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**MA International Relations Thesis-**

Human rights and foreign policy: A study of the impacts of a booming Chinese economy on the European Union's liberal agenda

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## **Introduction**

The world has consistently witnessed the rise and fall of dynasties or empires in the history of humanity through countless warfare. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was no exception either and the advance of technology has only accelerated the process in which countries can rise or fall from power. While the developed nations in Europe, North America and Asia have largely entered a period of relative peace, the nature of power dynamic between states is no longer characterised solely by their military capability but also their level of economic prosperity (Nye, 1990a). Trade balance, financial market, national economic growth have all taken a new determining role in the state's global influence as the global market becomes increasingly integrated (Oksenberg and Economy, 1999, p10).

The seemingly changing nature of power towards more economic based forms of primacy is a main theme in this project as I'd like to demonstrate that a state can achieve a stronger global influence by having a sizeable national economy. This is a recurring theme in the work of some scholars such as Streeck, Freidman, Oksenberg and Economy, Cerny, Genshel and Seelkopf, which will be looked at later. The key debate here is to see the extent a major global actor such as European Union (EU) would compromise on its ideology for economic interest and on this basis, evaluate its changing power relations vis-à-vis the People's Republic of China (hereafter PRC).

PRC as a rapidly developing country is entering the global political landscape swiftly after a series of economic reforms in the 1980s. A rapid economic growth rate allowed PRC to catch-up economically to now having the second largest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the world, which grants the state an increasingly decisive role in the global economy as well as – I will argue – in the global development of ideology.

On the other hand we have the European Union (EU), whose member states consist of some of the largest imperialist powers in history, having colonised and controlled the majority of the world in the past. Having relinquished most of their colonies and endured the two world wars, the founding of EU aimed at uniting Europe in the face

of other larger powers such as USA and the Soviet Union. The union also facilitated a speedy recovery to the national economy of the European powers after the wars and a consolidation of the European liberalism value.

The European liberal values including democracy, human rights and a market economy derived from neoliberal economics were later spread particularly eastwards to the former Soviet states in the Balkans and South Caucasus as they are the prerequisites for the accession to EU (Anastasakis, 2005; European Commission). Nevertheless, the promotion of the EU liberalism around the world has been criticised as an uneven process or at times contradicting. This is reflected in its relations with authoritarian state and an increasingly pragmatist approach in its foreign relations especially in the refugee crisis (Gresh, 2016; Alfred, 2016)

The same could be said for the Sino-EU relations and hence it's the main case-study of my research. Since they established formal diplomatic relations in 1975, EU has attempted to exert the same liberal values on PRC. The Chinese economy is now more integrated in the global economy than before, becoming the second largest trading partner of the EU and EU being the largest trading partner of PRC (European Union, 2016). Nevertheless, the illiberal nature of the Communist Party of China (CPC) remains to be evident throughout recent years especially in terms of violation of human rights. The hope of progress further diminished as the EU found itself in the midst of the sovereign debt crisis and economic stagnation, losing much of the bargaining leverage against a booming Chinese economy.

Extensive trade partnership inevitably creates an interdependent relation, yet if one side suddenly is more dependent than the other in this relation, the asymmetry could be a source of power for the other (Nye, 1990a). In this case, not only does the EU lose its ability to exert influence on the CPC in adopting a more liberal policy, but its legitimacy is potentially undermined too as the EU pursues closer economic ties with PRC despite ongoing human rights abuse that goes against the value, upon which the EU was founded. Against this backdrop, this paper investigates the impacts of PRC's

growing economic power on the European Union's increasingly vulnerable liberal agenda.

This research aims to investigate to what extent an integrated globalised economy that is increasingly tilted towards the PRC, impacts the ability of EU to advocate and safeguard their fundamental liberal values in a competitive economic environment and in the broader context of power struggle. The first section of the paper is divided as follows: this paper will first review relevant literature to conceptualise the notion of liberalism in EU and its criticism. I will then move on to the transformation of politics, power in the globalised age of an economic primacy world and look at the emergence of competition state and a new influential market force. This is followed by the challenge of a rising authoritarian PRC and its implication on the European liberalism. Finally, I will look at the power dynamics between EU and China based on their interaction in the context of trade, values and particularly human rights. In the second and third section, the paper will introduce the two sub case studies of France and Germany, looking at their respective bilateral relations with PRC through literature as well as discourse analysis.

### **Methodology**

For this research, the Sino-German and Sino-French relations are my chosen between-case studies. As the founding member states of the European Economic Community in 1957, which later led to the establishment of the EU in 1993, they are the two member states that, not only represent the core European values with full integration in the EU (including monetary union unlike United Kingdom), but also the largest economic weight of all. Not to mention that the relations of both states vis-à-vis China are more strategic than others due to their significant influence in other international institutions such as the G20 forum and the United Nation Security Council (UNSC).

For this paper, discourse analysis will be implemented in addition to qualitative research of secondary resources. The discourse analysis will be based mainly on the

official public communication from the President of France and the Chancellor of Germany respectively on their stance and attitude towards the bilateral relations with China between the periods of January, 2010 till December, 2016.

All public communications specifically commenting on the bilateral relations of the two countries with PRC have initially been selected. However, due to an unequal volume of available material between the two case-studies, I had to eliminate some German materials to make a fair comparison. The further selection criteria for the German materials are done on the basis of content quality, length and relevance to the topic. The analysis aims first to see the frequency and thus importance of the topic mentioned and to second, see the manner and attitude in which the relevant topic is portrayed by the state leaders. From this analysis, I hope to confirm the perceived significance of economic interest comparative to ideology or values and evaluate their degree of limitation and determination in pursuing the liberal agenda with PRC.

Due to the diverse nature of the European Union and also the fact that each state maintains their individual relation with PRC in addition to the one represented by the EU collectively, it would be out of the scope for this research to do a full coverage of all 28 member states. For this reason, the overall review of EU's stance against PRC in the first section will aim to compensate for this shortcoming by demonstrating the internal conflicts between the member states within the EU vis-à-vis PRC.

### **The EU's Liberal Agenda**

Article F of the Amsterdam Treaty sums up the core liberal values of the EU: "The [European]Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms..." (European Parliament, 1997, p8). Liberalism is a political theory with origin from the Age of Enlightenment in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, whose definition has been widely debated. It has been generally agreed that it constitutes the principles of equality and fundamental human rights to religion, speech, politics, property etc (Kirchner, 2009, p2). Men argued that the rise of liberalism in Europe was because governments were hoping to respect and compensate the

individual way of life of all Europeans after the hardship of the two world wars (2011, p537).

The right to property also gave way to capitalist neoliberal economics, believing in reaching maximum economic outcomes in trade with minimal intervention from the government through deregulation, privatisation, free trade and free market (Berman, 2009, p562; Friedman, 2005). In other words, the market force based on supply and demand is more efficient than a centrally planned economy for best economic outcome. This concept of market economy is also part of the Washington Consensus that has been advocated to the world by international institutions like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (Rodrik, 2011, p77).

However, complete market economy free from government intervention doesn't exist due to numerous limitations. Cerny argues that the boundary between state and market is very blurred nowadays as states also increasingly become a market actor themselves in a complex intertwined economic structure (1997, p267). Wallerstein claims that a perfect market would contradict capitalism as perfect information would allow buyer to bargain down to the minimum level of profit for the seller (2004). Polanyi says that "even laissez-faire economy was the product of deliberate state action" and the role of government is thus important to maintain the market (Block and Somers, 2014, p106). Furthermore, the governments may have other goals than just reaching maximum economic outcomes, including concerns related to social security, health and safety etc. Therefore, even the EU's model is said to be largely market economy with some blend of government interferences in order to ensure market stability and protect national interest.

Not only has EU upheld the liberal values at home, they have also made effort to project these values into the world because the EU model "based on the principles of democracy, freedom and solidarity... works", as quoted from a former EU executive (Prodi, 2000). This is supported by official statements where the EU legitimised intervention in third countries on the basis of human right (European Commission,

1995, p10) and their foreign policy to curtail relations with “governments engaged in violations of human rights and democracy standards” or even impose sanctions and apply other possible measures if necessary (Kuijper et al., 2013, p712). For this reason, a human right clause is present in all EU cooperation agreements since the 1990s to grant the EU rights to punish the partner in cooperation in case of encroachment on the human rights value (Men, 2011). As for the market economy model, it is a key condition to gain accession to the EU, thus opening up the markets of aspired EU neighbours. Men considers it as a “new interventionism” by the EU to instate these liberal values as universal through their global influence and compel third countries to adopt their values if they wish to improve their ties with the EU (Ibid.).

Liberalism in human rights and trade therefore represents a core component of EU’s identity and it has been legitimised to a great extent to become a more globally accepted value through their past efforts. Nevertheless, EU has been criticised for hypocrisy as a closer examination of EU’s foreign relations would reveal contradiction to these EU values. For example, EU has long held amicable relations with authoritarian governments such as Tunisia, Egypt before the Arab Spring in the name of combating terrorism (Gresh, 2016). In the face of rising nationalism in the EU, a recent proposal to offer financial assistance to some African states including the repressive dictatorships in Sudan and Eritrea in hopes of stemming the migration flow also drew heavy criticism. It goes against the 1951 Refugee Convention signed in Geneva and the EU’s claim to safeguard human rights when EU makes conscious effort to keep the refugees in oppressive states with poor human rights, especially if the dictators will benefit financially from this cooperation with EU (Alfred, 2016). The rapid development of Chinese exports is also largely due to developed countries like EU turning a blind eye to underpaid labours working in appalling conditions in PRC, which only helped firms from developed countries improve their profit margin at the expense of the Chinese labours (Kernaghan , 2009).

From this perspective, it can be said that EU’s foreign relations is increasingly



characterised by pragmatism over ideology. Since EU was confronted by economic stagnation, the rise of nationalism due to the financial crisis in 2008, this arguably becomes even more evident in its foreign policy and especially in its approach for PRC in order to favour its economic interest. In brief, the political and economic crisis at home is affecting its ability to keep pursuing its liberal agenda.

### **Globalisation and Transformation of the State**

To see how the EU ended up in the current crisis, it must be traced back to how their economy became increasingly integrated in the so-called globalisation phenomenon. The concept of globalisation is not easily defined as it encompasses a wide range of areas and there is a large debate about this concept. McGrew defined globalisation as a multidimensional process of intensifying worldwide integration (2007, p280). In the economic field, the general perception of globalisation is facilitated by growing market liberalisation and neoliberal economics principles, leading to a greater extent of interconnectedness between states and the gradual emergence of a singular operative system for the world economy (Ibid.). Reducing cost of transportation, communication due to technology advancement and the spread of neoliberal ideology have largely facilitated globalisation (Frankel, 2000, p2; Rodrik, 2011, p25). This also largely transformed the global political landscape.

National politics are no longer determined solely by the domestic environment but influenced largely by external elements from multilayered institutional settings beyond the sovereignty of the state (Cerny, 1997, p253). Looking at global trade alone, export has taken a significantly higher proportion of the world output than before, which highlights the heightened integration between states today (McGrew, 2007, p283). The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the growing influence of supranational/ international institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and market force, driven by what Friedman calls the “Electronic Herd”, comprised of “faceless stock, bond and currency trader... [and] big multinational corporations” who can move their capitals around the world instantly thanks to modern day technology and more relaxed capital control as a result of neoliberal principles (1999, p90).

Globalisation has therefore imposed an external restraint on the extent of autonomy that a state can dictate its own politics if it wants to be included in the process (Cerny, 1997, p.257; Oksenberg & Economy, 1999, p20). Rodrik points out that it ultimately clashes with democracy since states' policies have to prioritise the commercial and financial interests of the electronic herds over the social objectives for their people (2011, p206). Streeck agrees in claiming that heavily indebted countries like Greece is basically stripped of democracy in order to appeal to the market force for investment at the expense of social welfare for the nation (2011, p26). In other words, national interests and democracy come into conflict with the deeper integration with the global standards and therefore the state must effectively accept the global rules over domestic needs (Rodrik, p83; Buruael, 2013, p4).

This leads us to Friedman's concept of "Golden Straitjacket" that a state must wear in the age of globalisation dominated by neoliberal principles (1999, p87). This implies a greater extent of marketisation of national economy to convert the state into the ideal environment for investments but at the same time accept greater extent of external constraints on the available domestic policy choices. Friedman believes that "the tighter you wear it, the more gold it produces" and the quicker your economy grows (Ibid.). In Rodrik's opinion, Friedman is right in pointing out the underlying conflict between hyperglobalisation and domestic politics but its ability to generate wealth is overestimated as proven by the Argentinean crisis in the late 1990s, which only made the country even more vulnerable to external economic shocks (2011, p189).

Rodrik went on to propose the political trilemma model as shown in figure 1. Other than the "Golden Straitjacket" approach, the third component of domestic policy is included to visualise the incompatibility between the two and what the other two options are if a state wishes to keep the democratic policy component. "Global federalism" implicates a declining role of nation state to give place to a global democracy system, which the author views with scepticism as it seems too idealistic and not foreseeable in the current global climate. The "Bretton Woods compromise" is a step back from hyperglobalisation where nation states impose a more protectionist

approach, against the neoliberal principles, to give way for a more moderate globalisation and more space for the government to meet domestic needs rather than render itself entirely to the global rules (Ibid., p69; Burauel, 2013, p4).

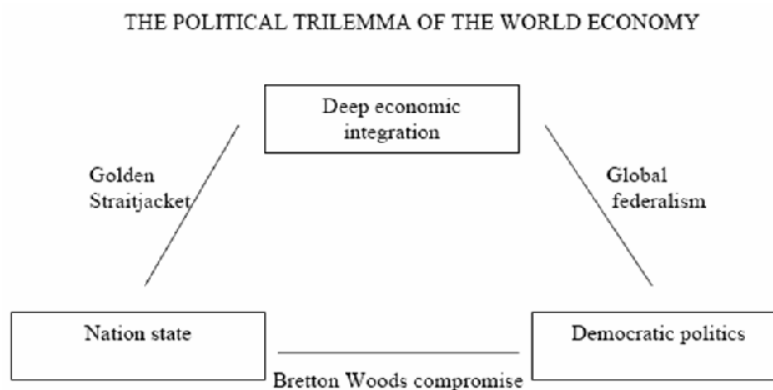


Figure 1 The political Trilemma of the World Economy. Pick two, any two (Rodrik, 2011, p201)

From the perspective of this model, countries who pursue neoliberal principles must necessarily give up democratic politics to an extent since the market economy aims to serve mainly the interest of businesses and multinational corporations instead of the domestic needs of the people. The cause for the rise of nationalism and xenophobia nowadays in Europe has been partly blamed on the inability of countries in golden straitjackets to protect and stand for the interest of their nation (Cerny, 1997, p255; Berman 2009, p573). The traditional mainstream parties can't protect the interest of the people against the deterioration of social mobility, equality, welfare anymore. Even though the underlying problem is an unregulated global marketisation that allows rapid wealth accumulation for the plutocrats, the people turn to xenophobic radical right parties in hopes for a solution. Dubbed 'descent into barbarism', this ultimately also undermines liberal values in the heart of the European societies with a surging discrimination and racism (Gonzalez-Vicente and Carroll, 2017). Apart from this internal illiberal development as the people's welfare reduces in the golden straitjacket, I argue that a "Golden Straitjacket" strapped EU also loses the capacity to pursue their liberal values externally because global rules now see the increasing omnipresence of PRC's economic power, which directly challenges EU's liberal agenda around the world (see below).

### **Competition State restrained by Electronic Herd?**

Another phenomenon in the age of globalisation was the transformation of traditionally welfare states into competition states (Cerny, 1997). While the golden straitjacket theory highlights the gradual disappearance of domestic democracy, the competition state theory explains the reason in greater depth. In brief, states are exposed to intense international competition in the era of globalisation and they face additional pressure to appeal to the market force; not just for fiscal stability but also prospective growth as demand for mass-produced goods is gradually saturated (Genshel and Seelkopf, 2015, p241; Streeck, 2011, p25). The increased mobility of capital obliges states to consider the policies of other competing states when adopting their taxation rate and wages to attract foreign businesses and investments (Friedman, 1999, p89).

The competition for mobile capital and economic growth therefore take the form of further privatisation of public services, implementation of business friendly policies such as low corporate tax rate, commoditisation of labour and marketisation of social relations with generally less welfare for the society, encroaching national democracy (Rodrik, 2011, p190; Genshel and Seelkopf, 2015, p238). Genshel and Seelkopf provided evidence of convergence on a lower corporate tax rate around the world and a tendency of shifting the burden onto labour taxation instead because capitals are far more mobile than labour (Ibid.). In the face of the financial crisis, governments were under pressure from the market to avoid another Great Depression and purchase the bad debt from failing banks in the wake of the global financial crisis and subsequently shifting the cost onto the nation through austerity measures. This is another example of states prioritising the domestic financial stability and business environment over the welfare of the citizens as a result of greater extent of marketisation (Ibid.; Streeck, 2011, p23).

While it is debatable whether those measures per se worked in favour of economy as it depends on other variables as well, they were all done in the pursuit of attracting foreign capitals and the electronic herds. In the economic primacy world, economic

power has become political power (Ibid.). According to Goldstein, those who become the core of the global economy attains the status of economic hegemony and the ability to dominate the field of international relations (1988, p281). Electronic herds are influential profit oriented actors who benefit the most from the emergence of competitive states in golden straitjackets (Friedman, 1999, p91). They often see political or human rights issues as a disturbance for their businesses (Cabestan, 2011, p88) and their increased involvement, interaction with the state through lobbying also helped encourage the competitive state and golden straitjacket approach (Cerny, 1997, p270). This is demonstrated by the fact that 20 business leaders of German firms accompanied Merkel's visit to PRC in 2016 (Delfs, 2016).

In short, globalisation under neoliberal principles has led states to pay greater attention to international trade and the electronic herds in order to boost economic growth. At the same time, that undermines their authority and ability to formulate domestic policies for the interests of the national democracy or else they'd face the adverse aftermaths of mass capital flight and downgrades of national bonds or credit rating while being strapped in this straitjacket (Streeck, 2011, p26). This demonstrates only partly the constraints from the market force but the opposing force from PRC also constitutes another obstacle for EU's liberal agenda.

### **The Rise of an Authoritarian Economic Powerhouse**

PRC has made huge progress since former statesman Xiaoping Deng implemented market reforms to open the country to world economy towards late 1970's. The integration to global trade has only accelerated since PRC's accession in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in December 2001. PRC's GDP in USD has more than six folded since 2001 to today and it also has the greatest number of middle-class as of 2015 (Credit Suisse, 2015). The rise of middle-class in PRC made it the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> consumer market as the population has higher purchasing power and higher demands for luxury goods (Wang and Ding, 2016; Sachwald, 2004, p254). A report by the European Parliament describes how PRC is considered as "THE strategic market" and the rise of PRC generated great opportunity for European businesses to boost revenue

(2011, p11). The domestic-driven growth helped insulate PRC from the world financial crisis as domestic aggregate demand compensated for the decline of foreign demands (Chin and Thakur, 2010). With the highest investment rate of any other G20 countries, it significantly helped the Chinese firms in technology acquisition, which enables industries in PRC to increase their international competitiveness and move their exports up the value chain (Guo, 2016; Fox and Godement, 2009, p11).

PRC has become a global power with significant economic might and also a growing tendency to provide stability and public goods to the global economy. This has been demonstrated in the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and the European sovereign debt crisis in 2010 when PRC contributed significantly to alleviate the situation through continuous trade and investment. The One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative with the aim of improving the infrastructure connection between PRC and Europe through the Eurasia continent and Africa is also supposed to have the objective of bring mutual benefits to both PRC and participating countries just like the win-win rhetoric often emphasised by President Jinping Xi (2016). Furthermore, 2015 and 2016 also saw the establishment of two multilateral development banks, the New Development Banks (NDB) involving the other BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), in both of which PRC has significant stake and financial contribution.

However, some scholars would highlight the underlying pragmatism in these developments. According to Leverett and Wu, the OBOR project is part of PRC's foreign policy of becoming more proactive and forward-looking, known as *fenfayouwei* (奮發有為), in order to promote greater regional influence and positive bilateral relations of PRC with the surrounding countries (2016, p130). It helps boost the status of PRC's currency as well through the Chinese financed infrastructural projects and ultimately expand trade with the affluent EU through a well developed freight route (Ibid.; Godement, 2015, p2). The development projects will also help gather goodwill from benefitting developing countries, leading to a potential

balancing against the current global system dominated by the developed countries (Ibid., p7). As for the AIIB, it's said to be part of PRC's shadow foreign policy to forge an alternative parallel structure to the current order (Huotari et al., 2015, p34). The transatlantic alliance of EU and US already showed signs of conflict as Germany, France and the UK joined the AIIB despite opposition and criticism from US that AIIB does not have the sufficient standards in terms of governance and in environmental regards (Browne, 2015). Neither AIIB nor NDB promote liberal values like the World Bank does (Godement, Parello-Plesner and Richard, 2011, p15). Their establishment and participation by liberal states like Germany, France signify an increasingly less liberal oriented global order led by PRC and a gradually more accommodating approach by the supposedly liberal EU countries towards PRC for economic interest.

These developments highlighted how the authoritarian state has gained much leverage in the world of globalised economy and also expanded their influence as PRC developed rapidly through becoming the world's factory. A more prosperous PRC now becomes a significant part of the electronic herds with increasing outwards FDI to the world, foreign countries also face pressure to comply with PRC's political expectation in order to maintain access to the strategic market. This is exemplified by pressure from Beijing for international community to not meet with political dissidents of the CPC. The meeting between former UK Prime Minister David Cameron and the spiritual leader of Tibet, Dalai Lama, in 2012 was said to have led to a loss of billions in Chinese investment for the UK and a study also supports this claim by stating an average decrease of 8.1% in exports to China in the two following years as a result (Fuchs and Klann, 2010). Cameron ultimately gave in to the pressure from Beijing in the end to agree not to meet the spiritual leader again in 2015 to resolve the tension.

Furthermore, the case of AIIB is another example of how liberal values is undermined as the EU countries also take a more pragmatic approach to accommodate PRC even though the EU external policy law requires them to curtail relations with countries

who don't respect human rights. The new economic power grants PRC much political capital to be more autonomous from political pressure from EU and more leverage to pursue own agenda. Ikenberry characterises PRC as a "part-time spoiler" instead of a full-scale revisionist, whose objective is not to challenge the global order directly, but rather slowly disrupt the liberal globalisation over time to insert their own ideational influence as their economic power grows (2014). This leads us to the question whether the 'straitjacket' of globalisation is increasingly designed by a rising authoritarian PRC?

### **The challenges for EU in the tug of war with PRC**

To answer the question, we should first analyse the historical power relationship between the two global actors. According to Nye, "power is one's ability to affect the behaviour of others to get what one wants"(2009). In light of this view, EU's power vis-à-vis PRC has been rather limited. EU had hoped that the strategy of integrating PRC into the liberal world order, then dominated by developed liberal countries, would have forced PRC to modernise and adopt more liberal values in its natural course, as implicated by the golden straitjacket theory, and maintain the liberal unipolarity (Maher, 2016, p3; Kappel, 2011, p5). Friedman predicted that PRC either "won't get richer or it won't be as authoritarian" once it is entirely integrated into global economy (1999, p337). With these beliefs, the liberal powers particularly EU have largely favoured PRC's involvement in world trade and took a less confrontational approach with PRC after heavy negotiations for PRC's reform as entry conditions into the WTO (Oksenberg and Economy, 1999, p21; European Parliament, 2011, p26). However, this only led to the opposite outcome contrary to the prediction. PRC perceived the accession to WTO in 2001 as the end of the reforms and not the beginning of its democratisation as PRC was under no further political or economical pressure from the liberal hegemonic power to undertake further reforms thereafter (Fox and Godement, 2009, p11).

Since the signing of the Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership agreement in 2003, EU's policy in engaging PRC has been characterised as 'unconditional', in the belief



that deeper integration of PRC would be sufficient to liberalise the government (Cabestan, 2011, p82; Fox and Godement, 2009, p1). It's a strategy that overlooks PRC's potential strength and ambition by offering much and demanding for little in return (Ibid.). Despite EU's attempts to review the strategy when PRC's liberal reforms lacked progress, conflict of interest amongst member states impeded EU to take a more unified and substantial approach in this matter (Cabestan, 2011,p82). Economic interest therefore took precedence over liberal ideologies in the 2000's (Maher, 2016, p6), and even France under Chirac's administration and Germany under Schröder were categorised as 'Accommodating Mercantilist' in Fox's report, taking a more accommodating stance vis-à-vis PRC to favour trade (see below) (2009). The strategy has therefore largely helped the rise of an authoritarian PRC into becoming a greater influence on the existing global order.

Since the financial crisis in 2008 that affected much of Europe, PRC finds itself in a better bargaining position than before (Ibid.). In the words of a Chinese scholar, PRC no longer "fears" EU because it's politically divided and EU now needs China more than the other way round (Maher, 2016, p17). The view is agreed by other occidental academics that EU is not perceived as a strategic geopolitical competitor by PRC (unlike USA) but rather as an economic giant with advanced technologies, from which PRC can greatly benefit from for the development of their national economy and industry (Wacker, 2015, p3; p5; Fox and Godement, 2009, p33; Kundnani and Parello-Plesner, 2012, p7; Schnellbach and Man, 2015, p6).

Indeed PRC has secured substantial technology transfer from EU through their policy. For example, European GSM producers must renounce their patent rights in PRC in order to enter the market (Ibid.). PRC 'helped' and invested in many troubled cash-strapped EU firms impacted by the financial crisis, through which PRC also acquired their technology (Ibid., Godement, Parello-Plesner and Richard, 2011, p1). Yet, as pointed out by the same scholars and Schnellbach and Man, the reverse process has been made difficult by PRC as the bureaucratic obstacles, lack of transparency and protectionism are few of the major problems EU firms face in order

to enter the PRC market (2015, p5). While PRC can indeed implement protectionist policies to protect strategic sectors according to the WTO terms, the definition for “strategic sectors” is unclear and it can be extended to any industry including kitchenware (Fox and Godement, 2009, p46). It’s for this reason that Godement, Parelo-Plesner and Richard called some EU member states ‘Frustrated Market-Opener’ since the EU market is highly transparent for external investment but this is not reciprocated by PRC, which reduces only investment opportunities for the EU in the bilateral relationship (see below) (2011).

As Cabestan stated, the rise of PRC per se is not the problem but rather the emergence of an illiberal CPC that doesn’t fully assimilate in the existing global order influenced by EU’s liberalism (2011). Previous examples demonstrated the limited degree of free market in PRC, not to mention that there are still a large portion of state-owned enterprise and state subsidise is a common practise to help them compete in the global market, going against the neoliberal principals of minimal state interventionism (Fox and Godement, 2009, p20; Godement, Parelo-Plesner and Richard, 2011). PRC’s economy only accepted limited marketisation deemed beneficial to the country but generally still far from a market economy to the same degree as the EU.

In addition, EU and PRC have different definition for the term human rights. The Western view of human rights that dominates the EU has always been seen negatively by the CPC because it leads to capitalism, democracy, which undermines the legitimacy of communism and its national sovereignty (Majtenyi et al., 2016, p70; Men, 2011). However, human rights for PRC refer more to the social and cultural rights of the citizens, especially those of the disadvantaged (Kinzelbach, 2015, p22). Also owing to its history that a long period of authoritarianism prevailed in China, Men argues that people have adapted to it and the culture of collective duties in contrast to individual ambition. Foreign invasions and colonisation of Chinese territories in the past also add to the cause of higher perceived importance of maintaining absolute authority over their sovereignty in PRC even at the cost of human rights, which is in conflict to the liberal value in EU where protection of

human rights take priority over sovereignty (2011.).

As a result, the CPC gains legitimacy by bringing stability and cohesion to the society through economic growth and right to subsistence even if it must deprive its citizens of some human rights like freedom of expression (Men, 2011, p544) This gave rise to a predominantly economic primacy government in PRC since the beginning in order to achieve legitimacy as well as to catch up to other developed economies.

### **Financial Crisis: A Divided EU with Internal Competition**

Since the financial crisis, the unity and economy of the EU have been put to the test. The national debt of countries like Greece, Portugal reached alarmingly high level that required bailouts to prevent them from defaulting on their debt and destabilising the Eurozone. Some scholars have suggested a gloomy outlook ahead for the EU. Fergusons states that a rising level of debt could signal the decline of a nation (2010). According to Maher, the EU is losing the will for strategic ambition in the world as they are too occupied by internal affairs (2016, p4), a view also shared by others that incoherent and uncoordinated foreign policies amongst themselves weaken their collective capacity to solve global problems and adapt to the changing global political landscape (Kappel, 2011; Wacker, 2015; Cao, 2014, p57). A sluggish economic growth only further drives disunity within EU. Each member state scrambles to stimulate their economy in their own way as there is a general lack of confidence that EU could act effectively to protect their individual national interests (Fox and Godement, 2009, p30).

In the face of a rapidly growing economy from the authoritarian state of PRC, it has only led to further division within the EU due to conflict of interest. The legitimacy of the EU is undermined as EU is unable to represent the collective interest in negotiation with PRC. “Brussels is losing importance, we must go back to the capitals, who make the decisions, speak to member states, even on trade” said by a Chinese analyst in Fox and Godement’s report (2009, p.33). Each member state still maintains and values the bilateral relation with PRC more than the EU-China relations for their

individual national interest, a situation also preferred by PRC to avoid dealing with the combined weight of EU as an economic giant (Maher, 2016, p18;Wacker, 2015, p7; Fox and Godement , 2009, p37).

Given the varied economic performance and global status of EU's member state, it's natural to expect great differences in their attitude towards PRC. Based on their attitude, Fox and Godement have divided the 27 EU member states into four categories of conflicting interest (before Croatia's accession in 2013), of which the Assertive Industrialists and the Accommodating Mercantilists are the most conflicting. The former supports tougher measures against PRC for political and economic issues, while the latter is compared to proxies of PRC within EU, favouring trade and friendly ties (2009). Godement, Parello-Plesner and Richard built on the report to come up with two new categories: Frustrated Market-openers who want to pressure PRC for market access reciprocity; Cash-strapped Deal-seekers who are the heavily indebted nations in urgent need for Chinese investment but less concern about market reciprocity as their industries can't compete in the PRC market anyway (2011, p7).

These categories highlight disunity in EU. Fox and Godement argue that the internal competitiveness and division were fuelled intentionally by PRC's carrot-and-stick strategy to foster China-friendly policies by member states in exchange for economic benefits (2009, p35). Godement, Parello-Plesner and Richard agree also in that PRC encourages "race to the bottom" within EU, "play off member against each other and against their own collective interests" so they have less leverage to drive a better bargain against PRC (2011, p1). This is shown by the substantial growth of trade partnership between PRC and the Central and East Europe countries (CEE) whose economies were previously heavily reliant on Western Europe, their new trade partnership with PRC granted them a new found independence in EU against the economically stronger member states (Ibid.; Stanzel et al., 2016).

For instance, when the former Premier of PRC, Wen Jiabao, visited Budapest to announce a line of credit worth 1 billion euro for Hungary, the Hungarian Prime

Minister, Viktor Orban, banned a pro-Tibetan demonstration, made no mention of human rights and also adopted a clearly more PRC friendly approach compared to 2000 (Ibid.; Godement, Parello-Plesner and Richard, 2011, p9). The major cause for this change of attitude can be traced back to a post-crisis weakened EU economy that needs capitals from an economically stronger PRC.

Appeasement Lobby, those who believe that a more critical stance on PRC's human rights is meaningless for national interest, is arguably expanding (Cabestan, 2011, 87). Though it often consists mostly of "Electronic Herds", we may find state leaders also increasingly sharing this view as economic stagnation continues in EU. Such is the case that I hope to investigate here. As EU member states each seeks to stimulate economic growth in this economic primacy world, to what extent are human right concerns taking less priority in the agenda as EU has diminishing leverage and global influence in the negotiation with the authoritarian PRC?

### **EU-PRC Human Rights Dialogue**

Initiated in 1995, the Human Rights Dialogue between EU and PRC had been taking place biannually behind closed doors as a means for officials to facilitate exchanges of opinions on human rights issues. This was until PRC reduced it to an annual event from 2010 onwards, reflecting a lessened significance of the diplomacy for the CPC (Schnellbach and Man, 2015, p17; Kinzelbach, 2015, p187). The quiet diplomacy reveals minimum details of the process of the dialogue, it was only in 2014 when the first press conference was held to allow for questions from the media and so its achievement remain largely unknown and immeasurable (Majtenyi et al., 2016, p8).

Despite EU's adoption of a landmark human rights package in 2012 to reaffirm the member states' commitment to human rights internally and externally, little changes in their PRC human rights engagement policy can be seen and much doubt over the effectiveness of the dialogue has also been raised within the EU (McMillan-Scott, 2013). Fox and Godement claim that PRC is pragmatic and skilful in accepting the dialogue and turning it "into inconclusive talking shops", a view shared by other

scholars, as it prevents EU from making public criticism against their domestic affairs and thus maintaining their international image (2009, p8; Cabestan, 2011, p83; Men, 2011, p546; Kinzelbach, 2015, p195). The lack of progress of the dialogue over the past years has even led to little expectation from EU officials for it to yield any progress on the human rights matter (Ibid.). Once again, the lack of will for EU to take a unified approach against PRC has been blamed here as PRC is able to be consistent and determined in downplaying an incoherent EU (Ibid., HRW, 2015)

Nowadays, PRC's human rights abuses remain evident, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) is still not ratified after the signing in 1998 and EU is powerless in this situation ( HRW, 2015). Especially in the face of the financial crisis in Europe and a more assertive PRC with growing international weight, EU's leverage in the negotiation is dwindling, to the point where PRC is "no longer willing to be lectured on human rights and democracy because 'times have changed'" as allegedly said by an official from PRC (Chen and Kinzelbach, 2015, p403). In addition, EU itself is also suffering a human rights crisis which damages their legitimacy in preaching this matter to foreign powers; racial discrimination, hate speech, social inequality and poverty as a result of the financial crisis are some persisting problems that threaten liberalism in Europe to date (Majtenyi et al., 2016, p68).

EU's rhetoric against PRC's in terms of human rights is therefore less persuasive and convincing now than ever. Its importance in the bilateral relation also seems to diminish as the words "human rights" has merely been mentioned twice in a small clause of the EU-China Strategic Agenda 2020 in contrast to a much larger section dedicated to a closer trade and cooperation partnership in various aspects and sectors (EEAS). It seems that the EU fears to enter economic decline especially after the financial crisis and thus prioritise economic growth through further integration in the world economy even though it is increasingly dominated by the authoritarian PRC.

## **Sino – French Relations**

As one of the first nations in the world to make an official declaration to protect human rights in 1789, France is known to be a key proponent on this matter and the place where European liberalism first originated. With significant post-colonial influence in Africa, the largest military personnel in Europe and an influential position in the UNSC, G7 and G20, France wields considerable global influence and considers itself a ‘small major power’ with special status in world politics (Cao, 2014, p55; Huotari et al., 2015, p27). This is reflected on their past preference to pursue an independent foreign policy within EU, including that of being the first to establish diplomatic ties with PRC in 1964, facilitating a change of policy in the west concerning the Taiwan Strait territorial dispute (Cabestan, 2006, p327).

Nevertheless, just like the EU, France’s stance on human rights is occasionally contradicting throughout history, especially during the colonial period. France may have played an active role in EU’s arms embargo to PRC after the deadly incident at Tiananmen in 1989 but France was also the first European country to resume diplomatic ties again with Beijing in 1991. Paris even adapted the One-China policy after Beijing retaliated on the bilateral trade when France sold arms to Taiwan following the event, drawing criticism that France succumbed to the pressure of an authoritarian power and turned their back on a new fragile democratic state (Cabestan, 2006, p327 - 333). Since then, both countries have steadily strengthened their diplomatic and trade relation, some say it’s strategic in hopes of forging a more multipolar world order not dominated by the USA and gain more autonomy in its foreign policy (Cao, 2014, p57; Cabestan, 2006, p331).

France as a founding EU member state has been influential in EU’s China policy in the past (Ibid.) but this relation has been complicated in recent years by other externalities and particularly a more powerful Germany. France under Chirac’s administration was behind the further integration of EU, believing that the collective weight can help France achieve its global ambition as well as defend its national interest like on trade (Cao, 2014; Godement 2015). However, some have pointed out

the competitive and also at times conflicting nature in this relationship. For example, as the fourth largest arms exporter of the world, France has been advocating for EU to end the arms embargo with PRC, arguing that PRC has made significant improvements since the Tiananmen incident. It caused a division within the EU as many in EU are not convinced of the argument and remain preoccupied by PRC's ongoing human rights violations (Maher, 2016, p7; Men, 2011; Cabestan, 2006, p330).

Furthermore, France has consistently exported significantly less to PRC than Germany (Cabestan, 2006, p335; Sachwald, 2016, p253). Having benefitted less from the growth of China, the French independent foreign policy is seen to be competing against both the technologically advanced North and the indebted South within EU for export and investment advantages (Ibid.; Godement, 2015; Huotari et al., 2015, p26). Duchatel gave the most notable example. When Sino-German relation was on a temporary brake as the new Merkel administration in Germany took a more critical tone towards the human rights issues in PRC and met with the Dalai Lama in 2007, Sarkozy did not share the same approach and instead signed 20 billion Euros worth of trade deal with Beijing while Germany was out of the picture. This played to the advantage of PRC as they secured technology transfer from France instead when relations with Germany was uncertain (2007).

Sarkozy did also try to challenge PRC on the subject of human rights afterwards in 2008, notably through threats to boycott the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing and meeting the Dalai Lama. However, adverse impacts on the French economic interest became apparent after the CPC retaliated through boycotts of Carrefour in PRC, alleged cancellation of airbus orders and meetings with PRC's trade delegation (Fox and Godement, 2009, p35; Cao, 2014, p55; Fuchs and Klan, 2010). In the end, the official declaration in 2009 to recognise Tibet as part of PRC's territory was what helped Sarkozy mend the diplomatic ties as France received PRC's trade delegation shortly afterwards (Ibid.; Cao, 2014).



According to Huotari et al., this signaled a return to pragmatism for France's China policy, which continued throughout Hollande's administration (2015, p26). Nevertheless, this is not new from France as past events such as the recognition of the One-China policy in the 1990's also suggested similar tendency to win back Beijing's favour. It shows that France in the end often prioritises economic interest over ideational principles and in fact, the new buzzword 'economic diplomacy' is now used by senior officials to describe its foreign policy, seeking out growth wherever it may be even if that's in the authoritarian PRC (Godement, 2015). According to Duchatel, France needs to secure Chinese capitals and trade deals to have the backing from French companies for the government, which is supported by the fact that France is now the largest market in the Eurozone for trade in the Chinese currency (Ibid.; Duchatel, 2007). The financial crisis of 2008 only put France in an even more vulnerable position against PRC with scholars claiming that France has now become a middle power struggling for economic growth (Godement, 2015; Huotari et al., 2015, p27).

### **Discourse Analysis of French president**

The analysis period of 2010-2016 saw the change of presidents from centre-right Nicolas Sarkozy to centre-left François Hollande, though there were no significant changes in their China policy as both the left and right in France see PRC as an important partner (Cabestan, 2006). This is most noticeable as both presidents frequently reminded the audience of the historical tie that both countries share since General de Gaulle as the "pioneer" of the occidental world that first established diplomatic ties with PRC (Sarkozy, 2010b). The Sino-French relation has been described as a 'friendship' that is "old", "profound", "solid" as the introduction or the ending of the speech on many occasions (Sarkozy, 2010d; Hollande, 2013d).

### **PRC's capability**

In terms of PRC's capabilities, it was no surprise that its economic aspect was extensively mentioned with 65.21%, nevertheless its transformative power was mentioned with even higher frequency of 69.56%. Most rhetoric concerning its

economic power is straightforward with frequent reminder of PRC having the second strongest economy in the world with rapid GDP growth rate. In more specific case, Hollande talked of PRC’s monetary power that has substantial capacity as a creditor for the occidental world as well as an increasingly internationalised currency (Hollande, 2014d), or pointing out that PRC’s strong domestic demand that will make its economy more robust than others (Hollande, 2015a).

It serves as an acknowledgement of PRC’s economic strength and in particular, it has been portrayed as “an opportunity of development” for France’s economy that would help stimulate its growth again (Hollande, 2015c). “Europe needs China for growth”, Hollande’s statement paints a TINA (There Is No Alternative) impression on the importance of PRC to reinvigorate the EU’s stagnant economy (2013c). Furthermore, its economic might has always been discussed positively in relation to job creation in France. Chinese investments in France and better innovation, market penetration by French firms in PRC are both essential to improve employment at home vis-à-vis PRC, protectionism is not a viable option for keeping jobs in France (Hollande, 2015b; Hollande, 2013a; Sarkozy, 2011). This rhetoric paves for the economic primacy foreign policy approach that will be discussed later.

Power Category	Number of Text Where Mentioned	Percentage
Transformative	16	69.56%
Economic	15	65.21%
Military	2	8.69%
Ideational	0	0%

Figure 2. Categories of PRC’s capabilities found in French discourses

The transformative category denotes the ability and potential in which PRC can exert global influence on global affairs and development including through its economic power. For example, both Sarkozy and Hollande have mentioned the important role of PRC in stabilising global economy, particularly in the face of the Eurozone crisis (Sarkozy, 2010a; Hollande, 2013b). The Chinese effort to help set global monetary or economic regulations is also welcomed by Hollande, given the increasing significance

of their national currency in world trade (Hollande, 2013a). In fact, both presidents have mentioned that Asia, with the most dynamic economy at the moment, has become the new “centre of the world where the future of the world takes shape” and that France must be present there or it risks becoming a country “with a shining past but not now anymore” (Hollande, 2013d; Sarkozy, 2010c). This rhetoric coincides with the idea of economic primacy and validates the ‘economic diplomacy’ approach mentioned before by the senior French officials.

PRC’s transformative power has also been mentioned in reference to its involvement in tackling key global issues and in international institutions such as G20 and UNSC has been highly valued in the speech of both presidents. “We won’t find solutions without the Chinese contribution”, this TINA rhetoric portrays PRC as indispensable for the development of global affairs (Sarkozy, 2010d). In the run-up to the Paris climate change conference, Hollande also repeatedly stressed the importance of PRC supportive effort in order to reach an agreement, especially because “PRC also has a great influence on [other] developing countries”, suggesting that PRC is an essential channel to get through to the less developed countries (2015a). This has strategic significance for France as PRC is heavily involved in the development and investment in Africa, where France has much post-colonial ties. PRC’s growing activity there could challenge France’s sphere of influence unless Paris could align Beijing’s interest with their own.

Interestingly, despite being the second country with the largest military expenditure after the USA, PRC’s military capability has only been mentioned on rare occasions and even so, only in positive light. Example includes when Hollande praised PRC for their contribution to UN’s peacekeeping force or refer to PRC as a responsible nuclear power keen on maintaining world peace (Hollande, 2014a; Hollande, 2014c). The presidents perhaps want to create a positive image for PRC at home to justify their strengthening partnership as military capability is deemed more threatening. It also confirms the view that the EU and PRC have little geopolitical conflict of interest and thus military capability is irrelevant in this relation. Furthermore, PRC’s ideational

power has also not been mentioned.

### Foreign policy for PRC

In line with the findings on how France depicted PRC’s capabilities, cooperation on trade along with global political governance are the most frequently mentioned, with both being mentioned 86.96% of the time. Specifically for economic ties, the Sino-French cooperation has been branded as “a priority of [our] foreign policy” by Sarkozy, portraying it as the single most important trade relationship for France (Sarkozy, 2010a). The benefits of the economic cooperation with PRC for France have been repeatedly mentioned and not once the adverse impacts, notably the large profitable Chinese market that the French firms can gain from and how it will help improve labour market in France. Thus both presidents have urged for the need to improve market presence of French products in PRC by greater investment from France or by greater reciprocity on market access from PRC with 52.17% of mentions. This has been mentioned often in the context of the 26 billion Euros trade deficit vis-à-vis PRC, both presidents mentioned the necessity to strengthen France’s capacity to penetrate the Chinese market instead of resorting to protectionism in order to balance the trade deficit from above.

Nature of Foreign Policy with PRC	Number of Text Where Mentioned	Percentage
Trade/ Economic Cooperation	20	86.96%
- Greater Market Presence in PRC	12	52.17%
- Mutual Benefits	5	21.74%
Political/ Global Governance	20	86.96%
Intellectual Exchange	14	60.87%
Ideational Similarity	7	30.43%
Address Human Rights	2	8.70%

Figure 3. Nature of French foreign policy vis-à-vis PRC

At the same time, Paris recognises that PRC ultimately has the authority in granting access to French companies and thus urges Beijing to pursue greater reciprocity in their trade policy, notably with Sarkozy asking for the rights for French companies to be a major stock holder in PRC in exchange for the recognition of their market

economy status (Sarkozy, 2010c). Hollande refrained from making similar proposal and just wished for Chinese effort to favour the growth of domestic demands and reduce import restriction (2013e).

“I affirm here: All obstacles, all brakes, all the procedures will be removed because we want to attract...capitals [and]...Chinese investments for employment, creation of trade” (Hollande, 2013b). Though Hollande has stressed that only investments that create jobs in France will be fully welcomed without any restrictions, this unilateral declaration reflects a power imbalance vis-à-vis PRC because the Chinese market is still reasonably protected by trade restrictions despite Hollande’s continuous appeal (2015a). The fact that Paris is willing to make such unilateral promise shows its eagerness to attract Chinese capitals, an eagerness that is clearly not shared to the same extent by Beijing and thus maintain its comparatively higher trade barriers against France.

From the perspective of competitive state, it can also be seen as France striving for better attractiveness for Chinese investment relative to other European countries by removing its trade barriers to PRC. Hollande specifically commented on the problem of France’s competitiveness, saying that “we are more expensive in certain sectors than our key competitors. This isn’t acceptable.”(2015b). He went on to praise the successful effort to lower the French labour cost again to “the same level or even lower than our German friends”, implying implicitly the competition against Germany in this area (Ibid.). This rhetoric from Hollande also supports the golden straitjacket theory that democratic policy cannot co-exist with globalisation as France has to compromise the income level and economic welfare of the French nation in order to appeal to the Electronic Herd for capitals, which are the Chinese investors in this case.

The mutual interdependence and benefits such as the ‘win-win’ rhetoric have also been mentioned with 21.74% of the time, “Europe needs China for growth and Europe needs Europe for development of their technology” (Hollande, 2013e), nevertheless, the dependence and benefits could well be unbalanced too just like the

power dynamic in trade restrictions, most likely favouring PRC. The debate on technology transfer throughout the 6 years also reveals similar finding on France's leverage against PRC in the negotiation. Sarkozy notably disagreed with a forced transfer of technology back in 2010 from French companies to PRC, contrary to Hollande who often talks of technological cooperation instead and also welcomed technology transfer from PRC on digital technology to France in 2015 (2015b). Not only did this reveal a rapid technological progress from PRC but also an indication of changing attitude from France from minor disagreement to full cooperation as PRC becomes increasingly advanced.

Apart from the economic cooperation, other aspects have also been commented on. The strategic partnership on global governance has been mentioned extensively, notably on how both countries have permanent seats at the UNSC and how a joint effort could from these two big nations can ensure better financial stability, peace and even to "conquer the world" together (Ibid). "We do not only have economic ambitions, we also want to increase the [intellectual] exchange between our two companies", referring to exchange of culture and research (2014b). Intellectual exchange also has 60.87% of mentions, specifically on the exchange of students between the two countries, language learning and scientific research in nuclear energy and aviation etc. The visa procedure for Chinese tourists to France has been shortened to just 48 hours. However, they are both arguably done out of economic interest to further improve the future business exchange as well as boosting revenue generated from tourism.

In line with the prediction, the necessity to address human rights and liberal values in PRC has hardly been mentioned with just 8.70% of the time. Hollande only mentioned it on his first visit to Beijing and he basically shared Sarkozy's approach thereafter in merely stating that they have different values despite their strong ties. However, there were no more mentions thereafter, reflecting perhaps the greater need of France to secure Chinese investments and capitals. Surprisingly, Hollande also increasingly talked of their ideational bond over the principles of independence and

sovereignty (2014d), perhaps in hopes of gaining Chinese support on the issue of Ukraine but in doing so, also justified the Chinese authority to undertake any possibly totalitarian action within their own territory regarding their political dissidents or the sensitive issue of Tibet for example. By remaining silent on human rights concerns, France is seen as compromising its liberal values in exchange for Beijing's favour.

### **Sino-German Relations**

Even before the establishment of diplomatic ties and the reunification of the country, West Germany was already the largest trade partner of PRC in 1972 (Kundnani and Parello-Plesner, 2012, p1). This is because Germany has consistently been one of the top exporters of the world. With the strongest economy in EU, it has earned the reputation as Europe's economic powerhouse (Wacker, 2015). In fact, many scholars indicated Berlin's economic reliance on foreign demand on statistics; the export sector employs one third of the German workforce, is responsible for around 50% of its total GDP and also account for 50% of all EU export to PRC (Ibid; Schnellbach and Man, 2015, p2; Kundnani, 2015). The similarity of the German and Chinese growth model has led many to call Germany 'the little China' because both economies rely on export-led growth with an undervalued currency and weak wage growth to favour trade surplus (Ibid.; Stark, 2010, p528).

For this reason, economic interest has dominated the bilateral relations especially since Schroeder's chancellery. Kundnani and Parello-Plesner talked of the costly German reunification as a reason to prioritise economic goals instead of political objectives (2012). In fact, the overwhelming economic focus of Schroeder's foreign policy led some to call it the checkbook diplomacy (Scheckbuchdiplomatie), achieving goals through economic means (Schnellbach and Man, 2015, p2). In particular, Schroeder's China policy has been described as 'Change through Trade' (Wandel durch Handel) and 'Change through Rapprochement' (Wandel durch Annaeherung), the idea to facilitate societal and political change in PRC through stronger trade and inclusion into the community of responsibility (Verantwortungsgemeinschaft) (Ibid; Kundnani and Parello-Plesner, 2012; Huotari,

2015, p31). Together with a China friendly Chirac in France, this has arguably influenced EU's overall China policy to be, which has being described earlier in this paper as, 'unconditional', offering much and asking for little in return.

When Merkel became Chancellor in 2005, she was critical of Schroeder's accommodating approach and her China policy was considered more value-based with a heavier focus on human rights (Heiduk, 2014, p118; Duchatel, 2007; Schnellbach and Man, 2015, p8). Notable examples include the meeting with the Dalai Lama in 2007, the boycott of the Beijing Olympic Games over the incident in Tibet in 2008 and also a firmer approach in the arms embargo debate (Ibid.; Cabestan, 2006). A publication from her party CDU stressed the importance to maintain good trade partnership with Asia without any protectionism but at the same time encourage stronger social justice and human rights values there in order to have an Asia that shares the German/ European interest in the future (CDU, 2007). The strong moral conviction is perhaps due to her upbringing in the totalitarian East Germany and the fact that his father is a pastor (Schnellbach and Man, 2015; Kundnani and Parello-Plesner, 2012). Nevertheless, CDU still perceives PRC as an important trade partner for Germany, calling Asia the "most dynamic region" and an "opportunity" for Germany and Europe (2007), and Merkel also did not visit PRC any less than Schroeder did (Schnellbach and Man, 2015).

Nonetheless, Merkel's more critical approach for PRC was challenged by the financial crisis in 2008, which brought economic growth and financial stability back as the priority for her government. While demands from Europe and USA have fallen due to the crisis, PRC emerged to be a stable demand for German goods, thus bringing a power shift directly to the Sino-German relation when Berlin became more dependent on Chinese capitals and investments (Ibid.; Kundnani and Parello-Plesner, 2012). In fact, PRC is said to be the principle reason that Germany made a quick recovery following the financial crisis in 2008, thus Merkel faced pressure from industrial lobbyist to maintain good ties with PRC and return to a more accommodating approach. Since 2011, Germany and PRC have been holding annual joint cabinet



meeting under Berlin's initiative, the first meeting of this kind agreed by PRC, demonstrating the significance each side attach to this bilateral relation (Ibid.; Kundnani, 2015; Wacker, 2015).

Merkel's effort has paid off as PRC officially became the most important trading partner of Germany in 2016, overtaking France and the USA. Yet, the increasing dependence on PRC for economic growth certainly comes with consequences for Germany. Berlin is now more vulnerable to an economic slowdown in PRC. It has reduced leverage in promoting human rights (Heiduk, 2014, p120) and also threatened by potential technology drainage whereby involuntary technology transfer enables PRC to gradually catch-up technologically and emerge as a competition in the technological sector (Huotari, 2015, p33; Kundnani and Parello-Plesner, 2012). For example, the German firm Q-Cells was once the largest manufacturer of solar cells but it ultimately collapsed due to Chinese competition (Ibid.).

Furthermore, the increasing competitions from PRC often become also a cause for conflict between Germany and the EU. Nowadays, Berlin is already said to be increasingly replacing Brussels as the partner for trade dialogue in the EU due to the strong economic power and its influence within the EU. The first trip made by the Chinese Prime minister in 2012, Li Keqiang, only visited Berlin and even a Chinese official has said "If you want something done in Brussels, you go to Berlin" (Ibid.; Kundnani, 2015; Pop, 2013). When EU tried to take anti-dumping measures to protect European firms against Chinese solar panel competition, it was met with Berlin's strong opposition on ground of not wanting to start a trade-war with PRC. Though it was widely seen as a move that weakened EU's position vis-à-vis PRC, it also raised the question on Germany's commitment to the Western alliance (Ibid.; Wacke, 2014; Kundnani, 2015; Schnellbach and Man, 2015). Skeptical scholars talk of it as Beijing's strategic goal to forge a more economically powerful but more dependent Germany on Chinese market so that Germany can "upload" its China friendly policy to EU level (Ibid.; Kundnani and Parello-Plesner, 2012).

### Discourse Analysis of the German Chancellor

The Sino-German relation celebrated their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary during the analysed period. While the length of the diplomatic relation was not used extensively as a sign of strength of the bilateral tie like France did, Merkel did express on numerous occasions, how impressive and unexpected it is for the two countries to have such close working relationship nowadays, with “70 Forums and Dialog Formats” where they can openly discuss any problems, indicating the close and important ties they share (2014b; 2016e). Though at times with a somewhat more critical tone than France (see below), Merkel has generally kept a positive discourse with PRC.

### PRC Capabilities

Akin to France, mentions of PRC’s economic and transformative powers are most common by Merkel, each with 52.17% and 56.52% of mentions respectively. She described the country’s development as ‘dynamic’ and also how important PRC is as Germany and EU’s major trading partner (2011). At the same time, its transformative power is associated with its growing economic power. Merkel once said, ‘it is a logical consequence for us that China becomes more globally constructive with its rising economic strength’ (2016b), welcoming its increased global responsibility. In general, Merkel has also praised PRC for its contribution to the peacekeeping and development of Africa as well as the cooperation in helping to achieve the Paris Climate deal, sharing the TINA belief of France that “not a single global problem can be solved without China and its involvement anymore” (2014b). Merkel has equally thanked Beijing for being a “reliable partner” during the difficult time of the Euro crisis, claiming that the Eurozone would have a different destiny if it weren’t for the Chinese support (2015a).

Power Category	Number of Text Where Mentioned	Percentage
Transformative	13	56.52%
Economic	12	52.17%
Military	0	0%
Ideational	0	0%

Figure 4. Categories of PRC’s capabilities found in German discourses

Different to the French discourse, Merkel is notably more specific and verbal in naming global issues where she expects Beijing to exert a greater diplomatic influence. Apart from the issue of Iran's nuclear problem that Paris has also commented on, she also expressed hope to have the Chinese contribution in solving the tension of the Korean Peninsula and the insurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan (2014a). Unlike France who has simply talked of their alignment with Beijing's principle of territorial integrity as an ideational bond in the official speeches, Merkel used the principle specifically to voice hopes to gain Chinese support for Ukraine's sovereignty.

Specifically, this was mentioned in one of her considerably more critical speech as she addressed a German think tank in Beijing and not accompanied by a Chinese official, in which she even questioned the nature of President Xi's visit at Maldives, it was a proof of her more vocal nature in expressing her own thoughts publicly. In the same speech, she also admitted that PRC is more strategic than the EU with better ability to think ahead of their interest, indicating the potential of the Chinese transformative power on shaping the world to come (2015a). Nonetheless, perhaps for similar reasons to France, the Chinese military capability has not been mentioned except in the context of their contribution to UN peacekeeping missions. Ideational power also scored zero mentions

### Foreign policy for PRC

In line with the findings for France, economic cooperation and global political governance are most widely mentioned in Merkel's public communication, both with 82.61%. The economic cooperation between Germany and PRC has been consistently hailed as "of utmost importance" or with other similar wordings (2010). Just as Hollande did, Merkel spoke of many opportunities to further broaden the economic exchange, notably through joint investments to enter economies of third states, urbanisation in PRC, Electro-mobility and membership at the AIIB etc.(2016d; 2014b; 2015b). This topic has always been spoken of positively, "Of course I have trust in China's economic development", and Merkel often condemned protectionist measures

(Ibid). Even in the case of the anti-dumping dispute between EU and PRC, Merkel has insisted that further dialogues will suffice to solve the issue and never resort to trade war (2012b).

In particular, she consistently reaffirmed the openness of German market to welcome Chinese investment and at the same time expressed wish for a greater reciprocity from the Chinese side, with 39.13% mentions. “Equality of treatment”, “fair competition” and “freer access” are the keywords used to achieve better conditions for German companies in PRC (2011). The subject of legal certainty in relation to patent, property rights and data protection has also been mentioned in connection to the reciprocity topic, thus indicating that Germany is also in an unfavourable situation just like France on trade vis-à-vis PRC, with fewer rights, less leverage for any negotiation and hopes to open the Chinese market(2016b). Even though German investments face more restrictions in PRC than vice-versa, Merkel spoke of mutual benefits in 34.78% of the time nonetheless, namely using the ‘win-win’ rhetoric, to encourage confidence and further investment from both sides.

Nature of Foreign Policy with PRC	Number of Text Where Mentioned	Percentage
Trade/ Economic Cooperation	19	82.61%
- Greater Market Presence in PRC	9	39.13%
- Mutual Benefits	8	34.78%
Political/ Global Governance	19	82.61%
Intellectual Exchange	15	65.21%
Ideational Similarity	1	4.34%
Address Human Rights	13	56.52%

Figure 5. Nature of German foreign policy vis-à-vis PRC

Merkel attributes the mutual success of the two countries in trade as well as global governance on the increasing dialogue and the exchange of opinion taking place between them, “the more mutual trust grows in our relationship, the more transparent things are, the more equal opportunities German firms will have in PRC...” (2016d). This increased dialogue also led to the establishment of a strong strategic partnership on global level, in areas such as the international financial system; global security and

reconstruction in conflicted countries; environmental protection and also cyber security.

Outside of the governmental level, cultural and intellectual exchange between citizens has also been widely promoted in her speech just like the French presidents did, with 65.21% mentions and examples such as the Chinese Culture Year and growing exchange of students to improve mutual understanding between the two nations. In addition, Merkel also praised Chinese firms for “having developed impressive technological competence in many areas and thus making them desirable partners for German firms in R&D” (2011). That serves as an acknowledgement of PRC’s increasing technological ability to compete internationally, which is portrayed very positively for German economy.

Until now, we see an overall very positive image of the partnership with PRC through Merkel’s discourse and contrary to France, she was able to maintain her consistency in speaking out about human rights. Much of the 56.52% mentions of human rights in her public communication allude to the importance of their annual human rights dialogue where the discussion aims improve human rights in both countries. Without being critical, she found ways to bring up the subject in a more cordial manner while telling the audience that the subject still matters a great deal to her in several occasions, “human rights always play a role in my speeches” (2012a). In this same speech when she spoke of human rights in PRC, she subsequently also showed understanding towards PRC that they “have to handle huge issues to ensure the welfare of the nation” (Ibid). Another example is when she spoke of the need for reforms for a freer expression of opinion, creativity and culture, she referred not only to “a society like the Chinese but also the German [society]” (2014a). The rhetoric of talking of human rights for both countries and the human rights dialogue as an exchange of opinion places significantly less limelight on PRC as the ‘bad guy’, which is certainly more accepted by the CPC.

It is interesting that the human rights discussed are all rather political that can

potentially influence the public opinion, but not much on social matters such as labour conditions, death penalty or rights of minorities such as Tibetans. Throughout this period of analysis, the human rights issues raised are primarily concerning the freedom of the press, information in relation to internet censorship, expression and the operation of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs). In a more unusual speech addressing students of the Tsinghua University, she advocated for democracy and social market economy with careful wordings, claiming that by providing property rights, educational rights and having a pluralist society, it formed the foundation that led to the success of Germany today (2014b). While it can be argued that human rights is such a broad topic that Merkel only targeted few of the main issues, in a skeptical view, she can be considered as strategic in speaking out only on issues that would favour liberalism development in PRC and thus the German stance in the global order but not issues that might raise the labour cost of their imports or sensitive issues that will clearly upset Beijing.

Nonetheless, comparing to her more confrontational approach before the financial crisis, it remains evident that her more cautious approach now to handle the subject is due to the growing leverage that PRC has gained as a powerful economic actor with strategic importance in contrast to a troubled Eurozone with stagnant growth. Merkel's promise to her constituency and her personal conviction may bring her to continue her dialogues on the subject but it remains unclear whether it has any real impact. When asked whether Beijing would take her human rights concerns seriously, Merkel answered in response, "at least we have talked intensively about it" (2016c). She has timelessly stressed the importance of the dialogues but are they ultimately just 'inconclusive talking shops' that Fox claimed them to be?

### **The Future of Liberalism**

Overall, the findings indicate that states leaders also share Streeck's idea that economic power has now become the new political power. The fact that both nature of power and cooperation are most frequently mentioned and also consistently coupled together is the proof. Even if EU is not dependent on PRC for economic growth, an

amicable relationship is still fundamental in pursuing global interest in the global governance area. In the face of stagnant growth and a more accommodating approach from France, Germany alone lacked the leverage to make any real progress on the matter despite the best intention. Even though Merkel did not cease to mention the human rights issues as finding shows, it's hard to see that her soft-line approach can bring changes to the increasingly assertive Beijing.

In retrospect, the findings validates Rodrik's trilemma theory, to the extent that a country like France has to put aside its liberal ideology in their discourse and Germany must also adapt a less critical approach regardless of the public opinion of PRC in the country to facilitate trade with the economic giant. In the perspective of competitive state, both countries can be seen as being in a popularity contest to win Beijing's favour by being the ideal partner that doesn't challenge its authority and its image. It raises the question whether economic prosperity is ultimately the only means to gain autonomy in a globalised democratic world and to spread ideational values. Perhaps just like Merkel said, the EU's mistake was the failure to think strategically for the long-term interest and did not take a more unified approach to enforce a stricter golden straitjacket on PRC when it still had the collective economic and political power leverage to do so. Instead, it welcomed the cheaper Chinese goods produced in poor labour conditions and now it's maybe too late to preach human rights.

In any case, a new global political dynamic has emerged in the new millennium. Marketisation of global economy has brought a strong interdependence between states all thriving for economic growth. Facilitated by advanced technology, power dynamic between states can now change rapidly due to a financial crisis or a change of administration as the constituency's opinion is also more readily influenced through a technological able media. Brexit and the Trump administration in the USA are examples where the nations unexpectedly voted to become more inward-looking. The liberal West is suffering an internal crisis and Merkel has even said to no longer rely on these two longtime allies anymore (McGee and Parker, 2017).

This casts significant doubts on the transatlantic alliance, not to mention the crisis of liberalism happening right now in Europe and USA due to the refugees and islamophobia, undermining the liberal global order that has shaped the global development in the last few decades. The rise of a proactive, forward-looking, illiberal PRC becoming increasingly an economic hegemony is just another catalyst for the change of the global development of ideology, arguably facilitated by the internal conflict of the West if Germany, France, Europe already have to turn to Beijing for economic growth and maybe even for political support on global governance. What was unthinkable few years ago is already reality, with an isolationist USA abandoning free trade and climate pledges while PRC's stance remains aligned with the EU. A progressively stronger alliance between EU and PRC certainly leaves us to question the future development of human rights and liberalism..

Considering the adverse externalities, the foreign policy of EU including Berlin and Paris is arguably more pragmatic than ideational vis-à-vis PRC. It leads to a greater debate whether ideational influence is only possible as an economic hegemony like Europe and USA were before the rise of PRC. Though given the uneven process of the liberalisation around the world, it could also be argued that countries like France has always been somewhat pragmatic and pursued global ideational development only when it favoured its status, national or even personal interest of the presidents. It raises another debate whether the EU is really as liberal as it claimed to be.

So, the future of liberalism remains opaque. While PRC has had remarkable development to become the economic giant today, its credit rating has been downgraded already over concerns of its mounting debt. No one knows when the rise of PRC will stop and what other abrupt changes we could expect from the Trump's administration. Nonetheless, EU should start by tackling the internal crisis if liberalism were to have a chance to survive. The current globalisation will only exacerbate the 'descent to barbarism' in Europe if the wealth inequality continues to widen, at which point, liberalism may crumble itself without the impact of any externalities.



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