words, one of the most open market economies dealt with competing with state-subsidised companies from non-open market economies. He emphasised the importance of fair competition and a level playing field in open markets, and that “the game is not protectionist versus market, but rather the game is open market versus state-capitalist intervention” (BMW 2016b, translation added). He concluded that the debate was about “the contradiction between and open market economy [offene Volkswirtschaft] and a state-capitalist intervention economy [Interventionswirtschaft]” (ibid, translation added). The differences in Italian and German discourse on Chinese investment and contestation of Market related practices were striking - the presented evidence speaks for itself. This work regards the statements made by Gabriel as among the strongest publicly voiced wilful contestation of Chinese practices and interpretation of the Market in the entirety of evidence collected.



The German-Chinese Intergovernmental Consultations were held in Beijing in June 2016. After Italy had expressed its willingness to participate in the BRI in May, and after German MEF Gabriel had publicly contested China's "state-capitalist intervention economy" (BMW 2016b, translation added). Asked whether KUKA and China's market economy status had been discussed at the meeting, Merkel responded that the earlier was not spoken about directly, and that the market economy status was a debate with China led by the EC (Merkel 2016). The consultations were focused on Sino-German cooperation in a multitude of spheres and marked the entrance of the BRI into Sino-German discourse. In this regard, the emphasis was on cooperation in infrastructure development along the Silk Road and in increasing the freight capacity of train connections from China to Europe (BPA 2016a). However, this work argues, based on the frictions perceivable from respective statements, that China's exchange with Germany stood in contrast to the one with Italy. For example, with respect to the differing views of China's appropriate market economy status:

At its heart, it is the question of how tariffs are levied when dumping takes place. *On the other hand, it is about the current grievances, that we all have, for example about steel imports.* We agreed this evening that we want to treat the whole issue on a very factual level. We just want to share the facts and see where there may be dislocations or where things are going the way they were promised. (Merkel 2016, translation added)

FM Li made China's position regarding obligations under WTO agreements clear:

China has fully implemented its commitment upon the entry of the WTO, and the EU and relevant parties should also fulfill their commitments. It is believed that China and the EU can deal with this issue with wisdom, so as to help China-EU practical cooperation move forward along the path of steady development. (FMPRC 2016d)

And lastly, referencing the issue of equal opportunities for investment in China:

Chinese companies are displaying a high level of interest in acquiring German businesses, said Angela Merkel. If we are open, she said, 'It must be possible to find good solutions here too. We do, of course, expect reciprocity from the Chinese side.' (BPA 2016b)

This is to illustrate, that the differing practices related to the Market were prominently voiced between Germany, and the EU in the year before, and China, while the exchange with Italy did not. And while Merkel did not mention the BRI in her remarks, the joint declaration welcomed the *China-EU Connectivity Platform* and German-Chinese cooperation in the freight train sector (BPA 2016a).

EU on China: European unity and safeguarding interests

Following Sino-Italian and Sino-German consultations, the EC released the *Elements for a new EU strategy on China* in June (EC and Mogherini 2016b). It was adopted in July as the policy framework for the EU on China (Council 2016). A central argument was that "[t]he EU must project a strong, clear and unified voice in its approach to China" (EC and Mogherini 2016b, 4). And further:

Member States should reinforce agreed EU positions in their bilateral relations with China, while the Commission and the EEAS should ensure that Member States are made aware when EU interests need to be safeguarded. (ibid, 17)

The strategy raised that "[m]utual economic and commercial interests are strong [between member states and China] but should not prevent the EU from upholding its



values in its relations with China” (ibid, 17). And it continued to emphasise the importance of European unity, while arguably contesting China’s political and economic system:

EU coherence and cohesiveness is vital on the big policy choices and on the maintenance of the rules-based international order. The EU should seek to build trust and co-operation with China based on shared interests. However, EU-China relations must also deal with the reality that China is a one-party system with a state-dominated model of capitalism. (ibid, 17, emphasis added)

While criticism of practices had been voiced in the previous China-EU Summit, the EU here adopted a clearer language in its contestation of Chinese practices related to the PIs under investigation. The call for “EU coherence and cohesiveness” (ibid, 17) vis-à-vis China is seen as an example for the EU-internal practice of Sovereignty, in the sense of its member states pooling their respective state Sovereignty (Diez, Manners, and Whitman 2011; Ahrens 2019). The strategy put forward two main themes subject to normative contestation, namely “a lack of progress in giving the market a more decisive role in the economy in the key areas of concern to the EU” (EC and Mogherini 2016b, 3) in relation to the Market, and that “China’s authoritarian response to domestic dissent is undermining efforts to establish the rule of law and to put the rights of the individual on a sounder footing” (ibid, 3) in relation to Sovereignty, International Law and the practice of HR. Regarding the latter, the purpose of the strategy was further expressed as, among other factors, to “[p]romote respect for the rule of law and human rights within China and internationally” (ibid, 3) and elaborated the EU’s interpretation of a rules-based order as follows:

A rules-based international order based on respect for international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, is a fundamental prerequisite for securing international peace, security, and sustainable development. Accordingly, the EU should work with China to promote the universal advancement of human rights, in particular compliance with international human rights standards at home and abroad. (ibid, 15, emphasis added)

From this, two arguments are made recalling the theoretical framework. First, the literal reference to promoting universal HR is considered evidence for solidarising efforts on the EU’s part in the context of HR and its interpretation of Sovereignty and International Law. And second, it is argued that the quote also provides clarity on the contested or polysemic – in Costa-Buranelli’s (2015) terms – phrase of “rules-based international order” (EC and Mogherini 2016b, 15). For the EU, such an order had International Law at its core and included “international humanitarian and human rights law” (ibid, 15). Considering this, and recalling FM Wang’s statement at the UNSC in 2015 – i.e. a strictly pluralist reading of the UN Charter in the context of Sovereignty and International Law – it arguably becomes clear that the EU actively contested such an interpretation and practice in its strategy on China at the time:

China’s crackdown on defence lawyers, labour rights advocates, publishers, journalists and others for the peaceful exercise of their rights, with a new and worrying extraterritorial dimension, calls into question China’s stated commitment to the rule of law and its respect for international obligations. (EC and Mogherini 2016b, 4)

The EU’s of contestation China’s economic system and Market related practices arguably found further expression in the demand that “China should limit the scope of security-related reviews of EU investments in China solely to issues that constitute



legitimate national security concerns” (ibid, 7) and that regarding incoming investment the EU “will use all the means at its disposal to address the potential market distortions and other risks of investment by enterprises which benefit from subsidies or regulatory advantages provided by the state” (ibid, 7). The proposal of finding “a common minimum definition of what constitutes critical national infrastructure” (ibid, 7) for the EU28 arguably is seen as a response to China’s Market related practices. The invocation of national security and critical infrastructure also marked the beginning of a new jargon deployed in the EU’s discourse on China.

A further example for the normative contestation in discourse was the EU’s criticism of Chinese (over)capacity in steel production and state subsidies, and its, in Chinese terms, socialist market economy or, in EU terms, state-led economy:

The EU is seriously concerned about industrial over-capacity in a number of industrial sectors in China, notably steel production. ...

China should also *honour its WTO commitment to notify subsidies*, starting with those granted to the steel sector. In the medium term, *China needs to reform its state-led economy and let market forces* naturally address the problem. (ibid, 7, emphasis added)

At the EU-China Summit in July, Juncker found clear words that support this view:

As concerns the *overcapacity in steel production*, I was explaining to our Chinese counterparts that it *is a very serious problem for Europe and for the Europeans*. The overcapacity of China is exactly twice the entire steel production of Europe, which is demonstrating what kind of problem we have to face. ... *And when we are saying that market rules have to apply, the Chinese know exactly that this, in concrete terms, means the closing down of steel plants.* (Juncker 2016)

Juncker explicated that, while the EC had not reached a conclusion, “for us there is a clear link between the steel overcapacity of China and the market economy status for China” (ibid). As perceivable from these examples, the EU’s tone in addressing disagreements on practices related to Sovereignty, International Law and the Market became franker and arguably threatening in the sense of extended punitive trade and investment measures against China.

And lastly, recalling the argument made in the beginning of this Chapter about the BRI “terms of affiliation” – the way of how the EU referred to the BRI in the strategy is considered a contestation of these:

Co-operation with China on its ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative should be dependent on China fulfilling its declared aim of making it an open platform which adheres to market rules and international norms in order to deliver benefits for all. (EC and Mogherini 2016b, 10)

Thus, this work argues that in this second phase, the BRI had become a projection screen for EU and German normative contestation regarding differing interpretations of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market – in contrast to Sino-Italian discourse, where normative contestation could not be identified.

Summary

In the second phase, the BRI entered Sino-European discourse predominantly as a means for furthering cooperation between China and the EU, Italy and Germany. Similarly, the respective discourse in 2015 emphasised cooperation. A change in Sino-German discourse is argued for with the takeover of KUKA and the public contestation



of China's Market related practices on part of Germany's MEF Gabriel, whose statements are considered as among the strongest contestations in the entirety of evidence collected. The exchanges between Merkel and Wang illustrated substantive disagreement of China's market economy status in relation to its state-subsidised steel industry. A criticism which China rejected. The contestation of China's political and economic system continued as a theme also in the EU's discourse in fall 2016. In that context, the EU also called for unity and coherence in how member states dealt with China in the future. The exchanges between China and the EU revealed disagreement over HR practices, which this work regards as Chinese contestation of the EU's interpretation of HR and solidarisation. And further, regarding foreign investment in Europe, the EU adopted a new jargon when referring to matters of national security. This is to say, that with the intervention of MEF Gabriel and the subsequent publication of the EU Strategy on China, the way in which substantive disagreement was voiced on part of the EU and Germany got more frank. The EU perceivable changed its stance towards the BRI, while Italy consistently argued for increased investment and also participation in the BRI. Thus, this work argues that in this second phase, the BRI had become a projection screen for normative contestation regarding differing interpretations of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market. In contrast to Sino-Italian discourse, where normative contestation could not be identified.

Chapter Six

Facing Variegated European Winds

This third phase, *Facing Variegated European Winds*, began with Germany, Italy and France openly calling for an FDI screening mechanism on EU level in February 2017. Despite co-signing the joint letter, Italy stuck its line of expressing the wish to become part of the BRI. The first Belt and Road Forum (BRF) was held by China in May 2017 with attendants from 56 foreign states on both ministerial but also heads-of-state level (The Diplomat 2017). Xi Jinping outlined the progress and further plans for the coming years. The EU and Germany declined to co-sign a joint declaration over disagreements regarding the “terms of affiliation” of China’s BRI framework. Italy, despite repeated calls for European unity and cohesion vis-à-vis China in recent years, did co-sign the document. The EC proposed a respective FDI screening mechanism in late 2017 (EC 2017b), agreement between the EC, EP and EUCO was reached in late 2018 (EC 2018d), and legislation passed in the EP in February 2019 (EC 2019a; EP and Council 2019).

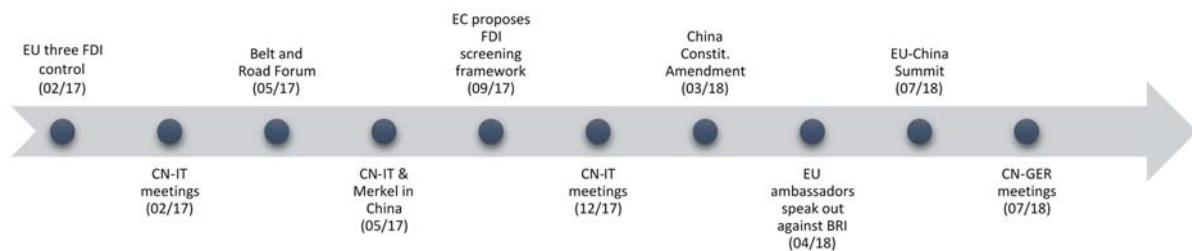


Figure 7: Timeline of phase three – 2017 to 2018

These substantive disagreements took shape in contestation of the BRI itself in April 2018, when the EU ambassadors to China filed a report, leaked to the press, speaking out against the BRI. The following month, Italian FM Alfano assured China’s FM Wang of Italy’s desire to participate in the BRI to more actively. The fall of 2018 was characterised by the publication of the EU own strategic framework to connect Europe and Asia; it had the EU’s points of disagreement from the BRF at its core and did not reference the BRI or China’s activities. And further, China, the EU and Germany clashed over latest developments in Xinjiang and concerns regarding the Uyghur population. In December, China published a further update of its policy on the EU, openly contesting the EU’s interpretation of universal HR based on Chinese Sovereignty and the cultural-difference argument.

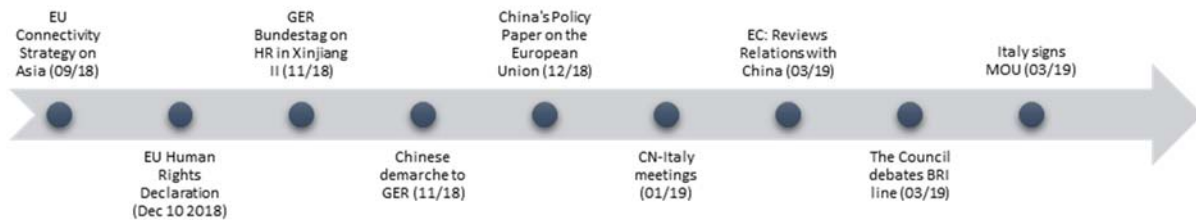


Figure 8: Timeline of phase three – 2018 to 2019

In early 2019, Italy declared its intention to formally join the BRI. In March, the EC reviewed EU-China relations and made proposals for a united/coherent policy line for EU28 dealings with China and the BRI. The EUCO debated these on March 22. On March 23, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Italian Premier Conte signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding Italy's formal affiliation with the BRI. This marked the end of the third phase, *Facing Variegated European Winds*.

The chapter argues that the BRI had become a dominant theme in Sino-European discourse in this third phase. And further, that the responses to the BRI by the EU and Germany increasingly differed from that of Italy, which became especially visible in Italy formally affiliating with the BRI in March 2019. This chapter further shows how a strategy or foreign policy such as China's BRI can become both the projection screen and direct subject to normative contestation, as it enshrines the essence of how China interprets and practices Sovereignty, International Law and the Market.

A time to make friends – and adversaries

In February 2017, the German, French and Italian MEFs sent a joint letter to the Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malmström. They voiced concerns regarding “non-EU investors [having] taken over more and more European companies with key technological competences” (Zypries, Sapin, and Calenda 2017), and that “we are worried about the lack of reciprocity and about a possible sell-out of European expertise, which we are currently unable to combat with effective instruments” (ibid). In a proposal, the EU triumvirate concluded that there was a need for an “European Solution, which would then similarly ensure fair competitive conditions across the EU” (BMW, MEF, and MISE 2017) and argued with below rationale:

In the field of investment, when other countries put up hurdles to direct investment by European companies or only allow such investment under certain discriminatory conditions whilst, at the same time, European companies are being acquired as part of other countries' strategic industrial policies, there is no level playing-field. *The playing-field is even less level if such investment is subsidised by state bodies.*

The *right of private-sector actors* to decide when to invest or sell (shares in) companies is *extremely important and merits full protection*. At the same time, however, it is also important to *prevent any damage to the economy through one-sided, strategic direct investment made by foreign buyers in areas sensitive to security or industrial policy*, and to ensure reciprocity. (ibid, emphasis added)

This proposal needs to be seen in context of the remarks by the German FM Gabriel regarding the KUKA takeover and the *EU Strategy on China*, which problematised know-how transfer practices and China's political and economic system. This letter is considered evidence of normative contestation aimed at the Chinese interpretation of



the Market Economy and related practices that deal with, or restrict, market access and the opportunities of the private sector. And further, it arguably presented a form of contestation significantly more confronting both in content and language.

In content, since the proposed framework would put FDI from China, and in the EU in general, under more scrutiny and ultimately EU control. And in language, with an eye to the wording; in earlier phases, the emphasis in European discourse was on the importance and the need for a level playing field and reciprocity. However, the proposal mentioned that “there is no level playing field” (BMW, MEF, and MISE 2017) and outlined the conditions for interventions regarding foreign investments in the EU28. The jargon introduced in the *EU Strategy on China* was arguably also picked up here when the MEFs called for “full protection” (ibid) of private operators’ rights, “to prevent any damage to the economy ... in areas sensitive to security or industrial policy” (ibid) and declared FDI screening mechanisms on member state level for “not sufficient to guarantee protection” (ibid).

At least for the Italian side, this presented a development contrasting the previously shown line of communication regarding foreign and especially Chinese investment in China. However, the Italian openness to Chinese investment and participation in the BRI, despite the co-signing of the joint letter to the EC, was expressed by the Italian President Sergio Mattarella on his visit to Beijing in the same month. As before, the Italian discourse seemed to adopt China’s civilisation-difference argument when speaking of equal values and differing identities, but arguably expanded the meaning by bringing in “peoples and their respective companies” (Mattarella 2017 translation added):

This is the spirit that animates the look with which we address with particular interest the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, ready *to contribute to it even in a dimension that goes beyond the strictly economic and commercial sphere. ...*

His [Xi Jinping’s] reassurances about China’s commitment to pursuing a policy of progressive economic opening and the reaffirmation of its willingness to increasingly facilitate foreign operators’ access to the Chinese market are *encouraging for those who, like Italy, believe in the interdependence of peoples and their respective companies, respecting the identities and values of each one.* (ibid, emphasis and translation added)

The occasion of the first Belt and Road Forum (BRF) in May 2017 is used to highlight the self-conception of the BRI by China at this point, but also the respective reception by the EU, Italy and China at the time. In his opening speech, Xi Jinping summarised the progress in developing the BRI as a framework, and also regarding infrastructure within its six corridors. He specifically mentioned that “[w]e have enhanced coordination with the policy initiatives of relevant countries, ...” (Xi 2017b) and subsequently referred to the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia, ASEAN, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Mongolia, Vietnam, the UK, Poland. Xi left out the *EU-China Connectivity Platform* launched in 2015 (EC and PRC 2015), and did not refer to any cooperation with the EU or Europe in particular. The remarks of EC Vice President Jyrki Katainen at the BRF arguably helped to understand this choice in context:

Done the right way, more investment in cross-border infrastructure links could boost sustainable growth for all. ... As China and the EU are both developing transport initiatives, coordination between us is essential. (Katainen 2017, emphasis added)



Katainen mentioned the *EU-China Connectivity platform* in this context and set out eight principles that infrastructure-building ought to follow; e.g. “transparency on plans and activities, together with open, rules-based public tenders and reciprocal market access” (ibid). The EC issued a statement which further clarified that the EU had certain conditions or demands for cooperation under the BRI framework:

We support co-operation with China on its "One Belt, One Road" initiative *on the basis of China fulfilling its declared aim* of making it an open initiative which adheres to market rules, *EU and international requirements* and standards, and *complements EU policies and projects*, in order to deliver benefits for all parties concerned and in all the countries along the planned routes. (EC and EEAS 2017, emphasis added)

These demands were not included in the *Joint Communiqué of the Leaders Roundtable of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation* (Xi and et al 2017), and no EU representative co-signed the document. German MEF Zypries reportedly commented in a press briefing at the summit that “[s]o far the demands of the EU countries in areas such as free trade, setting a level playing field and equal conditions have not been met” (as cited in Mistreanu and Petring 2017) and that “[t]herefore we say at the moment, if that does not happen, then we cannot sign.” (ibid).

The Italian Premier Gentiloni, who in contrast to Zypries did sign the joint communication, had meetings with both Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang following the summit where both Xi and Li emphasised the importance of Italy in furthering China-EU relations (FMPRC 2017b, 2017a). At a press conference in Beijing, Gentiloni praised the BRI and explicated concretely how Italy is to play role in it:

I would say that the fact that the Chinese President has confirmed their intention to include Italian ports among the ports on which to invest in this gigantic investment program as Silk Road terminals is important.

In particular, we are talking about the expansion of the ports of Trieste and Genoa, connected as they are to the railway and highway system that reaches the rich heart of Europe. (Gentiloni 2017, translation added)

This work regards these differing remarks and positions conveyed at the BRF as important evidence for a previously highlighted point. They perceivably illustrated the difference in Sino-Italian discourse to Sino-German and China-EU discourse in both the positioning towards the BRI and the contestation of Market related practices. Italy continued with the shown way of welcoming Chinese investment and framed the BRI as something “[going] beyond the strictly economic and commercial sphere” (Mattarella 2017, translation added). And in contrast, both the EU and Germany actively contested differing Market related practices, and expressed frankly that cooperation under the BRI framework had compliance with “market rules, EU and international requirements and standards, and complements EU policies and projects” (EC and EEAS 2017) as a condition. This work regards these demands, recalling the theoretical framework (Buzan 2014, 134–39), as evidence of solidarising tendencies on the EU’s and Germany’s part not regarding universal HR but in view of the Market. In other words, the conditions put forward can arguably be understood as a promotion of and insistence on the EU’s, and Germany’s, interpretation of the Market and its related practices. Thus, a solidarist understanding of what the Market as PI entails.



A further example of contestation regarding the issue of reciprocity of foreign investment opportunities and the change in language can arguably be perceived from Juncker’s State of the Union speech in September 2017:

Let me say once and for all: **we are not naïve free traders.**

Europe must always defend its strategic interests.

This is why today we are proposing a **new EU framework for investment screening**. If a foreign, state-owned, company wants to purchase a European harbour, part of our energy infrastructure or a defence technology firm, this should only happen in transparency, with scrutiny and debate. It is a political responsibility to know what is going on in our own backyard so that we can protect our collective security if needed. (Juncker 2017a, sic)

The EC added to this in a report accompanying the policy proposal in which mentioned that “**State-Owned Enterprises play a growing role in the global economy**” (2017c, 5, sic) and the EC took notice of occasions “where the state facilitates foreign take-overs by national companies, notably through facilitating access to financing below market rates” (ibid, 5).

In this context, there is a risk that in individual cases foreign investors may seek to acquire control of or influence in European undertakings whose activities have repercussions on critical technologies, infrastructure, inputs, or sensitive information. This risk arises especially but not only when foreign investors are state owned or controlled, including through financing or other means of direction. Such acquisitions may allow the States in question to use these assets to the detriment not only of the EU’s technological edge but also its security and public order. (ibid, sic)

Taking into account the previously presented evidence for substantive disagreement, or normative contestation, regarding matters of the Market and related practices, this work considers Juncker’s remarks and the EC communication as primarily aimed at China - despite neither Juncker nor the EC specifically mentioning China.

Headwinds from Germany and the EU

In April 2018, the news broke that all but one, unknown, EU ambassadors to Beijing had co-signed a report sharply criticising the BRI. The German newspaper *Handelsblatt* had received said report and cited it saying that the BRI “runs counter to the EU agenda for liberalizing trade and pushes the balance of power in favour of subsidized Chinese companies” (as cited in Dana Heide et al. 2018). This action and statement stood in stark contrast to how the BRI and certain disagreements on Market related practices were expressed before. Then, when the BRI just arrived in Sino-European discourse, it was welcomed as an opportunity. At this point in spring 2018, following the disagreements at the BRF in 2017, the BRI had arguably become itself subject to contestation by the EU and its member states.

Confronted with this report, the FMPCRC spokesperson Hua Chunying responded that “the EU side has clarified with China that the report by *Handelsblatt* is inconsistent with facts” (FMPCRC 2018a) and continued listing European heads of state that had expressed interest – interestingly not Italy. Her further remarks demonstrated how China perceived the BRI at the time and could be regarded as a response to the previously shown European criticism of the project. She explicated “that the Belt and Road Initiative is a global public good for mutual benefit, win-win outcomes and common development” (ibid), that it followed “the market law and established international rules” (ibid) and that “the Belt and Road Initiative is a



transparent one” (ibid). Hua concluded by stating: “We hope that relevant parties can look at and interpret the Belt and Road Initiative in an objective and correct manner” (ibid). At the G20 Summit the following month, Italy’s FM Alfano assured FM Wang of standing interest in participating the BRI (FMPRC 2018b).

The consultations between Germany and China, and the EU and China in summer 2018 took place overshadowed by respective increasing tensions with the US and President Trump regarding trade terms and disagreements over punitive tariffs. One development prominent in Sino-European discourse at the time were new possibilities of investment in China, outside joint venture structures and with European investors as majority shareholder (BPA 2018c, 2018a; EC 2018a).

The fall of 2018 was characterised by the EC publishing the EU’s own connectivity strategy, *Connecting Europe and Asia – Building blocks for an EU Strategy* (EC 2018b). The EU reiterated the importance of “[i]nternational rules-based connectivity” (ibid, 3) in relation to criticism brought forward also at the BRF:

Internationally agreed practices, rules, conventions and technical standards, supported by international organisations and institutions, enable interoperability of networks and trade across borders. In its internal market, the EU *guarantees non-discrimination and a level playing field* for enterprises and promotes an open and transparent investment environment while *protecting its critical assets*. (EC 2018b, 3)

Drawing on the theoretical framework, the mention of “[i]nternationally agreed practices, rules, ...” (ibid, 3), which are upheld by secondary institutions, can be understood as reference to the Market as the EU interpreted and promoted it. For example, Commissioner Katainen:

Infrastructure networks that will be built should *be coherent, interoperable, as well as financially and environmentally sustainable*. Calls for tender should be open and transparent to promote good governance and a level playing field. (EEAS 2018a)

As elsewhere before, the crucial question to ask is arguably the question of what was missing in the EU’s connectivity strategy. The absence of the BRI in it and the lack of reference to China are striking, considering the intense exchanges on connectivity in different spheres since 2015 between the EU and China, and reminds of the absence of the same in Xi Jinping’s speech at the BRF. However, the EC issued a memo addressing the question “**Is this strategy directly in competition with China's Belt and Road Initiative?**” (EC 2018b, sic):

The European Union's approach to Euro-Asian connectivity is *that it must be sustainable, comprehensive and rules-based*. ...

The European Union and China share an interest in making sure that our respective initiatives work well together, *despite the differences in approach and implementation*. *Connectivity is not possible if systems and networks are not interoperable*. ...

As the Joint Communication highlights, the EU will further step up its work within international organisations to *set and enforce global rules and standards, which will create a level playing field and equal opportunities for all*. (EC 2018c, emphasis added)

This open confrontation on part of the EU vis-à-vis the BRI and China, and the announcement of increasing activity “to set and enforce global rules” (ibid) in pursuit of a fair and level playing field, further showed how the BRI had become subject to contestation itself. In context, the common rules that were hinted at were arguably



those in line with the EU's interpretation of the Market – the ones that were seen as lacking within the BRI.

Following a debate in the German Bundestag on the condition of HR in the province Xinjiang, specifically the internment of Uyghurs in re-education camps, the Chinese Embassy issued a serious demarche, i.e. strong formal diplomatic protest. In it, China insisted on non-interference in internal Chinese affairs and respect for its Sovereignty:

On 8 November, despite the strong objection of the Chinese side, the so-called human rights situation in the Chinese province of Xinjiang was discussed in the German Bundestag. *The Chinese side is extremely dissatisfied with this and is bringing serious demarche to the German Bundestag and the German government.*

Xinjiang is part of the territory of the People's Republic of China, and questions concerning Xinjiang fall within the jurisdiction and internal affairs of China. The Bundestag's arbitrary allegations, in defiance of the reality in Xinjiang, against Chinese counter-terrorism and extremist policies, as well as Chinese nationality and human rights policies, *constitute a blatant intrusion into domestic affairs and a gross violation of China's sovereignty.* (PRC 2018, translation and emphasis added)

The reasoning brought forward by China was based largely on the fight against terrorism, religious extremism and the threat of separatism in Xinjiang, all of which started in the 1990s. The demarche concluded referencing the civilisation-difference argument in a Sino-German context, namely that:

Germany and China have a very different history and culture, and the understanding of Human Rights is not the same. China wants to have a dialogue with Germany *on the basis of equality and mutual respect*, to reach a better mutual understanding. However, China resolutely defends itself against the politicisation and instrumentalisation of Human Rights and thus interference in the internal affairs of other countries. *This is also a violation of international norm* [Regel]. (PRC 2018, translation and emphasis added)

This incident sharply evinced China's differing practice of HR vis-à-vis Germany. The demarche further demonstrated how China applied its pluralist interpretation of Sovereignty in relation to HR. That is to say, that China demanded non-interference in its internal affairs, in respect of non-interference, and insisted on self-determination, in respect of Chinese HR policies. And further, that China contested arguably perceivable solidarising tendencies on part of Germany when pledging to “defend itself against politicisation and instrumentalisation of Human Rights” (ibid, translation added). With reference to Costa-Buranelli (2014), this discursive practice is considered an example for the polysemic nature of PIs, i.e. the respective intended meaning was depending on the temporal and actor-specific context (Costa-Buranelli 2015).

Ahead of the debate in the Bundestag, Commissioner Elżbieta Bieńkowska had voiced sharp criticism regarding the situation in Xinjiang:

This expresses alarm about reports of mass detentions in political ‘re-education camps’ affecting Uyghurs and other minorities; of mass surveillance; of restrictions on travel; and of Uyghurs abroad being returned to China involuntarily. ...

There are legitimate concerns about the security of Uyghurs and other people belonging to minorities if returned to China. The EU urges all countries to consider carefully requests for international protection from such people, and, where applicable, to ensure respect of the non-refoulement principle. (Bieńkowska 2018)

And in December, the EU Delegation to China issued similar remarks and referred to “[c]redible reports, *including those from the United Nations*, point to a worsening



of the human rights situation in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” (EEAS 2018b). The respective statements could arguably be perceived as further evidence of the polysemic interpretation of Sovereignty, and also for the EU’s promotion of universal HR as example for solidarisation of international society on a global level (Ahrens and Diez 2015).

In the same month, China published its new policy on the EU. Against the backdrop of the clash over the HR situation in Xinjiang and the agreement between EC, EP and EUCO on the details of a foreign investment screening mechanism in November (EC 2018d), the policy provided insights on China’s the contestation of the EU’s interpretation of Sovereignty and related HR practices:

The European side should view China’s human rights conditions in an objective and fair manner and refrain from interfering in China’s internal affairs and judicial sovereignty in the name of human rights. (FMPC 2018c)

And, further, China arguably returned the EU’s standing criticism of Chinese Market related practices:

China follows with interest the EU laws and regulations on trade and investment, and *hopes that EU makes its legislation consistent with WTO rules* and takes concrete actions to safeguard an open and fair market environment to reduce and remove the doubts and concerns of Chinese companies. (ibid, emphasis added)

Italy sailing the Maritime Silk Road

The Sino-Italian consultations in January 2019 emphasised the close relation and intensified cooperation between the two countries. The respective remarks and joint statement did not indicate substantive disagreements. To the contrary; the Italian FM Moavero stated: “We are old friends who have known each other for centuries and such long-standing relations have taught us how to know and understand each other and are the foundation of a very sound relationship” (FMITA 2019). And further, FM Wang praised the Italian plans regarding participating in the BRI:

Moreover, the Italian blueprint for participating in the Belt and Road Initiative is being realized step by step, helping to open a new chapter in bilateral cooperation, Wang added. Italy has put forward a blueprint for its maritime, land, aviation, aerospace and cultural participation in the massive Chinese infrastructure and investment initiative. (State Council PRC 2019)

And within the joint statement, it was conveyed that “the two Parties confirmed great expectations for the upcoming State Visit to Italy by the President of the People’s Republic of China, Xi Jinping” (FMITA and FMPC 2019), arguably hinting at Italy intention to formally endorse the BRI. As international criticism to Italy’s plan rose, China responded by pointing to Italy’s independence and awareness of its own interests; arguably Italian Sovereignty. FMPC spokesperson Lu Kang said on March 8: “For one thing, Italy, a developed economy, knows very well where its interests lie and is fully capable of making its own policy decisions” (FMPC 2019). And when asked by an Italian journalist for his opinion on reports of external pressure to prevent Italy from formally endorsing the BRI, FM Wang Yi replied:

We welcome Italy and other European countries to take an active part in the Belt and Road Initiative. Italy is an independent country. We trust you will stick to the decision you have independently made. (CGTN 2019)



The press conference was on China's Foreign Affairs and held after the First Session of the 13th National People's Party Congress on March 8. Here, Wang also repeated the argument that China still was a developing country, like India (CCTV 2019). The same day, Italian Premier Conte scotched all rumours:

I believe that, with all the necessary precautions, this [BRI] may be an opportunity, a chance of our country. Xi Jinping will visit the country probably this month. It will certainly be the right occasion to sign a Memorandum of Understanding. Obviously, a framework agreement does not mean that we are bound to something the next day. What it certainly does is allow us to enter into dialogue about this project [BRI]. (Palazzo Chigi 2019, translation added)

On March 12, the EC provided a review of EU-China relations in preparation for the EUCO meeting later the same month. Three arguments are made from this communication. First, that the EU's language had become more confrontational, and that the emphasis on cooperation opportunities had made way for contestation:

Yet **there is a growing appreciation in Europe that the balance of challenges and opportunities presented by China has shifted.** In the last decade, China's economic power and political influence have grown with unprecedented scale and speed, reflecting its ambitions to become a leading global power.

China can no longer be regarded as a developing country. (EC 2019b, sic)

With this, the EU also contested China's repeated claim of remaining a developing country, and that this had to be reflected in international relations. And second, while systemic differences had been acknowledged by both the EU and China before, the classification of China as "systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance" (ibid) marked sharp turn in EU discourse and language:

China is, ..., *a cooperation partner* with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, *a negotiating partner* with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, *an economic competitor* in the pursuit of technological leadership, and *a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance.* (ibid, emphasis added)

And third, that the EC's ten proposed actions for a unified EU line on China did not reference the debate on Italy and the BRI but reiterate substantive disagreement with Chinese Market related practices. For example, when stating that "[m]aking progress towards elimination of forced technology transfers will also be of critical importance" (ibid, 6) in reforming the WTO. But also, regarding "the distortive effects of foreign state ownership and state financing in the internal market" (ibid, 11).

The EUCO meeting provided no immediate insights on the Italy-BRI matter; the major theme had been Article 50 and a delay of Brexit. Juncker's remarks on China at the press conference further underlined the presented arguments:

Our relations with China are – yes, well, how shall I put it – they are good relations, not excellent. *China is a competitor, a partner, a rival. And we need to adjust to this change in international relations.* Trade between China and the EU is asymmetrical and anything that's asymmetrical leads to imbalances. (EC 2019c, emphasis added)

On March 23, Italy and China signed the MoU formalising Sino-Italian cooperation regarding the BRI – Italy's "affiliation" with the BRI framework (ITA and PRC 2019b, 2019a). The following day, German FM Maas offered a German perspective on the matter. In an interview titled *Europe: We must move away from unanimity in foreign*



policy he stated that “a single country must not have the opportunity to always block all others” (Welt am Sonntag 2019, translation added) and said:

Former Belgian Prime Minister Paul-Henri Spaak once said: there are small countries in Europe and countries that have not realised they are small. In a world with giants like China, Russia, or our partner the US, we can only persist when as EU we are unified. And if some countries believe you can do clever business with the Chinese people, they'll be surprised and eventually wake up in dependencies. Short-term lucrative offers get a bitter aftertaste faster than expected. China is not a liberal democracy. (ibid, translation added)

Summary

In this third phase, Germany and the EU continued to openly contest Chinese interpretations of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market. The BRI had arguably become subject to contestation itself, as opposed to having been a mere projection screen for substantive disagreements in Sino-EU and Sino-German relations. The chapter has argued for an increasing divergence from the EU's proposed line on part of Italy regarding its response to China and the BRI. Germany and the EU openly criticised the BRI from a solidarist perspective for lacking certain Market related practices and thus contested the “terms of affiliation”. The EU subsequently proposed its own strategy on connecting Asia and Europe which emphasised an interpretation and practice of the Market in a solidarist sense. And further, that the EU and Germany sharpened their respective jargon when voicing criticism of the HR situation in Xinjiang but also regarding the previously highlighted themes of contestation related to the market; i.e. Chinese foreign investment in European critical infrastructure but also the general industrial base. The resulting discursive clash is considered evidence of the polysemic nature of Sovereignty in this discourse. That is to say, between a solidarist interpretation that emphasises the universality of HR and a pluralist interpretation that emphasises non-interference in domestic affairs, also with respect to HR. Here, China's responses were specifically frank In the sense that its embassy in Germany issued a demarche to the Bundestag and that China would “defend itself against politicisation and instrumentalisation of Human Rights” (PRC 2018, translation). The end of this phase was marked by Sino-Italian preparations for Italy's official endorsement of the BRI, by the EC labelling China a “systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance” (EC 2019b), and by Italy signing a framework agreement with China regarding its “affiliation” with the BRI.



Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This concluding chapter begins by presenting the findings to both the WQs and the central puzzle respectively. Then, it concludes with final reflections on the findings, the work and analytical framework, and possible implications for further research.

Summary of findings

WQs – Temporal unfolding, Defining themes, Role of the BRI

This work argues for three phases in Sino-European discourse since the inception of the BRI. They are *Anno BRI: Xi era begins 2013-2015*), *Chinese and European Strategic Currents* (2015-2016) and *Facing Variegated European Winds* (2017-2019). Each phase is shown to be characterised by respectively different defining themes that normative contestation between China and the EU, Germany and Italy manifests on. The same is argued for the role of the BRI in discourse and regarding normative contestation. Normative contestation is identified in differing forms and around different themes in all phases, and in all relations under investigation. The suggested core of normative contestation uncovered in this work relates to respectively differing solidarist and pluralist interpretations of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market, and differing related practices.

In the first phase, the main themes of contestation were the general repositioning of China under Xi Jinping on matters of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market. Moreover, the beginning negotiations for an agreement on foreign investments in Europe and China respectively was central to Sino-European discourse at the time. Here, the China had differing expectations with respect to when negotiations of a fully-fledged FTA could begin, i.e. as soon as possible, vis-à-vis the EU and Germany, i.e. in due time. Regarding the Market, the differing practices of market access, public procurement and foreign operators were at the heart of disagreements. And further, the fundamental difference in interpretations and practice of HR and the respectively differing interpretations of role of the UN Charter as representation of International Law became apparent in this phase.

In the second phase, there was initially a perceivable emphasis on cooperation in Sino-European discourse generally. The phase was characterised by joint strategic communication and strategy publishing by and between all, China and the EU, Germany, and Italy. A substantive change occurred in Sino-German discourse over disagreements regarding the Chinese takeover of KUKA and the sharp interventions by German MEF Gabriel, calling for caution regarding initially Chinese and then rephrasing as foreign investment in German critical infrastructure and the vital parts of Germany's industrial base. And further, the appropriate market economy status of

China at the WTO sparked disagreement in Sino-EU and Sino-German discourse. Contested themes here were practices of state subsidies in the Chinese steel industry, and also practices of HR in Xinjiang province and regarding the freedom of speech in China. The EU's strategy on China called for a unified cohesive European line vis-à-vis China and demonstrated the introduction of a new jargon in relation to foreign investments in Europe. Notions of protecting and safeguarding critical infrastructure and certain vital industries with know-how leadership were present in German and EU discourse respectively.

In the third phase, the concern of the EU triumvirate regarding a lack of means to control or review foreign investments lead to the proposal and eventual adoption of a foreign investment screening mechanism in Europe. China responded to this by arguably returning standing European criticism of its practices of market access in certain industries. Further, the EU proposed its own strategy for connecting Europe and Asia after substantive disagreements of the “terms of affiliation” of the BRI put forward by China. The lack of certain Market related practices or principles were heavily and openly criticised by the EU and Germany respectively. The same cannot be said for Italy. The EU and Germany clashed openly with China over re-education camps in Xinjiang province and the concerns for the Chinese Uyghur population. These themes were picked up in China's updated policy on the EU, calling for a respect of its Sovereignty and contesting the solidarising efforts on part of Germany and the EU in these spheres. And lastly, the EU adopted new terminologies in its discourse when labelling China a “systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance” (EC 2019b). The phase, and the analysis, ended with Italy “affiliating” with the BRI.



Temporal Unfolding Turning Points	Change of Relations Defining Themes	Role of BRI Relation to Contestation
Anno BRI: Xi era begins (2013-2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China's extensive internal and external reform plans • Civilisation-Difference Argument and HR • Sino-European Cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BRI plays major role in Sino-European discourse or regarding normative contestation
 EU-China joint strategy & BRI whitepaper		
Chinese and European Strategic Currents (2015-2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Partners for long run • Steel Overcapacity, state subsidies, fair investment environment • Call for EU unity and cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BRI treated as opportunity • Italy indicates participation interest • EU and Germany speak of linking with European initiatives
 KUKA takeover & EU triumvirate letter		
Facing Variegated European Winds (2017-2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign investment screening • Protection of critical infrastructure • Sharp language and systemic rivalry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BRI “terms of affiliation” • Direct contestation of BRI by EU and Germany • Italy joins BRI

Figure 9: Summary of findings regarding the three working questions



This work particularly stressed the diverging responses vis-à-vis both the BRI and China. That is to say, Sino-EU and Sino-German discourse over time became more confrontative and outspoken regarding substantive differences, while contestation was largely absent in Sino-Italian discourse. And in relation to the BRI, Italy indicated its interest in participating from the outset, whereas Germany and the EU bound cooperation under the BRI framework to certain conditions. In this context, the work argues that the BRI first became a projection screen for continuous normative contestation in Sino-EU and Sino-German discourse, and then in the third phase, became subject to direct contestation itself. Such a development of the role of the BRI in relation to normative contestation could not be identified in Sino-Italian discourse.

While in at the onset of the BRI, substantive disagreements revolved isolated from the initiative, in 2015, the BRI started entering Sino-European discourse as a theme for cooperation. In the last phase, the work considers to BRI to have become not just a projection screen for normative contestation between China and the EU, Germany and Italy, but subject to contestation itself. Predominantly on part of the EU and Germany. Sino-Italian relations were developing differently with respect to Italy formally endorsing the BRI in March 2019 and not showing possibly existing substantive disagreements in the analyses discourse. This work further showed how a strategy or foreign policy – such as China’s BRI – can become both the projection screen and direct subject to normative contestation, as such arguably enshrine the respective interpretations and practices of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market.

A core argument that this work makes in relation to the theoretical framework is that the substantive disagreements that manifested around aforementioned themes, that these disagreements were based in an arguably clash between solidarist and pluralist interpretations and related practices of PIs (Ahrens 2019; Knudsen 2019a; Spandler 2019; Costa-Buranelli 2019). Or differently, conflict between solidarist interpretations on part of Europe, and pluralist interpretations on part of China. In this regard, normative contestation from China was also perceivable with respect to solidarising efforts on a global level of the EU and Germany beyond an ERIS. And further, that the notion of polysemic PIs proved to be geared for dissecting differing interpretations of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market especially by considering the temporal and thematic context of Sino-EU, Sino-German and Sino-Italian discourse and relations. The polysemic nature of PI in relation to actors from different RIS was arguably most perceivable in the differing related practices, i.e. in practice, which relates back to Costa-Buranelli’s invocation of Wittgenstein’s (1958) “meaning is usage” (as cited in Costa-Buranelli 2015, 502).

Central Puzzle: Ways of normative contestation in Sino-European discourse

First and foremost, it is considered helpful to recall the central puzzle of this work before elaborating on findings:

In what ways are China and the EU, Germany and Italy respectively contesting or promoting rivalling interpretations of the Sovereignty, International Law and the Market (Economy) as primary institutions of international society in times of the Belt and Road Initiative?

How did the EU, Germany, Italy and China then contest or promote their respective interpretations of PIs in discourse?

For the *EU and Germany*, the promotion of HR and solidarist interpretations of the respective PIs and related practices were predominant. Meaning that in their discourse with China they promoted e.g. universal HR as part of Sovereignty, certain trade and market access rules, and a teleologic tendency with regard to the definition of a market economy and an economic or socio-political system. In contrast, *Italy* showed less confrontative or critical behaviour vis-à-vis China in discourse. Instead, Italy has been shown to have adopted certain elements of Chinese discursive argumentation, especially regarding the HR dialogue between the EU and China.

China on the other hand promoted a pluralist understanding of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market. In doing so, China deployed two main arguments in discourse to legitimise its choice of economic system and interpretation, and practice, of the respective PIs. First, it styled itself a developing country in extensive internal reform, thus needing to be held to the standards of a developing country and economy. And second, it invoked what was referred to as the civilisation-difference argument; i.e. all civilisations are equally valuable but different, and they are inclusive – thus there is no magic bullet.

While all actors did contest on a macro and meso level of discourse, i.e. in strategic documents or speeches at defining moments and turning points, the ways in which this was done proved different for the EU and its member status in comparison to China:

The Chinese President, Prime Minister and other high-ranking Chinese statespersons remained indirect and referred to e.g. the civilisation-difference argument, the statespersons representing the EU and its member states took a much more direct way of open, verbal disagreement and contestation. For China, the contestation was perceived in many instances from what was left out or not said, and from strategic documents, more than from statements made. And lastly, the analysis also showed that the active verbal contestation for China was carried out more by the government's spokespersons, rather than Xi, Li or Yang.

Building on these insights, it is argued that over the course of the three phases, the themes became more confrontational between the EU, Germany and China, and partially Italy, and that language in discourse turned perceivable harsher.

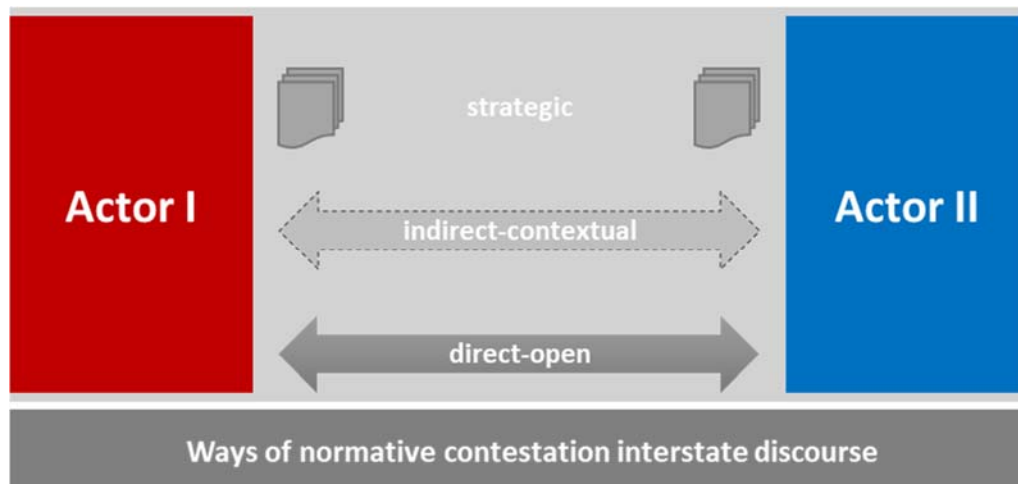


Figure 10: Three types of normative contestation in Sino-European discourse



In more abstract terms – at the very onset, in phase one, normative contestation between the respective actors was direct and open regarding the differing practices of HR, but more strategic in relation to the Market and International Law. In this respect, strategic means that normative contestation found expression in unilateral sources that had at their core a general, strategic positioning of the respective actor on a specific theme or PI. Or differently, that there was no direct and open contestation of the others' interpretations or practices of PIs in the respective speeches or writings. Examples for such strategic expression of normative contestation are the various Chinese speeches on its internal and external reform and repositioning in 2013, the EU's Global Strategy and the BRI whitepaper in 2015. These sources made fundamental unilateral positions and interpretations of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market clear. This is considered *strategic normative contestation*.

As already indicated, there is also *direct-open normative contestation* identified throughout all three phases. Here, examples are German MEF Gabriel's interventions in the in case of KUKA, EC President Juncker's remarks regarding systemic rivalries and the Chinese demarche sent to the German Bundestag in light of a debate there on the HR situation in Xinjiang province. The salient characteristics for direct-open normative contestation are the direct address of the other, i.e. naming, in writing or speech, and also a clear and open line of communication, i.e. straight talk or Klartext, regarding the theme or subject of substantive disagreement.

This leaves a third way of normative contestation identified in discourse – *indirect-contextual normative contestation*. In a way, this type can be considered to lie between strategic and direct-open normative contestation. While such an indirect-contextual way of expression normative contestation does not name the other actor or recipient, it does mention in Klartext the themes of contention. Thus, it is strategic in the sense that the indirect or thematic-contextual reference to a matter of substantive disagreement in speech or writing is expressed as a response to other statements in an earlier temporal context. From this, it becomes clear the context for indirect-contextual normative contestation is both temporal and thematic in nature. This third way of normative contestation could be identified especially thanks to the deployed theoretical and analytical framework – polysemic PIs emphasising the relevance of thematic context, and DT as a method emphasising the relevance of temporality. An example for indirect-contextual contestation are the EU's and Germany's respectively adopted lines of communication regarding a foreign investment screening mechanism in the sense that China is not mentioned as a cause or target for this, but the temporal-thematic context arguably makes it clear that it is the recipient of this contestation. If normative contestation was partially direct-open and predominantly strategic in the first phase, then it arguably manifested in a more indirect-contextual and also strategic way in the second phase with respect to the various strategy publications; i.e. macro level sources. And in the third phase, it could be perceived as predominantly direct-open. Bases on the analysis of contemporary Sino-European discourse in times of the BRI, this work argues regarding the respective actors, that they used the following ways to normative contestation respectively:

China deployed mainly strategic and occasionally direct ways normative contestation. Germany emphasised direct and indirect ways of expressing substantive



disagreements. Italy – in the occasional instances that could be identified – direct-open normative contestation in relation to HR, but with limitations in tone and sharpness. The EU contested differing interpretations and practices of Sovereignty, International Law and the Market in strategic, indirect-contextual and direct-open ways.

Final reflections

First and foremost, the utilised combination of the ES as theoretical framework and DT as main pillar of the analytical framework is considered to have provided substantial insights regarding both the central puzzle and the WQs raised in this work. And further, this type of discourse-based analysis of PIs allows to investigate how differing interpretations manifest in discourse and are communicated and contested by statespersons. Consequently, it is considered a viable approach for the study of PIs in the context of RIS and the process of regionalisation of international society.

As with PIs, so with findings: context must be considered. The context of this work was set by certain delimitations and the findings are thus subject to certain limitations. In future research, the overall framework could arguably benefit from certain additions in theory, methodology and scope:

Theory

The findings have revealed the benefit of borrowing the notion of polysemy from linguistics when analysing differing interpretations of PIs and respective practices in discourse. Moreover, with respect to the three proposed ways that normative contestation is expressed in interstate discourse, the role and importance of language becomes explicit. Future research focusing on normative contestation in discourse between actors from different RIS could thus benefit from drawing on the works of e.g. Wendt (2015) and Fierke and Antonio-Alfonso (2018).

The emergence of a new jargon in EU and German discourse in the sense of protecting and safeguarding an internal market and industrial base could profit from insights regarding security as a speech act; i.e. securitisation in the sense of the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Waever, and De Wilde 1998).

And lastly, also with respect to the consideration on further scope, drawing on recent advances in the field of regionalism and global IR could arguably prove beneficial for the study of actors from different RIS (Acharya 2004, 2014), and allow to address the implications for GIS (Buzan and Schouenborg 2018; Acharya and Buzan 2019; Acharya 2017).

Methodology

As the work consciously limited its scope to cover discourse on a macro and meso level, a future research project could include, or focus on, a meso level of discourse. Doing so would, on the one hand, allow to test the proposed three types of normative contestation in interstate discourse. And on the other, deeper insights into the themes of contestation regarding PIs could arguably be gained. This has in the past been proven successfully by e.g. Costa-Buranelli (2015) and Brasch-Kristensen (2016).



There are two ways proposed in which the micro level could be included – through an immersion into the milieu of statespersons to be able to capture impromptu remarks and everyday conversations, and through (semi-)structured elite interviews with statespersons.

Scope

The findings of this work and arguments made could arguably benefit from furthering the analysis of Sino-European discourse in times of the BRI by taking up other EU member states. This would also allow for further insights with respect to the diverging response of the Italy, and the EU and Germany, in a broader ERIS context; i.e. EU cohesion and unity in times of the BRI and vis-à-vis China.

A new dimension could be added to the analytical framework by including the within-member state discourse among and between different political actors and parties. This would admittedly be a very different but arguably promising project. The within-Italy discourse in times of the BRI and the Five Star Movement come to mind as an example.

And finally, if one chose to stay with the overarching theme of “China and the World” in contemporary times – thus also with the BRI – the study of discourse between China and actors from other regions arguably holds a lot of promise for furthering the agenda on the regionalisation of international society.



Appendix

Declaration of Honour

The undersigned *Simon Felix Täuber* declares that he

- 1) has written this work by his own hand without the help of a third party;
- 2) has clearly indicated the thoughts of other authors and literary quotes adopted directly or indirectly from other sources at the appropriate places within the document;
- 3) has not submitted this work for any other examinations.

The undersigned is aware that a false declaration will entail legal consequences.

Simon Felix Täuber

Copenhagen, Denmark

April 29, 2019



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