CHAPTER 1

Introduction

SCOPE, RATIONALE, AND RELEVANCE OF THE BOOK

This book is about unpacking European Union (EU) policy-making toward the People’s Republic of China (PRC/China). It illuminates how member states, bureaucracies, and institutions shape the EU’s China economic policy. China’s rise and economic comeback story are among the most dramatic developments of the last decades, and present a challenge to the EU both internally and externally. When observing the EU’s China policy, one is often confronted with puzzling observations. They include, among others, the following questions. The EU stands firm against unfair trade practices and uses trade defense instruments (TDIs) to uphold its commitment to open markets and free trade. Why were some EU member states simultaneously sideling the EU by engaging in parallel discussions with China regarding the dumping of Chinese solar panels on the EU market? If an EU industry was aware of unfair trade practices, for instance, by the Chinese side in telecommunication networks, why did the industry not lodge a formal complaint to the European Commission? Moreover, why are the member states that were aware of these practices influential in the decision-making stage but not in the issue identification stage of the policy process? When the European Commission’s Directorate-General (DG) concerned with development issues (DG DEV) was developing a strategy to deal with China’s rise in
Africa, why was there internal resistance from the Commission’s former DG involving external relations (DG RELEX)? Furthermore, why have no concrete EU-China-Africa trilateral development projects seen the light since the launch of the initiative in 2008? This book offers insights that contribute to a better understanding of these puzzles.

Although the number of academic publications on EU–China relations is booming, there is a specific and general inability of contemporary literature to explain the above’s puzzles. Academic work on EU foreign policy (EUFP) toward China is heavily policy-driven, with very few works using theory. This indicates a lacuna in the current literature and current academic approaches regarding EU foreign policy-making vis-à-vis China because even fewer academic works seek to test theoretical approaches thoroughly (Bersick 2015). However, multiple international relations (IR) theories have the potential to illuminate EUFP vis-à-vis China and to explain (part of) these puzzles, including the bureaucratic politics model (BPM), neorealism, and institutionalism. The BPM emphasizes internal bargaining within an entity; neorealism stresses that state interests dominate; institutionalism highlights the importance of competences, and EU law and procedures, which is of particular importance in an EU context with different procedures per issue area. These theories assume universal applicability, which is problematic in two ways. First, these theories do not apply equally well to all issue areas. Second, these theories do not illuminate all stages of the policy-making process, even when we focus on one issue area; that is, economics. When scholars use theory, there is a failure to unpack the policy cycle. The universal applicability of theories is a problematic assumption. Indeed, the contemporary literature’s inability is that those works that use theory do not test them thoroughly because they do not focus on the various stages of the policy cycle and do not add scope conditions. Case studies on the EU and China, as well as studies more generally, often do not focus on the policy cycle, including issue identification, decision-making, and policy implementation.

A more in-depth look into the policy cycle stages provides us with an analytical tool to gain more specific knowledge to explain the EU foreign policy-making process and add scope conditions. Scope conditions are universal statements that define the circumstances in which a theory is applicable (Cohen 1989: 83). As pointed out by Foschi (1997), they limit the applicability of the relationship proposed in a hypothesis. Scope conditions constitute the antecedent clause of a conditional statement. If a situation does not meet this, then nothing is being said about
that relationship. A scope condition specifies what we can and cannot see as evidence relevant to the formulated hypothesis by limiting the claim a statement makes. Given the limits of the existing literature, there is a need to explore EU foreign policy drivers vis-à-vis the PRC anew. The issue I argue in this manuscript is not that these existing theories are wrong or lack potential, but that there is an inadequate appreciation of the fact they do not apply equally well to all domains.

As discussed in the previous paragraph, there is a need to identify the range of applicability of these theories. When do they work and when do they not work? I show this by examining three distinct stages of the policy cycle in three political-economic cases. My three cases are the EU-China solar panel dispute, the EU investigation into mobile telecommunication networks from China, and the EU’s response to China’s rise in Africa where I look at the European Commission initiated EU-China-Africa trilateral cooperation initiative. These three cases are hot topics in EU-China relations, but they also have an apparent political-economic angle. I argue that neorealism works best to understand the decision-making stage in the solar and telecommunications trade defense cases, and it was visible in the background of the decision-making stage of the EU-China-Africa case. Institutionalism illuminates virtually every stage of every issue area in EU foreign policy-making. The BPM, for instance, fits the stage of policy implementation. However, this is predominantly correct when there is more leeway. When key (bureaucratic) actors leave, then policy implementation will reflect this.

Two main contributions make this project distinctive. The first one is my findings of theory scope conditions. The second is my empirical work because I am studying insufficiently studied cases and using more and better evidence to evaluate existing arguments and cull out these scope conditions. In more scientific terms, cutting the dependent variable into policy stages allows us to see if the independent variables highlighted by various analytical approaches are equally powerful through all policy process stages. These findings can provide useful analytical lenses for those studying EUFP toward other countries, regions, and issues.

The policy relevance lies in predicting what might happen in EU foreign policy-making and understanding which actors and factors are most influential in the three distinct stages of the policy process. Readers will get more clarity about how policy stages affect EU identification of issues, policy selection, and implementation. Given the peculiar institutional framework of the EU, this is highly important. It is all about
competences. Also, all three cases are part of a more significant challenge for the EU, which is how to deal with emerging powers in general and China in particular (see also Hooijmaaijers 2015, 2018, 2019; Keukeleire and Hooijmaaijers 2014; Hooijmaaijers and Keukeleire 2020). The first two cases enlighten the readers on the internal workings of EU trade defense policy, the evolving nature of Sino-European trade relations, and, more generally, the current challenges to globalization and the international trading order. The EU-China-Africa case illuminates the EU’s internal workings against the backdrop of a new party with its view on development with a focus on trade, investment, and infrastructure entering the African stage.

This chapter will continue as follows. The next section provides an introduction to EU–China relations and the EU’s China policy, which serves as a background for a better understanding of their relations. A section that focuses on the limitations of current academic approaches to EU-China relations will follow this. The subsequent section discusses several potential theoretical candidates for analyzing EU foreign policymaking. After that, I will set out the research design, methodology, and case selection, followed by this manuscript’s main findings and the theoretical and policy implications of these findings. This introduction chapter ends with an outline of the entire manuscript.

**An Introduction to EU–China Relations and the EU’s China Policy**

Over the past decades, EU-China relations have developed rapidly. There are various stages in the relationship, including the period of no diplomatic relations from the late 1940s until 1974, the period of mutual disregard (1975–1994), the period of mutual attraction (1995–2002), and the subsequent honeymoon period (2003–2004/2005), followed by a period of reflection and adjustment that started in 2005. Equally important is the move of the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) in 2019. Against the backdrop of China’s growing economic power and political influence, they reviewed the EU-China relations and the related opportunities and challenges and called for a more realistic approach. In their Joint Communication, the EU side mentioned that “China is simultaneously a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner,
with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance” (European Commission 2019). It is, however, important to emphasize that the systemic rival label is not official. The EU has and continues to designate the PRC as a strategic partner. The Commission called it something else but did not change the EU’s formal position. Still, the EU is in the nascent stages of a new debate about China. The Commission paper labeling China as a systemic rival reflected a sharp change in its balance of assumptions about EU-China affairs, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic is tilting that balance further (Small 2020).

The EU and China established bilateral relations in May 1975, with Christopher Soames being the first European Commissioner to visit China, in line with the country opening up. There were limited developments from 1975 until 1995 (though the EU and China signed a trade agreement in 1978), because both parties were more inward-looking, due to ongoing reforms in China and European integration. The year 1995 marks a change because, in that year, the EU’s first policy paper on China titled a long term policy for China-Europe relations was issued. The 1985 Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) is the principal legal framework for the relations between both parties. Nevertheless, it was only in 1998 that meetings of both parties’ leaders became institutionalized, and the first EU-China Summit took place. This first bilateral summit was de facto an offspring of the growing European and Asian interest in mutual interregional interaction. It was organized back-to-back with the second Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit in London (Bersick, 2015).

In 2003, the EU and China launched a strategic partnership to upgrade the status of their relationship. Both sides mutually recognized each other as a strategic partner in 2003, and the EU was on the receiving end of a “sticks and carrot” approach by Beijing to get to that point. The development of the Sino-European strategic partnership in the 2000s suits the broader context of the deepening of integration in the EU, including the establishment of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as well as China opening up and reforming and its subsequent rise (see Cottey and Gottwald 2010; Keukeleire and Delreux 2014). The 2003–2005 period was the honeymoon period in Sino-European relations. 2003, in particular, can be seen as the best time in the parties’ bilateral relationship because frictions between the EU and
the US over the latter’s invasion of Iraq created an opening for the establishment of an EU-China strategic partnership. 2005 brought about a change in Sino-European relations due to a textile dispute, and the EU’s decision not to lift the arms embargo against China (see Eckhardt 2010; Zhang 2014).

In the 2006–2010 period, it became clear that the atmosphere had changed. The EU was again inward-looking with the 2009 Lisbon Treaty and the subsequent establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS), leading to internal EU changes. The EEAS now became in charge of organizing the EU-China Summit. Over the last decade, particularly in the economic field, the balance of power has changed dramatically. China’s agreement in June 2012 to contribute $43 billion to the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) $430 billion bailout fund for the southern European countries illustrated this. Apart from the Eurozone crisis, the more recent migrant crisis, and the Ukraine crisis has made Brussels “less capable of providing global leadership” (Zeng 2017: 1173).

After an upgrade in 2010, the EU-China strategic partnership now involves foreign affairs, security matters, and international challenges such as climate change and global economic governance. The 2013 EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership has continued developing and diversifying from its original economic focus, creating opportunities for businesses and contributing to international security, environmental protection, and academic exchanges. Today, over 60 high- and senior-level dialogues are in place. The EU-China dialogue architecture comprises three pillars, including the High-Level Strategic Dialogue, the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, and the People-to-People Dialogue (see Burnay et al. 2014).

Since 2016, the EU’s China policy is defined by the Elements for a new EU Strategy on China that, together with the Council Conclusions EU Strategy on China, forms the EU Strategy on China, with the jointly signed 2013 EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation being a critical policy document. Even after the 2019 review of the Sino-European relations, this remains the cornerstone of the EU’s policy vis-à-vis China. In 2015, the EU-China Connectivity Platform was established to strengthen connections between Europe and Asia. However, in the Platform, little coordination and cooperation occur due to the differences between China and the EU.

The importance of Sino-European bilateral relations is manifest in the fact that the EU is China’s largest trading partner, while on the
other hand, China is the EU’s most significant source of imports and its second-biggest two-way trading partner. There are extensive dialogues, too, in the economic realm like the annual High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue established in 2009 and the sectoral dialogues such as the Economic and Trade Joint Committee, Trade and Investment Policy Dialogue, Economic and Trade Working Group, Dialogue on Intellectual Property, and Trade Defence Instruments Working Group. Moreover, at the 16th EU-China Summit in 2013, both parties announced that negotiations on an EU-China bilateral investment agreement—formally called a Comprehensive Agreement on Investments (CAI)—were to be launched. However, thus far, finding mutual agreement on the CAI has proven to be challenging. In part, the diverging interests and systems of both parties explain this. One key issue for the EU in the CAI is market access. This relates to a lack of reciprocity in EU-China relations. The EU wants China to treat the European companies in the PRC the same way that the Europeans treat Chinese firms in Europe. Another issue is how to deal with Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

Cooperation and dialogue between the EU and China go beyond bilateral trade and investment and include policy areas such as foreign policy and security, energy and environment, global economic governance, and human rights. The rise of China is one of the main developments in international relations over the past few decades, not only in the economic field, but also in climate change, on the African continent, and concerning Asian security. This highlights the multiple dimensionalities of China as an international actor as well as its relations with the EU and its member states as they also have established bilateral relations with the Chinese, which makes that they meet on multiple locations and multiple levels, including on the multilateral, regional, trilateral and bilateral level.

However, as also argued by Chang and Pieke (2018), the EU’s China policy as a whole, and of its member states is not principally about the PRC. Due to its starting point not laying in China, but in confronting challenges in Europe itself, the EU’s policy vis-à-vis China is first and foremost “a matter of choices about the future of European cooperation and union.” On a related note, a senior EU official described the EU’s relations with its then 28 member states as “having 28 mothers in law” (Interview senior EU official, June 14, 2018). This reality points out the challenges the EU is facing internally due to its hybrid nature, with Europe’s divided response to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
and increasing Chinese outward foreign direct investment (COFDI) in Europe just being two recent examples.

The EU has been grappling on how to deal with China’s massive footprint in diverse sectors and locations. The EU aims at encompassing a strategic partnership with China. However, the member states are simultaneously sidelining Brussels by concluding bilateral agreements with the PRC (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014). The EU member states’ tendency to pursue bilateral agreements with China and China’s ability to use the EU’s internal disagreement is frequently brought forward as the primary explanation for the EU’s lack of strategic edge (Michalski and Pan 2017). In a 2009 power audit of the EU-China relations, Fox and Godement showed that the then 27 EU member states hold diverging positions over two main issues, including how to manage Beijing’s impact on the European economy and how to engage the PRC politically. The authors argued that “collectively as well as individually” the EU member states will fail to get more from the PRC unless they manage to find a way to overcome their internal divisions and “leverage their combined weight into a strengthened bargaining position” (Fox and Godement 2009: 7). The new HR/VP Josep Borrell admitted the EU had been naïve about aspects of the PRC but stated this was now coming to an end. He urged more collective discipline toward China (The Guardian 2020).

On the issue-level, numerous frictions are bedeviling bilateral relations. One is the EU’s enormous trade deficit with China. Beijing had pledged to ease market access significantly, however many on the European side argue that Beijing is very slow to address these obstacles. The earlier mentioned lack of reciprocity is relevant here. Furthermore, COFDI in Europe has recently increasingly drawn attention because of the opaque state-sponsored Chinese firms (or a suspected state-firm link), COFDI’s targeted sectors including technology and infrastructure, the suddenness of COFDI, the sensitivity coming with China’s continuing political rise, and, again, the lack of reciprocity, with the KUKA case, in particular, being a watershed moment (Hooijmaaijers 2019). One should see the developments regarding COFDI in the EU and Huawei 5G mobile telecommunication networks that recently attracted much attention from both politicians and the public in this broader context.

In late 2018, the European Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament reached a political agreement on the EU framework for screening FDI, and there has been a reform of TDI. These developments illustrate that a reality shift has become visible regarding the EU’s trade
policy and can be seen as two steps forward to a different EU policy vis-à-vis China.

In the field of trade, there have been numerous disputes and investigations relating to solar panels, telecommunications, steel, and wine, with both parties calling for punitive tariffs. The fundamental differences between their legal frameworks and their different values and levels of development and the structural characteristics of their economic models complicate matters (Hallinan 2016). Another thorny issue is China’s market economy status (MES). Also, when China pressed the EU to launch a strong joint statement during the 2018 EU-China Summit against US President Donald Trump’s trade policies, Europe resisted. The EU shared the US’ assessment of China when it comes to, for instance, subsidies and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). However, at the same time, it felt that by the way the US is doing it, it was destroying the multilateral order. Combining these factors makes the EU-China economic relationship, “an uneasy partnership” (Farnell and Irwin Crookes 2016).

The 16+1 (or after Greece joining in 2019 17+1) policy of China with the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) potentially challenges EU unity. Somewhat related to 17+1, the BRI that was launched in 2013 causes “a great deal of confusion” for the EU member states and Brussels (Yu 2018: 232). Beyond the trade statistics and new (proposed) railway connections, the role of Xi Jinping’s globalization project “is not yet entirely clear” for Europe. However, various member states have pledged their support for it (Yu 2018: 232).

Moreover, problematic is the EU arms embargo against China that flowed from the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. The internal situation in China, particularly on human rights and the situation in Tibet and Xinjiang, also causes friction in the EU-China relations. Also, against the backdrop of the imposition of the Hong Kong national security law in June 2020, EU concerns had intensified over the erosion of the “one country, two systems” principle and Hong Kong’s autonomy. The EU decided to limit exports of surveillance equipment to Hong Kong over concerns about this controversial new law, leading to Beijing’s warning not to interfere in Hong Kong matters (Euronews 2020a).

Even though since the mid-1990s, a bilateral Human Rights Dialogue is in place, in the bilateral relationship between the EU and the PRC, the issue of human rights remains secondary to economic and geopolitical interests (Kaya 2014). Internal divisions among the member states play a role as well, as a recent report revealed that the EU member states adopt
widely divergent stances on human rights issues in their dealings with the PRC (Rühlig et al. 2018).

Another area of tension is climate change, in which both parties’ diverging views on multilateralism become visible. The PRC has won plaudits for its recent moves on climate change, but in 2017 it had allowed disputes over trade to impede a joint Sino-European declaration on the matter; consequently, just like after the 2016 EU-China Summit, no joint statement was launched after the 2017 Summit. On climate change, the PRC has never signed up to any commitment in a legal sense. Moreover, when it comes to legally binding issues, with the “deliberate dismissal” of The Hague’s arbitration ruling on the South China Sea issue, Beijing has demonstrated that it will ignore international law “when it does not suit its interests” (Godement and Vasselier 2017: 12). Furthermore, the African continent is an arena where one can question whether the EU and China are partners or competitors.

One of the explanations for the differences between the EU and China lies in the existence of conceptual gaps. Per Pan Zhongqi, the same concept can often be interpreted and applied in very different senses by different people. A conceptual gap could breed misunderstandings in international communication, sometimes without the awareness of those involved, leading to problems and possible conflict in their bilateral relations, including in the Sino-European relationship (Pan 2010). Conceptual gaps exist because many concepts are multifaceted, dynamic, and ambiguous. In theory, conceptual gaps are neither inevitable nor prevailing over conceptual consensuses. However, in practice, it is common for different actors to convey connotations by using the same concepts in their discourse. Conceptual gaps in the Sino-European relationship occur on a wide range of topics and issues, including sovereignty, soft power, human rights, democracy, the rule of law, stability, strategic partnership, global governance, and multilateralism (Burnay et al. 2016; Pan 2012a).

In the context of broader great power relations, for the EU, the Sino-European relations are essential. However, China is not the EU’s most important great power. The US still is the EU’s most important partner and security guarantor via the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and Russia is still the main great power “threat.” For the PRC, the US is the most important power and its main great power threat
and a role for US ally Japan. By contrast, Russia is considered a more reliable partner than the EU. For China, Europe is complementary. It is not a strategic rival, but it is useful for its market and experience platform.

Per Philippe Le Corre, COVID-19 has been “the game-changer” in finally altering European perceptions of China (The Guardian 2020). Andrew Small noted that China’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic had changed long-standing European assumptions about its reliability as a crisis actor and its approach to the European project. For now, Europe’s immediate medical-supply needs and dire economic situation will limit the scope of shifts in its policy vis-à-vis China. However, on issues ranging from supply chains to ideological competition, European governments have rebalanced their view of what dynamics with Beijing should look like in the aftermath (Small 2020). In late April 2020, HR/VP Borrell admitted that China did try to pressure the EU to dilute a COVID-19 disinformation report, adding that this was just normal diplomacy (EUobserver 2020). Be that as it may, around one week later, the EU expressed regret after its opinion article in the China Daily was watered down to remove references to the COVID-19 outbreak beginning in the country (Euronews 2020b).

In sum, there are four main takeaways from the analysis of EU-China relations. First, countless thorny issues characterize the Sino-European relationship. Second, internal divisions and diverging interests on the European side play a substantial role in the EU’s China policy. Third, the Commission paper dubbing the PRC as a systemic rival reflected a sharp alteration in its balance of assumptions about Sino-European matters, and the COVID-19 crisis is tilting that balance further (Small 2020). Combined with the launch of an EU framework for screening FDI and TDI reforms, these developments exemplify that a reality shift has become visible regarding the EU’s China policy. Fourth, the issues in Sino-European relations fit into three categories, including areas for (potential) cooperation, negotiation, and difficult issues to talk about (see Godement and Vasselier 2017). The three selected cases in this manuscript mirror these four points (see below).
The Scholarly Literature on EU-China Relations and Its Limits

The number of academic publications on EU–China relations is booming. As argued by Bersick (2015), there are several main foci in the contemporary work on the EU-China bilateral relations, with a large share focusing on the historical development of the EU-China relations, providing analyses of the evolution as well as the implementation of these relations (see Sandschneider 2002; Shambaugh 2004; Cameron 2009). Another central theme is descriptions of the EU-China Summits that took place since 1998 (see Pan 2012b; Song 2012) and the strategic partnership between both parties (see Renard 2011; Holslag 2011; Casarini 2006; Maher 2016; Geeraerts 2019). Generally, these kinds of works focus on the partnership’s policy challenges and offer suggestions for the bilateral relationship. To the swiftly expanding work on the Sino-European relations we can also add scholarly work on China’s recently launched BRI and the role of and consequences for Europe as well as the EU (see Zeng 2017; Li et al. 2018; Van der Putten et al. 2016; Zhao 2016). A third category focuses on cataloging areas of cooperation and conflict in the contemporary relations including in the areas of the economy (see Algieri 2002; Farnell and Irwin Crookes 2016; Menegazzi 2017; Reilly 2017), Chinese investment in Europe (see Meunier 2019a, 2019b; Hanemann and Huotari 2015), human rights (see Kinzelbach 2015; Baker 2002), climate change (see Torney 2014; Belis and Schunz 2013), security (see Kirchner et al. 2016; Noesselt 2016), energy (see Umbach 2007; Liedtke 2017), and global governance (see Men and Linck 2017; Wouters et al. 2012; Gross and Jian 2012). Another category concentrates on EU-China relations and a third party including Africa (see Hackenesch 2018; Men and Barton 2011; Stahl 2018), the US (see Shambaugh 2005; Harris 2017), or Central Asia (see Kavalski 2007a, 2007b, 2012; Bossuyt 2015).

However, these academic works are generally policy-driven, with few works using theory to explain EU-China relations (Bersick 2015). The lack of using theory suggests a lacuna in the current literature and current academic approaches with regard to EU foreign policy-making vis-à-vis China because even fewer academic works seek to test theoretical approaches thoroughly or add theory scope conditions.

Lastly, another limitation of the scholarly literature on EU-China relations relates to the cases studied and their quality. Indeed, the number of academic publications on EU–China relations is booming. However,
many cases are still insufficiently studied, for instance, because they do not focus on the various stages of the policy cycle. However, issue identification (the stage where a specific issue secures the close attention of policy-makers), decision-making (the stage where the EU foreign policy actors that possess the ability decide to approve the course of action), and policy implementation (the stage where the follow through on the policy is critical) are all equally important and relevant when we want to understand a specific case fully. In this manuscript, I am studying insufficiently studied political economy-related cases and use more and better evidence to draw conclusions.

Theoretically-Oriented Explanations of EU Foreign Policy-Making and Their Limits

While theoretical approaches to EUFP do not dominate the literature, there are some. These models include the BPM, neorealism, and institutionalism. Neorealism generally takes the position that the most powerful states’ security interests are decisive, followed by economic and other interests (see Waltz 1979). A neorealist argument would argue that not only state interests dominate, but that the most powerful EU member states dominate. Without consensus among the Big Three—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (UK)—it will be hard to get anything of significant importance done (see Tallberg 2008; Bendiek 2012). Another potentially relevant candidate is institutionalism. Institutionalism looks into EU law, EU procedures, competences, norms, and regulations to illuminate EU foreign policy dynamics. A third candidate theory that might be relevant for explaining EUFP is the BPM model, given the growing bureaucratization of EUFP. BPM explains policy-making by focusing on internal bargaining within the state (Allison and Halperin 1972). As for the growing bureaucratization of EUFP, the different (European) institutions involved in the making of EUFP including their staff and Directorate-Generals (DGs), the division of competences, and the multiple decision-making methods give us reason to believe that BPM is relevant.

These IR theories are often useful for illuminating a specific situation including in EUFP. However, just as often their explanatory value is unsatisfactory, and in these cases, there is a need for another, more appropriate theoretical tool (McGlinchey et al. 2017). Chapter 2 will provide information about the features and limits of these three theoretical models
that I will test to identify their usefulness and, more importantly, their scope conditions. Here, I will suffice with emphasizing that these three theoretical explanations of EU foreign policy-making all have the problem of scope. The issue I argue in this manuscript is not that these three models are not useful to better understand the dynamics of EU foreign policy-making, but that there is an inadequate appreciation of the fact they do not apply equally well to all domains. Given the limits of the existing literature, there is a need to explore the drivers of EUFP vis-à-vis China anew. There is a need to identify the range of applicability of these theories. These scope conditions may include issues and policy stages. Some IR theories work better in some stages or even in specific policy fields than others. For instance, the BPM may be particularly powerful in illuminating the stage of policy implementation (Caldwell 1977). Given the nature of the EU with its various procedures, sometimes there may or may not be a formal institutional role for the EU member states to execute their power.

**Research Design, Methodology, and Case Selection**

The case study method is best to examine the scope of the applicability of the three theories mentioned above. Case studies can serve several overlapping primary purposes that should be pursued simultaneously, including theory testing (Van Evera 1997: 55). The case study method, which has also been widely used by BPM analysts (Caldwell 1977; George and McKeown 1985), allows for cross-case comparison and allows for process tracing. Theory-testing process tracing “involves assessing whether a hypothesized causal mechanism exists in a single case by exploring whether the predicted evidence of a hypothesized causal mechanism exists in reality” (Beach and Pedersen 2016: 319). In particular, the process tracing is of critical importance because the objective of this research is to look at issue identification, decision-making, and policy implementation.

I am not just doing case studies but comparative case studies. Per Knight, a comparative case study is a research approach to formulate or assess generalizations that extend across multiple cases. Comparative case studies can address theory, wherein the cases are selected to test hypotheses from the theory (Knight 2015). Multiple case studies can provide more substantial evidence and more robust findings and test the findings in (extremely) different cases.
When it comes to theory testing with case studies, three steps are essential (Van Evera 1997). The first step is to state the theory. The second one is to state the expectations about what to observe in case the theories are valid. The third step is to explore the case (or for this manuscript the three selected cases) looking for congruence or incongruity between expectations and observations. The structure of the next chapter follows these three steps. I first discuss these three theories. Then I formulate hypotheses for each of the distinct stages of the policy-making process. I state the expectations about what to observe when the theories are valid. This research project’s comparative design highlights the multiple dimensionalities of the PRC as an international actor and of its relations with Europe. The selection of three cases, even though it remains rather exceptional being conducted by a single author, allows for better comparison.

As mentioned before, given the limits of the existing literature, there is a need to explore the drivers of EUFP vis-à-vis China anew. It is not that existing theories are wrong, but that there is a lack of awareness of the reality they do not apply equally well to all areas. I show this by looking at three distinct stages of the policy cycle in three cases. The three cases are all political economy-related, and they also relate to the challenge that China’s rise presents to the EU. The cases involve EUFP sensu lato, which means that policy areas like trade and development are considered an inherent part of foreign policy (see Keukeleire and Delreux 2014). There are various justifications for focusing on them, as I will discuss. The first case involves the EU-China solar panel dispute of the early 2010s, when Belgian politician Karel De Gucht served as European Trade Commissioner. The following criteria led to its selection. First, it was the most significant investigation ever conducted by the Directorate-General for Trade of the European Commission (DG Trade) when it comes to volume. On a related note, the case is well-documented by the Commission and is widely reported in the media. Second, my three theories make divergent, unique, and sometimes even opposite predictions about the case. Because I make a clear distinction between issue identification, decision-making, and policy implementation, this case allows us to see if the independent variables genuinely are powerful, which contributes to culling scope conditions. Third, a case in the trade field is of particular academic relevance, because the bureaucratic entities in the Commission that deal with foreign policy or external relations including DG Trade seem to have largely escaped the
attention from bureaucratic politics, contributing to the justification of the case selection as it is as a new type of test (Delreux 2015). Another justification for selecting this case is its resemblance to current policy-problem cases as it touches upon how to deal with China on trade defense matters. Continuing tensions between its member states characterize the EU’s trade policy. These tensions mainly follow the North-South division of the EU. The Northern member states prefer an open trading system, whereas the Southern EU member states prioritize defending Europe’s economic interests against external threats. Moreover, there is a third group of countries that includes Germany, which is a swing state. Because our analytical model also focuses on the interests of the EU’s most powerful states, there is potential for critical importance.

The second case focuses on the 2012–2014 EU investigation into mobile telecommunications networks from China. The case selection criteria for the solar case mostly apply to this case because it is also a case in the trade defense field. However, there are more arguments to warrant its selection. In a way, it was as an “extreme case.” It was a unique and unusual case, because it was the first-ever *ex officio* investigation conducted by the Commission. There was no formal complaint lodged by an EU industry. This case contrasts with the solar case that followed the standard procedure of a valid complaint lodged by an EU industry and had a clear timetable of events with set procedural deadlines. What makes it an even more unique case is that DG Trade decided in principle to open an *ex officio* anti-dumping and an anti-subsidy investigation concerning imports of Chinese telecom networks. However, that decision was not activated to allow negotiations toward an amicable solution with the Chinese authorities.

The third case selected to test the merits of the various arguments is the EU’s reaction to China’s rise in Africa through the launch of the EU-China-Africa trilateral cooperation initiative in 2008. This case involves a new actor with its view on development with a focus on trade, investment, and infrastructure entering the African stage. Several reasons warrant the selection of this case (see Van Evera 1997: 77–88). First, this case is particularly compelling from an institutional analytical perspective because three competing visions from the Commission, Council, and Parliament existed within the EU that harmed its capability to engage with China in Africa constructively (see Carbone 2011; Austermann 2012). Second, competing theories make divergent, unique, and sometimes even opposite predictions about the case contributing to testing the relative power
of these three theories. On a related note, even though several scholars have written about EU-China-Africa contributing to the availability of data, this has not been systematically done for three stages of the policy process based on various hypotheses flowing from my three candidate theories. The focus on theory and policy stages also relates to the earlier mentioned limitations of the existing literature regarding cases studied and the quality of the studies. An additional reason relates to the resemblance to current policy-problem cases. The EU has not yet been able to deal with China’s rise and the global power shift to the East. It is in this broader context that one should understand China’s rise in Africa.

My analysis relies on multiple sources of data. The first set of data includes legal and policy documents such as the Treaties, Council Decisions, Commission documents, policy memos, and official statements from involved parties. Preparatory documents and the negotiation positions of the relevant actors are also of importance. However, official documents are not always available. I supplemented my analysis with other empirical sources such as newspaper articles from main media outlets, including Reuters and the Financial Times, and semi-structured interviews. I did over 100 semi-structured interviews, consultations, and conversations with a wide range of interviewees, contributing to more and better evidence. The interviewees include senior officials from the European Commission’s DG Trade, officials from the Union delegation (EEAS) in Beijing, and officials from the Permanent Representations of EU member states to the EU, senior EU and European business representatives, senior solar panel industry representatives, senior telecom industry representatives, and trade lawyers that were involved with the EU-China solar panel dispute and the EU investigation into mobile telecommunications networks from China. I also interviewed EU officials from Union Delegations in Africa, the EEAS headquarters in Brussels, the Commission’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), officials from the Union delegation in Beijing, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), and African business representatives that worked on or were involved with China’s rise in Africa and the response of the EU, as well as Western and Chinese scholars from renowned universities and research centers with expertise in EU-China trade, or EU-China-Africa. I coded my interviewees to preserve their anonymity. Finally, I used a considerable amount of secondary literature on the respective topics to support my analysis.
Findings

The main theoretical contribution of this work is to specify the scope of the three selected theoretical approaches. These scope conditions involve both issue areas and policy stages. The three case studies showed that neorealism’s explanatory value in the issue identification stage is limited, partially due to the division of competences. Due to the formal procedures, there was relative power for the member states in the decision-making stage of the trade defense cases, because the Council has to vote on the final imposition of measures, supporting a neorealist argument for this stage. Given traditional national interests, countries have to assert themselves to defend their economic interests, which Germany demonstrated in the solar case. Even in the “extreme” telecoms case with no formal launch of an investigation, and thus no formal procedures that are part of such an investigation had to be followed, neorealism had explanatory value for the decision-making stage. In the EU-China-Africa trilateral cooperation case, the member state support meant the Commission could go ahead with its idea and launched a framework on which later member state initiatives could build. Neorealism was present, but in the background. The results from the decision-making stage affected the implementation stage as it created a space where the member states could launch their initiatives with China on Africa.

This research found that institutionalism sheds light on virtually every stage of the policy-making process and issue. It may not always have been the most dominant explanatory theoretical model. However, it almost always contributed to a better understanding of the various stages of the policy-making process. In short, EU law, procedures, and competences matter when we want to unpack EU policy-making. These findings provide useful analytical lenses for those studying EUFP not just toward China, but also vis-à-vis other countries, regions, and issues.

Concerning the BPM, we saw bargaining throughout the entire case, on the EU level, and with the Chinese side, in both the solar and telecoms cases. Then Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht predominantly drove this. The division of competences and the institutional setup partially facilitated the BPM’s explanatory value in the issue identification stage of the development case. We did detect “where you stand depends on where you sit” in most parts of both the development and trade cases. Where the agreements made in the decision-making stage were not legally binding, we saw there was leeway not fully to implement them as agreed.
upon. When key (bureaucratic) actors left in these situations, policy implementation reflected this.

The theoretical and policy implications of my findings reveal that it is essential to take into account that it is all about competences and that EU law and procedures matter. The competences shape a position for actors and allow them to act. Different actors may be relevant and influential in the different policy stages, including the issue identification and decision-making stages. There still is and continues to be an essential role for the EU member states in EU foreign policy-making, including trade defense and development. Considering the role of the (most powerful) EU member states is critical, given the substantial influence they have over the broader context of the relations between the EU and China. The same goes for understanding the role of the EU institutions, including the Council, the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the EEAS. EU-China affairs thus always have to contemplate the EU institutions and the (most powerful) member states. Internal divisions and diverging interests on the European side remain. They mostly follow the traditional North-South and East-West lines.

If a party wants to influence how the EU identifies policy in trade defense cases, it is essential to consider the formal procedures. In the case of unfair trade practices, industry parties can lodge a formal complaint. Some industries are better organized than others and thus file more complaints. Eventually, there is relative power for the (most important) EU member states in the decision-making stage. Whether the anti-dumping or subsidy cases are about Chinese solar, telecoms, or steel, the issue is mostly the same. The question is not whether there is dumping or subsidies from the Chinese side, which mainly relates to the issue identification stage. Instead, the question is whether “Europe” wants to do something about this situation or not, which involves decision-making. That is the ongoing debate in Europe. The Southern member states predominantly see it from a political perspective and feel that anti-dumping and subsidy practices are not acceptable. The Northern EU member states predominantly see it from a more economic perspective. They want to assess the overall effect of unfair trade practices on the EU when taking the interests of manufacturers, consumers, and users into account. The Commission predominantly feels they are working for the European industry. Interest groups are empowered in trade defense cases, but because of other issues, they do not have the full force in shaping economic globalization. Germany’s position is critical. Not only
is it Europe’s biggest economy, but also it can be seen as a swing state regarding anti-dumping issues. Berlin has difficulties making up its mind on anti-dumping issues. If a businessperson wants to know who should get his attention at the policy implementation stage, the Commission is a suitable candidate, but so are the (most powerful) member states. In trade defense cases, there is a clear timetable of events that makes it easier to target the relevant DGs of the Commission and the relevant member states when a decision is about to be made. These findings will help businesses to do better government relations and to be more aware of the business environment.

**Outline**

This manuscript will consist of five more parts. The next chapter will review the literature of the three selected theoretical models of (EU) foreign policy-making. This chapter also includes the comparative research design of the project, where I formulate hypotheses regarding the distinct stages of the policy cycle. I will provide information about the features and limits of the IR theories that will be tested later on in three case studies to identify their usefulness and, more importantly, their scope conditions. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 focus on these three case studies. The first case study (Chapter 3) of this book examines the EU-China solar panel dispute, the most significant trade defense case ever by volume that attracted much attention in the early 2010s when Belgian politician Karel De Gucht served as European Trade Commissioner. The second case study (Chapter 4) will look into the EU investigation into mobile telecommunications networks from the PRC. Similar to the EU-China solar dispute, this is a case study in the trade defense field. However, it substantially differs from the solar panel case, because this was an *ex officio* trade defense action initiated by DG Trade. Chapter 5 focuses on the EU’s reaction to the rise of China in Africa via the EU-China-Africa trilateral cooperation initiative. It specifically looks at the emergence of the EU’s perception of a China in Africa policy issue, its policy responses, and its implementation of these policy options. The concluding Chapter 6 will bring together the preceding chapters’ findings to unpack EU policy-making toward the PRC. Furthermore, I will discuss the theoretical and policy implications of my findings and the limitations of this study and the venues for further research.
INTRODUCTION

1. The EU Treaties established the EU. The EU member states are the parties to the treaties. Under the EU Treaties, the member states confer competences on the EU. The EU can only act within the limits of its competences. The Treaties founded the EU. The EU amended two key EU treaties several times. They are the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The Treaty of Lisbon (LT) that entered into force on December 1, 2009, reorganized these two Treaties.

2. Issue identification is the stage of the policy-making process where a particular issue secures the close attention of policy-makers. Decision-making is the stage where actors possess the ability to decide to approve the course of action. In the policy implementation stage, the follow through on the policy is critical (see also Carta, 2013; Versluis et al. 2011). For analytical purposes and manageability reasons, for this manuscript, we focus on these three stages. However, we encapsulated policy formulation in the decision-making stage.

3. In October 2020, the European Council reaffirmed the policy approach vis-à-vis EU-China relations as set out in this Joint Communication.

4. In early 2007, negotiations of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and China started. However, the PCA negotiation process stalled.

5. Following the strategic partnership between the EU and China, the PRC launched bilateral strategic partnerships with various EU member states (Chen 2013). The various partnerships question the coordination between the EU and its member states.

6. Worth highlighting is that the over 60 dialogues are often a touted figure by officials on both the European and Chinese sides. However, the question is whether it is the more, the merrier. Also, in reality, many of these dialogues happened a few times then fell away. Others meet very rarely, with little to show in terms of substantive output.

7. Exemptions include Christiansen (2016); Cottey (2018); Jørgensen and Wong (2016); Algieri (2002).

8. Per Van Evera (1997), the five primary purposes are explaining cases, creating theories, testing theories, identifying antecedent conditions, and testing antecedent conditions. In this manuscript, the overlap becomes visible as the theory testing is used to explain what happens in the cases.

9. By contrast, EUFP sensu stricto is limited to an analysis of the CFSP and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).
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