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China als „normative Macht“

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List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank
AOA	Articles of Agreement
AU	African Union
BRI	Belt-and-Road Initiative
CCP/CPC	Chinese Communist Party
CBDR	Common but differentiated responsibilities
CSFM	Community of shared future for mankind
DCD	Decoding China Handbook
DESA	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
EU	European Union
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GIS	Global International Society
GONGO	Government-organized non-governmental organization
GSI	Global Security Initiative
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICISS	International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDB	Multilateral Development Bank
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDB	New Development Bank
NPE	Normative Power Europe
P5	Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council
PKO	Peacekeeping Operation
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
PRC	People’s Republic of China
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

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1. Introduction

"We Asian and African countries need to co-operate […]. This co-operation should be based on equality and mutual benefit, with no conditions for privilege attached […]"
(Zhou Enlai at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955)

These are some of the words spoken by then-Premier of the People's Republic of China (PRC, henceforth: China) Zhou Enlai at the 1955 'Bandung conference' where 29 newly independent nations gathered with the aim to promote African-Asian economic and cultural cooperation. Apart from strategic interests, the conference also had a symbolic meaning for the recently decolonized states in their "road to freedom and independence" (Shimazu, 2014: 227). It was there that Zhou Enlai publicly announced the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence', which are mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in (each other's) internal affairs, (equality and) mutual benefit, and mutual coexistence (or peaceful co-existence) (Ma, 2004: 32–33).[1] According to Murphy (2022: 59) the 'Five Principles' "represent a very conservative interpretation of the Westphalian norms of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference". They have been included in the Preamble to China's Constitution since 1954 and are considered to have inspired the 1970 United Nations Friendly Relations Declaration (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 52). Furthermore, they are included in a number of treaties, communiques, and joint statements between China and its neighboring states (Tzou, 1990: 32). Later, Deng Xiaoping said that these principles should be "the guiding norms of international relations" (Deng, 1993 in Yang, 2020: 372).

After the 'bipolar' post-World War II order and the 'unipolar moment' after the end of the Cold War, the world in the 21st century is becoming a "multipolar world" where multiple poles of power increasingly shape the rules of international relations (United Nations, 2023). Today international politics is experiencing a major power shift from the west to the east and from the north to the south. To the east, the so-called 'rise of China' goes hand in hand with the relative 'decline' of the West[2] (Ikenberry, 2008). To the south, the 'Global South', referring to the BRICS-countries[3] and more broadly including all emerging economies that are not part of the dominant 'North', seeks to form a counterweight to Western dominance (Sacks, 2023).

[1] Depending on the translation the 'Five Principles' differ slightly.
[2] 'The West' in this context refers to developed democratic nations that are major stakeholders in international politics, especially the United States, the European Union, and Japan.
[3] BRIC(S) was founded in 2006 by Brazil, Russia, India and China. In 2010 South Africa joined. From 2024 five further members, namely Saudi-Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia and Iran will join,

Along with this development there is an "increased sense of pluralism" in the international society of states (Diez, 2022: 153). This leads to concerns of Western states that emerging powers will seek to establish new ways of cooperation in international affairs based on their own normative perspectives, thereby shaping, altering, or even upending the established Western-dominated international system along with its prevailing norms and institutions (Lynch, 2007; Zhang, 2011). A European scholar pointedly asks: "[W]hat is going to happen to the world order, or disorder, when different conceptions of the 'normative' are backed by multiple centres of huge humane and economic resources: convergence, or complementarity, or conflict?" (Michael Emerson in Tocci, 2008: ii).

The origin of the concept of 'normative power' can be traced back to the 'liberal moment' of the post-Cold War era where a discourse about the newfound international identity of the European Union (EU) as a 'normative power' emerged (Diez, 2022: 161). 'Normative Power Europe' (NPE) was first articulated by Ian Manners in 2002 who called the EU a 'normative power' that has the ability to "define what passes for 'normal' in world politics" (Manners, 2002: 236). Internationally the EU would act based on the "commitment to placing universal norms and principles at the center of its relations with its Member States and the world" (ibid. 241). In this regard 'universal' means that the principles promoted by the EU are enshrined in the United Nations (UN) system (ibid.).

In recent years, concerns about human rights and domestic political practices have increasingly come into tension with the 'sovereign equality of states' enshrined in the UN Charter. This tension is most exemplified by the concept of 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) "which legitimizes intervention in sovereign states where populations are threatened by mass violence and physical harm" (Johnston, 2019: 32). China contests this 'solidarist' notion of human rights and the dominant Western interpretation of them as 'universal', "seeing them as unwanted projections of Western values" (Buzan, 2022: 154).

Johnston (2019: 32) notes that the liberal international order that emerged after the Cold War is reinforced by only "a small majority of states" and that "China is one of the major states that does not support the liberal elements of this order". Moreover, former colonized states would have a strong normative argument that every state has the right to choose their own political system (ibid. 32–33). Zhang (2011: 242) explains that as a 'rising power' China has

online: https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/afrika/brics-staaten-erweiterung-100.html [Last accessed: 12.02.2024].

"contested the normative changes in post-Cold War international society that have seen human rights and democratization" becoming part of 'normal' political practice. He further claims that from a Chinese perspective a "pluralistic peace" would be better than a "democratic peace" and that Chinese officials increasingly express the view that "a pluralistic world is better for international peace and prosperity, and [that] China should take part in the revision of the international norms […]" (Zhang, 2011: 244).

Due to the current 'rise of China' in economic, political, and military power terms the international power structure is experiencing a profound transformation. In addition to these dimensions, this paper explores the extent to which China's 'rise' impacts international politics *normatively*. Thus, I ask the question whether, in the face of the current power transition, China can be considered a 'normative power'. Buzan (2022: 149) assumes that through China's 'rise' we will enter a "post-Western world of *deep pluralism*". In this thesis, I assume that the current (re)turn to a more pluralist international society is a favorable international environment for China to emerge as a 'normative power' that seeks to 'normalize' a pluralistic understanding of international norms. It's impact would lie in bringing about a shift away from a Western 'solidarist' understanding of 'universal' norms and values to a 'pluralist' understanding of the international norms enshrined in the UN system.

The topic of China as a 'normative power' only recently emerged and is still an under-researched topic. Most scholars talk about China as a 'normative power' from a cultural perspective (Kavalski, 2013 and 2022; Womack, 2008) and in comparison to the EU (Kavalski, 2017; Michalski/Pan, 2017). Some analyze it in the context of Chinese foreign policy, for example the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) (Benabdallah, 2019; Zhou/Esteban, 2018) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Peng/Tok, 2016). But what exactly are China's norms in international politics? As a point of departure, Yan (2018: 7) argues that China's guiding principles are not democracy and peace, but economic development and domestic stability. Furthermore, China traditionally understands human rights as social and economic rights rather than political and civil rights (Hasmath/Hsu, 2019). Thus, when studying the 'normative power' of China on the basis of a Western understanding of international norms this equips the concept with a selectionist bias. As Womack (2008: 266) argues, understanding China as an international actor *on its own terms* should be a "prerequisite to understanding China as a normative foreign policy actor".

Coming from the critical social theory perspective, Manners (2011: 233) holds that the purpose of normative power is "to change existing structures of power and injustice by opening up the possibilities of different perspectives". Engaging in a change of perspective in the study of International Relations (IR), I believe that the normative power concept should inform the study of the 'rise of China' with the aim of understanding China's role in an increasingly multipolar world. Thus, the following questions guide this research: How can China be assessed as a normative power? What are Chinese norms? How does it try to transfer them? What impact does China's normative influence have on international politics? In my analysis, I rely on Tocci's (2008) tripartite analytical framework which assesses a foreign policy against 1) its normative goals, 2) its normative means and 3) its impacts. This framework emphasizes the dimension of *international law* as "the most universal and universalisable 'normative boundary' within which to assess a foreign policy" (Tocci, 2008: 21).

Guided by the English School of constructivism, in the literature review I first define relevant terms such as 'norm' and 'institution'. As I argue that the current global power shift creates a favorable environment for China's rise as a 'normative power', I then discuss the 'rise of China' and the ensuing transformation of the international society of states. Next, I summarize the existing literature on 'Normative Power China' and point out their shortcomings.

In the theory chapter, I introduce Manners' (2002) seminal article and summarize the normative power debate, highlighting key aspects that are relevant to formulating a general definition of normative power. After discussing Tocci's (2008) analytical framework I conclude with my research design of a theoretically grounded set of criteria that can be applied equally to China, or any other actor, when assessing their normative power.

In the analysis, I then evaluate the criteria regarding China as a 'normative power' based on an analysis of China's foreign policy against its normative goals, means and impacts. As a starting point, in order to understand China's normative basis, I first outline China's understanding of international norms based on literature by scholars from both Chinese and non-Chinese contexts. Then, in order to understand China's own foreign policy norms, I trace historical narratives that are used in Chinese foreign policy today, and briefly outline the evolution of Chinese foreign policy norms since the founding of the PRC in 1949. Next, I analyze official Chinese government documents that contain foreign policy concepts, notably Xi Jinping's concept of 'a community of shared future for mankind' (CSFM), and summarize the debate amongst Chinese scholars concerning China's international identity. Then, I examine China's engagement in the UN in terms of personnel, financial contribution and linguistic

impact on UN documents. Moreover, I analyze China's engagement in UN peacekeeping, discuss China's peacebuilding norm of 'developmental peace' and the impact China had on the international norm of R2P. Given the fact that this is still a under-researched topic, I further take into account existing literature and case studies discussed therein regarding China as a 'norm-maker' in international and regional institutions such as the WTO and ASEAN, China-sponsored diplomatic platforms and China's engagement in the international climate regime. Furthermore, regarding institutionalization of relations as a form of engaging in shared practices, I also analyze China's own institution-building in the context of global financial governance, most notably the AIIB and discuss to what extent the BRI can be viewed as a normative foreign policy.

This thesis is an exploratory study that aims to examine the potential of China as a 'normative power' in the context of the rise of the 'Global South' and a pluralization of international relations. After carrying out my analysis, I evaluate the criteria of a normative power set out beforehand and draw a tentative conclusion. Rather than reaching a definitive answer on whether China is a normative power or not, the contribution of this thesis is to examine what kind of 'normative power' China is, which norms it promotes and how, and what effects it may have on international norms at this point in time.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter, I first define relevant terms of this thesis such as ‘norm’ and ‘institution’. Then, I discuss the ‘rise of China’ and the ensuing transformation of the international society of states from an English School perspective. Lastly, I summarize the existing literature on ‘Normative Power China’ and point out their shortcomings.

2.1. Definitions of Norms and Institutions

The influence of normative and ideational factors in international politics has long informed the study of IR and since the rise of social constructivism the role of norms in international politics has become a widely studied subject (Diez, 2005: 635). While there exist many conceptualizations of ‘norms’ and ‘institutions’, three aspects are important in this section: definitions, the relationship between domestic and international norms, and whether norms are agents of stability or change (Finnemore/Sikkink, 1998: 891).

First, while there is a general definition of a norm as “a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity”, in the sociological sense a norm is often defined as an ‘institution’ (ibid.). Therefore, it is important to differentiate between a *norm* as a single standard of behavior, and *institutions* as the way in which “behavioral rules are structured together and interrelate (a ‘collection of practices and rules’)” (ibid.). Michalski and Pan (2017: 73) add that a norm is an idea about appropriate behavior with a dual character: first, a norm defines what appropriate behavior *ought* to be and second, it constitutes an actor’s identity. In that sense, norms are both regulative and constitutive. Furthermore, “norms exist in a given social context” where a group of actors agree to act in accordance to standards of appropriate behavior form a society (ibid.). Thus, ‘norms’ and ‘institutions’ are necessary for any given society on the regional, national or international level.

Second, what Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) describe as ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ norms is reiterated by Michalski and Pan (2017) who differentiate between an ‘internal’ and an ‘external’ dimension of norms. They do so in order to understand claims of ‘universality’ of norms directed from the national level to the international level. Internal norms define what is regarded as appropriate behavior of nation-states in domestic governance, shaping the interactions between a state and its people, e.g. democracy, human rights or stability. External norms define what is regarded as appropriate behavior of nation-states in the international sphere, shaping the interactions between states and dictating how they should behave, e.g. peace, non-interference or multilateralism (Michalski/Pan, 2017: 74). Additionally, norms apply

differently in different social contexts. Domestically, there is a clear hierarchy between the state and the society with structures of accountability, but the international society is anarchical, i.e. without a centralized government. Moreover, these two dimensions are interconnected. Thus, a state that respects human rights internally might be expected to support humanitarian interventions externally (Michalski/Pan, 2017: 74–75). The problem with 'universality' arises when states interpret the obligations which internal norms have on their external conduct differently. Thus, whether internal norms are compatible or conflicting with external norms will in part determine the nature of this relationship. Consequently, the extent to which states share the same understanding of internal and/or external norms will shape the situation of the international system (ibid. 75).

Third, norms can act as agents of stability or change. Norms are neither static nor permanent, they tend to be context dependent and continuously changing (ibid.). Every country in the world has its own conception of norms, its own distinct history, political philosophy and resources (Tocci, 2008: i). Therefore, although norms may be regarded as 'universal' in a given society, it can be problematic when transferred from one social context to another, "because the universality of norms varies" (Michalski/Pan, 2017: 74). This complicates the debate about norms in the international context, for example between the EU, the United States (US), China, Russia and India, who might regard the same norm as a status-quo factor or a matter of contestation. For example, those who have experienced colonialism as a result may give more weight to the principle of non-interference in international politics (Johnston, 2019: 32). Indeed, what is regarded as a stabilizing norm by one, may be regarded as a possibility for change by the other.

Despite the condition of anarchy at the international level due to the lack of a world government, internationally states *do* form a 'society' where a type of order exists based on "common interests and common values", and which is bound by a "common set of rules" (Bull 1977: 13). In the English School understanding, 'primary institutions' are shared practices, principles and norms among states that define legitimate behavior within the international society of states: sovereignty, diplomacy, international law, territoriality and nationalism. Further, 'secondary institutions' are formal international organizations such as the UN, which constitute the international society. In this definition, primary institutions constitute the normative framing of international society (Navari, 2021). The degree of the international order can vary on a continuum from a "thin *pluralist* logic of coexistence" to a "thick *solidarist* logic based on shared values and institutionalized cooperation" (Buzan, 2022: 145).

Based on these considerations, I understand normative foreign policy actors to shape the international society of states and *vice versa*. Since the end of the Cold War the international society experienced a "liberal solidarist turn towards human rights and democracy" (Buzan, 2022: 148). This turn also informed the study of the role of the EU as a particular *kind* of normative power, namely one that has a "solidarist conception of international society, in which states and other international actors bear responsibility not only for their own citizens or members, but for other states and their citizens as well" (Diez, 2022: 155). In that sense, the EU challenged and reformed the fundamental institutions of international society (Diez et al. 2011). In the same way that the 'solidarist turn' was a favorable development for the EU to emerge as a 'solidarist normative power', I argue that current (re)turn to a more pluralist international society can be a favorable international environment for China's normative rise as a 'pluralist normative power'. The next section explains this development.

2.2. The 'rise of China' and the Transformation of the International Society of States

Due to the current rise of the so-called 'Global South' there is an "increased sense of pluralism" and the supposedly 'solidarist' notion of international society is increasingly contested (Diez, 2022: 153). For example, emerging nations criticize the negative impact of EU trade liberalization, accusing it of being infused with a 'neo-colonial' stance and 'double standards' (ibid. 161). Another challenge is that the EU pursued a solidarizing agenda within a society of states, which is still organized in pluralist international organizations, that emphasize the multiplicity of states, their sovereignty and a mutual commitment to non-intervention (ibid. 162). In that regard, the 2011 Libya intervention casted doubt on R2P as a new international norm as it legitimized the violation of state sovereignty (ibid. 164).

Buzan (2022: 149) explains the current 'rise of China' from an English School perspective and argues that China's view on the normative structure of the so-called 'Global International Society' (GIS) has become increasingly important. From the gradual opening-up period of the 1970s China is steadily integrating with the GIS (ibid. 147). At the same time, it is pressured by the West to adopt liberal understandings of human rights and 'good governance'. Within that context, China did not accept the pressure to 'Westernize' itself, but sought to find a way to blend modernizing reforms with "Chinese characteristics" and economic integration into the Western-led world economy (ibid. 147–148). The international financial crisis of 2008 was a turning point for China's role in global economic governance (Wei, 2020: 414). China's astonishing economic development and its current global ambitions under President Xi Jinping (2012/2013–) have spurred a lively debate both in and outside of China. Some say that under

Xi China is a reformist revisionist state, seeking changes in the great power management, but within the existing structure (Yan, 2014). Others claim that China is a status quo power (Johnston, 2003).

In this debate, Buzan (2022: 155) argues that on the one hand China supports nearly all of the accepted institutions of the GIS. He suggests that China shows strong support for the 'classical' Westphalian institutions of sovereignty, non-intervention, territoriality, balance of power, great power management, war, international law, and diplomacy. In particular, China takes a strong view on the rights of sovereignty and non-intervention, claiming these norms not only for itself, but also in its relations with others (ibid. 150–151). Lanteigne and Hirono (2011) even call China's insistence on the primacy of state sovereignty 'neo-Westphalianism'. On the other hand, while China is supportive of 'pluralist' institutions, it resists 'solidarist' ones, contesting Western conceptions of human rights and democracy and the dominant Western interpretations of them as 'universal', "seeing them as unwanted projections of Western values" (Buzan, 2022: 153–154). Buzan (2022: 154) further argues that Western conceptions of democracy and human rights are an 'existential' issue for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP or CPC) and that China's strong line on sovereignty, non-intervention and territoriality is designed as a defense against them.

Due to China's increasing material power Buzan (2022: 149) assumes that we will enter a post-Western world of "deep pluralism". In this scenario, China will be one of several great and many regional powers, but not a superpower. Deep pluralism will be defined not only by the diffusion of wealth, power, and political authority, but also by a decline in the liberal "standard of civilisation" and the diffusion of cultural authority and legitimacy to other civilizations (ibid.). In this projection, while the West will remain influential, they will no longer be dominant in either material or ideational terms. China will remain in the top ranks of powers, but it will not become a superpower for two reasons: first, because (theoretically) the conditions of deep pluralism will not allow any state to achieve (or in the case of the US maintain) the relative material power necessary to be a superpower. Second, while the ideational primacy enjoyed by the West for two centuries is eroding, there is no sign of any *other* universal ideology that might replace it and provide legitimacy for a superpower role (ibid.).

At the same time China faces the general problem that any rising power in international society faces. If a rising power tries to set standards for other entities, it is accused of exercising imperial power, even if it assumes that its standards are 'universal' (Keene, 2012). As China grows stronger, it can be expected that its norms will matter more and more in its foreign policy,

especially in its neighborhood, but also globally. The question is to what extent China's normative stance can influence, shape or transform the norms of the international society.

2.3. 'Normative Power China' Debate

Some studies talk about China as a 'normative power' from a cultural perspective (Kavalski, 2013 and 2022; Womack, 2008), in comparison to the EU (Kavalski, 2017; Michalski/Pan, 2017), and in certain policy areas, like the BRI (Benabdallah, 2019; Zhou/Esteban, 2018) or the AIIB (Peng/Tok, 2016). This section summarizes their findings and discusses their implications.

Multilateralism vs. multipolarity

According to Michalski and Pan (2017: 81) the biggest normative divergence between the EU and China is their different aspirations for a desired world order. While EU favors multilateralism in its international outreach, China aims for a multipolar world that would in theory be more "conducive to peace than a unipolar or bipolar world" (ibid. 84). While multilateralism promotes the existent rules-based order guided by liberal principles and practices, multipolarity provides China with a possibility to insist on the "coexistence of multiple poles of power" (Kavalski, 2017: 157). Womack (2008: 274) argues that from a Chinese perspective multipolarity implies a "democratic world order" in international relations that is built on "respecting all states as autonomous actors". However, this does not mean that China does not endorse multilateralism. In fact, multilateralism is argued to be an important tool to promote 'multipolarization' and a "democratization of international relations" (Michalski/Pan, 2017: 85).

Internal vs. external norms

China and the EU are different international actors in terms of their internal and external norms, their efforts regarding norm diffusion, and their normative influence on international society (Michalski/Pan, 2017: 76). In Manners' definition, the EU's norms are primarily internal, or rather the EU does not distinguish between norms directed at the national level and international level. However, this is different in the Chinese context. As argued by the authors, China's internal norms are unification, stability, harmonious society, and development (ibid.). Its external norms are based on the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' (ibid.). Duarte and Ferreira-Pereira (2022: 596) add multilateralism as a Chinese norm that is mainly advocated by the BRI and regional institution building. Additionally, it could be argued that 'development',

while defined as an internal norm, is exported in BRI and therefore becomes an external norm (Chaisse/Matsushita, 2018).

As mentioned above, the core difference between the West and China is their understanding of sovereignty. In the West sovereignty is 'relative' in the sense and that intervention in other states' internal affairs is considered a valid approach when human rights issues are at stake, i.e. in the R2P approach (Michalski/Pan, 2017: 72). This is in stark conflict with China's norm of 'traditional sovereignty' that is strongly based on respecting each other's sovereignty and which sees human rights conflicts as a domestic matter (ibid.). From China's perspective, "diffusing internal norms internationally constitutes an intrusion into the sovereignty of other states and a breach of the principle of non-interference, China's most cherished external norm" (ibid. 79). For China, only external norms are suitable for diffusion among nations, while the EU sees the diffusion of internal norms as necessary (ibid. 75). Moreover, while China rejects the EU's standards on human rights and democracy, it accepts external norms such as multilateralism, sustainable development, and peace (ibid. 72). The reason is that China accepts norms of the EU which it sees as external, but not others which it deems strictly internal (ibid. 75).

While in theory China may value sovereignty and non-interference it endorses the R2P approach (Snetkov/Lanteigne, 2015; He, 2019). Regarding the dilemma in international law, where international human rights law clashes with the right to state sovereignty and territorial integrity (Tocci/Manners, 2008: 315), China argues that humanitarian interventions are only legitimate on the basis of the necessary preconditions of an UN authorization, the prior consent of the countries concerned, and the use of force only as a last resort (Michalski/Pan, 2017: 87). This shows that China takes a strictly international law stance towards humanitarian interventions. However, it raises the legitimate question whether this stance is still in accordance with the original idea of R2P, namely to intervene when a state fails to protect their own citizens.

Regarding norm diffusion, the EU enshrines its norms in contractual arrangements with third countries, including human rights clauses and references to democratization, respect for minorities, good governance, and the rule of law (Michalski/Pan, 2017: 71). In contrast, Michalski and Pan (2017: 77) argue that China uses norms as "tools to build friendships with like-minded and/or similarly positioned states and resists unwelcomed socialization by its normative critics", for example criticism regarding China's 'internal' affairs. That is why in the

diffusion of its external norms, the ‘Five Principles’, China would target mainly developing countries that are most likely to share its values (Michalski/Pan, 2017: 77).

Although Michalski and Pan (2017: 78) suggest this differentiation between internal and external norms, they admit that there is inconsistency between China’s internal and external norms, mainly concerning ‘democracy’ in international relations, which China promotes externally, but does not practice internally. Thus, this explanation of Chinese norms is incomplete.

China as a ‘relational’ normative power

Womack (2008: 295–296) suggests that China and the EU have different logics of interactions when it comes to international society, namely the “logic of transactions” (EU) and the “logic of relationships” (China). The ‘logic of transaction’ promotes the optimizing of a specific good at a specific point in time (Tocci/Manners, 2008: 310). In contrast, the ‘logic of relationship’ promotes an understanding of a collective good articulated as the optimization of a relationship over time (ibid.).

Similarly, Kavalski (2017: 155) argues that the EU’s normative basis (the *acquis communautaire*) puts a rules-based order at the foundation of the EU and its foreign policy. He compares this legal framework of the EU with Chinese practices of *guanxi* (ibid. 150). *Guanxi* is defined as the practice of “balancing of relationships within the family, society, the state, and the international community” (ibid. 151). In his view, in Chinese foreign policy the tradition of *guanxi* would outline a ‘relational’ framework for the management of international politics (ibid.). Furthermore, he compares the EU’s and China’s historical origins and the discursive memory of the past in the context of present and future tasks. The EU is a peace project, which ensures peace and cooperation in the European community. In China, “it is the experience of national humiliation as a result of colonial incursions during the nineteenth century that underwrites the *guanxi* of China’s relational normative outreach” (ibid. 153). While the EU’s normative power is embedded in a rules-based governance mechanism, Kavalski (2017: 155) argues that “normative power China exposes a mode of relational governance inviting long-term interactions with Beijing”. Moreover, he supposes that while the EU’s interactions are “rooted in contractual obligations, internalization of promoted norms, and compliance, China’s foreign relations prioritize sociality, personalization, and reciprocity” (ibid.). Kavalski (2022: 72) argues that *guanxi* is the basis of the “deeply relational” character of Chinese foreign policy and that the driving force of *guanxi* is the commitment to the practice of doing things together.

These authors draw on a cultural perspective to explain China's normative basis. This, I do not find sufficiently explanatory to asses China as a 'normative power'. While the *acquis communautaire* is a legal framework that can be analyzed empirically, *guanxi* is an aspect of Chinese culture that describes interpersonal relationships. Moreover, they do not sufficiently talk about what exactly China's understanding of international norms or its own norms are.

China as a normative power in the context of the BRI

In 2013 China announced the start of the BRI, a massive infrastructure and investment project that aims at creating new trade routes and enhance connectivity along its contract states (World Bank, 2018). This will likely have a huge economic impact on the BRI partners states (most of which are developmental states in Central and Southeast Asia), but may also have political and normative implications. Benabdallah (2019: 97) views the BRI not simply as a projection of China's economic power, but as an example of how China promotes alternative norms and practices by providing alternative platforms for developing countries and "by sharing its expertise with development production […]". Furthermore, the BRI is underpinned with "phrases such as cooperation, mutual benefit, common security and development […] (ibid. 98). Duarte and Ferreira-Pereira (2022: 600) argue that the BRI emphasizes "the promotion of prosperity, peace and progress that China is willing to share with the rest of the world".

Zhou and Esteban (2018: 488) regard China's promotion of alternative ideas and norms in the BRI as fostering legitimacy and building its role as a normative power. Contrary to the mainstream opinion, which sees the 'rise of China' primarily as a threat, they argue that through the BRI China could show the world that it has peaceful, business-oriented intentions, and further stabilize China's relations within its Asian neighborhood (ibid. 488–498). They argue that the normative goals of the BRI, next to economic and strategic intentions, are to promote "common development and prosperity of all countries", prove "China's commitment to a peaceful rise" and "presents a Chinese vision for a new world order based on harmonious and peaceful coexistence" (ibid. 501). This highlights the interplay of strategic and economic goals infused with normative ideas. The BRI will be further discussed in the analysis.

China as a normative power in global financial governance

The EU has been diffusing its norms to other countries through economic and political interactions (Peng/Tok, 2016: 738). Peng and Tok (2016: 739) argue that the rise of China's economic power has provided a platform for China to spread norms of financial governance through for example the AIIB. The AIIB was founded in 2015 and entered into business with

57 founding member countries (Huijskens, 2017: 17). Wilson (2019: 155–156) explains that there is a huge demand for infrastructure financing in Asia and that the Chinese government did not see the existing multilateral development banks (MDBs) as sufficient for the task. Thus, it decided to set up its own bank to fill this 'infrastructure gap' (ibid.).

Peng and Tok (2016: 737) argue that the AIIB is a successor of Chinese norms in the area of global financial governance and a platform for Chinese normative projection. They argue that the AIIB's policies represent China's traditional principles of external assistance, such as 'no strings attached', 'mutual benefit' and 'non-intervention' (ibid. 740). Moreover, Zhou and Esteban (2018: 500) argue that institutions such as the AIIB enable China to form a bargaining coalition to shape global governance and to transform the existing international system. However, it is possible that these actions are motivated by political and economic interests rather than a true belief in the norms and regimes China promotes (Peng/Tok, 2016: 738). The AIIB will be discussed further in the analysis.

China as a discursive normative power

Kavalski (2013: 250) suggests that since normative powers engage in *relation* to other actors, how they are perceived externally is an important factor. Critics argue that demands for compliance with specific standards of behaviors in a conditionality clauses undermines the EU's socialization effects (Kavalski, 2012; Kavalski/Cho, 2015). Kavalski (2017: 156) argues that it is in the context of 'unconditionality' that China has begun to be seen as a distinct normative power. For example, Peng and Tok (2016: 746) outline that overall African countries give a positive feedback on China's financial policy, transforming China's image from an "ally against colonialism to a reliable economic partner". This has been shown by African leaders' public appreciation of China's unconditionality (Bräutigam, 2009). Moreover, by some political elites in Africa China's model of development has been perceived as an 'alternative model' (Manji/Marks, 2007), and as overall positive by African civil society (Keuleers, 2015; Sautman/Hairong, 2009). Similarly, BBC's annual poll of global perceptions indicates that the most favorable views of China are found in Africa, with no surveyed country having less than 65% positive views (BBC, 2014: 37). While such statistics are only first indicators of how China is perceived internationally, it shows a tendency that developing countries may welcome economic engagement from China. However, the extent to which this perception is due to an attractiveness of China's norms or whether it is due to economic and geostrategic motives remains unresolved.

In general, China is allegedly seen as a metaphor for “difference” to the Western hegemony over the post-World War world order (Breslin, 2011: 1324). For Kavalski (2017), this may explain why China is an attractive partner for developing countries, as they share the same narratives of competing against ‘Western post-colonial influence’ in international institutions. In Diez and Manners’ (2007) *discursive* understanding of normative power, China as a ‘normative power’ would reflect “not so much what China *actually* does, but an expanding *perception* of what it does and how it does it” (Kavalski, 2017: 156).

While it is no question that China is increasingly *portraying* itself as a normative actor in international politics, China as a ‘normative power’ remains an unexplored topic. This section outlined the existing academic debate and shows different approaches of defining China’s normative power. The question to what degree China is a normative power by itself, i.e. what Chinese norms are, and in which policy areas it is most prominent, is only partially answered. Limitations of the existing literature include the lack of differentiation between economic (or strategic) interests and normative influence. As it will be discussed in the theoretical chapter, a normative impact entails a transformative impact regarding norms at the international level, i.e. shaping the perception of the ‘normal’. For this reason, a normative actor’s engagement vis-à-vis international law, arguably the most important foundation of international relations, will be the focus of my analysis.

3. Normative Power: from its origins until today and beyond

This thesis asks the question to what extent China can be considered a 'normative power'. Thus, it is essential to introduce the Manners' concept of 'Normative Power Europe' (NPE). As argued above, apart from the model that was originally designed to discuss the normative power of the EU, a more general definition of normative power that can be applied to China, or any other actor, is needed. The following three sections discuss the evolution of the concept and provide the theoretical basis for the criteria I define in order to assess normative power.

3.1. Seminal article 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?'

In 2002 Ian Manners developed the concept of NPE which aims to describe the unique polity and foreign policy identity of the EU. He calls the EU a normative power that has the ability to "define what passes for 'normal' in world politics", i.e. influencing the behavior of others (Manners, 2002: 236). Manners named five "core norms" of the EU: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, human rights and four "minor norms": social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance, which the EU promotes in its foreign policy (ibid. 242–243). These norms are enshrined in the legal basis of the EU, the so-called *acquis communautaire* and internationally the EU acts based on the "commitment to placing universal norms and principles at the center of its relations with its Member States and the world" (ibid. 241). In this regard, 'universal' means that the principles promoted by the EU are enshrined in the UN system (ibid.).

This notion is not completely new. Carr (1962) differentiated between economic power, military power and the power over opinion. Galtung (1973: 33) describes "ideological power as the power of ideas" which is "powerful because the power-sender's ideas penetrate and shape the will of the power-recipient". Manners' theoretical foundation lies in the discussion of the EU as a 'civilian power' (Duchêne, 1972) in contrast to a 'military power' (Bull, 1982). A civilian power is defined by (1) a centrality of economic power to achieve national goals, (2) the primacy of diplomatic co-operation to solve international problems and (3) the willingness to use legally binding supranational institutions to achieve international progress (Manners, 2002: 236–237). Further, a civilian power's "conception of its foreign policy role and behaviour is bound to particular aims, values, principles, as well as forms of influence and instruments of power in the name of a civilisation of international relations" (Kirste/Maull, 1996: 300 in Diez, 2005: 617).

Even though the definition of ‘civilian power’ is similar to that of ‘normative power’, Manners views the two as distinct categories. Both Bull’s and Duchêne’s concepts share an interest in the status quo of international relations based on the centrality of the Westphalian nation state and *physical* power capabilities (Manners, 2002: 238). In contrast to ‘civilian power’, the concept of ‘normative power’ focusses “[…] power of an *ideational* nature characterized by common principles and a willingness to disregard Westphalian conventions” (ibid. 239, emphasis added). Manners (2002: 238) explains the internal collapse of eastern European regimes at the end of the Cold War “by the collapse of norms rather than the power of force”. This opened up new possibilities to consider the power of ideas and norms rather than physical force, as in civilian and military power (ibid.). By leaving this debate behind, “it is possible to think of the ideational impact of the EU’s international identity/role as representing normative power” (ibid.). He then specifies that the EU’s international identity is determined by its elite-driven, treaty based, legal order process, and its constitutional norms (ibid. 241). Thus, Manners notes that the EU’s “normative difference comes from its historical context, hybrid polity and political-legal constitution” (ibid. 240).

The EU has made its external relations informed by, and conditional on, a catalogue of norms which commit to individual rights and principles (Manners, 2002: 241). These norms are diffused in various ways: 1. Contagion (unintentional diffusion, leading by example), 2. Informational (result of strategic communications, such as new policy initiatives), 3. Procedural (institutionalization of relationship with a third party, membership in international organization, enlargement), 4. Transference (exchange of goods through substantive or financial means, export of community norms and standards) – both 3. and 4. are facilitated by conditionality clauses – 5. Overt diffusion (result of physical presence of EU in third states and international organizations), 6. Cultural filter (affects the impact of international norms and political learning in third states leading to learning, adaptation or rejection of norms) (ibid. 244–245).

As an empirical example, Manners points out the EU’s engagement in ‘normalizing’ the abolition of death penalty. The EU promoted the view that death penalty is not (or no longer) a sovereign issue of criminal justice, but (now) an international issue of human rights (ibid. 246). This view became a norm, in the sense that in 1983 the EU enshrined the abolition of death penalty it into the European convention for the protection on human rights, and shortly after the UN tried to do the same (ibid. 245). In 1996, it even became a condition for EU membership (ibid. 246). This example shows a normative rather than an instrumental commitment to “redefine international norms in its own image” (ibid. 252). In this case the EU was willing “to

impinge on state sovereignty", to intervene "in support for individuals" and to pursue this course of action in "the absence of obvious material gain" (Manners, 2002: 252–253), highlighting a 'solidarist' interpretation of international norms.

Assessing the full impact of the EU's normative power in this example is difficult (ibid. 248). However, two broad observations can be made. First, normative power is about raising an issue at the international level. Second, a normative power may seek to raise an issue with the aim of changing an international norm based on its own understanding of that norm. For the study of China as a 'normative power' this means that it does not suffice to promote a norm on the international level, but that it must have a transformative impact.

Criticism of the EU as a normative power

The debate around the question whether the EU is indeed a 'normative power' or not procured evidence for either side (see Diez, 2022: 160). The normative power role is contested inside the EU itself, as increasingly populism and autocracies challenge core EU norms such as the rule of law, undermining the EU's credibility to promote these norms internationally (ibid. 161). Furthermore, Diez (2022: 169) criticizes the debate of normative power as "too much of a self-centred, Eurocentric discourse […]" that failed to recognize the "diversity of concerns" in the international society. In the debate two aspects are often lost. First, the NPE concept was an invitation for self-reflection and a critical engagement with the norms that the EU was claiming to promote (Diez/Manners, 2007: 160). Second, the normative power discourse became part of the construction of a new EU identity in the post-Cold War world (Diez, 2005).

The main criticism is that the concept of NPE in itself is *normative*, in the sense that it assumes that the EU *should* act to transfer its (understanding of) norms onto the international society (Manners, 2002: 252). In fact, researchers cannot avoid making normative assumptions in the selection and interpretation of data (Manners, 2011: 227). Thus, the aim should be to move away from absolute claims about whether an actor is a 'normative power' or not, towards making relative judgements about how we might understand the normative power of that actor (ibid. 245). In that regard, 'normative power' as a concept is about making a more qualified observation regarding the character of an actor in international politics (ibid. 233).

3.2. Normative Power Debate

Since the publishing of the 2002 article there has been a lively debate about the interplay of normative power and other forms of power. As I explained above, China is 'rising' in economic, political, and military power terms and this paper seeks to analyze the way in which normative power *additionally* plays a role. It is important to note that the normative power concept does not claim that normative power is separate from economic or military power, but rather that it influences international politics *together* with other forms of power. This section discusses parts of the theoretical debate of normative power that are relevant to this study.

Normative power compatibility with military and economic power

Since normative power can go alongside other forms of power, the degree to which an actor has normative power differs in how far military power dominates other forms of power (Diez, 2005: 620). Indeed, "the more normative power builds on military force, the less it becomes distinguishable from traditional forms of power, because it no longer relies on the power of norms itself" (ibid. 620–621). Diez (2005: 616) notes that economic and military power may underpin normative power, but that normative power *impact* must be empirically traceable and "irreducible" to other possible factors. Furthermore, the imposition of norms through military force or economic sanctions cannot be regarded as successfully changing the behavior of others. Thus, normative power must rely primarily on *socialization* processes (Diez, 2005: 621). In other words, "normative powers are not in the business of enforcing orders over other actors, but of engaging other actors in shared practices" (Kavalski, 2017: 148).

The US is an example for a normative power that is backed up by military power (Diez, 2005). Historically, the US were guided by the frontier-myth and a 'God-given duty' to spread liberal values, which led to its foreign policy being infused with moralist ideals. For example, the invasion of Iraq was driven by specific liberal ideas of democracy (ibid. 621). However, in the beginning of the US' growing international role, Woodrow Wilson's idea was to spread peace throughout the world so that interventions would no longer be necessary. Even though the US supported the creation of a series of international institutions, over time military back-up of this normative power came to be of ever-increasing importance (ibid. 622). This shows that interests and norms cannot easily be separated, as building up international institutions after the second World War was a projection of American norms, but it also (intentionally or not) safeguarded US interests (ibid.). One of the problems with calling the US as a 'normative power' is that they project and impose norms while refusing to bind themselves to international treaties

(Diez/Manners, 2007: 181). The lack of reflexivity and a 'double-standard' stands out as a major weakness of normative power in the case of the US (ibid. 184).

In contrast to the US, the EU is said to rely on civilian rather than military means, and pursue the spread of norms, rather than miliary superiority (Diez, 2005: 613). The EU does not rely solely on military force or capabilities to achieve its aims, which are linked to *universal goods* rather than being in the self-interest of the EU (Diez/Pace, 2011: 210). Moreover, the EU provides these goods in a peaceful way, i.e. by defining what should be accepted as 'normal' (ibid.). In international law 'global public goods' are defined by 'non-rivalry' (everyone can use it in the same way) and 'non-excludability' (no one can be excluded from using that good) (Bodansky, 2012: 652). Universal goods or 'global public goods' are "available to everyone, whether they contribute to producing it or not" (ibid.). In contrast to Diez and Pace (2011), Smith (2001) questions the normative intentions of the EU and argues that the EU's insistence on norms embodies strategic or economic interests that benefit the EU as well. Thus, a relevant aspect for this study is that rather than assuming that a normative power does not have strategic interests, it is important to clarify that normative concerns and strategic interests can go together. For example, seeking 'stability' can be a strategic choice and a norm at the same time (Diez, 2005: 625).

This discussion shows that if one analyzes China as a 'normative power' it is important to observe the interplay of normative, economic and military power means, as well as the strategic goals and interests it pursues. For example, the BRI project is an infrastructure and investment project that also benefits China economically in return for its engagement, but does it also aim at providing 'global public goods' underpinned by certain norms? Furthermore, one could argue that China's institution-building is a projection of Chinese norms, like in case of the US. For example, Peng and Tok (2016: 737) argue that the AIIB provides a platform for Chinese normative projection.

Normative power and soft power

Kavalski (2017: 150) criticizes that instead of exploring normative power in an Asian context, so far the concept of soft power remains the dominant framework for analyzing Beijing's increasing influence. In fact, normative power is often confused with soft power. *Soft* power was conceptualized in contrast to *hard* power and is defined as "the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion and payment" (Nye, 2014: 19). According to Nye (2014), a state can affect another state's behavior in three main ways: threats

of coercion (“sticks”), inducement or payments (“carrots”) and attraction (ibid.). In this context, ‘power’ is defined as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want” (Nye, 2014: 20). Although both concepts highlight similar constructivist notions, “soft power is a resource or tool of national foreign policy to be chosen and wielded *alongside* hard power” (Diez/Manners, 2007: 179, emphasis added). In contrast, normative power is about shaping the norms of the international society, adding a *transformative* value to the concept that soft power lacks.

The distinction between soft and normative power is essential in order to understand the normative power approach. In terms of ‘power’ what makes normative power different from soft power is its “ideational nature characterized by common principles […]” (Manners, 2002: 239). Regarding norm diffusion, norm transfer takes place unintentionally by contagion or intentionally by strategic communication, institutionalization of relations or conditionality. It can also take place by the export of community norms and standards, or the “’carrot and stickism’ of financial rewards and economic sanctions” (ibid. 245). While soft power rests on the ability to shape the *preferences* of others by attraction rather than resorting to threats or coercion, normative power is about the “ability to shape conceptions of the ‘normal’” (ibid. 239). Furthermore, in the study of normative power one must differentiate between evidence of a norm transfer, and the conditions for transferring norms. In that sense, I understand (cultural) attraction or soft power not as an effect of norm diffusion, but as a precondition for it.

When it comes to China, Kurlantzick (2017) sees China’s soft power initiatives as a way to boost China’s influence without utilizing coercive miliary or economic tools, for example via educational programs, Covid-19 aid and promotion of Chinese culture via Confucius Institutes. Furthermore, Edney (2015: 261) believes that “China’s soft power strategies intend to make its hard power look less threatening to its neighbors”. This would help legitimize China’s rise in economic and political terms. Thus, soft power might be one of the foreign policy tools that underpins China’s normative power, in the same way that economic or military power does. However, this does not equate to normative power. The question must be: Does China shape norms at the international level?

Normative power in the context of international power transition

Above, I already talked about the ‘Normative Power Europe’ debate after the end of the Cold War being a reflection of a “solidarist conception of international society […]” (Diez 2022: 155). This discussion signaled a move away from classical power politics towards the idea that

human rights, international environmental standards and an obligation to care for individuals outside one's own state territory would become the new 'normal' (Diez, 2022: 159). The 1990s and 2000s were a "high moment of multilateralism" with a "supposed human rights consensus" (ibid. 161). From the English School perspective, the EU acted as a 'solidarist normative power', supporting the transformation of sovereignty towards an obligation rather than a right (Diez, 2022: 160). This indicates that the international power structure has a significant impact on the 'type' of normative power that can be successful in promoting its norms and *vice versa*.

Through the emerging 'Global South' countries there is an increasing sense of pluralism in international society that leads to a (re)turn to emphasizing the diversity and sovereignty of states (Diez, 2022/Buzan, 2022). The current power transition in international society is even mirrored within the EU by a re-pluralization of its foreign policy (Diez, 2022: 163). Diez (2022: 153) argues that "the EU has moved away from a foreign policy largely centred on norms and values, and instead has begun to put more emphasis on interests and 'hard power'". He even goes so far as to say that "[r]ather than being able to 'shape conceptions of the normal'[…], it seems that the EU itself has been shaped by the 'normal' of international society" (ibid. 167). The question is who is shaping that new 'normal' of the international society today?

So far, this section discussed the following criteria relevant to defining a normative power:

1) Normative power is about raising an issue at the international level with the aim of changing an international norm based on one's own understanding of that norm, thereby having a transformative impact.
2) Normative power can go alongside other forms of power such as economic or military power and may even be underpinned by them. However, normative power impact must be empirically traceable and 'irreducible' to other factors.
3) In addition, not the imposition of norms, but socializing processes are considered normative power, i.e. the power to shape the behavior of others through engaging in shared practices.
4) Normative and strategic interests may go together, but a normative power must have the intention to promote 'global public goods' that also benefit others.
5) Normative power is not the same as soft power, as it aims at setting standards of behavior and shaping international norms. This is understood as the 'transformative value' of normative power.
6) Normative power is dependent on the international power constellation it finds itself in. On the continuum there can be different types of normative power, for example 'solidarist' or 'pluralist' normative powers.

In the next section, I introduce Tocci's (2008) framework which helps to integrate these theoretical criteria into an analytical framework.

3.3. Towards Analyzing Normative Power in Foreign Policy

Since each country has its own distinct history and its own political philosophy, it can also have its own conception of the normative (Tocci, 2008: i). Thus, assessing a normative power is a difficult task. Tocci's (2008) tripartite framework is a theoretically grounded framework of analysis that assesses a normative foreign policy against its normative goals, means, and impact. The truly normative foreign policy actor should score consistently on all three categories and in many different contexts. In addition to criteria discussed above, this section further narrows down the path towards a set of criteria by which to analyze China's 'normative power'. In the following, I briefly discuss the three dimensions of Tocci's framework.

Normative goals

One's own normative understanding represents the "conceptual prism through which interests are constructed, interpreted, prioritized and operationalised […]" (Tocci, 2008: 6). When it comes to identifying normative goals of a foreign policy, the distinction between *values* (which are normative) and strategic *interests* (which may be non-normative) is difficult (ibid. 5). While the pursuit of strategic objectives can be normative, for example in the case of 'stability', the pursuit of allegedly normative goals may also hide strategic objectives (ibid. 6). In the case of China the promotion of the norm of multilateralism may be motivated by the strategic objective of asserting its power and promoting multipolarity within the international system (ibid. 6–7). Thus, if one intends to analyze and compare different international actors and the normative (or otherwise) goals of their foreign policies it is important to recognize the context of the international power constellation or transformation (ibid. 5).

Normative goals might be defined using communitarian theory (involving social issues) or cosmopolitan theory (involving concerns for humanity), both of which are contestable (Manners, 2011: 246). Instead, Wolfers' (1962) definition of 'milieu' goals in contrast to 'possession' goals is telling. While indirectly related to an actor's specific interests, 'milieu' goals "are essentially concerned with [shaping] the wider environment within which international relations unfold" (Tocci, 2008: 7). Nations pursuing 'milieu goals' aim at "shaping conditions beyond their national boundaries. If it were not for the existence of such goals, peace could never become an objective of national policy" (Wolfers, 1962: 73). Thus, rather than

trying to disconnect economic or strategic interests from normative goals, normative foreign policy goals are those that aim to shape the international environment (‘milieu’ goals).

In that sense, ‘shaping the normal’ refers to a standardization of behavior and the expectation of non-deviance, rather than a moral imperative. The ‘power’ of normative power lies in its ability to *change*, rather than maintain a status quo, and the aim is the setting of common standards (Diez/Manners, 2007: 175). Tocci (2008: 21) emphasizes ‘normative’ as based on *international law* and *institutions*, claiming that law, “while man-made and far from immune to international power politics, represents the most universal and universalizable ‘normative boundary’ within which to assess a particular foreign policy”. Furthermore, adhering to international rules represents a ‘self-binding’, i.e. tying one’s hands in the exercise of external power (Tocci/Manners, 2008: 314). This is a critical aspect of normative power as it sets an example and establishes “legitimacy, reliability and credibility vis-à-vis others” (ibid.).

In theory, international regularization through law binds the behavior of all parties, including that of the actor in question. This reduces the risk of imposing one’s own definition of norms on others through the sheer exercise of power (Tocci, 2008: 8). However, the problem arises that normative interpretations are closely linked to the power configuration in which an actor finds itself in the international system (Tocci/Manners, 2008: 312). From a realist perspective, power is a critical factor in determining when and which international norms are recognized and codified in international law, i.e. viewed as ‘normal’ (Goldsmith/Posner, 2005; Krasner, 1993). In other words, “international law is not immune to power politics, but is rather a reflection of it” (Tocci/Manners, 2008: 313). In order to be a successful ‘norm entrepreneur’ an international actor must have a certain degree of power, in order to persuade others to accept new norms and render them legally binding internationally (ibid.). Nevertheless, even with these tensions, international law still represents the lowest common denominator (ibid. 320).

Normative means

In contrast to economic or military means, a normative foreign policy must pursue normative goals through normative means (Tocci, 2008: 8). As discussed above, while economic incentives or military capabilities may underpin normative power, “imposition of norms through military force cannot be equated with changing the behaviour of other actors […]” (Diez/Manners, 2007: 180; see also Diez, 2005: 621). However, there is no clear consensus as to what constitutes ‘normativity’ in the deployment of normative means (Tocci, 2008: 10). Normative power is based on to the assumption that norms in themselves can achieve what

otherwise is done by military pressure or economic incentives (Diez, 2005: 616). From a social constructivist viewpoint, norms have an independent power that influences an actors' behavior (ibid.). Concerning the possibility of combining normative power with material or physical forms of power discussed above, the *prioritizing* of normative means helps to ensure that any "parallel use of material incentives and/or physical force is thought about and utilized in a justifiable way" (Manners, 2011: 231).

For Tocci (2008: 10), normative foreign policy means "are deployed within the confines of the law". Legal foreign policy means can be considered as normative in different ways. First, the primacy of 'right over might' tames "the power of the strong while protecting that of the weak […]" (ibid. 11). Second, "it sets the rules governing choices when different normative/non-normative goals compete" (ibid.). However, as discussed above, there is a tight connection between international law and power. For example, Caserta (2021) explains the criticism towards the US' or the West's dominance in the building of international law, conventions and institutions. Again, the international context in which normative means are applied is essential and the analyst must pay attention to *how* policy instruments are deployed (Tocci, 2008: 10).

In that regard, Tocci and Manners (2008: 311) argue that ascending powers like China "focus more on how international laws and rules are produced, valuing the process of negotiation, cooperation, reciprocity and mutual respect to establish international rules". This view rests largely on Womack's (2008: 266) assumption that from a Chinese perspective to act normatively would mean to act in respect of the other. Hence, Tocci and Manners (2008: 311) interpret China's emphasis on 'multipolarity' as entailing an international system where no state can dominate another. While I agree that analyzing China's behavior in international institutions is an indicator of how China promotes norms internationally, I am suspicious of cultural explanations regarding China's behavior.

Reciting Manners (2002: 244–245), on the one hand normative diffusion can be intentional, for example in strategic communication, institutionalization of relations or based on contracts. On the other hand, it can happen unintentionally by the mere representation of a certain normative stance in international politics. For Manners (2011: 233) a normative power should primarily be seen as *legitimate* in the principles that it promotes, and they should be promoted in a coherent and consistent way. Legitimacy of principles in world politics may come from previously established international conventions, treaties or agreements, particularly if these are important within the UN system (Manners, 2011: 33). In the case of China, in order

to be accepted as a "producer of norms" China must first be perceived as a responsible international power which accepts and upholds existing norms (Benabdallah, 2019: 93). Then, after "obtaining sufficient legitimate normative power, China can set its preferred agenda and persuade other members to integrate the proposed norms and values" (Zhao, 2024: 24).

Betts and Orchard (2014: 2–6) highlight two processes that are important in norm diffusion. First, the *institutionalization* of a norm that is reached when it emerges at the international level and becomes reflected in international law and organizations. Second, the actual process of norm *implementation* as the steps which introduce the new norm into formal legal and policy mechanisms until it becomes routinized. Fung (2020: 198) argues that emerging states like China can *contest* norms during the process of implementation at the international level and can thereby shape their application. Moreover, Huijskens (2017: 7) argues that when evolving from a 'norm-taker' to 'norm-shaper', "(re-)emerging countries start to express their views through more active engagement in multilateral forums and international institutions", highlighting the institutional dimension of normative power.

Normative impact

The focus on tangible results allows to 'double check' on what a foreign policy actor's objectives really are (Tocci, 2008: 11). However, most studies of normative power focus on goals and means, rather than on results (ibid.). Ideally, a normative power would be defined not only by the policies it pursues, but "by the impact it has on what is considered appropriate behaviour by other actors" (Diez, 2005: 615). Tocci defines a normative impact as a traceable path between action and "[…] the effective building and entrenchment of an international rule-bound environment […]" (Tocci, 2008: 11). The task would be to trace when, how and to what extent specific foreign policies engender specific institutional, policy or legal changes within a third country or internationally (ibid. 12). That is the difference between actually *having* normative power rather than merely *acting* as a normative power (Diez/Manners, 2007: 175–176).

As discussed above, normative power as an analytical category relies on the possibility to trace empirically the impact of norms in contrast to other possible factors, such as economic or political interests (Diez, 2005: 616). To illustrate this point: Do developing states engage with China due to the attractiveness of Chinese norms and/or due to the benefit of cheap investments and an alignment of authoritarian regimes? And what normative impact does that have? For example, Che et al. (2021) found that bilateral trade with and foreign aid from China

are important determinants of voting behavior in favor of China in the UN. This shows that tracing normative factors in contrast to other possible factors in voting behavior is a difficult (if not impossible) task and can therefore not be sufficiently dealt within the realms of a master thesis.

Instead, I conceive normative power to rely on socialization processes (Diez, 2005: 621) and engaging others in shared practices (Kavalski, 2017: 148). For normative power scholars, 'normative power' should ultimately be envisaged as having a socializing impact (Diez, 2005; Manners, 2011). Socialization as an impact of the promotion of norms can be seen as being part of an open-ended process of engagement, debate and understanding of the other (Manners, 2011: 238). Pu (2012) suggests that instead of viewing socialization in IR as a one-way socialization process of (re-)emerging countries into international institutions, socialization and norm diffusion should be understood as a two-way process. Thereby, emerging countries can be conceptualized as mutually shaping international norms, institutions, and each other, alongside the existing powers (ibid.). Accordingly, in the context of China's own institution-building China can exert normative influence on states that seek to become members in Chinese-led institutions, and socialization effects can happen due to the institutionalization of relations.

Lastly, the intended or unintended impact of a foreign policy rests largely on the *relative power* of the international actor vis-à-vis its target state(s) as well as in the wider external environment (Tocci/Manners, 2008: 312–313). That is why a thorough impact assessment also requires an analysis of the interaction between the foreign policy on the one hand, and the political opportunity structure underpinning the situation within a receiving party on the other (ibid.). This also means determining under which conditions and circumstances an international player is normative under the premise that any international actor is likely to pursue normative and other policies depending on time and place (Tocci, 2008: 21). The discussion on the current transformation of the international society of states in section 2.2. provides context in that regard.

4. Research Design

4.1. Criteria for a Normative Power

The above discussion beginning with the first formulation of the 'normative power' concept in 2002, its theoretical evolution thereon, and its integration into Tocci's (2008) tripartite analytical framework leads me to conclude the following criteria for the definition of a 'normative power'. These can be applied to China, or any other actor, in the analysis of their foreign policy in order to assess whether and to what extent they can be considered a 'normative power':

Normative goals

1) Normative power is about raising an issue at the international level with the aim of changing an international norm based on one's own understanding of that norm. That is why normative power is not the same as soft power, as it aims at setting standards of behavior and shaping international norms. This is the 'transformative value' of normative power.
2) Normative and strategic interests may go together, but a normative power must have the intention to provide 'global public goods' and to shape the international environment ('milieu goals').
3) A normative power must adhere to international law and engage in the entrenchment of it.

Normative means

4) Not the imposition of norms, but socializing processes are considered normative power, i.e. shaping the behavior of others through engaging in shared practices.
5) Norm diffusion can be intentional (by strategic communication, institutionalization of relations or based on contracts) or unintentional (by the mere presence of a normative stance).
6) Norms can be diffused in the processes of institutionalization and implementation of a norm.

Normative impact

7) Normative power can go alongside other forms of power such as economic or military power and may even be underpinned by them. However, normative power impact must be empirically traceable and 'irreducible' to other factors.
8) A normative power must be seen as a legitimate normative actor by others.

Additional aspects

9) A normative power is dependent on the international power constellation it finds itself in. Thus, it must be assessed against the background of the international environment and (transforming) power constellations.
10) On the continuum there can be different kinds of normative powers, for example 'solidarist' or 'pluralist' normative powers.
11) Any actor in international politics can exert normative power in addition to economic or military power. Thus, it is important to assess the *degree* to which an actor is normative.

On the last point, the here summarized criteria might be fulfilled in one policy area at one point in time, but not in another. Following Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), Tocci and Manners (2008: 324) suggest that different international actors act as 'norm entrepreneurs' in different areas according to their relative "comparative advantages". This is "determined both by their relative power and their legitimacy and moral standing in specific issue areas and/or regions" (ibid.). A normative power can create a norm, articulate it within the confines of international law, and then contribute to spreading the norm through their international relations. Ideally, this would lead to norm compliance through successful socialization of other international actors (ibid.)

Concerning the constraints of time and resources in the context of a master thesis it will be difficult to assess all the criteria in a satisfying way. I acknowledge that the following analysis cannot raise the claim to make an absolute judgement on China as a 'normative power'. However, as I have argued before, the normative power debate seeks to make a qualified observation regarding the character of a given actor in a given context.

4.2. Argument

In the same way that the 'solidarist turn' after the Cold War was favorable to the development of the EU as a 'solidarist normative power' (Diez, 2022) I argue that the current shift towards a more pluralist international society (Buzan, 2022) is a favorable international environment for the 'rise of China' as a 'pluralist normative power' that seeks to 'normalize' a (re)turn to a pluralistic understanding of international norms enshrined in the UN system. As Zhang (2011: 242) explains, China as a 'rising power' has "contested the normative changes in post-Cold War international society that have seen human rights and democratization" becoming part of political practice.

I agree with Tocci and Manners (2008: 326) that in an increasingly multipolar world emerging powers will increasingly have the ability to set 'new normals' in international politics. However, they argue that this 'multipolarism' must be accompanied with a strengthening of multilateral institutions, rules and procedures. Ideally, a healthy "competition of norms" between different international players would increase regularization of the international system across different policy areas (Tocci/Manners, 2008: 328). I will discuss this point in the analysis, but I must admit that such an observation must be made over a longer period of time.

4.3. Method

In the analysis I intend to assess China's foreign policy against its normative goals, means and impact. Regarding my research materials, I review an extract of existing literature and research findings published in English by Chinese and non-Chinese scholars, which discuss China's foreign policy regarding the criteria set out above. I focus mainly on research published in the last 20 years. In addition, I cite official documents released by the Chinese government and academic literature that comments on it. While some research about China as a 'normative power' exists, it is few and either theoretical in nature or limited to one policy area. Moreover, the majority does not follow a clear theoretical definition of normative power in their analysis. The above criteria set the framework in which I explore China's potential normative power in the case of *illustrative examples* of current Chinese foreign policy. I am aware that I am unable to draw a full picture of all Chinese foreign policies here. Still, I think it is meaningful to engage in furthering the understanding of China's underlying normative foundations, how it promotes its norms in international politics and the (degree of) normative impact across various policy fields.

There is a high bar when it comes to measuring normative impact within the realms of possibility of a master thesis. Regarding the overall context of an international rivalry of systems between the US and China (Ikenberry, 2008), a state might engage with China due to strategic, economic or (geo)political reasons and/or because of a normative alignment. The 'irreducibility' of normative power is important, but quite difficult to measure. Instead, I focus on analyzing changes at the institutional level concerning international law and possible socialization effects in Chinese-led institutions. Ideally, existing studies would reveal actual international law initiatives or a setting of standards for others in the context of China's growing influence in international institutions and the building of its own institutions.

5. Analysis

In this chapter, I first outline China's understanding of international norms (5.1.). Then, I trace historical narratives that are used in Chinese foreign policy today, and briefly outline the evolution of Chinese foreign policy norms since 1949 (5.2.). Next, I analyze official Chinese government documents that contain foreign policy concepts, notably Xi Jinping's concept of CSFM (5.3.) and summarize the debate amongst Chinese scholars concerning China's international identity (5.4.). These deliberations provide the point of departure for understanding China's normative basis, or in Womack's (2008: 266) words, understanding China as a normative foreign policy actor on its own terms.

Concerning the analysis of China's normative goals, means and impacts in current Chinese foreign policy, I then examine China's engagement in the UN in terms of personnel, financial contribution and linguistic impact on UN documents. Moreover, I analyze China's engagement in UN peacekeeping, discuss China's peacebuilding norm of 'developmental peace' (He, 2014), and the impact China had on the international norm of R2P (5.5.). Furthermore, I discuss China's role as a 'norm-maker' in international and regional institutions such as the WTO and ASEAN, China-sponsored diplomatic platforms, and China's engagement in the international climate regime. In that context, I also analyze China's impact on global financial governance, most notably the institution-building of the AIIB, and lastly discuss to what extent the BRI can be viewed as a normative foreign policy (5.6.).

5.1. China's understanding of International Norms

As I argued in the introduction, the concept of 'Normative Power Europe' is based on a European understanding of norms as a standard for a normative power. Thus, when applying the concept to China, which has a different understanding of international norms, there is a selectionist bias. This section outlines China's understanding of international norms by consulting with scholars from both Asian and non-Asian contexts and the 'Decoding China Handbook'[4] (DCD, 2023).

[4] The DCD is an independent non-profit project by China specialists who explain key terms of international relations as they are understood and used by the Chinese government. More specifically, they seek to explain the *differences* in normative understandings between the West and China.

China frequently highlights its commitment to *multilateralism* as the source of rules and standards for international cooperation (Rudyak, 2023: 59). It cites the BRI as an example, since "more than 160 countries and international organizations have signed cooperation documents with China" (Xinhua, 2019). However, contrary to the allegedly 'unjust' existing rules-based multilateral system, the BRI is presented as an alternative "multilateralism with Chinese Characteristics" that is based on "joint consultation", meaning that interaction is based on bilateral agreements rather than on universally binding rules (Rudyak, 2023: 59). In his report to the 19th Party Congress, Xi describes his understanding of multilateralism as "dialogue without confrontation, partnership without alliance" (Xi, 2017 in Rudyak, 2023: 60). De la Rasilla and Hao (2024: 67) note that Xi's commitment to multilateralism as opposed to unilateralism has translated into Chinese foreign policy, as it supports multilateral institutions and sets up new multilateral international institutions of its own.

Sovereignty is defined as the exclusive right of a state to govern within their own territory. In China, it is linked to the emphasis on mutual non-interference in domestic affairs as outlined in the 'Five Principles' (Hellström, 2023: 83). Tocci and Manners (2008: 310) argue that China's understanding of norms and normative action hinges on the idea of sovereign relations conducted in search of the 'common good' and thus the 'Five Principles' would represent this idea as well. Moreover, China is a strong defender of the normative understanding that sovereignty is non-negotiable (Hellström, 2023: 83). In that sense, in China sovereignty or rather 'state sovereignty' should be understood as the absolute power of the CCP to rule the Chinese state (ibid.). When speaking of 'China', the CCP includes the territories within China's *de jure* borders, as well as its territorial claims. As such, the Republic of China (ROC, henceforth: Taiwan) and island claims in the South China Sea are regarded as strictly 'internal'. This concept of 'state sovereignty' comes from selective historical territorial claims, in the case of Taiwan dating back to the Qing Empire (1644–1911/12) (ibid.). Despite a ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 which rules that China's 'historical' claims in the South China Sea have no legal basis the CCP maintains its stance. Furthermore, China's commitment to the Westphalian norm of 'sovereignty' influences its international human rights debate in the sense that China is suspicious of humanitarian interventions as they includes interference in domestic affairs of sovereign nations (ibid. 84).

While the West has an understanding of *human rights* as civil and political rights, China views economic and social rights as more important (Hasmath/Hsu, 2019; see also Michalski/Pan, 2017: 83). Accordingly, it has signed and ratified the International Covenant on

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), but has only signed and not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Moreover, China maintains that sovereignty and non-interference are more important than 'universal' human rights, and for the Chinese government human rights are an internal affair rather than a concern of the international community (Oud, 2023: 47). Yet, "[r]especting and protecting human rights" is written into the Chinese Constitution (Zhang, 2011: 241). As such, in a Chinese understanding human rights contain the notions of stability, harmony, subsistence and economic development (Oud, 2023: 47). Interestingly, China has ratified six of the nine core human rights conventions, but insists that the "right to subsistence", which does not exist in international human rights law, and the "right to development" are the most important human rights (ibid. 48). In 2017 at the "South-South Human Rights Forum" over 300 representatives from 70 countries and international organizations attended and adopted the Beijing Declaration which emphasizes the "right to subsistence and development as fundamental human rights" (Xinhua, 2017b).

This shows that internationally China sees itself as a norm entrepreneur in the sense that it is seeking to "break Western human rights hegemony" and change "international human rights governance" (Danhong, 2019 in Oud, 2023: 48). For example, Johnston (2018: 34) highlights China's impact on international human rights norms in its role in organizing the Bangkok declaration in 1993, where China engaged in finding an 'Asian position' on human rights prior to the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna.

The Chinese term *good governance* (*shanzhi*) carries the notion of 'benevolent' governance and was first mentioned in a high-level party document from 2014 (Drinhausen, 2023a: 42). China criticizes that the UN uses the term 'good governance' as a 'catch all' phrase that includes civil rights protection, public participation and involvement of non-governmental actors. Instead in the party-state discourse, good governance should increase prosperity, safeguard collective rights and establish law-based governance, i.e. codifying policies and measures into law (ibid. 41).

In Chinese, *rule of law* translates to "laws-based governance" and carries the notion of rule *by* law rather than rule *of* law (Oud, 2023b: 74). It has very little in common with the Western idea of rule of law as the legal system in China is supervised by the Party leadership. The law is viewed "as a tool to ensure stability and order" and serve to maintain the party rule (ibid.). Since Xi came to power, there is more focus on the rule of law and strengthening the legal and regulatory framework in China (ibid. 75). De la Rasilla and Hao (2024: 50) argue that

China has systematically implemented a plan to bolster its capabilities across all areas of *international law* as well. For example, in 2014 the CCP issued guidelines to "[s]trengthen foreign-related legal work" and to:

> "vigorously participate in the formulation of international norms, promote the handling of foreign-related economic and social affairs according to the law, strengthen our country's discourse power and influence in international legal affairs, and use legal methods to safeguard our country's sovereignty, security and development interests" (in de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 50).

From a Chinese perspective, the core principles of international law are state sovereignty, non-aggression, and non-interference (Oud, 2023a: 50). Furthermore, China views the liberal model of international law that has been dominant since the 1990s "as a tool of Western hegemony and interventionism" (ibid.). In contrast, the concept of 'a community of shared future for mankind', a widely discussed term introduced by Xi in 2017, is viewed as more inclusive than the current system, as it would emphasize 'common' rather than 'universal' values (ibid.).

The internal CCP 'Document no. 9' that was leaked in 2013 defines *liberal democracy* as a threat to regime stability (Drinhausen, 2023: 27). In China, the concept of 'socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics' appoints the CCP as the sole ruling party and the ultimate representative of the Chinese people (ibid. 26). Moreover, Chinese conceptions of 'democracy' include holding village elections and promoting intra-party democracy (Zhang, 2011: 241) and through the concept of "consultative democracy" the CCP formally incorporates interests of various social groups and local politicians (Drinhausen, 2023: 26).

Regarding this thesis, it is crucial to discuss China's understanding of 'democracy', since internationally China is advocating for a 'democratization' of the UN system. This would entail a 'fairer' share of votes by countries from the 'Global South' in international institutions and "equal acceptance of authoritarian forms of governance and values" (ibid. 27). In other words, 'democratization of international relations' in Chinese terms means reforming global governance structures to better reflect the international power changes (Huang, 2021: 539–540). This includes increasing the representation of developing countries in international institutions (ibid. 541). Furthermore, from a Chinese perspective a "harmonious world" could be achieved by a "democratization of international relations" (Michalski/Pan, 2017: 84). Zhang (2011: 244) claims that from a Chinese perspective a "pluralistic peace" would be better than a "democratic peace" and that Chinese officials increasingly express the view that "a pluralistic world is better for international peace and prosperity, and [that] China should take part in the revision of the international norms […]" (ibid.). However, as mentioned earlier, there is an inconsistency

between China's internal and external norm of 'democracy', as it promotes it externally, but does not practice it internally (Michalski and Pan, 2017: 78).

This section described China's view on the international norms enshrined in the UN system. It highlights how 'universal' norms can be interpreted differently by different actors. Further, it shows how difficult it is to compare different 'normative powers' in international relations, as they can have their own understanding of what the 'normal' should be.

5.2. History and Evolution of China's Foreign Policy Norms

This section reflects on the history and evolution of China's foreign policy, tracing relevant narratives with the aim of better understanding China's normative foreign policy basis. Tocci and Manners (2008: 311) explain that in the case of China the reception of its history and philosophy plays an important role in determining the interpretation of its norms and values in its foreign policy today. For example, Zhao (2015: 962) notes that President Hu Jintao's (2003–2013) concept of a 'harmonious world' is derived from the traditional Chinese philosophy of 'harmony' and further, that current President Xi is "obsessed with citing Confucian classics and using Chinese history to present China's domestic and external policies". In particular, at the 18th Congress of the CCP in 2014 "realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" was formulated (Compilation and Translation Bureau of the CCP, 2014). While internationally the 'rise' of China is broadly debated, in China itself the term 'rejuvenation' is used "to emphasize their current status as a return to a state of past glory rather than a rise from nothing" (Zhao, 2015: 981).

In the Chinese narrative the Chinese Empire was once a great power in Central and Southeast Asia that maintained a vast system of tributary states. According to Fairbank and Teng (1941: 137) who studied the tributary system of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911/12), this system was used for "political ends of self-defense", it had a "fundamental and important commercial basis", and it "served as the medium for Chinese international relations and diplomacy". Furthermore, in order to be allowed to participate in the "Chinese civilization" one must recognize the supreme position of the Emperor and his mandate to "rule all men" (ibid. 138). The "paradigm" of the 'Chinese world order', a term coined by Fairbank in the 1960s, coincided with the "celebration of China's imperial history by Chinese leaders" themselves (Zhao, 2015: 962). Zhao (2015: 963) explains that the past Empire was rhetorically reconstructed as the "peaceful Chinese empire". While some scholars have criticized this

concept as a myth, others depict "the Chinese world order as benevolent governance and benign hierarchy" (Zhao, 2015: 962–963).

When Western powers colonized the Chinese Empire, the tributary system collapsed. The so-called 'unequal treaties' signed during the 19th and early 20th century tell the story of China's "humiliations and territorial losses […]" (Zhao, 2015: 981). Tocci and Manners (2008: 311) argue that the so-called 'century of humiliation' from the Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1856–1860) to Japan's occupation of Manchuria (1932–1945) plays a crucial role in determining China's international identity today. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the 'victimization' of its past provided the "historical context for the diplomacy" of the PRC ever since (Womack, 2008: 269). Womack (2008: 266) claims that Chinese norms today are "based on the critical rejection of imperialism and the presumed right of intrusion into weaker political communities". Moreover, Johnston (2019: 33) argues that China's experience as a former colonized state motivates its strong normative argument that states should have the sovereign right to choose their own political system.

Concerning the evolution of China's foreign policy since 1949, at the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai publicly introduced the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' that were included in the Preamble to China's Constitution since 1954 (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 52). They have their origins in regional talks between China, Myanmar (Burma) and India in the 1950s that sought to ensure peaceful interaction (Snetkov/Lanteigne, 2015: 127). Furthermore, Tzou (1990: 32) lists a number of treaties, communiques, and joint statements between China and its neighboring countries where the 'Five Principles' are included. Additionally, de la Rasilla and Hao (2024: 52) argue that they have inspired the UN Friendly Relations Declarations in 1970. Deng Xiaoping even said that these principles should be "the guiding norms of international relations" (Deng, 1993 in Yang, 2020: 372). According to Huang (2021: 536), Chinese leaders such as Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao reiterated that a "just and equitable" order could only be reached by "adhering to the Five Principles […] and strictly observing the purposes and principles of the UN Charter[…]". Moreover, Swaine (2015: 4) argues that today China also frames its foreign policy objectives under the BRI and the 'Five Principles' as in line with UN principles.

In a speech during the first visit of a Chinese state leader in Africa[5] Zhou voiced the basic rules of China's foreign aid in a speech, namely "equity and mutual benefit" and that China "never asks for any privilege and never poses conditions" (Zhou, 1964 in Peng/Tok, 2016: 740). Thus, Peng and Tok (2016: 740) argue that the principles 'no strings attached', 'mutual benefit', and 'non-intervention' have been guiding China's foreign aid to African countries since the 1960s. Today, the Chinese government still repeats those words:

> "When providing foreign assistance, China adheres to the principles of not imposing any political conditions, not interfering in the internal affairs of the recipient countries and fully respecting their right to independently choosing their own paths and models of development. The basic principles […] are mutual respect, equality, keeping promise, mutual benefits, and win-win" (State Council, 2014).

Womack (2008: 272) describes the ideological evolution of Chinese foreign policy in the 1970s and 1980s in terms of a normalization of relations with the US and an adaptation of international norms, signified by China's return to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1971. Deng Xiaoping, who was an influential political figure of the 'reform and opening-up' period that started in 1979, intended to create a favorable external and internal environment for economic growth and 'keep a low profile' in international affairs (Wei, 2020: 417). Thus, He (2021: 47) argues that the guiding principles of China's 'reform and opening-up' era were "peace and development". In 1991, they were written into China's Constitution (ibid.).

China's post-Cold War engagement under President Jiang Zemin (1993–2003) focused on bilateral strategic 'partnerships' and gradually put more emphasis on engaging with multilateral institutions, especially on the regional level (Snetkov/Lanteigne, 2015: 126–127). He too was guided by the 'Five principles of peaceful coexistence'. For example, the post-Cold War 'New Security Concept' (*xin anquan guandian*) stressed 'equality' and 'non-interference' (ibid. 126).

Johnston (2008) argues that from the 1980s to the 2000s China's international identity was constructed by three main factors: (1) increasing national (economic) strength, (2) increasing *participation* in international institutions and (3) increasing *socialization* with the international community. During that time, four major Chinese foreign policies developed (Womack, 2008: 273–274): (1) The policy of non-interference in domestic affairs was applied more strictly in the sense that the abandonment of communism (Soviet Union, Eastern Europe,

[5] On the significance of Zhou's visit to Ghana in January 1964 shortly after a failed assassination attempt on President Nkrumah see online: https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202106/1226506.shtml [Last accessed: 07.02.2024].

Mongolia) was not criticized, (2) more diplomatic attention was given to China's Asian neighbors after international isolation due to the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, (3) increased involvement in multilateral and regional institutions, for example joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, establishing ASEAN plus three in 1997 and the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area in 2002, and the founding of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 1995. Lastly, (4) since the end of the Cold War, China "viewed the global situation as one of multipolarity" (Womack, 2008: 274). This term is used to criticize 'unipolarity' under the premise that no one state could and should dominate the world, and thus successful foreign policy involves cooperation on the basis of mutual interest and respect (ibid.). During that time, China gradually shifted from a bilateral approach towards a multilateral one, exemplified in its support during the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 (Gerstl, 2020: 128).

In 1999, after the Asian financial crisis then Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji (1998-2003) declared that China seeks to be a "responsible power" (*fuzeren daguo*) (He, 2019: 260). In 2003 then executive vice-president of the CCP Party School Zheng Bijian introduced the term of China's "peaceful rise" (*heping jueqi*) and in 2004 President Hu Jintao used the term "peaceful development" (*heping fazhan*) in an attempt to mitigate threat perceptions of China's 'rise' (ibid.).

The 2008 global financial crisis created a 'window of opportunity' for emerging powers to share their views on the global stage (Huijskens, 2017: 16). China gained international prestige and could demonstrate to the world its "alternative development model" that withstood repercussions from the crisis (Wang, 2019: 56). Wei (2020: 418) claims that the 2008 crisis elevated China's international status. Moreover, after the 2008 crisis there was a growing demand from the international community for China to "shoulder international responsibilities proportionate to its rising power […]", for example at the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference (ibid.). To this, China responded in the 2011 'White Paper on Peaceful Development' that as "its comprehensive strength increases, China will shoulder corresponding international responsibilities and obligations" (State Council, 2011). Concerning foreign aid, in 2010 former Chinese minister of commerce Deming Chen said that "providing foreign aid and honouring its global obligations is an important way for China to present its image as a responsible great power […]" (Chen, 2010 in Zhao, 2024: 22).

This section outlined the historical narratives that inform China's foreign policy today. It also reflected on the gradual development of China's foreign policy rhetoric since the founding of the PRC in 1949, especially since the 'reform and opening-up' era. Arguably, the

most drastic changes in foreign policy rhetoric happened since 2013, when Xi started using the term 'striving for achievement' (*fen fa you wei*) indicating a shift away from Deng's 'keeping a low profile' (Wei, 2020: 420). Furthermore, under Xi China formulated the official proposal of a 'Chinese Dream' and the launched the BRI (ibid.). In addition, in 2017 the 19th CCP Congress established 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era' (ibid. 414). The next section discusses China's foreign policy rhetoric since Xi's inauguration.

5.3. Xi Jinping's 'Community of Shared Future for Mankind'

In 2015 Xi held a speech at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) where he promoted a vision of an international order based on the often cited Chinese value of 'win-win' cooperation, highlighting "common values" of "peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom" (Xi, 2015). There, Xi also officially launched the concept of "a community of shared future for mankind"[6] (CSFM) (ibid.). The CSFM-doctrine builds on a long-standing Chinese foreign policy tradition. At the 60th anniversary of the UN, Hu held a speech titled "build towards a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity" (Hu, 2005). In 2007, Hu first mentioned a 'community of common destiny' (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 53). In the report of the CCP's 18th national conference in 2012 it reappeared and signified that "a country should accommodate the concerns of others when pursuing its own interests and it should promote common development of all countries when advancing its own development" (Hu, 2012). When Xi came to power CSFM was further consolidated into official language of the Chinese government. At the 19th CCP National Congress in 2017, foreign minister Wang Yi described the course of China's diplomacy in the "new era" like this:

> "[…] China will endeavor to foster a new form of international relations and build a community with a shared future for mankind […]. These twin objectives are inspired by the fine traditions of the 5000-year Chinese culture emphasizing the pursuit of the common good, by the core values championed by China's peaceful foreign policy for over six decades, and by the CPC's global vision of delivering benefits to the people of China as well as those of all other countries" (Wang Yi, 2017 after Rolland, 2020).

In 2017 CSFM was included in the CCP's Charter and in 2018 the preamble of the Chinese Constitution was amended to include CSFM (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 54). De la Rasilla and

[6] The Chinese term 人类命运共同体 (*renlei mingyun gongtongti*) can also be translated as "a community of shared destiny for mankind" or simply "community of common destiny".

Hao (2024: 52) even argue that out of the series of bywords that Chinese leaders have put forward over time CSFM is the "most globalist in orientation to date".

But what exactly does the CSFM-doctrine entail? Since Xi came to power, he stresses the "urgency of strengthening global governance and reforming the global governance system" (Xinhua, 2015). Zhao (2024: 22) argues that China envisions an international order that is "fair and transparent", which pays special attention to the "interests of developing countries, a focus reflecting China's self-perception as a leader respecting all powers". Therefore, China would attach great importance to equal participation of developing and developed countries in decision-making processes within international institutions, and sees this as a 'democratic mechanism' (ibid.). Further, China promotes paying greater attention to the need of developing countries regarding UN reforms (ibid. 23). Arguably, China's efforts concerning developing countries are closely linked to its own economic growth, but they also enforce the narrative of sovereignty in view of its past as a colonized country, which it shares with other developing countries (ibid.).

Rolland (2020) explains that a prominent idea that has emerged under Xi is "the claim of Chinese exceptionalism", and since every country is "exceptional" in its own way it should have the right to choose its own economic and political model. At the opening of the 19th party congress Xi states that China's path "offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach […]" (Xinhua, 2017a). On a critical, note Rolland (2020) argues that China promotes an 'anti-Western', 'anti-status quo' and 'anti-liberal' ideology. In rejecting the 'universal' values Xi would promote the idea of 'harmony in diversity' where no one system (democracy or authoritarianism) is superior to the other. This 'anti-ideology', she argues, "is at the core of Xi's 'community of shared future" (ibid.). Accordingly, Xi's CSFM vision is designed to appeal to those who feel disadvantaged by liberal democracy, e.g. developing states (ibid.).

Fung (2023: 389) explains that today, due to China's simultaneous status as a 'great power' *and* a 'developing state', China finds itself in a dilemma position to seek recognition from both groups. Moreover, China (and India) have a dual foreign policy identity "as self-appointed anti-imperialist Global South leaders *and* great states with unique civilizational attributes and contributions to global governance" (ibid. 387, no emphasis added). Rolland (2020) draws a parallel to China's imperial history and the ancient tributary system, reiterating

that the CCP's ultimate goal is to realize the "dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by 2049. Accordingly, she argues that within China's sphere of influence China's leadership hopes that its preferred rules, norms and standards will be accepted, reproduced, and followed by countries of the 'Global South' (Rolland, 2020).

He (2021: 49) argues that although Xi advocates a "Chinese approach" to global governance, so far there has been no "Chinese normative package internationally". Rolland (2020) agrees and argues that Chinese elites have not yet *fully* articulated the institutional arrangements, principles and norms that they would like to promote (Rolland, 2020). This is a critical argument. I disagree with these authors and provide the following example against it. In April 2022 Xi launched the 'Global Security Initiative' (GSI), which formulates 'six commitments'[7] of China's foreign policy and identifies priority areas of cooperation (MOFA China, 2023). Chaziza (2023) argues that while the content is not new (as it mostly reiterates long-standing principles and groups existing foreign policy goals under new labels) it is framed as a "global initiative". It consolidates the basic norms of modern Chinese foreign policy as codified in the 'Five Principles' (ibid.). He further argues that the GSI expresses China's intention to "de-legitimize the United States' role in Asia and advocate an exclusivist approach to Asian security governance" (ibid.).

Meanwhile, the GSI debuted on the diplomatic stage in Africa and the Middle East. In December 2022, at the China-Gulf Cooperation Council summit Xi heralded a "new era" in the China-Arab partnership, inviting the Gulf states to join the GSI "in a joint effort to uphold regional peace and stability" (Xi, 2022 in Chaziza, 2023). Furthermore, China presents itself as a peace broker in bringing together Saudi-Arabia and Iran in 2023 after they had severed diplomatic relations in 2016 (Belkaïd/Bulard, 2023). Putting aside the impact of this deal on peace in the Middle East, it is the first time that China presents itself as a mediator internationally and in a region traditionally dominated by the US (ibid.).

In general, rhetorical devices of government officials are carefully chosen words and must be taken with a grain of salt. I believe that the foreign policy dogmas presented here do to a certain extent reflect the actual aspirations of China for a world where authoritarian regimes are not stigmatized, and where the assumption that prosperity and peace can only be achieved

[7] The 'six commitments' can be summarized as commitment to 1) "common security", 2) "respecting sovereignty", 3) "abiding by the UN Charter", 4) "taking security concerns of all countries seriously", 5) "peaceful dispute resolution" and 6) "maintaining security in traditional and non-traditional domains" (MOFA China, 2023).

with a democratic system is revoked. In Chinese terms this would represent a more ‘democratic’ and ‘plural’ international society (Drinhausen, 2023: 27/Zhang, 2011: 244).

5.4. Debate on China’s International Identity in Chinese Academia

As mentioned above, in the debate of ‘normative power’ it is often overlooked that the NPE concept is an invitation for self-reflection and a critical engagement with the norms that a country is claiming to promote (Diez/Manners, 2007: 160) and that the normative power discourse *itself* is part of the construction of a normative power’s identity (Diez, 2005). As China becomes a more powerful player in international politics Chinese scholars debate China’s new role and identity. This section briefly outlines the debate. Given that fact that I cannot access literature published in Chinese this is only a small extract. However, I believe it is still interesting as there have been signs that Chinese officials seek advice from Chinese scholars and include them in the deliberation of foreign policy (Zhao, 2023; Wei, 2020).

Zhao (2023) explains that in China, similar to the West, academia has an influence on policy-making and that the CCP increasingly consults with academia in the policy making process. For example, the debates on China’s ‘peaceful rise’ (Zheng, 2005) and as a ‘responsible stakeholder’ (Zoellick, 2005) among Chinese and international scholars happened around the same time Hu Jintao started using the term ‘peaceful development’ in 2004. Another example is the China Foreign Affairs University and Brookings project on ‘managing global insecurity’ from 2007 to 2009. Wei (2020: 419) was part of that project and argues that it had a “significant impact on shaping the Chinese official perspective of China’s power and responsibility”.

After the 2008 global financial crisis the scholarly debate was driven by China’s identity as status-seeking in the international system (Wei, 2020: 414). While the official goal of the CCP is ‘national rejuvenation’ and some scholars argue along those lines that China should reclaim its ‘historical place’ (Wang, 2012), scholarly debate in China also revolves around China’s strategic capabilities, institutional power and *normative power* (Wei, 2020: 415). Chinese scholars in general agree with the need for a significant transformation of the international power structure, institutions, norms and governance (ibid.). According to Wei (2020: 415–416) a majority argues that China should make its due contribution by introducing reforms to the rules-based international system so that it can reflect the changing power structure of international politics and improve China’s representativeness and legitimacy. One Chinese scholar argues that the goal of China’s diplomacy should be to build a ‘new type of international relations’, meaning that China should approach developing states with the values

of mutual respect, fairness, justice and 'win-win' cooperation (Zheng, 2018: 6 in Wei, 2020: 421). Some Chinese scholars propose China should take advantage of its economic development to provide more international public goods, for instance development assistance, infrastructure building and connectivity (Ren, 2015: 63 in Wei, 2020: 425). Wei (2020: 426) argues that China should increase its personnel representation and weight in international institutions "to enhance China's institutional power".

Another debate focusses on China's 'normative power' for which the more popular Chinese term "discourse power" (*hu ayu quan*) is used, "referring to the power to develop and diffuse internationally-accepted discourse and internationally-recognized norms based on Chinese values, ideas and theories […]" (Wei, 2020: 426). Although Wei (2020: 427) claims that concepts such as CSFM have to some extent helped to improve China's international image, he argues that Chinese scholars are aware these slogans are not internationalized discourses. Indeed, they are often unilaterally articulated by Chinese officials. Wei argues that a very important aspect of Xi's 'striving for achievement' dogma is for China to play a proactive role in developing international norms (ibid.). Some point out that the emphasis on Chinese values in promoting China's principles and practices has actually undermined the efforts to build China's normative power (Li, 2018: 88–89 in Wei, 2020: 427).

As I discuss in the next sections, some of the suggestions Chinese scholars made, like for example increasing Chinese personnel in international institutions, are actually part of China's current foreign policy. In the analysis so far, I have analyzed China's normative understanding from a conceptual perspective (how China understands international norms), from a historical perspective (how Chinese leaders use historical narratives today), from official Chinese foreign policy rhetoric (inter alia Xi's CSFM-doctrine) and from a Chinese academic perspective. In the following, I analyze various Chinese foreign policies with regards to how China uses normative means to promote its normative goals and to what extent this creates a traceable impact.

5.5. China in the United Nations

In this section I first discuss the China's engagement in the UN in terms of personnel, financial contribution and linguistic impact on UN documents (here exemplary of international law). Concerning normative means in Chinese foreign policy I then outline China's role in UN peacekeeping, specifically regarding China's peacebuilding norm of 'development peace' (He, 2014) and China's impact on the R2P-debate. I argue that while the former is not a strong case

for China's normative influence, in the latter China had a discernable impact on international norms.

China's engagement in the United Nations

During the 'reform and opening-up' era, China's participation in international institutions was mainly led by economic interests (Zhao, 2024: 17). Over time, economic interdependence created 'spillover effects' in areas such as peace and security (ibid. 18). Huikang Huang, a Chinese scholar and member of the UN International Law Commission, recalls 50 years (since 1971) of the PRC's engagement in the UN. There, he argues, China continuously advocated for the establishment of a "new international *political* and economic order[8]" (Huang, 2021: 536, emphasis added).

In 2024 China has 35 nationals serving as heads of international organizations and in top positions at the UN principal organs, funds, programs, specialized agencies, and other UN bodies (Zhao, 2024: 16). In addition to being an active member in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Chinese nationals hold senior positions in the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Telecommunication Union, and the International Civil Aviation Organization. In 2020, four of the 15 UN specialized agencies were chaired by Chinese officials, next to the three already mentioned, China also chaired the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (Tung/Yang, 2020). While this is a significant representation, He (2016) argues that in terms of its population China is still underrepresented. It only ranks number 14 from 193 UN member states in terms of civilian employees in the UN secretariat, and only 11 Chinese occupy D1 or above level posts, whereas the number of the US (50), UK (24), and France (17) are much higher (He, 2016[9] in He, 2019: 271).

In 2019 China became the second-largest budget contributor to the UN after the US, paying 12% of the total UN budget (Zhang, 2022). Moreover, in 2024 China is the first contributor to the regular UNESCO budget, where it also supports the 'UNESCO Silk Road

[8] The similar 'new international economic order' (NIEO) is a set of proposals by developing countries from 1974 which aims at "building a lasting set of relationships conducive to peace through greater equality of economic opportunity […]" (Laszlo et al. 1978: xvii). Advocate groups include the 'Group 77' and the 'Non-Aligned Movement'. China is a member in the former and an observer in the latter.

[9] The article was published in Chinese: He, Yin (2016): *Lianheguo weihe shiwu yu Zhongguo weihe huayu quan jianshe* [UN peacekeeping affairs and China's discursive power]. In: *World Economics and Politics*, Vol. 11, 40–61.

Programme' that aims to promote inter-civilizational cultural dialogue (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 66).

Since 2007 the position of under-secretary-general for the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) has consistently been held by Chinese career diplomats (ibid.). Former head of DESA Liu Zhenmin stated that the BRI serves the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Tung/Yang, 2020). After that, the DESA endorsed the China-funded program "Jointly Building Belt and Road towards SDGs" signaling its approval of "the BRI's effect on achieving the Goals" (ibid.). At the BRI Forum in 2017, UN Secretary General António Guterres even said that the UN system would stand with Beijing to achieve the SDGs (Guterres, 2017).

While the UN as a whole may welcome China's efforts under the BRI concerning the SDGs, criticism regarding 'hidden' geopolitical ambition also becomes louder (Tang/Yang, 2020). Apart from engaging into assimilating the BRI into SDGs, Chinese officials in the UN would give the Chinese government opportunities to reshape the UN's development programs by "silencing the critics of its human rights record, providing monetary incentives to secure the support of other member states, and bringing more of its nationals into the UN" (ibid.). For example, Huang (2019) reports that a former head of DESA hindered the president of the World Uyghur Congress, Dolkun Isa, from attending the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues. Another example is China's impeding of the UNHRC by encouraging authoritarian regimes to support China and downplay China's policies in Xinjiang, thereby dividing the UNHRC (ibid.). In 2019 a letter from 39 ambassadors, mostly from African and Middle East countries including Saudi Arabia and Russia, positively evaluated the developments in Xinjiang, claiming that China's counter terrorism measures were a success (ibid.). These examples show that Chinese officials sitting in top positions of UN bodies can exert influence in agenda-setting there.

Another example is China's influence in the World Health Organization (WHO) during the Covid-19 pandemic, which shows how problematic China's growing outreach can be. WHO Secretary General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus repeatedly suggested not to impose a travel ban for China, and downplayed the severity of the outbreak (Tung/Yang, 2020). His inconsistency and reluctance to criticize China's attempted cover-ups of the outbreak have damaged the WHO's image internationally, with some even calling it the 'Chinese Health Organization' (ibid.).

Although China's tactics in the UN could be a 'role model' for emerging states, it could also harm the essence of sustainable international cooperation (Tung/Yang, 2020). On the one hand, Tung and Yang (2020) argue that China uses the UN as a tool for achieving its goals and would thereby erode the trustworthiness of UN institutions from within. On the other, Zhao (2024: 15) argues that as the largest 'developing country' in the world and as a permanent member of the UNSC (P5) China's membership and active participation in international institutions can also raise the legitimacy of these institutions. I believe that in this argument, Zhao (2024) refers to 'legitimacy' in the eyes of emerging states or the so-called 'Global South' and their understandings and preferences of international norms.

China's linguistic impact on UN documents

This section traces how China engages in the formulation, specification and enshrinement of a Chinese perspective of international norms into official UN documents, here exemplary of international law. The principles and norms of state sovereignty, equality and non-interference are all enshrined in the UN Charter. Thus, it is debatable to what extent China's promotion of these norms can be viewed as genuine. However, Job and Shesterinina (2014: 158) argue that "[i]n essence, the substance of a norm, per se, may be less at issue than its embedded normative and institutional framework". In that regard, Caserta (2021: 32) explains the historical dominance of Western powers in institutionalizing their legal traditions and understandings of norms in international law. Since China started joining international treaties, conventions and covenants, China's influence and contribution therein have increased (Huang, 2021: 538). Thus, China has evolved from being integrated into international law regimes to actively participating in them (ibid. 537). From a legalistic standpoint, China's normative impact on international law would lie in "rhetorically Sinicizing international legal concepts" (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 69).

Amongst others, Chen (1984: 24) argues that the 'Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation Among States in Accordance with the Charter of U.N.' adopted by the UNGA in 1970 reflects the substance of the 'Five Principles'. A more concrete example is the 'Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States' adopted in 1974, where the 'Five Principles' were reiterated word by word as the "Fundamentals of International Economic Relations" (UNGA, 1974: 51). One must admit that each of the individual principles has long existed and was not formulated first by the PRC, but Chen (1984: 24) argues that by being put together in this way, they acquire new meanings as individual principles of a whole. Additionally, they would reflect the "new international

situation created by the rise and growing role of Third World states" and their efforts in overcoming colonial legacies (Chen, 1984: 24).

In recent years, China has been "advocating for democracy and the rule of law in international relations, as well as the building of a new type of international relations and a community of shared future for mankind" (Huang, 2021: 539). For example, in 2019 the wording "shared future" was inserted into the resolution titled 'The contribution of development to the enjoyment of all human rights' (UNHRC, 2019). Another telling example is the following. In 2018 China and other states of the 'Global South' proposed a draft resolution in the UNHRC where CSFM was inserted for the first time (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 61). There, the Human Rights Council recognizes:

> "[…] the importance of fostering international relations based on mutual respect, fairness, justice and mutually beneficial cooperation, with the aim of building a *community of shared future for human beings* […]" (UNHRC, 2018: 2, emphasis added).

The vote was contested, with 28 voting in favor, 17 abstaining and the US voting against it. This caused a great controversy surrounding the resolution with legal experts from the West claiming that it represents an "attempt to indirectly excuse its own rights lapses" (Mitchell, 2018). In 2020 the UNHRC adopted this draft as resolution 43/21 titled 'Promoting mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of human rights' (UNHRC, 2020). In China this was reported as the UNHRC adopting a "China-sponsored resolution" (Xinhua, 2020). In fact, the resolution was favored by mostly developing countries and countries from the 'Global South', while most European countries including Germany, voted against it.

The so-called 'democratization of international relations' is a long-term goal of the 'Group of 77', which is composed of 134 countries (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 64). They represent the established effort of the 'Global South' to contest Western dominance in international law (ibid.). China's seeming allegiance with the 'Global South' goes so far that Xi pledges that "the vote of China in the United Nations will always belong to developing countries" (Xi, 2015). Apart from its active engagement in the UNHRC China has become an active player in the UNGA as well, having sponsored 351 resolutions between 2013 and 2018 (248 as China, and 103 in collaboration with the 'Group 77') (Taskinen, 2020). Many of these resolutions include the term CSFM or official Chinese diplomatic language (ibid.). Furthermore, the notion of CSFM has been echoed in several UNGA resolutions concerning peace and security, including UNGA Resolution 2344 ('promotion of peace and stability in Afghanistan and the surrounding region'), UNGA Resolution 69/32 ('no first placement of weapons in outer space'),

and UNGA resolution 72/250 ('further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space') (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 57).

CSFM as an internationally echoed concept got more attention during the protectionist administration of US President Trump (2016–2020), which saw international organizations as 'hindrances' to the US, contrasting the 'win-win' rhetoric against 'America first' (ibid. 68). It was during this period that "China strengthened its participation in, and furthered its financial contributions to, the work of the UN and related international institutions" (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 50). Most of the above mentioned resolutions were also passed during that time. Furthermore, China started to expand its international treaty network, most of which evolves around the BRI, but also "new international treaty obligations in the fields of climate change, international trade, arms control, […]" (ibid.).

To conclude, various Chinese legal scholars highlight China's activity in UN institutions and their 'success' in having Chinese diplomatic language imbedded in official documents (Chen, 1984; Huang, 2021). This section showed the impact of China's increasing activity in the UNHRC and the UNGA and how it succeeded in having the 'Five Principles' and Xi's rhetoric of CSFM formalized in UN documents.

China's engagement in UN peacekeeping

China's increasing integration in global affairs is reflected in its increasing participation in the UN, most notably peacekeeping and peacebuilding (He, 2021: 42). At first, when the PRC rejoined the UNSC in 1971, it opposed the idea of peacekeeping operations (PKOs) due to its normative stance on 'traditional' state sovereignty and non-intervention (He, 2019: 257). Moreover, the domestic situation in China as a 'revolutionary state' kept the People's Liberation Army (PLA) preoccupied with safeguarding China's territorial integrity (ibid.). In the 1980s and 1990s China gradually adjusted its position "due to its need for a favourable international environment that could benefit its own economic development-oriented reform and opening up strategy" (ibid. 255). In that context, Zhao (2024: 18) talks about 'spillover effects' of economic interdependence created in areas such as peace and security. In 1981, China for the first time voted in favor of the extension of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and provided financial support (He, 2019: 257).

He (2007: 14) argues that internationally China intends to be a responsible power, to strengthen the UN, and to share more burden for peace and security. Today, China has become one of the major contributors to troops in PKOs, and arguably its rising contributions reflect

China's view on its role in the international system (Job/Shesterinina, 2014: 154). In 2017 China had 2,654 peacekeepers, including 2,417 troops, 81 UN Military Experts on Mission (UNMEM) and staff officers, and 156 police officers. Those were active in 9 of the 15 ongoing PKOs and one special political mission (He, 2019: 260–261). In total, China has so far contributed more than 35,000[10] military and police peacekeepers (ibid. 261). In terms of contribution of personnel China ranks number one among the P5 (World Economic Forum, 2019). Furthermore, in 2020 China was the second largest budget contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget (Gowan, 2020). In addition, China is a great contributor to peacekeeping personnel training and both the Chinese police and military peacekeeping training institutions host international training courses (He, 2019: 263).

The following debate outlines the complex interconnectedness of China's strategic and normative goals in UN peacekeeping. Zhao (2024: 27) argues that China's engagement in peace and security issues is an attempt to mitigate the 'China threat' theory "by demonstrating its willingness to adhere to principles of peaceful rise and coexistence". Arguably, China's role in UN peacekeeping helps China's image as 'responsible stakeholder', and *at the same time* promotes stability in countries where China has significant strategic and commercial interests, such as Senegal, South Sudan and Mali (World Economic Forum, 2019). Lynch (2014) reports that China has significant interests in areas where it deploys peacekeepers, for example regarding natural resources like oil in the case of South Sudan. Indeed, despite its substantial contributions to PKOs, Shambaugh (2013: 7) argues that China is not committed to international norms, but that it acts in self-interest. Chen (1984: 26–27) puts it differently and says that the reason the PRC pursues peace internationally is not *only* out of altruism or pacifism, but *also* in its own interests as China is "in need of a peaceful environment to build up her economy". However, as He (2019: 254–255) argues this would not explain China's deployment of peacekeeping troops to Lebanon and Haiti, both places that are not rich in resources. Moreover, Haiti is an interesting case, because it recognizes Taiwan as a state, refuting the assumption that China's engagement in PKOs is linked to the 'One China Policy', i.e. the diplomatic recognition that there is only one legitimate Chinese government (ibid. 255).

He (2019: 256) argues that China's shift towards a stronger engagement in UN peacekeeping operations is due to its international identity as a 'rising China'. For example, in 2013 the PLA included 'peacekeeping' as one of its major missions in a white paper issued by

[10] This is a calculation by He (2019) based on data from the UN archives, online: https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/ranking-of-military-and-police-contributions [Last accessed: 15.02.2024].

the Chinese Ministry of Defense (State Council, 2013). There it says that the PLA should assume international responsibility, and play an active role in maintaining world peace, security, and stability (State Council, 2013). Most significantly of the increased burden-sharing by China is the statement of Xi in 2015 at the UN General Assembly. He announced massive commitments to strengthen UN peacekeeping, inter alia that China will provide free military aid of US100$ million to the African Union (AU) to support the building of the African Standby Force and the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis (Xi, 2015). He (2019: 271) explains that overall UN peacekeeping efforts benefit from China's financial and personnel contribution. This in turn would also feed into China's 'peaceful' rise narrative (ibid.). Concerning the criteria for a 'normative power' to be considered a 'legitimate' international actor by others, China's engagement in UN peacekeeping could have an impact in that regard. However, as mentioned above there may be limits regarding by whom China is viewed as 'legitimate'.

China's peacebuilding norm of 'developmental peace'

Peacebuilding is an important part of PKOs that includes infrastructure building, and helping host states to establish or reform political, economic, and social institutions (He, 2021: 42–43). According to He (2014) China's peacebuilding norm is based on 'developmental peace' instead of 'liberal peace'. He (2021) admits that there is no official Chinese endorsement of 'developmental peace' (yet). However, he argues that this norm shapes China's international aid program and its peacebuilding activities (ibid.). For example in 2017 China's foreign minister Wang Yi said that the root cause of migration from Syria is "poverty" and that it must be addressed through "development" (MOFA China, 2017). This section discusses the concept of 'developmental peace' as an example of China's own norm formulation and application in the realm of peacebuilding.

The concept of 'developmental peace' seeks to be an alternative to 'liberal peace' which has dominated peacebuilding since the end of the Cold War (Wong, 2021: 523). Liberal peace is promoted as the 'universal' peace norm of peacebuilding and includes economic liberalization and political democratization (ibid. 524). In contrast, developmental peace focusses on strong state institutions and economic development (ibid. 523). While both 'liberal peace' and 'developmental peace' focus on institutions as foundation of lasting peace, liberal peace gives more importance to institution building, while developmental peace gives priority to economic development (He, 2021: 48). More specifically, Chinese aid comes without requirements for liberal reforms (Bräutigam, 2009). In other words, developmental peace

prioritizes economic development without introducing change to the local government (Wong, 2021). In fact, He (2021: 49) argues that China's norm of 'developmental peace' opposes radical change since in China's view every state has its own conditions and should therefore reform gradually. This notion is based on China's own experience of economic (under)development, with China being one of the poorest countries in the world in the 1960s (Wong, 2021: 523). Thus, China believes the root problem of conflict to be 'underdevelopment' and seeks to address this via economic development and poverty alleviation (ibid. 523–524).

The underlying assumption of 'development peace' is that "with political and social stability as a prerequisite, development can lead to sustainable peace" (He, 2021: 47). However, there is no mention of *how* this political stability should be achieved, highlighting only not to attach 'political strings' to aid (Pang, 2013 in Wei, 2020: 523). Furthermore, while 'liberal peace' prefers an active civil society that should participate in democratic governance 'developmental peace' downplays the role of civil society vis-à-vis a strong state (He, 2021: 48). Moreover, instead of deploying infantry battalions China prefers to send medical and engineering teams to post-conflict societies (Xue, 2017). The idea of 'development peace' is to promote a different set of norms, especially where 'liberal peace(building)' has fallen short (Wong, 2021: 523).

The main criticism against 'developmental peace' is that it lacks when it comes to protecting human rights and ensuring 'human security' – a term that is itself sensitive in China (ibid. 526). Wong (2021: 529) claims that while 'developmental peace' is good at containing conflict through provision of stability, prioritizing economic development and pulling countries out of poverty, it omits notions of 'good governance', environmental protection or the rights of minorities. This may in turn lead to future conflict (ibid.). An example is China's peacebuilding engagement in Myanmar. Wong (2021: 531) argues that it is a rare case where China plays an extensive role in the internal affairs of another country, as it has an interest in Myanmar to remain a stable partner for investment. However, so far there is no evidence that the 'developmental peace' approach played an instrumental role in resolving ethnic conflicts in Myanmar (Sun, 2019). Wong (2019: 533) describes the situation as one of 'negative peace' with only temporary security. Moreover, China silences international efforts to speak out against human rights violations against the Rohingya (ibid.). To sum up, while in theory 'developmental peace' can contain conflict, it faces difficulties in solving them in the long term. Furthermore, China's 'double standard' regarding human rights violations limits the legitimacy of the 'developmental peace' approach.

Wong (20201: 525–526) explains that while the idea of creating peace through development is not exclusive to China, as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are based on the same idea, he argues that the BRI or other economic initiatives are “all tools to advance the developmental peace agenda”. Li (2021: 107) raises this point and argues that the BRI can potentially have an impact on UN peacebuilding due to its emphasis on conflict prevention through economic development. To the extent that the BRI needs a peaceful environment as a precondition for it to be successful, economic cooperation can be a driving force for China to engage in promoting peace in BRI countries (ibid.). In a keynote speech in 2017 Xi proposed one of the five roads of the BRI to be “a road for peace” (Xinhua, 2017). Indeed, many of the countries that are BRI contractors are also recipients of UN peacebuilding, such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka or Yemen (Li, 2021: 106). Furthermore, some cooperations already exist between the BRI and the United Nations Development Program, United Nations Children’s Fund, the WHO and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ibid). Li (2021: 109) admits that the link between the BRI and peacebuilding is still limited, and that there has not been an official endorsement of the BRI in the UN peacebuilding framework. Nevertheless, the BRI and the ‘development peace’ approach could potentially have an impact on peacebuilding if already existing cooperations with UN institutions were to be expanded.

Two more examples of norm diffusion in China’s peacebuilding approach will be discussed in the following: development aid and activities of Chinese government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs). First, Wheeler (2012) argues that China’s development aid is seen as an ‘opportunity’ for authoritarian countries as they are not required to improve on democracy and human rights standards in order to secure aid from Beijing. Furthermore, China approaches other countries not as ‘donors’, but as ‘fellow developing countries’, replacing the term ‘aid’ (*yuanzhu*) with ‘development assistance’ to its ‘development partners’ (Wong, 2021: 525). Arguably, this rhetoric emphasizes the ‘win-win’ logic behind China’s engagement, as China also benefits “from the security created by development” (ibid.). However, one thing is forgotten here. China does have an unofficial ‘political clause’ in its foreign relations, namely the ‘One-China’ policy. Dreher et al. (2018) found that when it comes to Chinese development aid in Africa the regime type of the recipient state is irrelevant. Rather, in addition to the poverty level of the recipient state, the recognition or non-recognition of Taiwan seems crucial (ibid.). A recent example is the Pacific Island nation of Nauru that switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China after the Taiwanese presidential election in January 2024, presumably to gain access to Chinese aid. On this, the government of Nauru

said that "[t]his policy change is a significant first step in moving forward with Nauru's development" (in Wu/Moritsugu, 2024).

Second, civil society and NGOs have traditionally been viewed as agents of norms export (Hasmath/Hsu, 2019). Arguably, China can also export norms internationally via its GONGOs which have been increasing their global presence, most notably in Africa (ibid). While there are no official statistics about their numbers, one example is the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation in Africa. Hasmath and Hsu (2019) explain that this program sets up community-based centers for first aid, healthcare, and water supplies in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda (ibid.). Another activity is the healthcare program in Sudan launched in 2012. The authors suggest that while NGOs in the West represent a 'Western model' of democratic state-society relations, Chinese GONGOs can help their local host nation to operate more effectively under an illiberal regime, as they themselves have been socialized in an authoritarian environment (ibid). While NGOs promote political liberalization via humanitarian and development aid, Chinese GONGOs endorse or may even strengthen authoritarian tendencies (ibid.). In addition, they could have a negative impact on the perception of Western NGOs and thereby reduce their influence in the long-term (ibid.).

While 'developmental peace' as a distinct Chinese approach to peacebuilding has the potential to bring peace through economic development, it omits human rights issues and fails to resolve ethnic tensions, which are often the root-cause for conflict (Wong, 2021: 535). Furthermore, Chinese norms can also be transferred through Chinese development aid and China's GONGOS.[11] Both should be studied more in-depth in the future in order to trace possible norms transfers there.

China's impact on shaping the norm of 'Responsibility to Protect'

A fundamental normative debate with diverging ideas exists in the case of how the international community should deal with major humanitarian and security crises, in particular the controversial norm of R2P (Snetkov/Lanteigne, 2015: 114). There is a longstanding debate between sovereignty as a 'right' or a 'responsibility' of a state (Fung, 2020: 195). In the first official document on R2P published by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in 2001 the emerging norm of R2P no longer focused on state sovereignty as undisputed territorial control, adding the notion of sovereignty as a "conditional right" (ibid.).

[11] The 'norm' of 'no strings attached' in Chinese development aid can be argued to be a 'non-norm'. However, I understand this to be a concrete norm, as it is based on the idea of 'non-interference' in a country's internal affairs.

The report states that "th[is] kind of intervention […] is action taken against a state or its leaders, without its or their consent, for purposes which are claimed to be humanitarian or protective" (ICISS, 2001: 8). This means that when a state is judged incapable of executing its responsibility to protect its citizens from mass atrocities, then the international community has a responsibility to act (Fung, 2020: 195).

Since R2P emerged as a concept it has been defined and redefined, but never codified in a treaty or convention (Job/Shesterinina, 2014: 147). Lacking the back-up of international law its evolution entails an "contention between its 'norm entrepreneurs" (ibid.). Fung (2020: 198) argues that by contestation of the norm China had an impact on the formulation of it. Job and Shesterinina (2014: 144) agree and note that in consistently advancing its particular interpretation of R2P China acted as a 'norm-shaper'. This section outlines China's engagement in the formulation and implementation of the norm of R2P.

Tocci and Manners (2008: 315) argue that while the US and the EU promote the rights of individuals "to the point of discursively justifying military intervention in breach of a third state's sovereignty […]", China, Russia and India are more inclined to defend the principle of non-interference, even "at the cost of tolerating gross violations of human rights and democratic principles". Russia and China have been critical to the emergence of R2P from the beginning and having veto power in the UNSC, their position impacts the formulation and implementation of this norm (Snetkov/Lanteigne, 2015: 116). In the cases of the Libyan conflict, the Syrian civil war, and the annexation of Crimea, Russia and China acted as a "single bloc […] in opposition to Western powers" (ibid.). However, regarding R2P China is more conservative than Russia, acting in line with international laws and norms in the sense that it prefers multilateral solutions to promote peace and stability (ibid. 117). Snetkov and Lanteigne (2015: 130) argue that with its increasing global role China has developed its own independent stance on humanitarian interventions.

Throughout the 1990s China abided by its position on 'traditional' sovereignty opposing "non-consensual unauthorized intervention, even in the light of massive civilian suffering" in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti and Kosovo (Job/Shesterinina, 2014: 151). Instead, China argued for "peaceful mediation" and "economic development" to attain peace (ibid.). By reiterating traditional views of state sovereignty China sought to counter a turn towards a more interventionist stance. According to Snetkov and Lanteigne (2015: 128) the initial fear was that R2P would amount to a "codification of great power rights to intervene under the guise of humanitarian intervention".

When R2P was first discussed in 2001, China neither accepted an expansive interpretation of R2P nor did it reject the norm entirely (Job/Shesterinina, 2014: 144). Instead, China insisted on maintaining the principles of sovereignty, guarding the principles of the host states' consent, and an UNSC authorization of an intervention (ibid. 152). Snetkov and Lanteigne (2015: 136) call China a "permission giver" and "norm maker" as China presents itself as a 'responsible' power in humanitarian issues that seeks to ensure that "the *current* international rules are upheld" (emphasis added). Furthermore, reluctant to unilaterally intervene directly on the ground China would favor "mediation and diplomacy as primary crisis resolution mechanisms" (ibid.). I highlighted the word 'current', as this stance supports my argument that China emphasizes a 'pluralist' understanding of the (original) international norms based in the UN Charter, as opposed to a 'solidarist' understanding.

In the 2009 Secretary-General report on R2P China succeeded in underlining that the concept of R2P should only apply to four crimes, namely genocide, war crimes, ethnical cleansing, and crimes against humanity, and that it should not be arbitrarily or unilaterally interpretated or extended (Job/Shesterinina, 2014: 157). When it comes to the 'three pillars of R2P' China supports the view that the first two, *prevention* (through preventive diplomacy and long-term economic development) and *state capacity building* must be prioritized over the third, *intervention* (ibid.). While China did adopt its original stance, it argued that intervention must be "carried out in the 'right' fashion, via multilateral regimes such as the UN and not via great powers (read: the United States)" (Snetkov/Lanteigne, 2015: 126). He (2019: 271) argues that China's endorsement of R2P marks a considerable shift away from its previous stance and can be attributed to its changed international identity as a "rising power" and its goal to "play a constructive role in UN peacekeeping affairs".

In addition, China encouraged the integration of regional organizations and the importance of dialogue and cooperation (Job/Shesterinina, 2014: 154). In the case of Libya in 2011, China stressed the integration of regional actors and organizations into the mandate, namely the AU and the Arab League (Wong, 2021: 530). Officially, China chose not to veto the resolution establishing a no-fly zone, instead abstaining from the UN resolution due to requests from AU and Arab League (UNSC, 2011). Furthermore, China called for "all peaceful means" to be exhausted before considering the use of force (in Job/Shesterinina, 2014: 156). Thus, for China, Sudan's regime killing of civilians in Darfur in 2006 was not seen as a sufficient condition (ibid.). Only when the crisis spread to Chad, China acted to secure Sudan's consent to deploy peacekeeping forces (Davies, 2011: 269). Wong (2021: 528) argues that China, not

being constrained by a colonial past, could persuade Khartoum to accept peacekeepers, something the West did not achieve. Zhao (2024: 26) notes the role China has played regarding the norm of non-intervention in this case, insisting on Sudan's consent to an international intervention, thereby respecting Sudan's sovereignty. However, critics say that in the 'Darfur Crisis' China's was driven by strategic interests (oil) and improving its image after international denunciation (Wong, 2021: 527–528). Another 'double standard' of China's interests and norms is seen in the case of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and China's desire to maintain good ties with Moscow (Snetkov/Lanteigne, 2015: 132).

The norm of R2P is a good example where China as a member of the UNSC became more vocal in the processes of formulation and implementation of international norms in line with its own normative preferences and interests. Essentially, China was successful in fortifying the 'primacy of the state' in the norm of R2P (Fung, 2020: 196). When it comes to normative means, China attempted to modify a norm at the international level through normative resistance, thereby projecting normative power (Fung, 2020: 198; Fung, 2023). In other words, China's 'norm contestation' was a cost-effective means to projecting power (Fung, 2020: 194). While China's efforts did not limit the use of R2P in the 2011 Libyan intervention, China had emphasized the UNSC authorization and regional organizations' buy-in for action which was at the time endorsed by the US (Fung, 2020: 204). According to an interview by Fung (2020), a Chinese official felt that the US had 'recognized China' in that regard (ibid.).

After the Libyan intervention Ruan (2012) coined the term 'responsible protection'. He criticized that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had abused its mandate in Libya and enforced a "regime change". According to concerns of acting without Syrian consent China vetoed the resolutions to engage in 2014 and 2015 (Fung, 2020: 205). Fung (2020: 205) notes that the 'responsible protection' theme enabled China to express support for the norm of R2P, but at the same time "cast its vetoes as responsible action". To be clear, as Job and Shesterinina (2014: 153) argue, regardless of China's rhetorical endorsement and engagement in the formulation of R2P "China has been unwilling to support action against states failing to protect their populations".

China's normative insistence on 'sovereignty first' is still reflected in the discussions of R2P today. Instead of a responsibility of the international society, China "emphasize[s] the primary responsibility of states to protect civilians, even in cases where the state itself is linked to committing atrocities […]" (Fung, 2020: 205). China still resists co-option by Western

powers, instead insisting on its normative preference for 'traditional' sovereignty and territorial integrity as "cornerstones of international affairs" (Fung, 2020: 207). Furthermore, China emphasizes achieving R2P through state and regional capacity-building, early warning systems and conflict prevention (Fung, 2023: 396).

Without traceable normative impact it would be premature to call China a 'normative power'. While it is challenging to measure the full impact of China's norm diffusion, this section showed that China had a certain impact on the international norms of 'sovereignty', 'non-interference' and 'R2P' (Job/Shesterinina, 2014: 158). Since China is a veto power in the UNSC it will continue to have an impact on humanitarian interventions. I believe that China will only consent (or abstain from vetoing) a resolution if an intervention has the host country's consent and an authorization of the UNSC. However, based on these restrictions interventionist notions like 2011 in Libya, where global powers intervened in order to stop mass atrocities, are less likely to happen in the future.

5.6. International Institutions and Regimes: China's role as a 'norm maker'

Chinese scholars argue that after four decades of 'reform and opening-up' China has been fully integrated into the international system (Jia, 2015: 16, in Wei, 2020: 429–430). According to Zhao (2024: 15), over time China has integrated into the international community and today plays and increasingly important role in shaping international institutions. Huijskens (2017) argues that China is becoming more important in influencing international norms and institutions, arguing that China is evolving from a 'norm-taker' to a 'norm-shaper' and 'institution-builder'. For example, it has become more active in the UN, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), but also set up its own institutions, like the AIIB and the BRI (ibid. 2). This shows that China is no longer unilaterally being socialized into the existing global order by the West, but is becoming an active 'socializer' itself (ibid. 23). However, the question if China is moving from a 'norm-taker' to a 'norm-setter' is contested in the literature (Gerstl, 2020). Clark (2014: 333) explains that "in order to become a respected norm-maker, China must first be seen to be fully integrated as an appropriate norm-taker". The following discussion shows that 'norm entrepreneurs' can be more or less successful in different policy areas depending on to their relative "comparative advantages" (Tocci and Manners, 2008: 324).

In the following, I discuss China's engagement in international and regional institutions such as the WTO and ASEAN, China's involvement in providing diplomatic forums and platforms and China's engagement in the international climate regime. Then, I discuss possible

norm transfers in the case of China’s own institution-building in the case of the AIIB and to what extent the BRI can be considered as a normative foreign policy.

China's engagement in international and regional institutions, forums, platforms, and regimes

Along with its growing economic weight since the 2008 global financial crisis China has taken the lead among emerging countries in actively playing a role in global governance (Huijskens, 2017: 2). Since 2008 China argues for reforms of international institutions, especially in global financial governance (Gerstl, 2020: 125). By continuously reiterating those demands through the BRICS(+) joint declarations, G20 meetings and Davos summits, China “portrays itself as acting in the interest of the Global South, aiming to strengthen the voice of non-Western, less developed nations in the international arena” (ibid. 125–126). For example, in the WTO China brought at least four cases to the Dispute Settlement Body between 2008-2010, “with an aim of changing or softening the potential negative impacts of existing trade rules through interpretations […]” (Gao, 2011: 17–21). Furthermore, Chien-Huei (2018: 550) argues that China uses the WTO as a negotiation platform for “new norms that are favorable to China and other developing countries”.

Arguably the most important regional organization in Asia is ASEAN. There, China increased its cooperation with the ‘ASEAN plus three’ format in 1997 and the establishment of the ‘China-ASEAN Free Trade Area’ in 2002 (Womack, 2008: 273–274). Gerstl (2020a) argues that today China risks to undermine the unity of ASEAN and the EU in regional norm-setting. Especially since some members of ASEAN (Cambodia and Laos) and the EU (Greece, Hungary, and member candidate Serbia) seem to support China diplomatically. For example, in 2014 the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Cambodia failed due to discord on the South China Sea dispute (Gerstl, 2020: 129).

A major challenge in Asia is the weak regional infrastructure connectivity (Gerstl, 2020a). Thus, regional or sub-regional standards and rules must be developed. The EU and ASEAN are respected players with a history of providing regional public goods in the form of rules, norms and institutions (ibid.). The main question is whether China will rely on the existing international and regional norms, or if it aims to promote its own rules and standards (ibid.). Partly, China uses existing infrastructure initiatives, for example building on bridges in the Greater Mekong Subregion that were financed by Japan (ibid.).

Regarding common sets of rules, the so-called 'ASEAN way'[12] and multilateral cooperation mechanisms are the base of the governance system in Southeast Asia (Gerstl, 2020: 128). Thus, Gerstl (2020: 135) argues that the hurdle for China to provide an alternative is high, as the overlapping of norms reduces the probability of the establishment of China-led governance mechanisms.

The question whether China has an impact as a 'norm-setter' in existing regional institutional frameworks in Asia can only be partially answered. Womack (2008: 278–279) draws a successful impact from China's engagement with ASEAN as part of its 'good neighborhood policy'. Not only does he argue that China's relationships with Asian countries improved, it also supposedly enhanced 'mutual benefit', as the creation of a free trade area and China's accession to the ASEAN 'Treaty of Amity' are seen as "milieu achievement in the regions" (ibid. 279) and as positive contributions to international law and institutions (Cheng, 1999). However, concerning the overlapping of Chinese norms with the 'ASEAN way' and China's relying on existing regional norms and infrastructures, China's ability to exert normative influence is limited (Gerstl, 2020a).

While China's normative impact on ASEAN may be limited, Rolland (2020) argues that China controls the agenda and sets its own rules and norms (which are implicitly or explicitly endorsed by participants) in its diplomatic efforts towards developing countries, consisting of Chinese-led organizations, forums and platforms. For example, when it comes to forging international dialogue with the 'Global South' China has become increasingly active. The first 'Forum on China-Africa Cooperation' (FOCAC) was held in Beijing in 2000. In 2004, China and Arab League co-launched the 'China-Arab States Cooperation Forum'. Also in 2004 China established the 'China-Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum' and in 2006 the 'China-Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum' (Zhao, 2024: 19–20). Furthermore, in 2019 there was a 'Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations' in Beijing (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 65). While these forums are not international institutions *per se*, they provide platforms to exchange views on a wide range of issues. Moreover, as per pledges via the FOCAC the Silk Road Fund is among the Chinese institutions that provide development funding to Africa (Murphy, 2022: 75). When it comes to norm diffusion Manners (2002: 245) speaks of 'overt diffusion', where norms can be diffused by the result of physical

[12] The 'ASEAN way' is a standard of behavior based on respect for sovereignty, non-interference, informal dialogue and consensual decision-making as well as the lack of will to enforce rules among the ASEAN member states (Gerstl, 2020: 128).

presence of an actor in international organizations. In the case of 'transference', the export of community norms and standards can happen through economic exchange or financial aid (Manners, 2002: 245). Thus, these mechanisms should further be considered in the assessment of China's normative influence within these platforms over a longer period of time.

Concerning the international climate regime, a case study found that the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Summit was one of the first instances in which China expressed its own views on climate change norms internationally (Huijskens, 2017: 8). While in the West the 2009 Summit is generally viewed as a 'failure', China considered the outcome a success, as China, India, Brazil, and South Africa (the so-called 'BASIC countries') came to an agreement with the US, "surpassing the EU's proposals for the content of a binding agreement" (ibid.). China was able to present itself as a "responsible power" and conclude the Summit with an agreement as opposed to without one (ibid.). The position China defended was to not agree to the binding commitments the EU proposed. Huijskens (2017: 10) explains that China's general policy stance regarding climate change does not entail external oversight and externally binding emission cuts. Furthermore, instead of fully conforming to the norms preferred by the West, China used the discussions as a stage for voicing its own views and preferences, thereby shaping the outcome (ibid. 16). As a result, China (and the BASIC countries) refused to agree to make mitigation commitments and to allow international monitoring of China's climate action. Traditionally, China favors the Kyoto protocol and the 'common but differentiated responsibilities' (CBDR), placing more burden sharing on developed countries (Zhao, 2024: 28–29). In the negotiations of the Paris Agreement China insisted on the inclusion of CBDR as well (ibid. 29). Jinnah (2017: 299) sees this as an example of China as a "norm-entrepreneur", as China was successful against the US position.

Institution building in global financial governance: The case of the AIIB

Peng and Tok's (2016) argument of China as a 'normative power' in the AIIB was discussed in section 2.3. To recap, they argue that foreign aid is a major vehicle for China's normative diffusion and that the AIIB's policies represent China's traditional principles of external assistance, such as 'no strings attached', 'mutual benefit' and 'non-intervention' (ibid. 740). This section traces the process of the foundation of the AIIB, explains its internal structures, evaluates possible normative influence on AIIB members, and a possible impact on reforms of the global financial governance structure. The case of the AIIB is special insofar as China became an 'institution-creator' (Huijskens, 2017: 22).

The AIIB was founded in 2015 and entered into business with 57 founding member countries (Huijskens, 2017: 17). Wilson (2019: 155–156) explains that there is a huge demand for infrastructure financing in Asia and that the Chinese government did not see the existing MDBs as sufficient for the task. Thus, it decided to set up its own bank to fill this 'infrastructure gap' (ibid.). In his speech at the AIIB's signing ceremony China's finance minister Lou Jiwei said "the Bank will serve to boost regional infrastructure and economic development and hence support global economic recovery […]. China [seeks] to fulfil its growing international responsibilities […]" (Lou, 2015).

Gerstl (2020: 126) traces how during the negotiations between Chinese and European diplomats concerning the governance rules of the AIIB, China initially aimed to propose own norms and standards for the AIIB. However, after opposition it later made concessions and mostly accepted existing standards for financial governance (interviews by Gerstl, 2020: 126). As a result the AIIB copies well-established international standards of financial governance, not explicit Chinese ones (ibid. 135). Zhao et al. (2019) agree that the AIIB is largely aligned with lending standards of other MDBs. In the Articles of Agreement (AOA) it says that the bank intends to complement the existing MDBs (AIIB, 2015: 1). Moreover, if China seeks to cooperate with the ADB or other institutions, "it has to adopt the norms of environment protection, good governance, and social security in its policy framework" (Peng/Tok, 2016: 742). A socialization process can be observed here, as environmental protection is now included in China's foreign aid goals and the AIIB (State Council, 2014).

Nevertheless, Peng and Tok (2016: 744) insist that China regards the bank as a global public good that "serves as a vehicle for China to manifest its illustrations of an ideal financial governance structure". Underlying is the assumption that in order to facilitate economic growth infrastructure building is key (ibid. 750). Accordingly, this logic is enshrined in the first article of the AOA signed by the 57 founding members, including the UK, France and Germany, where it says: "The purpose of the Bank shall be to foster sustainable economic development, create wealth and improve infrastructure connectivity in Asia […]" (AIIB, 2015: 2). For this reason, Peng and Tok (2016: 740) argue that membership in the AIIB implies an endorsement of China's principles of foreign aid and infrastructure investment, and that membership would (over time) enhance China's normative influence in both the recipient countries and AIIB member states.

Qian et al. (2023: 222) take a different approach. They argue that becoming a founding member of the AIIB signals an embrace of "China's rising status" (ibid.). Remarkably, from 2015 to 2023 the AIIB's approved members doubled to 105. Since Japan and the US are not

members, the AIIB is seen as "real competition for the World Bank and for Western political influence in the developing world" (Qian et al. 2023: 218). Interestingly, scholars found that Western donors scaled back their demands of recipient countries in response to more competition (Hernandez, 2017), indicating a possible impact of the AIIB. A preliminary result of Qian et al. (2023: 220) supports this, indicating a reduction in participation in World Bank infrastructure programs by founding members of the AIIB, representing a shift in preference when it comes to infrastructure programs. Indeed, most countries that were founding members of the AIIB, previously voiced complaints concerning funding from the World Bank, for example long approval times and conditionality on high social and environmental standards (ibid. 231).

Concerning the structure of the AIIB, the voting rights are divided between 70–75% of voting rights for Asian countries (which are mostly developing countries) and 25–30% for non-Asians (Peng/Tok, 2016: 744). Moreover, Asian developing countries (excluding China) have a combined 30% voting power, ensuring them a larger influence in the AIIB than in the World Bank and the ADB (ibid. 745). In contrast to the IMF or the World Bank where the US have a veto power, in the AIIB China holds 26.06% of the total voting rights, effectively having the largest say (Huijskens, 2017: 20). Thus, there is a "gap between China's normative appeal of governance structure and the actual setting of the AIIB […]" (Peng/Tok, 2016: 745). However, it can be argued that the different voting distribution represents China's wish for reform in the governance structure of multilateral financial institutions regarding a 'fairer' distribution of voting rights than before (ibid. 743). Admittedly, this does not mean that China successfully diffused its norms of financial governance and "norms of infrastructure construction" to Western member states (ibid. 741–742). In the end, while the AIIB provides an alternative bank for investment projects mostly demanded by Asian developing countries, the World Bank remains the preferred bank for non-infrastructure projects (Qian et al. 2023: 230).

Other new Chinese-led financial institutions and initiatives include the New Development Bank (NDB), founded as a successor of the BRICS Bank, and the Silk Road Fund. Both were founded in 2014, arguably out of "frustrations about the little to no reform in […] the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund" (Huijskens, 2017: 18–19). In the NDB, as well as in the AIIB, China is the major shareholder. But, contrary to the NDB, where capital is evenly held, the AIIB relies more on China's contribution, which renders China a leading position in policy making there (Peng/Tok, 2016: 740).

Global developments, such as the relative 'decline' of the West and the 'rise' of the 'Global South' create pressure to reform and restructure existing institutions. In retrospect the 2008 global financial crisis created a 'window of opportunity' for reform of the international financial system (Huijskens, 2017: 16). In 2010 China had 2.8% of voting shares in the World Bank and 5.5% in the ADB, while the US and Japan had a combined voting right of 23.6% in the World Bank and 26% in the ADB (Peng/Tok, 2016: 743). Similar accounts can be drawn for the IMF, where the US can even veto decisions (ibid.). In 2009, the IMF reformed its governance structure (without letting go of the veto power of the US) and in 2010 the World Bank redistributed its voting rights (ibid. 744). In December 2015, the US Congress approved the reform plan of the IMF which was formulated in 2010, finally increasing the voting rights of China and other emerging states (ibid. 749). However, the ADB is still dominated by the US and Japan (ibid. 744). Arguably, the ADB is not representative of the economic power in the region, as Japan has more than twice as much voting shares than China and the ADB always had a Japanese president (The Economist, 2015). Peng and Tok (2016: 749) argue that the launch of the AIIB in 2015 encouraged the ADB to raise its annual fund for infrastructure by nearly 40% in 2015. For now, to what extent China's institution-building impacted these reforms remains an unanswered question.

On the one hand, China engages in the existing legal order and promotes reforms therein. On the other, it has started to proactively establish a "secondary-level rule system" (Zhao, 2024: 23-24). Through the AIIB for example China encourages "regional integration through multilateral means" (ibid. 25). In addition, developing countries chose to join the AIIB due to frustrations concerning the World Bank and the IMF (Qing et al. 2023). Some say that as an alternative international institution, the AIIB will inherently reflect Chinese "norms of practice" and will spread those to member states and recipients (Hasmath/Hsu, 2019). I agree with Peng and Tok (2016: 751) that Chinese-led institutions, above all the AIIB, provide a potential platform to spread Chinese norms and to create socialization effects with its member states. In that regard, "[t]he operations of the AIIB will be a barometer for China's normative power for years to come" (ibid.).

The BRI: a normative foreign policy or not?

The BRI is a massive infrastructure and investment project that aims at creating new trade routes and enhance connectivity along its contract states (World Bank, 2018). While in the beginning it was aimed at increasing cooperation with neighboring countries, the scope quickly expanded and the BRI became a globally oriented initiative (Rudyak, 2023: 59). Since the launch of the

BRI in 2013, the academic discission of the BRI has been manifold. Chaisse and Matsushita (2018) argue that the BRI represents the first in its modern history that China is attempting to export its development model.

Even after becoming the second largest economy in the world China still understands itself as a ‘developing state’ (Fung, 2023: 389). Buzan (2022: 153) agrees and explains that China’s commitment to development is rooted in the understanding that China itself is (still) a developing country. In addition to the aspects mentioned in section 2.3. in the following I consider to what extent the BRI can be viewed as a normative foreign policy.

Concerning the normative values of the BRI it is seen as a “new formula for global governance”, including “international cooperation […], economic integration […], connectivity […] and sustainable development” (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 62). Rolland (2020) argues that with its promises to infrastructure development, financial integration, expanded trade, policy coordination, and multilayered cooperation the BRI has the potential to tie its signators closer to China and its sphere of influence. Duarte and Ferreira-Pereira (2022: 600) see the BRI as China’s “soft power tool” to emphasize the “promotion of prosperity, peace and progress that China is willing to share with the rest of the world”. Others argue that similarly to the ancient Silk Road the BRI aims to bring China back to the center of the world and create a China-centered order based on a *Pax Sinica* (Xing/Duarte, 2018: 283).

In China’s first-ever white paper on BRI it says: “China will continue to promote the BRI as its overarching plan and its top-level design for opening up and win-win international cooperation” (State Council, 2023). In fact, the title of the paper calls the BRI a “key pillar” of Xi’s foreign policy vision of a “global community of shared future” (ibid.). Furthermore, the white paper can be seen as addressing the ‘Global South’: “[T]he economic globalization dominated by a few countries has not contributed to the common development that delivers benefits to all […]” (ibid.). On many occasions Xi emphasizes the importance of “South-South solidarity” (Sacks, 2023). While the first BRI forum in 2017 was attended by 29 leaders this number grew for the second forum in 2019 to 37 leaders. In 2023 only 23 state leaders came, however mostly from ‘Global South’ countries. Russia and Hungary joined all three meetings, Czeck, Greece and Italy only the first two (ibid.). In 2023, the BRI forum’s three high-level meetings concerned connectivity, green development and digital economy (ibid.). Sacks (2023) assumes that “there will likely be fewer railroads, ports, and airports, and more emphasis on digital connectivity, standard-setting, training courses, and people-to-people ties” in the future.

Even though the BRI is portrayed as a 'win-win cooperation' and as complementary to existing (sub)-regional frameworks, it represents more of a "basket of various domestic and external policies and implementation tools rather than a cohesive grand strategy" (Gerstl, 2020a). Along with Ziegler's (2020: 4) assertation of the BRI as a "Silk Road renaissance" with which China would seek "to reshape the world order more to its liking", Western countries view the BRI as a geopolitical initiative that serves strategic interests of the CCP. From that perspective, motives for the promotion of the 'New Silk Road' are domestic Chinese development objectives as well as strategic, foreign policy, security and economic interests (Gerstl, 2020: 123). In that regard, Zhao (2014: 21) argues that China's emphasis on 'peaceful development' and a 'harmonious world order' serve the purpose of creating a stable external environment that in turn is beneficial for China's internal socio-economic problems.

From another perspective, Li (2021: 102–103) argues that the driving force behind the BRI is not the Chinese government, but rather state-owned enterprises. Therefore, the role of the CPP in the BRI is limited to building platforms and cooperation projects (ibid.). In that regard, Fung et al. (2023: 5) explain that "a shift in another states' policy towards a government can result from state, quasi-state, or non-state actors at home or abroad, not directed by the influence-seeking state" (ibid.). Within the BRI there are many quasi-state and non-state commercial actors who intentionally or unintentionally shape the perception of China's ambitions through their actions (ibid. 7). Some argue that China's investments in developing countries are not coordinated by the central government, but by state-owned, private or hybrid companies linked to local governments that "seek business opportunities by lobbying the Chinese state in pursuit of their interest" (Hameiri/Jones, 2016: 86). This discussion represents a challenge to studying China's normative intentions in the BRI, because while these diverse actors can serve as the 'right arm' of the Chinese government, in some cases they can have their own distinct interests (Fung et al. 2023: 9).

Nevertheless, the Chinese government signed BRI agreements, so-called 'memorandums of understanding' (MOUs) with around 140 states, as well as 30 international organizations (de la Rasilla/Hao, 2024: 62). Furthermore, the bilateral BRI implementation instruments are flanked by multilateral institutions and formats such as the AIIB and the 17+1 (Gerstl, 2020: 124). In addition, China seeks cooperation with existing regional formats such as the EU, the SCO or the Eurasian Economic Union (ibid.). Along with the Silk Road Fund, the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China are the primary financial

institutions for BRI projects in Africa (Murphy, 2022: 245). However, China has not (yet) imposed a governance system in those regions to implement the BRI (Gerstl, 2020: 134).

Partly, China already sets new practices, for example with the 17+1 format in Central Eastern Europe as a new cooperation format with regular forums for bi- and multilateral discussions (Gerstl, 2020a). However, in the 17+1 format, cooperation is not pursued in a normative vacuum, and the established EU governance mechanisms, rules and norms directly or indirectly impact all the members, even China (Gerstl, 2020: 134). Moreover, not every country that has signed a BRI memorandum of understanding hosts BRI projects and joining BRI does not guarantee that a country will receive preferential treatment from Chinese banks (Sacks, 2023).

On the one hand, when the BRI was launched in 2013 expectations for economic benefits were high. On the other, skepticism of growing Chinese influence potentially causing economic and political dependency accompanied this launch (Gerstl, 2020a). Fears have arisen concerning potential hidden geopolitical motives, opaque governance structures and 'dept traps' (ibid.). Concerning the 'debt trap' which many BRI participants may face, notably Laos or Cambodia, China responded with issuing a debt sustainability framework in 2019 at the Second BRI forum (Gerstl, 2020: 129). Still, many concerns remain. For example, even though Vietnam singed a MOU the Vietnamese government is reluctant to formally label projects as 'BRI' projects (ibid.). Furthermore, in 2018 the Vietnamese public protested against three special economic zones that would have been controlled by Chinese companies for 99 years, and consequently the plans were abandoned (Thayer, 2018). Another example is Italy (the only G7 signator of the BRI) that joined in 2019 and dropped out in 2023, which is considered as a major blow for the initiative's international legitimacy (Lu, 2023).

To sum up, while the much-discussed BRI is essentially an infrastructure investment and development project, it has been rhetorically upgraded to a "key pillar" of Xi's foreign policy vision of a "global community of shared future". Via the BRI China represents itself as a voice of the 'Global South' and seeks to provide public goods linked to development along its signator states (Sacks, 2023). Contrary to accusations of hidden geopolitical ambitions, China articulates the BRI as a 'win-win' cooperation that will also benefit China in return (State Council, 2023). While in the context of the BRI China acts still more as a 'norm-taker' than a 'norm-setter', Beijing's ability to set regional norms will likely grow in the future (Gerstl, 2020a). Based on the debate in this section I see the 'normativity' of the BRI in its non-ideological, pragmatic and potentially 'open-ended' approach.

6. Evaluation of Criteria

Concerning the criteria of a normative power set out above I conclude my analysis[13] of Chinese foreign policies regarding their normative goals, means, and impacts with the following remarks:

Normative goals

1) *Changing an international norm based on one's own understanding of that norm*: Being a member of the UNSC, China has the ability to raise issues at the international level and the subsequent power needed to change international norms based on its own understanding of that norm. For example, it's strictly 'non-interventionist' stance on R2P led to formulation and implementation of R2P based on a 'state sovereignty', effectively blocking the norm of R2P. Furthermore, China's engagement with the international society of states is *transformative* in so far as China aims at setting standards in UN documents regarding the 'Five Principles' and CSFM. This would further consolidate China's stance on 'traditional' sovereignty and 'non-interference' on the international level, especially regarding China's stance of human rights as strictly 'internal affairs'.

   Moreover, China engages in and provides diplomatic formats and platforms where developing countries can voice their opinions and concerns, for example through the BRICS(+), various fora, or through the 'Group 77' in the UN. There, China promotes the reforming of international institutions to include more voting rights of developing countries, which (if realized) will further transform the international society of states in the 21st century.
2) *Intention to provide 'global public goods' and shape the international environment ('milieu goals')*: China's basic assumption is that of 'win-win' relations. Thus, in China's foreign policy normative and strategic interests go together. More specifically, China's normative foreign policy approach encourages cooperation based on 'pragmatism' that benefits itself and others at the same time. For example, China frames its foreign policy objectives under the BRI as a force for the global good (Swaine, 2015: 4). Hence, China's engagement with ASEAN and the BRI could be regarded as creating 'global public goods', such as free trade areas, infrastructure investment and connectivity. Moreover, China on the one hand calls for reforming existing governance structures, and on the other is willing (and able) to create

[13] Initially, structuring the analysis (chapter 5) according to the criteria would have been a logical step. However, as the discussion in this section shows, China scores differently on the various criteria and may fulfill a criterium in one policy field, but not in another. That is why I decided to only refer back to the criteria in this chapter.

alternative institutions. Thereby, it shapes the 'milieu' of global financial governance, especially with the AIIB in Asia.

3) *Adhere to international law and engage in the entrenchment of it*: The CCP advocates a 'strengthening of international law'. Examples where China acts in the entrenchment of it are its engagement in the WTO dispute settlement body and its activity in the UN, specifically regarding its contributions to resolutions in the UNGA and UNHRC. Regarding international human rights law, China's engagement in the Bangkok declaration could be highlighted. However, China not ratifying the ICCPR and its refusal to let other countries criticize its human rights regime lessens the degree of China's engagement regarding international human rights law. In that regard, China's handling of human rights issues domestically and abroad diminishes its international credibility.

Normative means

4) *Not the imposition of norms, but socialization processes are considered normative*: On the one hand, China is fully integrated and socialized into the UN and engages in expanding its influence therein, most notably by financial contributions and increasing Chinese personnel in key positions. Regarding socialization processes, I see China's institution building in the AIIB as an example where China engages in shared practices of infrastructure investment and gives more voting shares to traditionally underrepresented developing countries.

   On the other, China's imposition of norms and interests in the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam, where the relations with China are overshadowed by ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea, limits China's 'normativity' (Huijskens, 2017: 4). Beijing proceeds with the building of artificial islands and on them, military bases. In addition, Chinese vessels search for oil and gas in the Exclusive Economic Zones of Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam (ibid.). Thus, in this specific area 'might makes right'.

5) *Norm diffusion can happen intentionally or unintentionally*: In its foreign policy China intentionally realizes its normative goals through normative means, namely through economic engagement, development assistance with 'no strings attached' (apart from the 'One-China policy) and by strategic communication in the UN and Chinese-led platforms and fora. Through an increasing degree of institutionalization of China's relations with countries from the 'Global South' in various formats China such as the BRI, the BRICS(+), the 'Group 77', etc. China has further potential to diffuse its norms intentionally or unintentionally.

6) *Norm diffusion through institutionalization and implementation of a norm*: China was an active contester in the processes of institutionalization and implementation of the norm R2P. Furthermore, it can be argued that China institutionalizes its norm of 'developmental peace' in its peacebuilding approach (including development aid and Chinese GONGOs) or through the BRI.

Normative impact

7) *Normative power can go alongside other forms of power, but normative impact must be traceable*: China's normative power is largely underpinned by its economic power, as it enables China to invest huge sums abroad and provide substantial development aid. The same can be said for China's financial engagement in the UN and UN peacebuilding. Concerning 'irreducibility', Chinese officials voice their normative goals through various government papers and speeches and engage in having those phrases formalized in the UN system, for example regarding 'sovereignty' and 'non-interference' in the case of R2P, or the 'Five Principles' and Xi's CSFM dogma in UNGA or UNHRC resolutions. As mentioned in 4) China imposes its norms and interests in the South China Sea, *inter alia* by building military bases. This limits China's normative impact in that region and (in part) internationally.
8) *A normative power must be seen as a legitimate normative actor by others*: This is a crucial point as I believe China is seen as a 'legitimate' normative actor by those who profit from their engagement with China, namely developing countries in Africa and Asia. In contrast, developed countries are critical of China's growing influence. Recently, this dichotomy is not so clear, as dissent about China is growing vocal in developing countries as well, for in the Philippines (Fung et al. 2023).

Additional aspects

9) *A normative power is dependent on the international power constellation*: Regarding the ongoing global power transformation and the great power competition China's normative influence is limited to developing countries that have an interest in distancing themselves from their traditional partners, i.e. Western developed nations. Moreover, in recent years there is a trend in sub-Sahara Africa where multiple coup d'états and rising criticism of 'neo-colonialist' structures lead to a repulsion of European powers, most notably France.[14]

[14] In February 2024 Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali have been discussing the creation of a common currency and the abolishment of the CFA-Franc. Arguably, this represents their wish to break with their colonial past with France by "fighting against" inherited structures and "economic colonization" (own translation), online:

In return, this leads to an increase of Russian and Chinese influence (Hudson, 2023). Given the fact that African countries represent the largest voting block of UN member states, this is a significant development.

10) *There can be different kinds of normative power*: In my opinion, China promotes a 'pluralist' understanding of the UN Charter, as it voices criticism against 'solidarist' notions of humanitarian interventions or 'good governance' that gained traction after the end of the Cold War.
11) *The degree of normative power*: When it comes to the degree of China as a normative actor vis-à-vis the 'Global South' there may not be as much impact as it seems. Increasingly, India and China are competing for the representative 'voice'[15] of the 'Global South' (Kawashima, 2023). Furthermore, the ongoing border dispute in the Himalayan mountains limits China's normative power in that regard (Ayres, 2020).

Based on this assessment China partially is a 'normative power'. It has had normative impacts and acted as a 'norm entrepreneur' regarding the R2P norm in the UNSC where it has veto power. Furthermore, regarding China's "comparative advantage", it has had and likely will have more normative impact on global financial governance and economic cooperation, as well as infrastructure investment. Regarding the eleven criteria, China scores differently according to the policy area. As I argued earlier, this is due to normative power being determined by an actors' relative power and legitimacy in the respective policy area.

At the same time, none of the other global players, such as the US and the EU, consistently adhere to their normative standards (Tocci/Manners, 2008: 318). In recent years, the US (especially under Trump) were not interested in providing 'global public goods' anymore[16] – at least not for free. As a result, other actors have the opportunity to step in to 'fill the gap' (Gerstl, 2020: 125). Beeson and Li (2016: 491) go so far as to say that "nothing approximating global or even regional governance is no longer possible without the participation and cooperation of China".

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https://lanouvelletribune.info/2024/02/le-niger-veut-une-nouvelle-monnaie-pour-sortir-de-la-colonisation/ [Last accessed: 13.02.2024].

[15] In January 2023 India hosted an online 'Voice of Global South Summit' with more than 120 participants. China did not participate, indicating a rivalry (see Kawashima, 2023).

[16] In 2017 President Trump announced the US' immediate withdrawal from the 'Trans-Pacific-Partnership' (TPP) and the Paris climate agreement, the latter taking effect in 2020. President Biden re-entered the Paris Agreement on his first day in office in 2021, ending the 'America fist' doctrine for the time being.

In this thesis, I hypothesized that China is the kind of normative power that seeks to ‘normalize’ a (re)turn to a pluralistic understanding of international norms and bring about a shift away from a Western ‘solidarist’ understanding of ‘universal’ norms and rules. Regarding humanitarian interventions and the norm of R2P this can be said to be true. In addition, China promotes its ‘Five Principles’ in the UN, which are said to represent a classical Westphalian understanding of norms (Murphy, 2022: 59). Furthermore, China promotes a ‘democratization’ of international relations which entails more representation of developing countries, including China, effectively leading to more pluralism in international relations.

Concerning Tocci and Manners (2008: 326) condition of ‘multipolarism’ being accompanied with a strengthening of multilateral institutions, China on the one hand pushes for reforming multilateral institutions and builds new ones. The AIIB is the most telling example, but also the various multilateral platforms, fora, summits, etc. On the other hand, China’s approach could lead to a ‘blocking’ of international institutions and a diminishing of trust in the existing international order. While my analysis was selective and by no means tries to represent exhaustive findings, it does point to the real possibility that China is a ‘normative power’ in certain aspects, in particular towards developing countries in Africa and Asia.

Now to the limitations of my assessment. As I mentioned above, China’s ‘normative power’ is dependent on the ongoing systemic conflict between China and the US, and to some extent also with the EU. More broadly, in the 21st century the international society struggles to adjust to contestations of the legitimacy of international institutions such as the UNSC, the IMF and the World Bank (Job/Shesterinina, 2014: 158). Thus, the normative foundations of global and regional economic, political, and security governance increasingly face scrutiny (ibid.). Furthermore, international norms or sets of norms are being contested as a whole or in part by emerging states which did not play a major role in creating them (ibid.). Increasingly, not only China, but many emerging countries demand their ‘fair share’ of voting power in international institutions and a ‘democratization’ of world politics.

In that sense, China’s normative ambitions align with those of the ‘Global South’. However, as Hasmath and Hsu (2019) point out, China’s normative foreign policy approach is based on *pragmatism*. China’s foreign policy norms would lack moral appeal and therefore be more accessible (ibid.). Recently, this pragmatic approach of “practicing policy is spreading globally and, not coincidentally, in African and Southeast Asian nations, where China has increasing commercial investments and trade activities and growing political ties”

(Hasmath/Hsu, 2019). Over time and deepened engagement China's normative preference for 'pragmatism' will likely be transferred to its partners.

A 'negative' impact of China's 'normative power' could then lie in more international legitimacy of authoritarian regimes. This could result in a decline of liberal values and a liberal understanding of international norms, most notably human rights and good governance. In Africa, China is viewed as an "ally against colonialism" (Peng/Tok, 2016: 746). In contrast, by the West China's economic involvement in Africa is perceived as spreading corruption and weakening transparency and good governance. Thus, the US and Europe regard China as a "negative normative power in Africa" and criticize the principles of unconditionality and non-interference as unethical (ibid. 747).

7. Conclusion

This thesis set out with the aim of understanding China's role in an increasingly multipolar world. It asked the question if in the face of the current power transition marked by the 'rise' of the 'Global South' China can be considered a 'normative power'. In presenting existing literature concerning China as a 'normative power' and discussing their shortcomings I found that so far China as a 'normative power' has not been discussed based on a theoretically grounded framework. Drawing on the theoretical debate of normative power that started out with Manners' seminal article in 2002 I argued that normative power scholarship needs to take into account other potential normative actors in international relations. Hence, I discussed Tocci's (2008) analytical framework which contributes to the normative power debate in so far as it defines international law as the most universalizable 'normative boundary' by which to asses a normative power and thus renders the concept generalizable (Tocci, 2008: 21). My contribution was to tie the different ends of the normative power debate together and define generalizable criteria by which China, or any other international actor, can be assessed in the same way, overcoming the selectionist bias of the 'Normative Power Europe' concept.

Concerning the criteria set out to answer the question if China is a 'normative power', and if yes to what degree, I assessed major Chinese foreign policies against their normative goals, means and impacts. First, I outlined the evolution of Chinese foreign policy doctrines and traced the impact historical narratives have on China's foreign policy today. Formally, China is on a path to national 'rejuvenation'. Moreover, I argued that China's normative foreign policy is based on the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' which were first formulated by Zhou Enlai in the 1950s, namely mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence. In addition, 'peace' and 'development' are norms that have been guiding China's 'rise' – at least rhetorically (He, 2021: 47). President Xi formulated the concept of 'a community of shared future for mankind' addressing the 'Global South' and internationally China advocates a 'democratization' of international relations, i.e. reforming the decision-making processes in international institutions so they can become more 'equal' and 'fair'.

I analyzed major Chinese foreign policies and their various impacts on international politics, in particular China's growing influence in UN bodies, its contributions to UN peacebuilding and its impact on the formulation and implementation of the R2P norm. Moreover, I discussed China's engagement in regional and international institutions such as ASEAN, China's diplomatic initiatives, China's engagement in the international climate regime

and its own institution-building in the case of the AIIB. Lastly, I discussed to what extent the BRI can be viewed as normative foreign policy.

As a result, China partially is a 'normative' power in the sense that it is successful in promoting its normative understanding of 'sovereignty' and 'non-interference' on the international level, especially regarding the norm of R2P. Furthermore, China succeeds in having the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence' and Xi's CSFM-dogma formalized in UNGA and UNHRC resolutions. Another example is China's engagement in reforming existing institutions in global financial governance and the creation of the AIIB as an alternative bank for developing states in Asia. Arguably, Chinese-led institutions provide 'global public goods' to its members states, and this is further reinforced by China's engagement in infrastructure development and economic cooperation through the BRI. However, China's as a legitimate 'normative power' has profound limitations when it comes to international human rights norms and China's unresolved territorial disputes.

Nevertheless, I come to the conclusion that China is the kind of normative power that seeks to 'normalize' a (re)turn to a pluralistic understanding of international norms set out in the UN Charter. China's criticism of a liberal understanding of 'universal' norms is that they represent the will of a "small majority" of democratic states (Johnston, 2019: 32). In endorsing the concept of China as a 'normative power' it is possible to conceptualize China's normative foreign policy as being aimed at achieving a world where China's interpretations of international norms become the new 'normal'. Instead of a world led by Western institutions, in this deliberation China's overall normative goal is "to foster a new form of international relations and build a community with a shared future for mankind" (Wang Yi, 2017 after Rolland, 2020).

What are the implications of China as a 'normative power'? At a systemic level, whether China is a 'status quo' or a 'revisionist power' remains a contentious debate. In this analysis, I drew an overall positive account of China's integration into international institutions and its engagement therein, but more empirical research is needed on how China effectively shapes international institutions, and whether this has an overall positive effect on the degree of integration of international relations or whether it leads to a decline in legitimacy of international institutions and a division therein.

As a result of the relative 'decline' of the West and the simultaneous 'rise' of the 'Global South' the international power constellation of the 21st century will experience a significant power shift. On the one hand a 'healthy norm competition' could have the effect of a 'democratization' of international relations. After Tocci and Manners (2008: 319–320) in this scenario each international player would set global normative standards in its area of 'comparative advantage' determined by its capabilities, interests and inclinations across different spheres of governance. In a multipolar world this would to some extent reflect the changing power political configurations as well as the legitimacy and standing of different actors across different policy fields (ibid.). On the other hand, concerns regarding China's autocratic regime and a possible degradation of international human rights norms through China's 'rise' as a 'normative power' remains a hindrance for China to be regarded as a 'legitimate' normative actor by Western countries. Still, regarding China as a *discursive* normative power that rests on anti-colonial narratives China is successful in tying developing countries closer to itself as it is seen as a metaphor for "difference" (Breslin, 2011: 1324). In the end, China's 'normative power' is largely underpinned by and dependent on its economic and political power. If either of those two were to decline, China's normative 'appeal' is likely to decline as well.

If we follow Buzan (2022: 149) in expecting the international society of states to shift towards 'deep pluralism' this will create a dilemma for Western powers. On the one hand, they seek cooperation with emerging powers to address common global issues such as climate change and humanitarian crises. On the other hand, they worry about the challenges emerging powers pose to the existing liberal world order (Pu, 2012). It is true that financial and practical governance structures could be reformed in the mutual interest of the industrialized and developing nations. Gerstl (2020a) suggests that in order to include China into existing international and regional governance structures both the PRC and Western powers must compromise on certain issues. However, in this view an ensuing conflict will be about how far Western countries are willing to negotiate for example international human rights norms.

In my opinion, the main challenge for international relations in the years to come is how to ensure that the 'rise of China' and its integration into the international society of states progresses peacefully, especially regarding China's predominant position in key technologies. Overall, there is a need for more deliberation on how to accommodate a rising 'Global South' into the international society of states, how to reform international institutions to represent a fairer global distribution of voting rights and resources, and most importantly, how to ensure

the preservation of the UN Charter, in particular regarding the maintenance of international peace, international cooperation and the protection of human beings.

Lastly, the ‘Normative Power Europe’ debate was an invitation for self-reflection and a critical engagement with the norms that the EU was claiming to promote (Diez/Manners, 2007). In my view, Chinese scholars should engage more in the discussion of possible shortcomings of Chinese norms and their implications for world politics. In this globalized world multilateral cooperation is the only viable way to realize the common goals of the international society and Chinese scholars could contribute to the debate in that regard. Furthermore, the normative power discourse became part of the construction of a new EU identity in the post-Cold War world (Diez, 2005). In a similar way, debates of China’s ‘normative power’ could further the construction of a Chinese identity based on Chinese norms such as ‘peaceful coexistence’.

This thesis sought to analyze how the normative power dimension plays a role in addition to China’s ‘rise’ in economic, political, and military power terms. In the end, rather than making an absolute claim on whether China is a ‘normative power’ or not, debating this question allowed for a more qualified observation regarding the character of Chinese foreign policy in the current international context. My preliminary result indicates that China’s normative foreign policy is guided by a ‘pluralist’ understanding of the UN Charter. Furthermore, I showed areas of international relations where China did have a normative impact, namely the norm of R2P and various UN resolutions. In general, there is more need for the analysis of China’s normative influence in international politics. In that regard, the theoretically grounded set of criteria can provide a framework for future analysis.

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