Sino-EU multilateralism relation
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Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between China and the EU. In specific, it explores the Sino-EU in economic activities. China’s economic activities include several factors, primarily oriented to foreign direct investment (FDI) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The acts of China have caused certain countries to become more apprehensive of China and its success on this concern because of China’s development. The study focuses on Chinese initiatives in different EU countries, including Germany, Italy, and France. The participation of these three countries is specifically linked to the presence of Italy as a more powerful EU member nation in the BRI, as well as Germany and France. Therefore, these responses to this inclusion and implications, along with proceedings of China and the two nations, would show the EU’s position in this regard. This study postulates that China's lack of compromise, conformity with her peers, poses questions about China’s understanding, doubts that China can very well not bear, and should potentially be cautious because of the deteriorating partnership with the US.

Subjects: Chinese Studies; European Studies; International Politics; International Relations; Chinese Politics; European Politics; Government; Political Communication; Public Relations; Political Economy

Keywords: BRI; China; EU; structural realism; defensive realism; soft power; multilateralism

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT
Defensive realism, multilateralism, and soft power were the philosophies considered for this study. It can be seen that China’s attitude to the EU was very close to its ties with the US, in which the activity of China was primarily characterized by one-sided benefits. However, there was a lack of compromise throughout the study, which would help the EU adhere to a more rational manner, trying to ensure the deals made to achieve benefits for oneself. Furthermore, the increased scrutiny of the EU indicates certain similarities with the US concerning the trade war. China’s conduct is somewhat unusual as the lack of compromises over ideals has not provided too many benefits for robust economies, the study says. The use of similar theories indicates a confusion as to what the potential outcome of the research might be, while different approaches might produce a more detailed and complex analysis.
1. Introduction

The economic growth of China resulted from its global expansion to the world under an international reform implemented in 1978. Since then, China has expanded at an incredible pace during the subsequent 40 years and, in 2018, became the second-largest economy in the world. It indicated that in this period, China was the world’s fastest-growing economy, with an annual growth rate of 9.72 percent (Lau, 2015). However, this progress had decreased since 2015, when the relatively low growth rate of 7 percent was the new reality they had to confront, contributing to a transition to a new mindset and further connection with economic growth and development (Lau, 2015). Moreover, their trade war with the US complicates their status and prosperity when a broad market for the communist nation abruptly closes. As such, new measures must be undertaken to avoid further deterioration either to sustain its growth to boos, or at least to meet bare minimum standards.

Relationship with the EU exists as an option to address the issues which the EU-China trade war is creating. China already has a friendship with BRICS, and they will risk everything if they do not find an alternative for their ties with the US. The proof for this lies throughout the relatively low development resulting therefrom. New paths must, therefore, be pursued to avoid a sense of complacency within the Chinese mindset. Nevertheless, China already has significant trade ties with the EU (Hanemann et al., 2019). One would also assume that the need to rely on the EU is ridiculous. Nevertheless, China's trade relations with the US have been equally good but have recently worsened nonetheless. China will also ensure that this occurs as much as possible with the EU.

EU-US relations have also deteriorated due to various US acts that have helped alienate itself from the EU. It includes not only the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris climate accord. Such acts may be used to convey a signal that the US finds it unimportant to pursue an international human rights effort that alienates itself from allies who strongly regard such concerns (Melchior, 2018). China may see this as a timely opportunity to develop an alliance with the EU to offset the damages from the trade war and gain power in the West. The widespread disillusionment between the EU and China with the US at present may theoretically catalyze a new strategic partnership.

According to Zhou (2017), other China-related perspectives have shown that this strategic partnership is political on its own terms only. While the two involved parties declare that they have a mutual collaboration, there is always a lack of trust and the fear of rivalry in certain respects. Zhou further contends that these are primarily political, though, because there is very little to be expected in cooperation between China and the EU. Chinese acts in the Dalai disputes, as well as various issues related to intellectual property originating from outside China and various human rights problems, are included in incidents (Zhou, 2017). This strategy, therefore, not only serves as China's way to fill a void left by the US owing to its propensity to alienate partners, but it also means that China will not miss any vital trade partner. Essentially, this strategy helps to strengthen their current relations because the experience has shown that their view of their overall development as a growing state could be undesirable. Although trade is an essential part and should not be overlooked, China could become more prominent in western countries in the long term. However, how would that happen? What moves will China take to promote better understanding in the EU? Hence, how would the economic activities of China impact its relationship with prominent EU members?

This study is mainly utilized in the comparative case study due to the nature of the subject matter. The main aim is to examine the different measures that China has implemented in its interactions with different EU member states and thus consider how their relations have affected them and to see whether these efforts are crucial to avoiding a similar event such as the US trade war. Different activities might or might not have strengthened relations among the various states, and thus could serve as a guiding principle for China to conduct with Western nations in the future. Also, the possibility of another trade dispute with another trading partner because of gaps in political and ideological views is a risk that needs to be taken seriously. Finally, the findings will be elaborated. The core method of research is
qualitative because of the comprehensive nature of the study. Moreover, the nature of the work, peer reviews, article, media, and other reliable documents are the critical source data of the study.

The structure of this paper is as follows. The first section addresses the theories applied for this paper, such as structural realism, defensive realism, soft power theory, and multilateralism. The second section will discuss the development of trade relations between the EU and China. Further analysis was divided into two: one for Italy, which had just joined the BRI and the EU headed by France and Germany because of the two nations that played a significant role in the EU and skepticism about China and its actions. Finally, findings suggest that China’s approach towards the EU was very similar to its relations with the US, where the behavior of China was mainly marked by one-sided gains, and prioritized personal interest over more harmonious actions.

2. Structural realism

Structural realism implies that the main actors in the argument are the sovereign states of international society. According to Waltz (1979), “to define a structure requires ignoring how units relate with one another (how they interact) and concentrating on how they stand in relation to one another (how they are arranged or positioned)” (p. 80). No ruling body can dictate their actions and, thus, an anarchical political system (Baylis et al., 2014). States are fundamentally self-interested actors, allowing their interests to drive and influence their behavior and the rationale for such acts. The rule mentioned above of anarchy permeating the political system also indicates that the actions of states lack property and a sense of decorum. Should any step be more critical to the person in question than alternate action, then the same course of action will be taken.

Nonetheless, it means that every gain would be an adequate justification for intervention. Self-interest and one’s protection are the most critical aspect of such advantages. If any action is contradictory to these two fundamental principles, it is not considered appropriate or prudent.

According to academics and others, who advocate realism, the naive presupposes the perception of decorum or virtue by other political actors. The underlying concept of anarchy within structural realism implies that no state can presume that every situation, or rather, cannot be regulated by intergovernmental organizations. Therefore, players can participate only in ways that secure their immediate interests and longer-term goals; all primary considerations are decided by the need to guarantee our security and ability to support ourselves (Baylis et al., 2014).

Cooperation between states is not inconceivable, while the anarchic system and uncertainty regarding foreign actors are prevalent and the primary motivator for each actor. As previously stated, the motives that most impact the individual state are the action selected. Unless that is achieved by collaboration with another actor, cooperation should not be ruled out. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the lack of confidence between the actors is persistent, and coordination could mean that another state has improved capability for its gain. Rationalism thus saturates the relation between cost and benefit, ensuring that the partnership is advantageous to all the parties concerned (Baylis et al., 2014).

There are two branches of philosophy within the context of structural realism-defensive and offensive realism. This study will only focus on defensive realism. Thus, the following section will discuss this branch.

3. Defensive realism

Waltz’s theory of international politics (Waltz, 1979) represented the “original” way of structural realist thinking, but after the emergence of Mearsheimer’s offensive realism, it has often been labeled as “defensive realism” (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013; Mearsheimer, 2013). The primary debate among the two schools of structural realism is about “adequate power.” Contrary to offensive realism, defensive realists do not think that states want as much power as possible (Mearsheimer, 2013). Instead, they are considered to strive only for the appropriate amount of
power (Waltz, 1989) to maintain the existing balance of powers and to prevent the trigger of a counterbalancing coalition against them (Dunne & Schmidt, 2014).

Defensive realism means that the security of the state, including the power to self-interest, is given priority. The principle does not ignore the idea of self-interest; it merely stipulates that the role of an actor to power is secondary to ensuring the essential existence of the entire state. In short, when a country tries to seek more power, it must first strive to ensure its survival and safety. To facilitate their survival or preserve the balance of power in the anarchic system where all states are based, mat treaties are merged. The emergence of another state may pose a threat to actor security and thus entail alliances and other arrangements to ensure one’s survival and to maintain the status quo between or within the two states involved. It is because the rise in potential power among nations is a possible tension caused between the countries. Increased anarchic power could make it not only possible but also very likely that one’s position in the system improves because it would be in the best interest of a steady-state to solidify such strength and thus lead to hegemonic world order.

Moreover, a nation’s military strength serves as the most transparent and most important indicator of global power. Therefore, an improvement in military capacity may imply a desire to use such resources should the actor concerned benefit. The rise in the military may indicate an increase in concern in prospective countries because of this tendency. Within realism, a state acts first and foremost in its own best interest. The enhancement of these capacities would further encourage actions that otherwise could alienate other nations because of concerns that failure to do so could jeopardize their security and overall position in the global power balance (Baylis et al., 2014).

It could make onlooking countries more likely to reinforce their defenses to combat the perceived threat to their security and thus intensify the supposed hostility in the international system (Baylis et al., 2014). Because of this fragile confidence among nations in the global system, war will still exist as a possibility according to defensive realism. As such, states must fortify their defenses to avoid sight. In defensive realism, war is seldom seen as the desirable outcome, and so retaining a balance of power is the desired alternative, which is one of the critical distinctions between defensive and offensive realism. Under defensive realism, power helps to ensure the security of the state and preserve the balance of power within the global system.

4. Multilateralism
According to Keohane (1990), multilateralism defines as “the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states” (p. 731). Alternatively, multilateralism can be considered as “a system of interaction combining rules, institutionalized cooperation and inclusiveness” (Bouchard et al., 2013, p. 4). There are three distinct concepts of international cooperation and relations, including multilateralism, unilateralism, and bilateralism (Keohane, 1990 as cited in Tago, 2017). The distinction, as names suggest, lies in terms of the three different types of collaboration, where one state applies to unilateralism, two countries to bilateralism, and three or more countries to cooperate multilaterally. However, scholars argue that there are more inconsistencies between three definitions beyond a numerical differentiation that are essential to understanding multilateralism correctly (Tago, 2017). John Ruggie is a good illustration of a scholar who provides three alternate concepts for multilateralism, including generalized organizing principles, indivisibility, and diffuse reciprocity (Ruggie, 1992). The first two considerations include unsound and discrimination selectivity (Tago, 2017). Such two features are in contrast to preferential bilateralism, where the Cold War is the typical example, and include a normative setting guideline for collaboration on public goods in a multilateral institution or cooperation (Tago, 2017). The aspect of indivisibility concerns a regulatory framework within a multilateral cooperative initiative and can be defined as the most important of all three features, as the features mentioned above are focused on the specified normative guidelines. As such, the involved parties concerned must consider the normative standard to be valid for ratification (Newman et al., 2006).
However, Ruggie does not say much about what it means when he points out the value of a norm. Instead, Newman et al. explore the complexities of these principles and what they might suggest for this alliance, such as an inquiry into the possibility of contemporary significance. It is necessary to remember that when the affected countries accept such regulations, they may become non-representative to periods where they exist, or the current participants are ideological and thus could need modification (Newman et al., 2006). However, because of the above-mentioned ideological positions, this can become more troublesome. Different views of the essential direction to a prosperous and functioning state will lead to different spots on regulations in the coalition and lead to changes in the guidelines as a way to satisfying member states. It becomes more difficult if member states come in with differing opinions on various issues and perceptions of the norm, in particular in the current international context, as systems and members become increasingly complex (Newman et al., 2006).

The concern with unsatisfactory member states that seem inappropriate considering the understanding of the term norm cause implies good and bad. In terms of various ideological loyalties, for example, the idea of good and bad could, as previously indicated, become very subjective. For instance, if China joined a multilateral alliance of this kind, its constitutional principles might theoretically clash with the Western countries because of the political difference between the East and the West. The norms will be viewed as right or inaccurate for the definition of normative dependency, depending upon the perspective of the viewer. Consequently, a consensus would be difficult to achieve without compromise being an integral part of developing a functional multilateral cooperation (Newman et al., 2006).

5. Soft power
According to Carr (1946), world power can be split into three sub-sections, which are economic power, military force, and the power of opinion, accordingly soft power delves primarily into the latter (Nye, 1990). Soft power can be viewed as a resource that encourages a state to use non-aggressive tactics to achieve its desired results or to accomplish its objectives in some way by persuading other nations to act in a certain way. It is different from the first listed types of global power, economic, and military, that relate more to aggression and are mainly considered forms of hard power (Blanchard & Lu, 2012).

As mentioned, soft power is the ability to convince other states to act in a way that benefits the country that attempts to use soft power. The acts in question, however, come primarily from the country itself. In principle, the actions of one country are imitated by foreign nations, owing to their favorable state view or at least behaving to the desires of the state. However, it is essential to enhance one’s status in the system to intensify this behavior, as very few actors want to emulate undesirable acts or stick to their ideology (Blanchard & Lu, 2012). The central point of this power is the main difference between hard and soft power. Inside hard power, the performer himself is the target, and his talent uses the capability to produce a desirable result. Indeed, soft power mainly focuses on the target audience. Their understanding of the actor involved is a vital sign that an actor has or does not have any soft power to use. Also, the failure or success of the soft power effort of a state depends primarily on three factors. Such considerations are the coherence of national and international political values, the ability to attract a culture of the country, and actions of a legally accepted and spiritual decorum (Nye, 2011).

When a particular state engages in several actions to enhance its social perception, which does not align with the target audience, the effort under consideration is seen as a failure. When the initiative in issue eliminates the nation’s awareness, then it is a significant failure to connect with the target audience, but even a lack of perception adjustments can be viewed as a failure to improve social understanding. As such, legitimacy and credibility are highly essential to all soft power efforts to make beneficial changes in the image of the state in question (Nye, 2011).
Nonetheless, it has to be remembered that while hard power is mostly just that, hard, it can be used to boost soft power. It is because of the notion of soft power that affects a nation’s perception. When economic resources were to be used, for example, in diplomatic and humanitarian ways, such as financial support in regions of severe poverty or crises or natural disasters. These activities can enhance the perception of the situation in the eyes of both the recipient and the audience. As mentioned, one of the three reasons for increasing soft power is coordination between international and domestic agendas. When a particular state asserts that humanitarian causes matter to the state, then its social perception would improve financial support to a humanitarian cause through its commercial usage. Investing in other countries could also serve to boost the social understanding of the actor in the destination country, but also the allies of the beneficiary (Nye, 2011). Therefore, military resources may also serve as a way to boost soft power in the right circumstances, for example, military training activities and partnerships that will enhance the other party’s social perception of the state in question (Nye, 2011).

However, it should be noted that these cases require support or assistance with military action rather than imposing on the sovereignty of a state. As such, foreign military aid, while not aggressive to the people in question on paper, may generate disdain because of a lack of transparency, which can occur when the military intervention takes place in foreign nations.

The relation between military and soft power is also quite fascinating, as opposed to the relationship between commodities and currency, where hard power serves as the first and soft power is the latter. Hard power is often seen as being offensive, but the amassment of allies through hard power is usually unhostile because it could damage an incentive of an associate to use hard power together with a specific state. Soft power is used to legitimize the need to use hard power, while hard power also decreases soft power, as seen with the US in the Afghan and Iraq wars. Although hard power is still the most potent and specific guarantee in achieving the desired result, soft power is hard to use consistently since the expense of using hard power can prove too costly for a state (Nye, 2011).

6. Application of theory
Defensive realism will be one of the three approaches to evaluating the behavior of China and the EU, in particular, Germany, France, and Italy. The premise of realism that the universe is anarchical helps to make the international system skeptical and incorporates concepts such as self-interest, survival, and power maximization. Such factors could have reliable explanatory power in Sino-EU related activities, all of which, of course, is an international organization. However, the theory does not deny their relevance, the focus instead places on the importance of state survival, thus negating the importance of international organizations and coalitions that do not directly benefit the state.

Multilateralism applies to international relations between three or more states and represents the analytical aspect of collaboration. The critical thing is to provide an antidote to the more pessimistic and skeptical reactive realism to make the topic more nuanced. Because of the importance of multilateralism and the authenticity of international organizations, they can both create an interesting duality in the analysis with a focus on aspects that ignore the other. The examinations will also discuss four primary states, China, France, Italy, and Germany, due to multilateralism in relations between three or more countries. That points to potential weaknesses in theory; the EU includes a large number of states, but they will not be a focal point.

Soft power will be used to evaluate the potential consequences of China’s actions. Since the study involves analyses of the current approaches focused on theories, China’s efforts could theoretically paint a new image of the nation, the soft power of which could have a more straightforward idea. The affected soft power of China could have a positive or negative impact on its legitimacy in the global system. Since their actions are representative of China itself and their soft power is reflective of their capacity to comply with these efforts. The incorporation of realism and multilateralism can provide a very complicated explanation and repercussions for China with soft power as a method for evaluating the potential ramifications of the approaches applied to the two theories.
7. Hence, how would the economic activities of China impact its relationship with prominent EU members?

These theories allow the study to solve the problem because of the structure of the arguments. The dilemma formulation encourages an examination, and an interpretation of the situations utilizing stimulus introduced into the relation and defensive realism serves as a more apprehensive reason for looking at those nations. Thus, the study provides a way of understanding the behavior of the countries in question. Multilateralism is a more optimistic view of the issue since it considers collaboration to be the critical factor in a relationship. Therefore, implementing this theory is a way to provide insight into the problem that may be needed in a study like this. The paper may seem prejudicial to these outcomes if only one of these theories is included, as one method may mean the presumption of positive or negative consequences by the behavior of China depending on the approach chosen. The use of soft power takes root in the results of the analyses of the theories adopted and helps to examine the behavior of the States in question, thus analyzing the role of China’s soft power towards the onlooking states in its study, thus providing a clearer idea of the effect of the economic efforts.

8. The BRI entry of Italy

Italy and China’s actions can be regarded as necessary for both parties from a realistic defensive standpoint. Because of the idea of preserving the relative power balance and sustaining and even strengthening Italy and China’s stability.

The global balance of power can be said to have shifted as a result of the changes in the past few years, owing both to US tariffs and Brexit. In entering into this alliance, both countries will help avoid future setbacks and leverage new opportunities in the aftermath of these two events. Firstly, the economic and general status of Italy in the EU does not depend on influence or influence within the organization. The Italian economy has recently suffered and is expected to experience even more stagnant growth according to OECD (2018), in 2019 and 2020, GDP growth is expected to slow to 0.9%. Increasing volatility and higher interest rates would decrease the propensity of households and firms to consume and invest, compensating for the impact on practices of fiscal expansion. In Italy’s main trading partners, slow growth will hinder export growth. Although moderating, the investment rebound will continue to support import growth. While consumer price inflation increases, moderate productivity growth will reduce wage growth, leading to real wage losses. It would slow down household consumption growth along with declining employment growth (OECD, 2018).

According to OECD (2018), there is a growing need for a new partner. However, after Brexit, a vacuum appeared in the EU, a gap that Italy could fill. Therefore, by entering into the BRI and eventually benefiting from this new agreement, Italy can thus improve its means of increasing its power and standing in the EU. Under defensive realism, the strategic balance of power must be preserved as decisions to optimize the influence of other countries that are alienated, compelling them to take action in their own hands and leverage power as a way to ensure their security. If others in the EU consider the power vacuum generated by Brexit as an incentive to improve their relative position in the EU, Italy may fall even further behind in the relative balance of power. The promise of more power inevitably calls for other states, and activities in this context are to be expected. Therefore, Italy will act in the same way, doing all that is possible to maintain the current power balance or potentially improve its relative position. However, this could spread fear and tension between other member nations and Italy.

Nevertheless, the notion of power is subordinate to the promise of their survival within defensive realism. In recent years, China’s rise has been unequaled, and any reform is seen as a threat to its security and containment at all costs. In this context, their acts are entirely consistent with defensive realism, especially following the trade war. It is only sensible that measures like this would receive more significant consideration as a means to ensure their continuous growth in an international system in which US tariff policy currently seems to be immune to such progress. Nevertheless, their motives in the BRI could be viewed as contradicting the notion of power as
secondary only. Within the BRI, China’s belief that acquisitions and industries in which investment is made are the key decision-makers are more closely related to power amplification.

However, the entry of Italy into the BRI further enhances its original strategy for constructing an infrastructure line between Asia, Europe, and Africa under defensive realism, which offers more incentives for all parties involved. Moreover, as an EU member of the G7, Italy is a leader more relevant than the Eastern European countries and, as a consequence, has a relatively high profile of participation in the BRI. This presence further counteracts their setbacks during the US trade war with defensive realism. Based on the theoretical viewpoint, the trade war is counterproductive to their overall position in the world for specific reasons, according to defensive realism. Owing to defensive realism, it impedes their ability to guarantee their growth and hampers their ability to obtain their security. That is the worth of the BRI. Through speeding up and extending its initiative, China maintains the potential to boost its growth and thereby preserve its relative position in the global system and security.

In reality, however, their acts seem to indicate some sort of inconsistency. Within defensive realism, the deal between China and Italy would have been more prevalent. China, as it is, retains the freedom to invest through the BRI in Italy, but remains a non-market economy where foreign firms have little ability to deal with Chinese counterparts. In principle, the intervention of China promotes its development and also hinders the growth of other countries and mainly plays the positions of both ally and rival. These acts generate tension and anxiety from prospective states as a challenge to their relative status in the global system. The possibility of growing influence within the EU is unattractive in the arena of defensive realism. In this context, Italy’s new allegiance to China could cultivate mistrust and friction between Italy and the other G7 affiliates (Casarini, 2020). The increased influence on various aspects of a G7 nation’s soft and hard infrastructure would allow China to join Russia through a state that has expanded its strength. Italy rising could contribute to China’s growth, and if Italy gained further influence, it would also be possible for China to increase more significant power. As a result, many EU member states are more concerned that Italy will benefit from this relationship due to its apprehensive view of China.

Another notable aspect is the nationalist ideology that has permeated both the EU and the US. Also, Melchior (2018) contends that nationalism is the primary concern for the best interest, culture, and stability of a single nation, deliberately counteracting the act of globalization to ensure that the rise of a foreign state never takes place at the detriment of one’s economic growth and development. It has resulted in Donald Trump to become President and then fighting several multilateral deals to ensure America’s first approach that established Washington’s new agenda (Melchior, 2018). It is Brexit that the UK has deliberately left a multilateral body within the EU to guarantee its security in the first place, thus having a more critical perspective on developments and investments from other countries. While these two cases were the two most famous as a result of this change in paradigm and political activity, other countries were also influenced, including France, which almost elected Marine Le Pen, who was considered first and foremost a nationalist. While not all countries within the EU have been impacted in the same way, the EU is a supranational entity whose member states can dictate their motives within the EU, offering the EU a strategic perspective on others; that is particularly true as two of the most influential EU members, France and the UK, have been affected prominently.

It should be noted, as Germany remains an example of a nation that remained relatively uninfluenced. Germany’s conduct concerning the two World Wars is highly likely to be the primary reason for that contempt towards nationalist ideals. However, the essence of the EU is one of consensus between states, and if the majority of states remain vigilant about the fact that skepticism regarding new potential partners is to be exercised, Germany has limited chances of circumventing this. Primarily, the EU then uses a much more defensive, realistic approach to protect its value-based legitimacy and to put its security first. Theoretically, this would close other nations; Italy’s economy remains unsatisfactory for them. The decision must be taken for Italy: whether the BRI should encourage its growth by recognizing the EU’s position or show
solidarity with the EU’s status and remain skeptical at the cost of its economy. In a decision very much consistent with defensive realism, the nation chose the former, since that decision is a step towards ensuring their security. International organizations are not outdated in defensive realism, but the world is seen as one of anarchy. As such, a decision to promote development is sensible in an anarchic world, where trust is confined as a whole.

Concerning multilateralism, China's inclusion of Italy in the BRI feeds certain facets of multilateralism, although it mostly opposes the concept. Italy entering the BRI may seem to follow multilateral guidelines, purchase trade agreements with welcoming member countries, disregard any slight selectiveness, make sure that every nation interested in joining the BRI is accepted, providing that it adheres to the criteria laid down by China. The multitude of countries often gives a multilateralist appearance, as various countries cooperate with China. However, when discussed in more detail, this does not necessarily apply. The actions taken in favor of the BRI may seem to be regulatory for China as its initiative remains and would, of course, want to maintain a certain level of leverage over the whole effort to ensure its advantages. As stated in the multilateralism portion of this paper, however, the notion of normative remains arbitrary, as long as the parties concerned have different ideals. Italy has decided to forgive these concerns in an attempt to secure its prosperity, as described in the study of defensive realism in Italy. Italy is, however, a member of the EU and is therefore affected by the EU.

Firstly, the political gap cannot achieve a reasonable consensus. The EU is focused on a more liberal approach to partnership, in which the various states retain their organization within the Union. The Socialist ideology of China contrasts with this, as can be seen in its domestic affairs where, for example, agencies are confined to state-owned enterprises. Italy is part of the EU and thus adheres to EU principles. Therefore, there may be some contradictions where the EU and BRI have conflicting agendas that preclude China from benefiting entirely from its new addition to its initiative.

Secondly, there is the lack of a compromise. Italy has committed and chosen to comply with the terms set out by China, and must adhere as such to two different sets of contradictory provisions. The statutory criterion for multilateralism establishes a potential for compromise to ensure that any of the associated member states have a reasonable code of conduct. The lack of understanding in China means that this area of tension will remain where Italy will bear the brunt of difficulty due to both the EU and the BRI allegiance. In multilateralism, the concept of obsolete procedures persists as one of the considerations to be addressed to guarantee the longevity of cooperation. Ideally, the rules and the code of conduct should be updated to conform to the periods they occur. The moment that China exists was when a lack of consensus and apprehension or fear of other countries led to the US trade war. From a multilateral point of view, China's tendency should be more likely to adjust actions with Western states and future West allies to ensure that relationships are maintained.

Interestingly enough, however, China stayed unphased in this feature of its strategy, despite their new focus on Italy. It could also be perceived from a multilateral perspective as an attempt to influence the EU even more without sacrificing its ideals. When Italy strengthened its EU status as a result of the BRI, it would have increased EU influence. As a result, China would likewise gain a foothold for further expansion of the BRI by sticking with the Chinese regulations laid down in partnership with the BRI. While this is a shrewd political game from the Chinese standpoint, it goes against the concept of an established normative code of conduct that is negotiated.

Another indication of Chinese uncompromising is the lack of a BRI agency. Within the BRI, investments, and partnership dividends are primarily based on China. The other countries are unable to invest in other states and are unable to reach the Chinese market, which makes the policy more in Chinese favor. Although this makes sense for China from a defensive realism perspective, within multilateralism, this lack of investment flows and removes the idea of BRI
multilateralism to make it primarily bilateral, albeit in a large number of member states. Unless China had adhered to the principles of multilateralism, the policies would have included guidelines to promote a more reasonable balance of power for all member nations, including those able to invest and receive dividends from the Chinese market. Initially, China vowed to make this a reality by joining the WTO in 2003, guaranteeing that its markets would be open to foreign countries and that other countries would participate in the Chinese market of the WTO in 2003.

As mentioned in previous analyses in Italy, due to its conduct, China's soft power has hit the EU. According to China's Policy Paper on the European Union states, “maintain two-way openness, promoting mutual investment. China will substantially ease market access, fully implement the pre-establishment national treatment management system and a negative list to promote a stable, fair, transparent, low-based, and predictable business environment that respects the legitimate rights and interests of foreign investment and treats Chinese and foreign firms registered in China as equals. China hopes that the EU will continue to keep its foreign market open, reduce and eliminate barriers to investment and discrimination, and provide a fair, transparent, and stable policy environment for Chinese businesses operating in Europe and protect their legitimate interests and rights.” (Yi, 2018).

This statement reflects China's intention and willingness to embrace other EU countries to invest in its nation while simultaneously calling on the EU to remain open to investments and activities. Moreover, it reflects a desire to open up the Chinese market to the EU to improve the relationship between the two entities, a longstanding fascination with the EU. It strengthens China concerning the EU, under soft power. The EU wants, as reported, a more transparent Chinese market to enable authorized access to the Chinese market. It is following EU principles, in which liberal trade agreements are prevalent in the Union. Although economic means frequently concern hard power, the perception of how soft power is used, as stated in the previous section of the theory. Within soft power, the position and values of the target audience are paramount for creating a relation with them. All efforts to promote a more positive relationship would fall on deaf ears of a value difference. As such, this policy paper is an effective way to improve soft power in the European Union, thus suggesting a strategic action to ensure that the conduct leading to the US trade war appears to be a singular example. Through extension, Italy, in compliance with the paper, should need to stick to the skepticism of the EU, because the report offers a reasonable opportunity to boost its status as long as China recognizes the various facets of the document.

Nonetheless, it requires action in conjunction with this quotation and others in the statement. It would have the opposite effect in Italy and, by implication in the EU, on their soft power. As the case may be, the actions of China were seen as inconsistent with these terms about both the BRI and the World Trade Organization (WTO). China's pledge to the WTO was, as stated previously, open its economy and markets to foreign businesses, improve transparency, and the rule of law within its trading regime (Xinhua, 2018). In the EU as a whole, however, these assurances are still unfruitful as China is one of the primary sources of tension for EU grievances within the WTO (WTO, 2018). The statement explicitly states that China may open up its market to the EU Member States, and Chinese action on the WTO reflects this promise, a promise that the EU does not feel is honored. It is counterproductive to China's position in connection with soft power. Also, this inconsistency induces mistrust in China and destroys the desire to believe in promises made by China. Strategic partnerships are formed based on trust and thus of mutual benefit within the collaboration, but a lack of action or a slow response to such commitments undermines the prestige of Chinese policy for foreign nations. It could also be a challenge for Italy because it could demonstrate that China is using economic means to benefit from a new partnership while keeping the relationship from becoming a positive-sum relationship. This difference between the vow and the action or the current lack could lead to Italy regretting the initiative and dissuading other countries from participating. The activity of this kind would be unwise for China as similar conduct; the US trade war was motivated by an appeal for growth against ideological values and a focus on compromises.
However, the prospect of other nations joining the BRI remains ever-present amid this. The justification for this is tension between a country's core values of politics and an overall sense of security. It is fascinating enough, a struggle between soft power and defensive realism. As previously stated, soft power should not completely dissuade a nation from agreeing if it interests its security at best. It is known that the EU has had concerns concerning China, including Italy. One potential explanation for this is the surge of nationalism, which has formed in the Western nations, as seen in the US and the Trump and EU elections, as previously stated. These pessimistic views were elevated in other nations, where personal growth remained paramount and a self-interest paradigm that dominated over the prosperity of other countries, including Italy, Germany, and France. As a result, self-interest would be of utmost importance.

9. The role of Germany and France on China’s economic efforts
From a defensive pragmatic perspective, China’s relationship with the EU, and especially Germany and France, as the EU’s two more powerful actors are a fascinating one. China’s investments in Germany and France are substantial, having invested 37 billion USD in the EU in 2016 (Hanemann et al., 2019).

Initially, these investments could appear detrimental to China’s security because of the lack of significant investments by the EU in China. This conduct, though, is rather smart when delved into. In this way, they will gain experience to challenge their economic growth, as their production inevitably would falter because of a lack of technical capacity. It implies innovation in the developed technology industry is a viable way to learn the way more developed countries operate. In doing so, China is circumventing years of production, trial and error by achieving the same level of technology by bringing back their technical expertise. The defensive realism feature aligns well with relative growth, as the acquisition of these new techniques preserves their relative growth. It could also boost China's ability to invest in SOEs, leading to new inventions in the goods for the Chinese market, while at the same time ensuring that the states in which these investments were made have little competitive potential. In this way, technical ignorance, incompetence, or absence are avoided, and a possible challenge to their future development is eliminated. Moreover, China’s relative growth would be in its favor compared to other nations with such technical competencies.

It has changed, though, as Chinese FDIs across the EU dropped by 50% between 2016 and 2018 (Hanemann et al., 2019). From the standpoint of the EU, the former status quo was a question that could be gleaned from the five-year downturn. One possible reason for this might be the lack of competitive opportunities in the Chinese market. As has been reported, in 2003, China entered the WTO and agreed to introduce measures to open up the Chinese market to foreign competitors that genuinely reach the international market and encourage the global market to enter China (Xinhua, 2018). However, these actions have still not taken place, and the actions taken in this respect can be interpreted differently.

The EU increased screening for FDIs from China, which is sound and reasonable from a realistic defensive standpoint (Hanemann et al., 2019). China’s FDI returns, coupled with the lack of access to its economy, contrasts sharply with the idea of a perceived balance of power. Such disproportionate advantages may, under a realistic defensive perspective, allow individual nations to ensure their growth or, at a minimum, ensure the relative balance of power is remained undisturbed. In that way, China retained its own ability to act as a strategic partner while also maintaining its competitiveness as a result of benefits gained from the collaboration. Defensive realism claims that behavior like these would generate tension between nations because the system’s altered balance of power will lead to mistrust. The anarchical mechanism would most likely trigger such a response if China were to compromise in such a way that concurrently disturbs a crucial building block of defensive realism. According to defensive realism, the rise in Chinese capability without similar benefits to the EU will trigger a response to ensure one’s security. The decision was made by reducing FDIs, including the screening above approaches with enhanced scrutiny and skepticism.
While the EU agreed to screen the FDIs in their entirety, France and Germany concentrated on specific aspects. France outlined FDI screenings in the fields of cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, robotics, semiconductors, and space operations, while Germany decided to focus more than 10% on investment in defense, critical infrastructure, and media from foreign companies (Hanemann et al., 2019). It may be due to the above power balance. China’s technology-related investments open up opportunities for China to achieve new trade secrets for manufacturing, infrastructure, and so on, which would disrupt the balance of power. If this happens, it will take some time for China to become independent without having ever opened up its market as it should have done since joining the WTO. It would be perfect for maintaining its security from China’s viewpoint, as self-sufficiency indicates a high level of protection and a high degree of confidence in its survival and prosperity. The notion of this incident would, however, imply that Germany, France, and the EU, in general, would lose their appeal. Because of how the EU is superior, more Chinese FDIs exist across the EU, and not in developing countries. They are still desirable and appealing as a viable partner. A quid pro quo would be beneficial in this scenario in which collaboration would flourish on all parties involved.

While defensive realism does not clash with the principle of retaining the previous status quo, the advantages of that structure should be significant. Despite their investments, France and Germany are not countries that would crumble. While their growth cannot be comparable to China, even though its growth has declined, they are still nations that are in growth (OECD, 2018).

The trends in Italy have driven them to join the BRI as a way of promoting expansion, but Germany and France, which after Brexit are two of the most influential EU members, will stick to their principles more effectively than Italy. A potential reason for the preference for values and self-growth could be in the surge of nationalism described previously, leading EU countries to be more security-oriented and less involved in maintaining productive and interdependent ties based on mutual trust. As such, the propensity to behave in line with defense realism seems more rational and perhaps even predictable. As mentioned, Germany has not been affected in the same way as other countries, yet it remains in a supranational union concerned and cannot resist touching this outcome. Agendas thus influenced prompt responses of nationalism that contradict the notion of one’s benefit at the cost of one’s values and national dignity. Combined with France’s and Germany’s strength as EU economies, which, given the above nationalistic movements, usually still retain liberal member state regulations, defensive realism is rather robust as a justification. They are privileged not to compromise on core values or give up China clear advantages in the case of sustained growth. Defensive realism would conclude that the minimum collaboration condition is to be able to collectively benefit from cooperation so that the current power structure between the parties involved is not disrupted.

From the multilateralism standpoint, the actions of China with the EU remain inconsistent with the recommendations of the theory. The entrance of China into the WTO is a prime example. Although China insisted on paper to open up its market for WTO membership, the EU mentioned above approach to this WTO proposal concerning China is evident. As stated, multilateralism emphasizes the significance of the normative code of conduct, which applies to the time that it occurs to preserve its validity and to ensure that all the parties involved comply, as all relevant parties approve the partnership regulations. It would have created goodwill and would have associated themselves with the concept of compromise. A compromise of its principles in this context may have meant a less antagonistic view of China. However, China’s status about its core values, such as its role in the One China Policy and foreign countries’ involvement with domestic problems in opposing the principle and promoting the notion of popular sovereignty, is absolute. Nevertheless, China would have opened its doors to competition and turned it into a market economy that would have been suitable for the dissatisfied EU, establishing a quid pro quo partnership between China and the EU.
Another example is China’s FDI conduct. In refusing to achieve the same future gains for the EU, they undermined the concept of normative guidelines at their specific times. It should, however, be noticed that this argument could not have been extended if the extreme downturn in Chinese FDIs was more abrupt in the EU or had it occurred for a shorter period. The decline, however, started in 2016, when EU investments reached 37 billion USD and subsequently dropped to 2018, whereby the new amount by contrast, as reported, amounted to 17 billion USD (Hanemann et al., 2019). This phase could be regarded as sufficient time for China to adapt to the new status quo to offset decreases in investment. For China, the trade war could be considered as a stimulus for seeing new trade relations as a critical instrument for sustaining its growth. However, very little has transpired from the perspective of China to rectify or overcome adverse trends over this period. If China had acted in accordance, as stated previously, China might have been more likely to open its market to the EU. Actions under the WTO to the degree that France, Germany, and the EU considered satisfactory were presumably seen as good faith, and while doing so would undermine Chinese products on the Chinese market, due to increased competition, the option was to lose more investment opportunities. The relative strength of China would not have changed dramatically in conjunction with its growth in previous years, but its success would have been anticipated in critical areas. It is attributable to the organization’s liberal trade policy in the EU. Although the notion of nationalism is becoming increasingly prevalent within the West, the Union is still an example of a multilateral partnership in which dividends still hold high satisfactory rules. As such, it becomes challenging for the EU to scrutinize China’s FDIs as a reaction to Chinese expansion, given the benefits the EU will reap from cooperation. Although the nationalism now appearing to influence the policies of the EU does not exclude this possibility definitively, the EU’s benefit from integration like this makes these acts ill-advised and contrary to the core values of the EU as a whole; nationalism has become a force in the policies of the EU, and it does not determine on the course of action of the EU definitively.

An indication that the EU needs more influence on the regulations is that France goes into new trade deals on equal footing with China, but appears vigilant in its opposition to the Belt and Road Initiative. As previously noted, the BRI has little bargaining ability to ensure that the arrangement is deemed acceptable for potential member states. Any effect on the regulations or the code of conduct as directly opposed to the two primaries, albeit different values of France, the liberal trade and national importance to ensure one’s prosperity on one’s terms. It is because France is a strong economy that can prioritize its ideals without having to think about compromising its value-based integrity. As a consequence, the necessity to join the BRI in less than acceptable terms does not extend to these two realities, France’s ideals and its economic strength. Through reaching arrangements, France and China adhere entirely to the notion of compromise and normative principles accepted by both sides. The lack of inclusion of other countries in these contracts circumvents a fundamental aspect of multilateralism, including the involvement of more than two nations in any kind of collaboration. At best, this can be represented as a bilateral normative deal between both countries, although it is a case in point where France is willing to cooperate with China if an organization is given to them.

Multilateralism, therefore, has theorized implication that it is an underutilized abstract principle in China’s response to the EU that might damage China’s partnership and perception as a whole, as the EU essentially represents the theory in action.

In terms of soft power, China’s actions do little to reinforce itself in this regard. Positive feedback was given, as reported, by the desire to enter the WTO and codify new market practices, but the negative aspect emerges due to inconsistencies between statements and actions. Within the context of soft power, as has been described, it is of paramount importance to determine the appropriate approach to the target audience, as soft power stands as the only sort of influence which relies entirely on the target's interpretation of actions rather than on tangible results from the use of hard power. The appeal of values, desires, and so forth are appropriate appeal points. In this respect, however, China’s soft power suffers.
The lack of conformity generates discrepancy, which is very similar to Italy’s dynamic of soft power with China. However, within the EU and Italy, there is a difference between France and Germany. Despite projections that suggest an undesirable slowdown in their economic development, Italy’s growth was marginal. Nevertheless, this is not the case. The lack of compromise in China shows a clear picture of what ideals and which they do not value. These initiatives had little need for soft power in this context because China’s exponential growth over time encouraged more new cooperative ties on China’s terms. After all, most countries engaging with China needed them. As an example, Italy itself stands, but France and Germany do not. Germany and China also have clear values and need more than that to agree to work together. The interest difference is still too significant to be significantly improved, possibly due to the rise of populism in the EU. However, this increase in nationalism may be considered contradictory. Given the two different ideologies that determine what the EU is doing, the odds of China appealing to them seem rather challenging, as it does not know which aspect to appeal to. While it is rational that China would fail in an attempt to appeal to the EU because of this inconsistency, the problem lies in its method of appeal. Mainly because their actions in regards to the WTO and their FDIs presumably did not appeal to either orthodoxy. China’s activities concerning the WTO have generally been characterized by a lack of collective action, making it harder to trust China with a liberal stance due to the lack of goodwill that has been formed in non-compliance.

Additionally, the lack of consistency in declarations and actions would only generate more reasons for skepticism from an already skeptical nationalist perspective. In the case of the FDI, the absence of measurable returns, as opposed to those received by China, will potentially alienate all contradictory dogmas. The idea of an uneven balance between two parties is counter to the notion of mutually beneficial collaboration, generating discontent within one side. The relationship is characterized by exploitation, keeping the market closed, while securing benefits from the demand of the other parties at the same time. It is also a notion that fuels nation skepticism, where this absence of dividends would possibly lead both to the end or to downshift a further benefit, particularly for one benefic, of the current agreement. The EU, as it stands, is essential to ensure that policy is taken to deliver returns at the cost of values. The only way that the EU or China would stick to each other without compromises is to threaten their security so that it would overcome the need to retain some obstructing values and require an assessment of which of those values are superfluous or paramount.

10. Conclusion
Defensive realism, multilateralism, and soft power were the philosophies considered for the study. Defensive realism was selected to look deeper into more apprehensive conduct and to explain possible actions which could appear counterproductive to collaboration to ensure security. Defensive realism has helped analyze suspicious or exploitative activities in the studied context and has been useful in evaluating possible motives behind behaving in a way that can build future tension given China’s current status quo with the US. On the other hand, multilateralism was selected for complexity.

The use of similar theories indicates a confusion as to what the potential outcome of the research might be, while different approaches might produce a more detailed and complex analysis. Besides, the EU has embraced a collaboration-based approach as a multilateral body, Italy’s involvement in the BRI, and large numbers of FDIs in the EU. However, the analysis showed that the inclusion of multilateralism did not produce the desired results. Although the nuanced analysis of the dynamics posed remains a specific liberal philosophy for inclusion in matters and relations, which remained mostly bilateral. Soft power has been included as a way to examine the possible ramifications of said actions concerning Chinese activity with the EU. The theory was intended to test the effects of analyzes of the two previous methods and to serve as a tool to explore the implications of China’s actions as well as the possible alternatives to China’s conduct.

According to the study, it can be seen that China’s attitude to the EU was very close to its ties with the US, in which the activity of China was primarily characterized by one-sided benefits,
inconsistencies between statements and actions, as well as a priority given to personal growth over more harmonious conduct. However, there was a lack of compromise throughout the study, which would help the EU adhere to a more rational manner, trying to ensure the deals made to achieve benefits for oneself. Furthermore, the increased scrutiny of the EU indicates certain similarities with the US concerning the trade war. China’s conduct is somewhat unusual as the lack of compromise over ideals has not provided too many benefits for robust economies.

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