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Strategic Narratives in Sino-European Relations

Master's thesis

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Year of the defence: 2024

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
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In Prague on 03/01/2024.

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References

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the presentation of strategic narratives by various European Union (EU) institutions towards the People's Republic of China (PRC), with a particular focus on developments between 2012 and 2022. The core of the research was an analysis of EU strategy and foreign policy documents on China. The aim is not only to identify different EU strategic narratives towards the PRC, but also to analyse how these narratives envisage EU-China strategic engagement, how they evolve over time, how they differ across institutions, and what the dynamics of different narratives within EU institutions are. The first part of the thesis provides the context of current Chinese and European narratives and explains the theoretical and methodological framework used. The second (main) part of the thesis is an analysis of EU policy communications on China. The key finding is that there are inconsistencies and sometimes even contradictions between the narratives used by different EU institutions, and that there is no single vision for EU-China strategic engagement. The evolution of each narrative over time has also been very different. Such inconsistency hampers the EU's efforts to present a coherent strategic approach vis-à-vis China. This, in turn, can arguably weaken the EU's ability to negotiate effectively with the PRC in both bilateral and multilateral settings. In other words, China's rise and growing discursive power require the EU to increase its own discursive power and narrative coherence in order to better compete with Beijing on the world stage and defend its interests and values more effectively.

Abstrakt

Cílem této práce je analyzovat prezentaci strategických narativů různých institucí Evropské unie (EU) vůči Čínské lidové republice (ČLR) se zvláštním zaměřením na vývoj v letech 2012 až 2022. Jádrem výzkumu byla analýza strategických a zahraničněpolitických dokumentů EU týkajících se Číny. Cílem je nejen identifikovat různé strategické narativy EU vůči ČLR, ale také analyzovat, jak tyto narativy předpokládají strategickou angažovanost EU a Číny, jak se vyvíjejí v čase, jak se liší mezi jednotlivými institucemi a jaká je dynamika různých narativů v rámci institucí EU. První část práce uvádí kontext současných čínských a evropských narativů a vysvětluje použitý teoretický a metodologický rámec. Druhou (hlavní) částí práce je analýza politických usnesení EU týkajících se Číny. Klíčovým zjištěním je, že mezi narativy používanými různými institucemi EU existují nesrovnalosti a někdy i rozpory a že neexistuje jednotná vize strategické angažovanosti EU a Číny. Vývoj jednotlivých narativů v průběhu času byl také velmi odlišný. Tato nejednotnost brání snahám EU prezentovat koherentní strategický přístup vůči Číně. To následně může oslabit schopnost EU účinně vyjednávat s ČLR jak v bilaterálním, tak v multilaterálním prostředí. Jinými slovy, vzestup Číny a její rostoucí diskurzivní síla vyžadují, aby EU zvýšila svou vlastní diskurzivní sílu a narativní koherenci, a mohla tak lépe konkurovat Pekingu na světové scéně a účinněji hájit své zájmy a hodnoty.

Keywords

Strategic narratives, foreign policy, European Union (EU), European narratives, People's Republic of China (PRC), Chinese narratives.

Klíčová slova

Strategické narativy, zahraniční politika, Evropská unie (EU), evropské narativy, Čínská lidová republika (ČLR), čínské narativy.

Title

Strategic Narratives in Sino-European Relations

Název práce

Strategické narativy v čínsko-evropských vztazích

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INTRODUCTION

China's rise from a rather poor developing country to a major economic power is a prominent theme in current academic, public, and foreign policy circles. In general, the discussion of China has shifted from a focus on its economic growth and its integration into the global open economy to a dialogue on the challenges that this shift entails. The challenge lies in China's increasingly assertive foreign policy as it pursues its goal of becoming a major power not only economically but also in terms of global influence.¹ Therefore, given the increasing importance of modern China in global affairs, there is a growing need to study the discursive tools that Beijing frequently uses, as well as to study the narrative creation of the European Union (EU).

China's rise has been accompanied by a major transformation in Beijing's external relations, so it is not surprising that Sino-European relations have also undergone a major change since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the EU and China in 1975. Just ten years later, in 1985, the main legal framework for relations with China (the EC-China Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement) was signed, and almost another decade later, in 1994, the EU-China political dialogue was formally established.² A key development in the cooperation between the two entities came in 2003 with the launch of the EU-China Strategic Partnership,³ which aimed to take EU-China relations beyond the long-standing economic relationship focused on trade and investment to a broader framework of engagement encompassing all other areas of cooperation,⁴

¹ Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Why Chinese Assertiveness Is Here to Stay," *The Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (2014): 151–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660x.2014.1002161>.

² European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2013 on EU-China relations (2012/2137(INI))," *Official Journal of the European Union* 59, no. 2016/C 036/20 (2016): 126, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013IP0097&qid=1690555858966>.

³ The same year also saw the publication of China's first ever policy paper on the EU.

⁴ EU-China Summit, *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* (2013), https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/china/docs/eu-china_2020_strategic_agenda_en.pdf, 1.

such as on the world's most pressing political, security and global challenges. This was followed just a decade later by the joint adoption of the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, which provided further strategic guidance for the partnership. As a result of this rapid development, the phenomenon of Sino-European relations and the respective foreign policies of both entities (especially those of individual European states) have been widely discussed by a wide range of scholars and policymakers. The research output of various institutions and journals on this topic is immense, mostly focusing on Sino-European economic relations and possible security issues, China's foreign policy endeavours, as well as Beijing's strategic narratives encompassing its foreign policy, such as those of the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI)⁵ or the overarching 'China Dream'.⁶

The last point introduces us to the issues addressed in this paper. With the rise of China and its global policy, Beijing began to develop and subsequently use strong discourse power in its multilateral and bilateral relations. This happens in two ways. First, the Chinese leadership aims to increase its soft and discursive power.⁷ Second, as a rapidly growing power, it has created new strategic narratives to navigate its rise and its relations with other countries.⁸ Beijing's interaction with the EU and its member states is no exception. Subsequently, in response to the sudden prominence of China's strategic narratives in international relations, scholars have begun to analyse Beijing's narratives. As a result, there is currently a plethora of research devoted to analysing the formation of China's narratives towards the EU and its European member states, namely in terms of the impact of Beijing's flagships such as the 'China Dream' and the BRI.

⁵ Also called the 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR).

⁶ Also called the 'Chinese Dream'.

⁷ Linus Hagström and Astrid H. M. Nordin, "China's 'Politics of Harmony' and the Quest for Soft Power in International Politics," *International Studies Review* 22, no. 3 (2020): 507–13, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viz023>.

⁸ Aleš Karmazin and Nik Hynek, "Russian, US and Chinese Revisionism: Bridging Domestic and Great Power Politics," *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 6 (2020): 966–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1776221>.

However, research on European narratives has not gained much traction, especially compared to the focus on China's narratives. Existing literature tends to focus on the difficulties of European narrative formation, mainly the struggles to form and project coherent stories due to the hybrid structure of the EU and the clashes between its many voices, both national and supranational. No comprehensive study has yet been published on the problematics of the EU's strategic narratives towards China, in particular through an analysis of EU-China strategic communications published by different EU institutions - a study that would explore the problematics of the similarities, differences, and possible disparities of European strategic narratives deployed by the EU institutions.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to answer the following research question:

How did the EU present its strategic narratives towards China in its EU-China strategy and foreign policy documents published or adopted between 2012 and 2022, and how do these narratives envision EU-China strategic engagement?

In answering the main research question of this thesis, the following sub-questions will be used to guide the research and subsequent analysis of the EU's narrative presentation towards China.

1. What are the main strategic themes of EU foreign and security policy communications on China published between 2012 and 2022?
2. What are the EU's strategic narratives identified in the collected communications?
3. How did the EU's narratives evolve over time? Were there changes in content and narrative style?
4. Do the narratives vary between different EU institutions? If so, how?

The structure of the thesis is as follows. First, the literature review provides an overview of the academic debate on China's and the EU's respective strategic narratives. Second, the theoretical and methodological framework is presented, contextualising the academic debate on strategic narratives (as the main framework to be used later in the final part of the thesis) and outlining the data collection process of the documents collected for this thesis. Third, a content analysis of the collected policy communications is carried out in order to answer the first sub-question posed and to be used later as a building block for the following (core) part of this thesis. The chapter ends with concluding remarks in which the results of this analysis are discussed. Fourth, and most importantly, the narrative analysis of policy communications is carried out to identify the strategic narratives deployed by the EU institutions towards China. The remaining sub-questions guide the author through this part of the analysis in order to answer the main research question. This chapter also ends with concluding remarks that discuss the findings of this analysis. Finally, the thesis ends with conclusions, which reiterate the main findings of the narrative analysis and possible implications.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter conceptualises the issue of China's and the EU's strategic narratives on the basis of existing literature in order to provide background knowledge for answering the formulated research questions. While there are many academic works devoted to the analysis of China's narratives, research on European narratives, especially as presented by European institutions, has not gained much traction. First, China's narratives, and in particular President Xi's flagship initiatives, are discussed to provide an overview of China's current foreign policy and the content and argumentation of its narratives. Second, the EU's current

narratives and the struggle of the institution to develop coherent narratives, especially in contrast to those of Beijing, are discussed.

1.1 China's Strategic Narratives

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Chinese leaders have embarked on a journey to regain their once proudly held 'great power' status in international relations. The Chinese political elites see this quest as an effort to regain their unfairly lost international status (lost during the era of the 'Century of Humiliation'), rather than as an effort to gain something new - it is simply an ascent to the nation's former world status.⁹ One of the means to achieve Beijing's goals is the use of strategic narratives, which have subsequently become the subject of much debate among scholars.¹⁰

China's quest for greater discursive power began with the establishment of the Grand External Propaganda programme during the Hu Jintao era and the subsequent investment of billions of dollars by the state to promote the internationalisation of state media to 'tell the China story well'.¹¹ This new emphasis on a strong discursive power has since become an integral part of China's political strategy.¹² Hu's successor, Xi Jinping, has not only continued his predecessor's efforts, but has taken the discourse a step further. "Instead of only seeking to shape how the world sees China, Beijing now seeks to use discourse power, particularly through creating, disseminating, and promoting strategic

⁹ Yan Xuetong, "The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes," *Journal of Contemporary China* 10, no. 26 (2001): 33–34, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10670560123407>.

¹⁰ See: Lutgard Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23 (2018): 387-411, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-018-9529-8>; Yi Edward Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives in Global Governance Reform under Xi Jinping," *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 128 (2021): 299-313, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1790904>.

¹¹ Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives," 300.

¹² Yunhan Zhang and Jan Orbie, "Strategic Narratives in China's Climate Policy: Analysing Three Phases in China's Discourse Coalition," *The Pacific Review* 34, no. 1 (2019): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2019.1637366>.

narratives, to shape the international system itself".¹³ China's grand narrative, the 'China story', consists of various strategic narratives, usually designed for simultaneous consumption by both domestic and international audiences.¹⁴ These narratives, "constructed deliberately by political actors to achieve political objectives" typically involve "selective interpretations of the past, present, and future designed to achieve political objectives through persuasion".¹⁵

A much-used discursive device in Chinese politics (and therefore strategic narratives) are slogans. Official slogans have long been used in Chinese politics, both in internal strategic documents and in main speeches, and have become an "integral part of China's political system".¹⁶ Similarly, many scholars have spoken of their importance to China's political system.¹⁷ Political slogans serve a variety of functions, one of the most common being propaganda.¹⁸ However, the purpose of a slogan can be manifold. Aleš Karmazin, for example, argues that there are four additional core functions that Chinese slogans fulfil, as they are useful in terms of promoting ideological innovation, articulating policy and strategic direction, structuring policy as well as political debate, and demonstrating continuity in Beijing's policy and thus maintaining a sense of unity in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).¹⁹ Furthermore, as William Callahan argues, official slogans are easily dismissed as propaganda, but they are an essential tool for organising ideas and activity in Chinese politics.²⁰ The CCP

¹³ Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives," 300.

¹⁴ Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse," 387.

¹⁵ Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives," 304.

¹⁶ Aleš Karmazin, "Slogans as an Organizational Feature of Chinese Politics," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 25 (2020): 411, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-019-09651-w>.

¹⁷ See: Karmazin, "Slogans as an Organizational Feature," 411–29; Xing Lu, "An Ideological/Cultural Analysis of Political Slogans in Communist China," *Discourse & Society* 10, no. 4 (1999): 487–508, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926599010004003>.

¹⁸ Lu, "An Ideological/Cultural Analysis," 487–93.

¹⁹ Karmazin, "Slogans as an Organizational Feature," 411–29.

²⁰ William A. Callahan, "China's 'Asia Dream': The Belt Road Initiative and the New Regional Order," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 1, no. 3 (2016): 226–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891116647806>.

has mastered the art of using slogans as a political tool,²¹ as they have been used to achieve the right formulation, to consolidate the regime's discourse, and to present a desired world view.²²

In other words, slogans function as 'ideological frames'.²³ In particular, slogans associated with the CCP's political leaders (who launch or adopt such slogans) "typically encompass a broad range of policies and bear a broad message that is supposed to influence the overall (national as well as local) political environment" and are very likely to be linked to discourses that are essential to defining Chinese politics.²⁴ Moreover, such slogans help formulate key policy visions in terms of Beijing's overall strategic course (policy direction), as well as demonstrate the unity of the CCP leadership and help maintain its continuity by "demonstrating that each generation builds upon the previous one".²⁵ 'Xi Jinping Thought', the official doctrine of the current Chinese president, consists of a series of discursive strategies and slogans such as the 'Chinese Dream', the 'New Normal', the 'Four Comprehensives', or the 'Community of Common Destiny', which continue the political discourse of previous Chinese leaderships.²⁶ Similarly, President Xi has also on several occasions called on the media and government to 'tell the China story well' or 'properly', following in the footsteps of his predecessor.²⁷ There has been a general consistency in the discourse used by both past and present CCP Party leaders, with the same Party priorities and long-standing principles being maintained over the years. However, the strategic

²¹ Karmazin, "Slogans as an Organizational Feature," 411-18.

²² Lu, "An Ideological/Cultural Analysis," 487-93.

²³ Karmazin, "Slogans as an Organizational Feature," 416.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 417.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 422.

²⁶ Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse," 387.

²⁷ Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives," 300; Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse," 393-5; Zhongping Feng and Jing Huang, "Chinese Strategic Narratives of Europe Since the European Debt Crisis," in *One Belt, One Road, One Story?: Towards an EU-China Strategic Narrative*, ed. Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Jinghan Zeng, (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 139-65.

narratives currently in use are more diverse and are spread more loudly.²⁸ A non-exhaustive list of China's current major political slogans and strategic narratives has been drawn from the existing literature on strategic narratives and is presented below.

China Dream

The 'China Dream' or 'Chinese Dream' is a central narrative of Xi Jinping's foreign policy, in which Beijing strives to rise on the world stage and achieve a status commensurate with its economic power and size.²⁹ "Aimed at restoring the CCP's ideological legitimacy and attractiveness, and at enhancing its self-confidence", the 'China Dream' began to emerge and spread during the latter part of Hu's administration, and later came to the fore under President Xi's administration.³⁰ The 'Chinese Dream', as a "patriotic call to promote political unity" and an attempt to ignite a nationalist revival and link Party and Confucian values, was introduced by Xi as General Secretary of the CCP in November 2012, and later reiterated in his inaugural speech as President in March 2013.³¹ Rather than referring to an individual Chinese person's dream, it refers to the collective national dream of a successful modern China.³² It is arguably for this reason that the 'China Dream' at times challenges the 'American Dream' by presenting the 'China Dream' as the moral one, as a bundle of positive nationalist aspirations, in contrast to the American individualist or even 'selfish' one.³³

²⁸ Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse," 387.

²⁹ Karmazin and Hynek, "Russian, US and Chinese Revisionism," 957.

³⁰ Peter Ferdinand, "Westward Ho – the China Dream and 'One Belt, One Road': Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping," *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016): 942, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12660>.

³¹ Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse," 401.

³² Ferdinand, "Westward Ho – the China Dream," 943.; Karmazin, "Slogans as an Organizational Feature," 424.

³³ William A. Callahan, "Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream," *Politics* 35, no. 3–4 (2015): 223, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12088>.

One of Xi's key strategies is to narrate and share the positive experience of 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' (China's current ideological system) with the global audience as a viable alternative world order, especially when positioned against the Western-style democratic liberal one. 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics' is presented as the best possible governance system or model for China to achieve a prosperous society, and the achievement of this goal is then part of the broader 'Chinese Dream.'³⁴ Furthermore, the principles of 'peaceful development' and 'building a prosperous society' pursued by leaders before Xi have been projected into Xi's goal of achieving a 'moderately prosperous society in every sector' by 2021 (i.e., the centenary of the founding of the CCP) and achieving the modernisation and complete reunification of the nation by 2049 (i.e., the centenary of the founding of the PRC).³⁵ 'National rejuvenation', a crucial element (central component) of Xi's 'Chinese Dream', stands for precisely this restoration of China's former status as a 'great power' in the international arena. This shift represents a major change from the previous position of Deng Xiaoping, another well-known Chinese leader, who maintained the belief that "China should hide its capabilities and bide its time."³⁶

Belt and Road Initiative

The BRI, proposed by President Xi in October 2013, is a massive maritime and land infrastructure project that aims to achieve global connectivity between Asia, Europe, and Africa. This project of global 'infrastructure connectivity' is central to the 'China Dream' and an embodiment of Xi's political legitimacy.³⁷ Signalling Beijing's more active and long-term foreign policy, the BRI is a highly ambitious infrastructure development plan comprising two overlapping projects, the land

³⁴ Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse," 387–96.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 401.

³⁶ Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives," 300.

³⁷ Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse," 393.

‘economic belt’ and the ‘maritime silk road.’³⁸ Although the BRI is an original terminology, a “novel in the official discourse under Xi Jinping”, it can be perceived “as an international expansion on previous, more local policies, such as the ‘Go West’ strategy”.³⁹ The BRI is being used to present to the world the new, alternative vision for the world that the Chinese authorities are pushing – ‘Socialism with Chinese characteristics’.⁴⁰ If fully realised, the project would radically alter the geography of global affairs; however, the success of the BRI depends largely on the cooperation and support of others.⁴¹ Although the BRI itself is an infrastructure development strategy rather than a narrative, it is accompanied by strategic narratives that explain the need for states to engage with the initiative by convincing them of the inherent ‘benefits’ of their active participation in the project. Since its inception, the BRI has become a dominant narrative framework of Sino-European relations and, together with the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (a key financial instrument of the BRI), signals a much more proactive stance by China in Sino-European relations, especially when compared to the previous “hiding-capacities-and-biding-time diplomacy style”.⁴²

Community of Common Destiny for Mankind

The ‘Community of Common Destiny for Mankind’ or ‘Community of Shared Future for Mankind’ is another of Xi’s foreign policy signatures, a political slogan that encapsulates Beijing’s vision of an alternative world order. Originally introduced by Hu Jintao, this narrative was later brought to global attention by Xi, who has reportedly mentioned the concept more than 100 times in his

³⁸ Ferdinand, “Westward Ho – the China Dream,” 942.

³⁹ Lams, “Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse,” 397.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 387.

⁴¹ Ferdinand, “Westward Ho – the China Dream,” 955-56.

⁴² Feng and Huang, “Chinese Strategic Narratives of Europe,” 146-53.

speeches, presenting it as “China’s core principle to deal with the numerous challenges in global affairs”.⁴³ This strategic narrative was written into the Party Constitution after the 19th Party Congress in 2017, and is seen as central to the ideology of Xi Jinping Thought.⁴⁴ “Underlying this narrative is a global outlook, a new ‘win-win’ model in international relations in terms of mutual collaboration instead of the old ‘zero-sum’ model associated with a Western Cold War mentality”.^{45,46} The ‘community of common destiny for mankind’ is a strategic narrative used to persuade members of the international community to support this newly articulated vision of world order.⁴⁷ As explained by Xi at the 70th United Nations General Assembly in 2015, the ‘community of common destiny for mankind’ “encompasses five dimensions including political partnership, security, economic development, cultural exchanges, and environment”.⁴⁸ This demonstrates the broad scope of Beijing’s quest to transform global governance. As part of this narrative, the principles of ‘fairness’ and ‘equality’ are highlighted as counterpoints to the current world order, which is arguably a strategy to attract developing countries in particular.⁴⁹ In terms of enhancing its international dialogue, “China is stepping up its public diplomacy in the hope of enhancing its moral appeal of sincerely pursuing peaceful development and its dream of a ‘community of shared future for mankind’”.⁵⁰ For this reason, traditional Confucian values of harmony and sincerity have been increasingly linked to Chinese socialism in order to make the latter sound more appealing on the global stage.⁵¹ The success of this particular narrative on the global stage is

⁴³ Yang, “China’s Strategic Narratives,” 306.

⁴⁴ Lams, “Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse,” 397.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁴⁶ Emphasis for ‘win-win’ and ‘zero-sum’ added.

⁴⁷ Yang, “China’s Strategic Narratives,” 306-307.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁵⁰ Lams, “Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse,” 406.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 406.

evidenced by the fact that the phrase of a 'Community of Shared Future' was part of a resolution adopted at the UN Human Rights Council.⁵²

Global Governance Reform

In addition to the political slogans and (their respective) strategic narratives discussed above, Beijing's overall 'global governance reform' efforts should also be mentioned. Although, as noted previously, there has been no substantial ideological shift in Chinese narratives during President Xi's era, there has been a shift in the CCP's approach to the use of narratives as Beijing now actively seeks to use the power of discourse to reform the current global governance system. The current world order was established and continues to be run under the auspices of the US-led liberal democratic states, which "welcome China's participation on the condition that it follows the existing rules and behaves like a responsible stakeholder".⁵³ China, however, does not identify itself with this established world order and is therefore currently promoting a 'major-country' diplomacy 'with Chinese characteristics', which is the main ethos of the 'China story' being propagated globally.⁵⁴ In other words, the Chinese leadership is taking a more active and assertive role in international relations to promote the new, supposedly fairer, global order with the 'peaceful' and 'harmonious' nature of Chinese culture, endowed with Confucian values. Moreover, with the new emphasis on discourse power and the use of strategic narratives, China seeks to achieve the status of a 'rule/norm maker' and subsequently to lead global governance reform in areas that it perceives as not in line with its own objectives.⁵⁵ In other words, Beijing's current focus is on using discourse power

⁵² Ibid., 397-8.

⁵³ Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives," 305.

⁵⁴ Lams, "Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse," 406.

⁵⁵ Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives," 305.

to explain, justify, and promote China's new identity as a global leader, i.e., the leader of global governance reform.⁵⁶

It is important to note, however, that China is not, for the time being, seeking to overthrow the existing international world order altogether, but rather is seeking both status and power as it strives to exploit, rather than completely change, the current global rules.⁵⁷ There is much that China can achieve within the current world order in terms of its aspirations to 'great power' status, and thus it is currently "neither completely satisfied with the existing international order nor determined to overthrow it".⁵⁸ As a major global actor, China shares many common interests with the rest of the world, including Western liberal democracies. For example, it is in China's own interest to cooperate on common challenges such as nuclear proliferation or climate change. Recognising this, Beijing has been an enthusiastic supporter of selective international rules and norms where its values and principles are broadly aligned with the rest of the international community, such as those mentioned above. However, there are also narratives in which China stands in firm opposition to widely accepted norms, such as the universality of human rights, where internationally accepted norms are heavily based on Western liberal values that are perceived as politically threatening to China, and Beijing therefore does not intend to abide by these norms.⁵⁹ Moreover, Beijing sometimes seeks to be at the helm of the creation of new norms when the specific area of the global governance is still contested - as in the case of cyberspace, where China is promoting its own internet governance norm, the 'internet sovereignty approach', which "recognizes a nation-state's authority to limit and control Internet activity within its own

⁵⁶ Ibid., 302-3.

⁵⁷ Karmazin and Hynek, "Russian, US and Chinese Revisionism," 956.

⁵⁸ Yang, "China's Strategic Narratives," 301.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 305.

borders”.⁶⁰ It is in these areas where Beijing’s values do not align with established norms that it uses strategic narratives to legitimise, promote, and subsequently change these pre-established norms and standards according to its own values. In other words, “China oscillates between making use of the current order, trying to change some of its rules, shifting the global balance of power and pushing through its influence in specific thematic and regional areas”.⁶¹

1.2 EU’s Strategic Narratives

Since its inception, the EU has relied on strategic narratives to tell the story of its own emergence as an international actor, seeking to “build support within Europe for deeper integration and sought to forge influence internationally”.⁶² In other words, the EU has sought to narrate a common European identity. This central narrative emerged with a primary focus on a grand strategic vision of people from different backgrounds working together for a war-free Europe, narrating the EU as a ‘force for good’, an emerging international actor that has learnt from its bloody past.⁶³ This was followed by a narrative of the reconstruction of Western Europe after the Second World War, or a narrative of peace and reconciliation, which was then followed by a narrative of the post-Cold War period.⁶⁴ The new dominant narrative was that of European integration, of ‘Economic Europe’ and its single market, which has been at the heart of European integration since the 1980s and narrates the EU’s identity as a marketplace.⁶⁵ “The

⁶⁰ Ibid., 311.

⁶¹ Karmazin and Hynek, “Russian, US and Chinese Revisionism,” 967.

⁶² Alister Miskimmon, “Finding a Unified Voice? The European Union through a Strategic Narrative Lens,” in *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations*, ed. Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 85.

⁶³ Ibid., 88.

⁶⁴ Ian Manners and Philomena Murray, “The End of a Noble Narrative? European Integration Narratives after the Nobel Peace Prize,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 54, no. 1 (2015): 188.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12324>.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 191-2.

EU is inextricably linked with a strategic narrative, primarily aimed at bringing European states together in a cooperative project and to project a collective voice".⁶⁶ Developing such a European narrative, however, is no easy task.

Currently, "the European Union is considered a great power but without a single voice."⁶⁷ There is a great diversity in the domestic and foreign policies of EU member states, as well as a plurality of EU institutions. It is this supranational and intergovernmental hybrid nature of the Union that complicates the formation, projection as well as reception of an EU strategic narrative, as it "frustrates efforts to speak with a single European voice in international affairs".⁶⁸ According to many scholars, the EU struggles to formulate and project a coherent narrative. Notwithstanding the remarkable integrative steps the EU has taken since the end of the Cold War, the EU still struggles to form a coherent narrative (both internally and externally) which potentially hampers its strategic impact.⁶⁹ This can be seen in the following debate on the many different, overlapping, and changing narratives that scholars have analysed over the years of the EU's existence. Some scholars argue that there have been clashing narratives between East and West rather than an overarching European narrative. Although the EU has "[sought] to develop a doxa, a core story of Europe's quest for greatness, this grand narrative is subverted and transgressed by the cross-currents of many different intersecting 'small' narratives found in the continent's various peripheries".⁷⁰ In addition, a series of internal shocks have hampered the EU's ability to maintain internal cohesion (already severely challenged by increasing EU membership) and deploy strategic narratives –

⁶⁶ Miskimmon, "Finding a Unified Voice," 86.

⁶⁷ Alister Miskimmon and Ben O'Loughlin, "The EU's Struggle for a Strategic Narrative on China," in *One Belt, One Road, One Story?: Towards an EU-China Strategic Narrative*, ed. Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Jinghan Zeng (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 33.

⁶⁸ Miskimmon, "Finding a Unified Voice," 85.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 85-88.

⁷⁰ Johan Fornäs, "Europe Faces Europe: An Introduction," in *Europe Faces Europe: Narratives from Its Eastern Half*, ed. Johan Fornäs (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2017), 5.

shocks such as the Eurozone crisis, Brexit, or Russia's aggressive foreign policy in Eastern Europe.⁷¹ For instance, Brexit as an event undermined existing traditional European system narratives and currently serves as a reminder of the EU's failure to project unity.⁷² The EU failed to convince EU sceptics of the benefits of a united Europe, leading the majority of people in the UK who voted to feel that the disadvantages of being in the EU outweighed the benefits. In other words, the European strategic narratives that portrayed the EU as a valuable entity, emphasised its strength, and promoted unity and cooperation were challenged by the Brexit narratives, and lost.⁷³ Therefore, Brexit, essentially a nationalist narrative, won over European unity narratives.

There is currently no consensus on an overarching European narrative. A salient point is that the European Union "has often been slow or reluctant to explicitly set out a strategic narrative".⁷⁴ Some scholars claim that one of the dominant narratives of the EU today is 'united in diversity,' that is, the Union's motto.⁷⁵ However, other scholars criticise this claim, arguing that there is no strong narrative structure connected to this motto and that it may therefore be appropriated in too many ways or not at all.⁷⁶ Others argue that the EU has narrated its identity as an archetype that can be used by other countries in transforming in the international order.⁷⁷ Much of the current discourse focuses on the EU's struggle to construct a European identity, leading many scholars to attempt to characterise a common European essence, identity, or a narrative.

⁷¹ Miskimmon and O'Loughlin, "The EU's Struggle for a Strategic Narrative on China," 21.

⁷² Emma Flaherty and Laura Roselle, "Contentious Narratives and Europe: Conspiracy Theories and Strategic Narratives Surrounding RT's Brexit News Coverage," *Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 1.5 (2018): 53–60, <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/26508118>.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 53–60.

⁷⁴ Miskimmon, "Finding a Unified Voice," 91.

⁷⁵ Andrew Higson and Monica Sassatelli, "Narratives of European Identity," in *European Cinema and Television: Cultural Policy and Everyday Life*, ed. Ib Bondebjerg and Eva Novrup Redvall (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-7.

⁷⁷ Miskimmon and O'Loughlin, "The EU's Struggle for a Strategic Narrative on China," 27.

Subsequently, “many have problematized the lack of sufficiently rich and successful narratives of a shared European identity”.⁷⁸ There has been a great deal of research on ‘European identity’, but there is no consensus on what it means, what it encompasses, or who it includes.⁷⁹ The search for a European identity is particularly difficult because it is still in the process of being created and is therefore highly contested.⁸⁰ For these reasons, the EU has struggled to communicate its identity and its role in the global arena, as well as how it perceives the emerging international order and new policy challenges; however, “without a clear sense of what the EU’s narrative is, it makes it very difficult to project.”⁸¹ The struggle to find a common narrative is reflected in the EU’s calls for a common, comprehensive, and consistent EU global strategy, as well as in its efforts to “develop a more discernible narrative of its role in international affairs based around broad principles contained in formal texts such as the European Security Strategy of 2003”.⁸²

However, there is a growing urgency for the EU to be able to project coherent narratives. Particularly since the turn of the century, we have seen the EU take a more active role in international affairs,⁸³ coinciding with the rise of China. In light of these new developments, Miskimmon and O’Loughlin argue that the EU must engage with China’s growing role as a ‘goal-shaper and order-shaper’.⁸⁴ “The EU’s model of transforming the international system—its system narrative—must respond to this challenge... to prevent potential tensions and conflicts and restore its own vitality”.⁸⁵ However, given the discussion in this

⁷⁸ Fornäs, “Europe Faces Europe,” 4.

⁷⁹ Markus Thiel and Rebecca Friedman, “Introduction: Culture and Narratives of Transnational Belonging,” in *European Identity and Culture: Narratives of Transnational Belonging*, ed. Rebecca Friedman and Markus Thiel (Routledge, 2016), 1.

⁸⁰ Higson and Sassatelli, “Narratives of European Identity,” 26.

⁸¹ Miskimmon, “Finding a Unified Voice,” 88-95.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁴ Miskimmon and O’Loughlin, “The EU’s Struggle for a Strategic Narrative on China,” 27.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

chapter, it is not surprising that the EU has struggled to develop a compelling EU-China strategic narrative.⁸⁶ There are major challenges to the EU's efforts to project a coherent strategic narrative, stemming from the "continued centrality of member states as the main foreign policy actors".⁸⁷ Moreover, its hybrid institutional structure (comprising of supranational and intergovernmental aspects) "differentiates it from state actors with more conventional decision-making structures".⁸⁸ China, on the other hand, as a conventional state actor, has a much more linear decision-making structure that allows it to formulate strong, coherent narratives – especially since the CCP's priorities and policy legacy have been very consistent over the years, following the same goals and principles. The emergence of both the EU and China as global foreign policy actors is transforming the current international order,⁸⁹ which is increasingly shaped by actors' strategic narratives. According to Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Zeng, "the scope for cooperation or conflict between the two will be determined by their respective strategic narratives of how they view this new international order, how they view their emergent identities as international players, and how they press strategic narratives in the policy areas they interact in".⁹⁰ It is therefore crucial to study the narrative formation of various EU institutions towards China. At the moment, Beijing is one step ahead.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁷ Miskimmon, "Finding a Unified Voice," 86.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 102.

⁸⁹ Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Jinghan Zeng, "Introduction," in *One Belt, One Road, One Story?: Towards an EU-China Strategic Narrative*, ed. Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Jinghan Zeng (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 10.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 10.

2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Strategic Narratives

As is now widely acknowledged, the end of the Cold War led to the emergence of a new system of global politics and, with it, a new world order. In this new reality, the old ways of understanding international relations and power struggles based on the use of hard power were no longer sufficient, as the frameworks widely used at that time were no longer adequate to explain the new power politics. Therefore, as new dimensions of security issues began to emerge, various scholars sought to conceptualise them by creating new theoretical frameworks to help explain the dynamics of global affairs in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Strategic narratives are one of these emerging frameworks. Rather than discussing the various theoretical underpinnings or potential shortcomings of the concept of strategic narratives, this essay will attempt to explain the emergence and basic components of this concept in order to later use it as a lens for analysing China-focused foreign policy communications published by the various European institutions.

One of the seminal concepts created to help conceptualise this shift in post-Cold War era security dimensions was Joseph Nye's 'soft power', largely seen as the antithesis of the traditional concept of 'hard power' (a form of political power that relies largely on power resources – usually military or economic means – to pursue policy objectives).⁹¹ As defined by Nye, 'soft power' is a positive, attractive force that "arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies".⁹² It is often used to achieve a state's foreign policy objectives and is defined as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than

⁹¹ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990): 153–71, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>.

⁹² Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (2004): 256, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20202345>.

coercion or payments”.⁹³ However, soft power was soon criticised for its shortcomings and somewhat narrow and vague conceptualisation at the same time. While seen as a major advance in theoretical concepts to explain the new power dynamics, the concept of soft power was soon seen as inadequate to explain the newly emerging projections of state power, especially when it came to authoritarian states. William A. Callahan, for example, argued that soft power, defined predominantly as a positive form of power, could also take on a negative rather than a positive form, like in the case of China, whose politics are strongly characterised by the narrative division between ‘itself’ and the barbaric ‘other’.⁹⁴ In addition, Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig argued that authoritarian soft power should instead be classified as ‘sharp power’, since its aim is not to win the ‘hearts and minds’ but rather to use coercive and manipulative techniques to achieve its goals.⁹⁵

‘Strategic narratives’ are another of the new theoretical frameworks that have emerged since the shortcomings of the concept of soft power were exposed. According to Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon and Ben O’Loughlin, strategic narrative is “a new means to understand soft power”.⁹⁶ Like Nye’s concept, strategic narratives aim to understand the fundamental change in the international system by examining methods of influence in international affairs. Strategic narratives bring us “back to asking what means and methods of persuasion and influence are likely to work under what conditions, and to a focus

⁹³ Ibid., 256.

⁹⁴ Callahan, “Identity and Security in China,” 220-3.

⁹⁵ Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, *From “Soft Power” to “Sharp Power”: Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World*, Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence (National Endowment for Democracy, 2017), 13.

⁹⁶ Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O’Loughlin, “Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power,” *Media, War & Conflict* 7, no. 1 (2014): 70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635213516696>.

on those conditions of communication and interaction, which have changed so fundamentally since Nye's seminal 1990 article".⁹⁷

Strategic narratives are essential to understanding persuasion in global affairs, as they lie at the intersection of communication and international relations. They address "the formation, projection and diffusion, and reception of ideas in the international system" and are used strategically by different states to influence their target audiences.⁹⁸ In other words, political actors "craft and project narratives in order to give sense to international affairs in a way that gives them a strategic benefit".⁹⁹ Moreover, strategic narratives as a concept contribute greatly to the understanding of communication in international relations. Arguably, one of the biggest differences between the concepts of soft power and strategic narratives is the following. As Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon and Ben O'Loughlin explain, "communication involves both verbal and other forms of communication. This is important because a focus on strategic narrative then bridges the gap between hard and soft power concepts. The use of military force, for example, can be understood to be part of the narrative projection of a state".¹⁰⁰ This factor greatly enhances the explanatory power of narratives, making them much broader than the narrow definition of soft power, which focuses primarily on aspects of attractiveness and appeal.

Strategic narratives are a communication tool, a means by which political actors can give meaning to past, present, and future events, create a shared meaning of these events, and ultimately shape the behaviour of international and/or domestic actors in order to achieve given political objectives.¹⁰¹ Narratives help

⁹⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁹⁹ Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 248.

¹⁰⁰ Roselle, Miskimmon, and O'Loughlin, "Strategic Narrative: A New Means," 75.

¹⁰¹ Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*, 7.

to “explain the major dynamics in international affairs”¹⁰² and can be used to “legitimise and justify grand strategic plans and their application”.¹⁰³ Some of the better known narratives include the United States’ Great Power or the War on Terror; the Cold War; the Rise of China; the efforts of EU member states to shape their integration processes within the Union; or even Samuel Huntington’s Clash of Civilisations.¹⁰⁴ Actors in the international system “hold long-term narratives about themselves, about issues, and about the international system,” and seek to either challenge or reinforce the current system.¹⁰⁵ A particular theme of a narrative (be it an actor, an issue, or the international system itself) is framed at any given moment by different actors in different ways,¹⁰⁶ depending on their interpretation of the issue at hand. This framing is a crucial part of the formation of narratives, whereby the various components of narratives are *framed* in a particular way, whereby to frame means to select, emphasise, and make connections between certain aspects of events or issues in order to promote a specific interpretation, evaluation, or solution.¹⁰⁷ This leads to interactions and clashes between different narratives. Through the use of strategic narratives, actors seek to “create a shared understanding of the world, of other political actors, and of policy” and hope that their narratives are strong enough to win over their counter-narratives, which would then strengthen that actor’s legitimacy and increase its power.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Ibid., 1.

¹⁰³ Karmazin and Hynek, “Russian, US and Chinese Revisionism,” 958.

¹⁰⁴ Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*, 1-43, 140-46.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰⁷ Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and US Foreign Policy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), quoted in Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, “Introduction,” in *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations*, ed. Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 1.

There are certain elements that make up a narrative. Generally speaking, “a narrative entails an initial situation or order, a problem that disrupts that order, and a resolution that re-establishes order, though that order may be slightly altered from the initial situation”.¹⁰⁹ Different scholars have proposed different components, which tend to be very similar in nature. A good starting point for understanding the basic components of narratives is the framework proposed by Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon and Ben O’Loughlin,¹¹⁰ who identify the components as follows:

- *Characters or actors* are those who have agency and are important to the narrative. These can be states, non-state actors, NGOs etc. It is also important to pay attention which specific states or non-state actors are involved in a given narrative.
- *Setting / environment / space* refer to how the international system, or the world, is understood. For example, is it one of growing interdependence and globalisation or one of friends and enemies?
- *Conflict or action* refers to perceived threats, responses, and interactions between actors.
- *Resolution or suggested resolution* is a course of action to resolve a conflict or disruption of the status quo. In other words, which kind of actions are highlighted as relevant ones?

In conclusion, strategic narratives serve the purpose of legitimation or making sense of one’s strategic situation. Through their use, political leaders shape the experience of a particular audience. When used ‘strategically’, they function as instruments of persuasion, whereby the narrator creates a rationale for taking

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Leonard Bernardi et al., *Narrative Landmines: Rumors, Islamist Extremism, and the Struggle for Strategic Influence*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), quoted in Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*, 7.

¹¹⁰ Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle, “Introduction,” 7.

certain actions and convinces the audience that this course of action was indeed necessary and justified. Strategic narratives will be used as a tool to explore and help conceptualise European narratives. The components presented above are a useful stepping stone in the effort to look at the basic components of narratives - components to be considered when identifying EU's narratives from the collected strategic documents and communications. The focus of the analysis will be on framing and presentation of the narratives by the European Union. The main issues to be identified in the EU's narratives will be which institutions are the narrators, how the narratives are articulated (what is the plot of the narrative) and how they are justified, how they have evolved over time and how this evolution differs between the narrators. Moreover, as Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle note, "no state's narrative exists in a vacuum: the ether of international affairs is filled with multiple narratives—competing and overlapping, epochal and issue-specific".¹¹¹ Therefore, in addition to identifying European narratives, this thesis will also examine the dynamics between the narrative presentation of various EU institutions.

2.2 Data Gathering

For the purposes of this thesis, primary sources on EU-China foreign and security policy were collected. All these sources are official documents published by different EU institutions and are therefore both valid and reliable. The primary sources collected were policy documents published between 2012 and 2022, i.e., the timeframe set by the research question. First, key documents that define the EU's China policy and provide the basic framework for relations between the two entities were collected as follows. According to the Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China, the basic premises of EU-China engagement are defined by the following three documents: *Elements for a new EU*

¹¹¹ Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle, *Strategic Narratives*, 141.

Strategy on China (2016) and *Council Conclusions EU Strategy on China* (2016), both of which were reviewed in 2019 in the *EU-China – A Strategic Outlook*.¹¹² In addition, the practical agenda for cooperation between the two entities is set out in the *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* (2013) and the EU-China Summit Joint statements.¹¹³ For this reason, all four documents mentioned were collected on the website of the European External Action Service (EEAS),¹¹⁴ and the EU-China Summit Joint statements were collected on the official websites of the Council of the EU and the European Council,¹¹⁵ as well as on the website of the European Commission (EC).¹¹⁶ In addition, as the annual EU-China Summits are the highest-level forum for bilateral relations between the two entities, not only joint statements but also and joint press communiqués of the Summits from 2012 to 2022 were collected, where available.¹¹⁷

Second, the EUR-LEX database was searched for additional documents defining the EU's foreign and security policy towards China.¹¹⁸ The following documents defining the EU's strategies towards China were selected using a multi-stage selection process. The (initial) pre-selection was done by keyword search (search results containing 'China', 'EU-China' and 'EU strategy' in the title were included). Furthermore, only documents written in English and published between 2012 and 2022 (inclusive) were included. The subsequent selection of documents was done through a surface reading of the selected samples. If the

¹¹² European Union, “Basic Framework for Relations,” EEAS (2021), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/china/basic-framework-relations_en?s=166.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ European Union, “Documents and Publications,” European Council, Council of the European Union (accessed February 15, 2023), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/>.

¹¹⁶ European Union, “Press Corner,” European Commission (accessed January 13, 2023), <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/home/en>.

¹¹⁷ Documents were collected from: European Union, “Documents and Publications.”

¹¹⁸ European Union, “Access to European Union Law,” EUR-LEX (accessed February 15, 2023), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html?locale=en>.

content of the documents could not be considered strategic,¹¹⁹ they were excluded from the analysis. Furthermore, the documents sought were those that dealt with the transnational strategy of the EU (as one entity) vis-à-vis China (as another entity). Therefore, only documents defining EU-China foreign policy or European security strategy vis-à-vis the PRC were considered. Communications defining and setting the conditions for niche areas of cooperation, such as climate change, air safety, (free) trade or investment, or documents dealing mainly with some of China's special administrative regions and issues, such as human rights violations or Hong Kong's autonomy, were therefore excluded. After all these steps, four European Parliament resolutions met the criteria. In addition, in order to ensure that the most important EU-China communications outlining the respective institutions' strategic cooperation were selected and that no important documents were omitted, the selection of documents was cross-checked through an additional search on relevant EU search engines and databases, namely those of the EEAS, the European Commission, the Council of the EU and the European Council, to confirm that the selection of documents was indeed comprehensive of the EU's China strategy and included all relevant documents. No additional documents were found that had not been identified prior to this final cross-check.

The aim of the document selection described above was to achieve representativeness rather than an all-encompassing account of all the communications published by the EU on its China policy. Therefore, the selection of documents presented and analysed is not an exhaustive list of all EU-China policies, as this would be an unfeasible task given the limitations of this thesis. Rather, the selection provides an overview of the European Union's strategy towards China and thus a means of analysing the evolving relationship between these two entities and the strategic narratives used. Following the pre-selection

¹¹⁹ The aim of this thesis was to analyse communications of foreign and security policy and of a strategic nature.

of documents and a cross-check of their suitability for the subsequent analysis, the *Council Conclusions EU Strategy on China* (2016) were ultimately excluded from the documents collected for the following reasons. An essential part of the research presented in this thesis is the analysis of the evolution of the narratives of different EU institutions over time. However, this document was found to be the only communication adopted by the Council of the European Union, and thus the development of themes or changes in narratives over time would be impossible to observe.

A total of 13 documents were collected following the data collection described above. The following table shows all the documents collected for analysis, as well as the pseudonyms assigned to each communication for further reference throughout the thesis.

Pseudonym	Full title of the document
Main Strategic Documents	
Strategic Agenda	EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation
Elements	Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Elements for a new EU strategy on China
Strategic Outlook	Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council: EU-China – A strategic outlook
EU-China Summit Communications	
14th Summit	Joint Press Communiqué of the 14th EU-China Summit
15th Summit	Joint Press Communiqué 15th EU-China Summit: Towards a stronger EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

Summit of 2014 ¹²⁰	Joint Statement: Deepening the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for mutual benefit
17th Summit	EU-China Summit joint statement: The way forward after forty years of EU-China cooperation
20th Summit	Joint statement of the 20th EU-China Summit
21st Summit	Joint statement of the 21st EU-China summit

European Parliament Resolutions

EP of 2013	European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2013 on EU-China relations
EP of 2015	European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2015 on EU-China relations
EP of 2018	European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018 on the state of EU-China relations
EP of 2021	European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021 on a new EU-China strategy

Table 1: Full titles and pseudonyms of communications collected

Source: Author's own list

3. EU'S COMMUNICATIONS IN RELATION TO CHINA: CONTENT ANALYSIS

In order to analyse the documents by means of content analysis, their text must be divided into different categories. This allows us to systematically identify their characteristics, comment on the content of the documents, and draw conclusions from the data. This type of analysis allows us to identify the focus and trends of the communication and to highlight the differences in the content of the document. The content analysis was carried out on the collected sample of EU-China policy documents published between 2012 and 2022. Each communication

¹²⁰ This particular EU-China summit was not officially given a serial number from which to create a pseudonym for the document. Therefore, the year of the summit was used to create the pseudonym instead.

is a unit of analysis, i.e. there were 13 units of analysis in total. The coding categories for the analysis were constructed deductively, i.e. determined in advance, based on the findings from the previous chapters of this thesis and the research questions posed. The content analysis was carried out in the following stages. First, the data identification and the collection of relevant documents were carried out as described in the previous chapter, section '2.2 data gathering'. Second, the coding categories (described later in section '3.3 coding framework') were established in accordance with the formulated research questions. Third, the content was coded accordingly. Due to the nature of the codes selected, coding into multiple categories was possible. Fourth, validity and reliability checks were carried out on one document of each document type. Fifth, the documents were analysed, and the results presented. The main purpose of this analysis was mainly to answer the first sub-question of the thesis, i.e. what the main themes in EU foreign and security policy communication on China were, and then to use it as a starting point for the narrative analysis.

3.1 Basic Characteristics of the Documents

Document	Author (EU institution)	Type of document	Year published	By
Main Strategic Documents				
Strategic Agenda	European Council, European Commission	Jointly adopted strategy	2013	EU-China
Elements	European Commission, EEAS	Joint communication	2016	EU
Strategic Outlook	European Commission, EEAS	Joint communication	2019	EU

EU-China Summit Statements

14 th Summit	European Council, European Commission	Joint press communiqué	2012	EU- China
15 th Summit	European Council, European Commission	Joint press communiqué	2012	EU- China
Summit of 2014*	European Council, European Commission	Joint statement	2014	EU- China
17 th Summit	European Council, European Commission	Joint statement	2015	EU- China
20 th Summit	European Council, European Commission	Joint statement	2018	EU- China
21 st Summit	European Council, European Commission	Joint statement	2019	EU- China

European Parliament Resolutions

EP of 2013	European Parliament	Own-initiative resolution	2013	EU
EP of 2015	European Parliament	Own-initiative resolution	2015	EU
EP of 2018	European Parliament	Own-initiative resolution	2018	EU
EP of 2021	European Parliament	Own-initiative resolution	2021	EU

Table 2: Communications divided by document type and basic features

Source: Author's own findings

Table 2 presents the basic characteristics of the documents analysed. It shows the EU institutions involved in the policy-making process,¹²¹ the type of the document, the year of publication, and the entities issuing the communication (the EU or the EU and China). These basic classifications provide us with crucial information that will be used later in the analysis of the documents. Knowing which institutions published these communications allows us to analyse possible correlations between them and the content of the documents. Another important feature of the documents is the year of publication, which allows us to observe whether there has been a change in content and/ or narrative over time. In addition, it is also crucial to take into account whether the communication was adopted only by an EU institution or through EU-China cooperation, as this further influences both the content of the communication and the formation of narratives.

3.2 Basic Structure

European Parliament Resolutions

EP resolutions are generally structured.¹²² The first part of the communications is a bulleted list of a wide range of written communications, declarations, resolutions, adopted legislation, and important milestones. It thus illustrates the legal and factual basis of EU-China relations, with recent developments being added to each new resolution.¹²³ The second part of the resolutions is another bulleted list, with each entry illustrating other realities and, in particular, recent developments in the EU, China, or EU-China relations, setting thus the context

¹²¹ Table 2 illustrates the EU institutions involved in the adoption of the documents, rather than listing the representatives of the institutions that adopted the documents. Moreover, representatives from Beijing are omitted as the main purpose of this table is to illustrate which EU institutions were involved in the adoption of these documents. The full list of authors can be found in Appendix 1.

¹²² With the exception of EP resolution of 2018.

¹²³ This first part illustrates the frameworks, agreements, resolutions, treaties, communications, declarations, reports, Council conclusions, established dialogues, guidelines, policy papers, international conventions, PRC legislation, and many others.

of current issues in the domestic spheres of both entities as well as in terms of their mutual relations. In addition, this second part illustrates the values on which the EP wishes to base EU-China relations, such as adherence to the UN Charter and the universality of human rights, and draws attention to the repression suffered by those concerned in China. In these two sections, the EP refers to new developments both in China and in various EU institutions, demonstrating a continuous high degree of situational awareness. The third and the largest part of the document is a structured body, divided into sections with headings.¹²⁴ In addition, all resolutions end with an instruction to the President of the EP to forward the resolution to various European institutions (such as the Council and the Commission) as well as to the government of the PRC.

EU-China Summit Statements

An unstructured document was the exception for EP resolutions. The reverse is true for communications following EU-China summits, where only two out of six documents analysed were somewhat structured. The rest were written as a long bulleted (numbered) list of various global developments and issues, shared values, cooperation frameworks and dialogue mechanisms. In general, the documents list a wide range of achievements and cooperation successes in various fields that need to be followed up by further cooperation in order to take EU-China cooperation to a higher level, as well as note areas where mutual cooperation and dialogue should be strengthened.

¹²⁴ The only exception was the EP resolution of 2018, where the main body was not structured, but consisted only of numbered paragraphs.

Main Strategic Documents

The main EU-China strategic communications are structured. The *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*, jointly adopted by the EU and China, is divided into a foreword, sections with short introductions (sometimes followed by headings of sub-sections) and key initiatives listed in numbered bullet points. The document is written as a positive action plan, similar to the Summit communications. The *Elements for a new EU Strategy on China* and the *EU-China Strategic Outlook*, adopted by the EU, are similar in form and are arguably the most structured of all the documents analysed. The documents are no longer so focused on mutual engagement, nor do they read like a wish list. Instead, the communications are written in a more analytical way, assessing EU-China cooperation and providing a lot of context on China. The text is divided into thematic chapters with headings (and subheadings), and the sections provide the reader with comprehensive information on developments in China, as well as on the values and principles of engagement on which the EU wishes to build their mutual relationship. The first communication concludes its sections with bulleted summaries, while the second assesses several dimensions of the bilateral relationship and sets out a concrete 10-point action plan.

3.3 Coding Framework

Table 3 (below) illustrates the coding framework used to analyse the primary documents collected. The definitions of the coding categories are described below, together with an explanation of why these exact categories were considered important for the analysis. It should be noted that the analysis carried out on the basis of this framework is not an exact analysis, as the conceptual categories may overlap. The focus of this analysis was not to list all the themes, actors and narratives present, but rather to identify the most prominent ones that

define the documents and to analyse their role and presence. The findings from this content analysis are then used to inform the narrative analysis.

Doc.	Themes	*Threats	*Opportunities	Actors	China's narratives
Doc. No.1					
Doc. No.2					
Doc...					
Doc. No.13					

Table 3: Coding categories used for the content analysis

Source: Author’s own analysis

With regard to the themes of the documents, the presence of the three most prominent themes was determined (based on the amount of space allocated to the themes) and then marked, with the most dominant theme being numbered 1, and the second and third most dominant themes being numbered 2 and 3 respectively. Second, the most prominent threats and opportunities were identified based on the space, frequency, intensity (i.e. the amount of strength in a particular direction) and perceived importance of the themes. These two categories were then juxtaposed to derive an overall ‘classification of China’ in the communications as a threat, partner, or rival, which is illustrated in the tables summarising the results of the analysis in the following section of this chapter (‘3.4 main findings’). Third, the author looked for a significant presence (determined by space and frequency) of actors other than the EU (and its institutions) or China. In addition, a reason for their mention and the direction in which these actors were discussed would also be commented. Fourth, China's narratives were searched for, with the author focusing mainly on the direction and intensity in which the narratives were described. The narratives the author primarily searched for were those identified in the literature review based on the

existing literature. This context was then also used to derive an overall classification of China.

3.4 Main Findings

The following chapter summarises the highlights of the content analysis of the documents collected. The highlights are discussed per type of document, i.e., in three sections - first are the European Parliament Resolutions, second are the EU-China Summit Statements, and third are the Main Strategic Documents. The main highlights are presented in a table. This is followed by a discussion of the most salient aspects across the coding categories and their development over the years.

European Parliament Resolutions

Doc.	Themes	Classification of China	Actors	China's narratives
EP of 2013	1. Human rights issues and abuses 2. China's external relations 3. Universal values	Ambiguous (partner)	N/A	N/A
EP of 2015	1. Human rights issues and abuses 2. China's economic growth 3. Security threats and escalating tensions	Becoming a threat	US cooperation	Chinese Dream, New Normal, BRI, Global Governance Reform, Major Power Discourse.
EP of 2018	1. Human rights issues and abuses 2. China's economic growth 3. Environmental Governance	Becoming a threat	EU's partners in the Asia-Pacific	BRI, Global Governance Reform.

EP of 2021	1. Fostering EU's strategic autonomy	Threat (rival)	US and other like-minded partners	BRI, Global Governance Reform (Digital Governance).
	2. Human rights issues and abuses			
	3. EU's like- minded partners			

Table 4: Main findings of the content analysis: European Parliament resolutions

Source: Author's own analysis

In terms of the EP resolutions, arguably the most dominant theme was that of human rights issues and abuses and the general lack of respect for certain rights in China, coupled with frequent calls for Beijing to uphold the universality of human rights and make tangible improvements to its poor domestic human rights record. Among the issues frequently raised were the growing assertiveness of President Xi's government both internally and externally, the curtailment of human rights under the pretext of security and stability, controversial cyber security and national security laws, massive digital surveillance, religious regulations in Tibet and Xinjiang, the gradual erosion of freedoms in Hong Kong, flawed Chinese jurisprudence, the death penalty, illegal detainees living in inhumane conditions in prison camps, and the dysfunctionality of the EU-China human rights dialogue. Similarly, Beijing's responsibility to uphold international values and contribute to peace and global security as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the importance of peaceful settlement of disputes based on international law (such as UNCLOS), and the wishful thinking that Beijing would support a new world order based on universal values of human rights, democracy and human security were also frequently mentioned. These themes were overarchingly linked to Beijing's shift from 'reactive diplomacy' to 'proactive diplomacy' and its increasingly assertive behaviour.

Concerns about China as a rising political power were closely intertwined with the theme of its economic growth, the second most prominent theme overall, as China increasingly translated its economic power into political influence, including through the BRI. As a result, the EP's perception of the BRI gradually shifted from positive to negative, as the BRI began to be recognised for its geopolitical and security dimensions and as a highly effective narrative framework for Beijing's foreign policy. For this reason, the BRI had a strong presence in the 2018 and 2021 resolutions, as the theme of China as a 'threat' was prevalent throughout the resolutions. Subsequently, the EP stated that the new EU strategy on China must provide tools to address the political, economic, social, and technological threats posed by China, as its strong economic growth and assertive foreign policy agenda (in particular its investment strategy) pose a serious threat to multilateralism and core democratic values. Overall, there was a strong focus on FDI and financial flows, in particular on China's financing of critical infrastructure (BRI). There was also continued concern about China's assertive and expansionist policies in the South and East China Seas and the Taiwan Strait, as well as China's changing role and engagement in multilateral organisations, which are aimed at reshaping norms and advancing Beijing's long-term geopolitical strategy and economic interests. Great concern was also expressed about China's increasing digital authoritarianism and promotion of its own digital governance model, and the subsequent use of Chinese domestic censorship at the UN to manipulate procedures to minimise scrutiny of China's behaviour.

In fact, the EP resolution of 2021 was the first communication where human rights issues and violations did not dominate the table, although it remained a very prominent theme throughout. The resolution focused on achieving strategic independence from China, thereby promoting the EU's strategic autonomy. Acknowledging that the current EU-China strategy was flawed in many respects

and needed to be updated, the EP stated that the future EU strategy on China must address the political, economic, social, and technological threats posed by China through its various channels. The EP also called for an EU-wide audit of the EU's dependence on China and, for the first time, discussed China's covert actions in Europe, such as disinformation campaigns. It is also worth noting the EP's great situational awareness, as the resolutions always referred to recent events and developments when explaining its stance towards Beijing. This was reflected in a great ability to follow China's narratives and understand their implications for both Beijing's foreign policy and the EU's strategic engagement with China.

Moreover, instead of greater cooperation with Beijing, the EP sought to build partnerships with the EU's 'like-minded partners' and combine the strength of liberal democracies. This marks another major shift in the content of the resolutions. There was a significant evolution in the presence of actors in the communications, from virtually no mention of actors other than China and the EU to their prominence in the resolutions. The first change occurred in 2015, when cooperation with the US was mentioned in terms of exploring a common approach to Beijing, especially in light of the 'Chinese Dream'. The following resolution listed the EU's partners in the Asia-Pacific region (in addition to the US, Japan, South Korea, ASEAN, Australia, and New Zealand were also mentioned as partners in the region). In 2021, the US and other 'like-minded partners' were mentioned several times. For the first time, the importance of the EU-US partnership was stressed, along with the need to develop a dynamic transatlantic relationship with the US administration. Moreover, 'like-minded partners' became a widely used catchphrase (referring to the US, Canada, the UK, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan) as the EP called for greater cooperation with these states. It should be recalled that the resolutions analysed were, by default, specifically concerned with EU-China relations. The

shift in focus from the EU-China partnership to the wider Asia-Pacific region is therefore significant, as it signals a much greater concern with the region as a whole rather than with only China, and a move towards less dependence on China as a partner and more cooperation with 'like-minded partners' who share the same democratic values.

This shift was also reflected in the decreasing number of opportunities for EU-China cooperation (these were mostly focused on addressing global concerns such as human rights, regional security issues, climate change and other key environmental challenges). The nature of the opportunities for cooperation with China has changed very little. Over time, however, the threats became more prominent in the resolutions, and by 2021 they seemed almost to counteract the potential positive effects of the partnership. The EP's perception of Beijing shifted from a belief that the Union should take greater advantage of the opportunities offered by China's economic growth and investment in Europe to a recognition of the need to promote the EU's strategic autonomy and cooperation with other partners as its former partner increasingly became a strategic rival and a 'threat'.

EU-China Summit Statements

Doc.	Themes	Classification of China	Actors	China's narratives
14 th Summit	1. Economy, trade, and investment 2. Environmental governance	Partner	N/A	Peaceful development.
15 th Summit	1. Economy, trade, and investment 2. Environmental governance 3. Global issues (peace and security)	Partner	N/A	Peaceful development.

Summit of 2014*	1. Economy, trade, and investment 2. Global issues (peace and security) 3. Environmental governance	Partner	N/A	BRI.
17 th Summit	1. Economy, trade, and investment 2. Multilateralism/ UN values 3. Environmental governance	Partner	N/A	BRI.
20 th Summit	1. Economy, trade, and investment 2. Global issues 3. Environmental governance	Partner	N/A	BRI.
21 st Summit	1. Economy, trade, and investment 2. Global issues 3. Environmental governance	Partner	N/A	BRI.

Table 5: Main findings of the content analysis: EU-China summit statements

Source: Author's own analysis

As Table 5 shows, there was a great deal of continuity in the content of the summit statements. The themes present hardly changed over the years and the classification of China as a 'partner' remained constant, as did the lack of mention of other actors in the communications. In addition, China's narratives were mostly mentioned sporadically and always in a positive light. The general tone of the documents can be summed up by an excerpt from the 20th Summit, which states that the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership "has greatly enhanced the level of EU-China relations, with fruitful outcomes achieved in

politics, economy, trade, culture, people-to-people exchanges and other fields“ and that both “leaders reaffirmed their commitment to deepening their partnership”.¹²⁵ The focus of the documents was on achieving greater cooperation between the two entities in all possible areas, significantly strengthening bilateral ties, reaffirming commitment to deepening their partnership (in promoting peace, prosperity and sustainable development for the benefit of all), belief in China's (eventual) adherence to international human rights frameworks and responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, and a general belief in China's commitment to uphold the UN Charter. Indeed, the importance of promoting and protecting multilateralism and UN values (and the rules-based international order with the United Nations at its core) was a frequent theme of the communications, as was the need to address global challenges together and to enhance exchanges on human rights.

In terms of specific themes, there was a clear predominance of economic, trade and investment issues in all the post-Summit documents analysed. Frequently mentioned themes included global economic governance, financial stability and regulation; promoting an open world economy and a rules-based, transparent trading system with the WTO at its core; and forging synergies between the BRI and the EU Investment Plan and Trans-European Transport networks. Another prominent theme of the communications, global issues, was indeed mostly related to economic governance and investment, as well as climate change and environmental protection. It included cooperation on a wide range of global and regional issues (peaceful resolution based on UN values), both bilaterally and in the framework of international organisations such as the G20, the World Bank, or the WTO. A third prominent theme was environmental governance, namely

¹²⁵ EU-China Summit, *Joint statement of the 20th EU-China Summit* (2018), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/36165/final-eu-cn-joint-statement-consolidated-text-with-climate-change-clean-energy-annex.pdf>, 1.

climate change (Paris Agreement and Montreal Protocol), energy security, food safety and security, nuclear safety, sustainable development agenda (joint efforts to implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda), water and energy dialogue, and circular economy.

Given the nature of the documents analysed (i.e., statements issued after EU-China bilateral meetings), China was unsurprisingly classified as a ‘partner’ in all communications. Moreover, the documents focused exclusively on EU-China relations, there were virtually no other actors or partners mentioned in these communications. The EU repeatedly reaffirmed its support for China’s ‘peaceful development’ and ‘moderately prosperous society’, and both sides agreed to build synergies between the BRI and other investment and infrastructure efforts, such as the Investment Plan for Europe. In general, the documents read like a laundry list of cooperation successes in a variety of areas that need to be followed up by further cooperation, and listed various dialogue mechanisms, mostly based on bilateral rather than multilateral cooperation. The only threats mentioned were those of protectionism and regional security issues, while the opportunities were omnipresent and lay in strengthening EU-China cooperation and taking it to a higher level, for example by boosting trade and investment, helping to address common challenges, and cooperating on cultural exchanges and on research and innovation.

Main Strategic Documents

Doc.	Themes	Classification of China	Actors	China's narratives
Strategic Agenda	1. Economy, trade, and investment	Partner	N/A	Win-win results.

	2. Environmental governance 3. Peace and security			
Elements	1. Economy, trade, and investment 2. Peace and security 3. Human rights	Cautious partner	EU's partners in the Asia-Pacific	Win-win results, BRI, Global Governance Reform (Digital Governance)
Strategic Outlook	1. Economy, trade, and investment 2. Peace and security 3. Environmental governance	Partner and a rival	N/A	Global Governance Reform.

Table 6: Main findings of the content analysis: Main strategic documents

Source: Author's own analysis

In terms of the content of the three strategic documents, there was little change in the issues raised, but rather in the way they were presented and whether cooperation with China brought more threats or opportunities. From an initial sense of security in the partnership, the EU moved to a more cautious approach to cooperation, and finally to seeing China as both a 'partner and a rival'. In terms of the thematic themes of the communications, economy, trade, and investment were the most present themes underlined by China's growing connection to global capital markets. The central thesis was that this development can generate benefits for all, provided that the right frameworks are in place. The topics discussed were similar in all three resolutions, covering the need to nurture an

open global economy, economic growth and cooperation, the EU-China investment agreement, the need to step up coordination at WTO (a cornerstone of the multilateral trading system) and G20, and to draft new frameworks in terms of China's economic growth to establish additional rules and set a level playing field. Chinese investment in Europe was welcomed provided it was in line with EU law and regulations. Peace and security issues were the second most prominent theme and mostly discussed in the context of multilateralism with the UN at its core (upholding rules-based international order and human rights). Among the issues mentioned were cybersecurity, organised crime, cooperation on peacekeeping and on regional security challenges (such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action for Iran and denuclearisation of the DPRK), maritime security and freedom of navigation and overflight (namely in East and South China Seas), China's increasing military capabilities and assertiveness, and hybrid threats such as information operation. Albeit present in all the communications, the theme of security issues was most prominent in the *Elements 2016* as the focus shifted on China's expanding interests and increasing assertiveness, realisation of the geostrategic consequences to BRI, and noticing China's growing endeavours to have a greater say in global governance.

The *Strategic Agenda* in 2013 was full of calls for more cooperation, greater interdependence, shared responsibility, and strategic partnership in addressing common challenges on the basis of equality, respect and trust. There was no real mention of threats from China, as the focus was on strengthening various areas of cooperation. Similarly, the possibility of 'win-win outcomes' was often mentioned in terms of potential synergies between the EU's and China's strategic development plans (China's two Centenary Goals and the 12th Five-Year Plan, the EU's 2020 strategy). In *Elements 2016*, however, the dynamics started to shift as there was again a mention of 'win-win cooperation,' but this time with a focus on the geo-strategic implications of the BRI and the importance of China's

adherence to international market rules, current international norms as well as EU standards. The main theme of *Elements* (2016) was continued cooperation on a wide range of issues, but also a growing caution about China's ambitions, stating that “the EU should ensure that it has a clear understanding of China's defence and security policies in order to inform its engagement with China”.¹²⁶ In other words, China's growing global presence was seen as both a threat and an opportunity. The main threats were related to the unprecedented rise of China and its growing global influence and assertiveness in both economic governance and foreign policy (such as in terms of the realisation of the major geostrategic implications of the BRI and concerns over freedom of navigation and overflight in the East and South China Seas), China's restrictive approach to internet governance, and its environmental problems (the impact of which would be felt by the EU). The main opportunities were related to cooperation on global issues such as climate change and environmental problems, international conflict resolution and peacekeeping, and the sustainable use of water and energy resources. It was also in 2016 that there was a visible shift from an exclusive focus on strengthening the partnership with China to a focus on deepening partnerships and engagement with the wider Asia-Pacific region, noting that the EU's close partners in the region, such as the US, Japan, Korea, ASEAN, and Australia, should be taken into account when formulating policies towards China.

Their relationship became even more complicated in 2019, as the EU perceived China as both a ‘partner and a rival,’ noting that “China is, simultaneously, in different policy areas, a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely

¹²⁶ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL: *Elements for a new EU strategy on China* (2016), https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/china/documents/more_info/eu_china_strategy_en.pdf, 13.

aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance".¹²⁷ While reaffirming the EU's commitment to their comprehensive strategic partnership, there was a growing recognition of the changes that China's growing economic and political power and its aspirations to become a leading global power have brought to international affairs. The most prominent threats identified were those of rising tensions and China's maritime claims in the South China Sea, increasing military capabilities and ambitions to have the most technologically advanced armed forces by 2050, Chinese investment and growing protectionism of its domestic market (lack of reciprocal market access), hybrid threats and information operations, and the issue of ensuring the security of critical infrastructure and the EU's technological base (mainly in terms of the 5G networks as the future backbone of our societies and economies). As regards the opportunities of the partnership, these were again linked to the promotion of common interests at global level, such as cooperation on sustainable development and climate change.

3.5 Concluding Comments

The content analysis revealed different levels of engagement with certain issues by different EU institutions, as well as different developments in each institution's perceptions of China. The European Parliament was consistently concerned with human rights issues and abuses and increasingly saw China as a 'threat', which was reflected in calls for more cooperation with 'like-minded partners'. There was some attention to China's narratives by the institution, as there was a gradual shift in perspective on the BRI from positive to negative, as

¹²⁷ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL: *EU-China – A strategic outlook* (2019), <https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2019-03/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>, 1.

it was recognised for its geopolitical and security dimensions. The summit statements, on the other hand, had a clear preoccupation with economy, trade, and investment throughout, and showed no change in the perception of China as a 'partner' of the EU. Some of China's narratives, such as the BRI, were mentioned in the documents, always in a positive light. Similarly, there was a clear focus in the statements on cooperation between the EU and China alone, with no mention of other actors or partners. This (lack of) development is perhaps not surprising given the nature of the summit communications, which are the result of bilateral EU-China meetings. Nor is it surprising that the summit communications were uncritical of China's behaviour, focusing exclusively on the milestones achieved and the future opportunities for enhanced cooperation in all possible areas.

The main strategic documents also had a clear focus on economy, trade and investment. There was some overlap between the themes of the summit statements and the main strategic documents, arguably linked to the fact that the European Commission was the common author of both sets of documents. Unlike with the summit statements, however, there was an evolution in the perception of China in the main strategic documents, as its classification gradually shifted from a 'partner' to a 'cautious partner' and finally to a 'partner and rival.' This shift was largely dependent on the context and the specific issues mentioned, for in some fields China was called a 'systemic rival' and in others a 'cooperation partner'. It should be noted that although the EC and EEAS were the first to acknowledge certain rivalry between the EU and the PRC, the EP described Beijing's efforts, growing influence and interference in European strategic assets as much more threatening.

Although the focus of the communications varied, the documents often addressed the same issues, but with very different narrative styles. Common to

all communications was an appeal to China to behave as a responsible power in the international system and to abide by international norms based on UN values. However, this appeal was much stronger in the documents issued unilaterally by the EU (i.e., the EP resolutions, *Elements*, and *Strategic Outlook*) than in those adopted bilaterally by the EU and China (i.e., the summit communications and the *Strategic Agenda*). Similarly, almost all the communications placed adherence to UN values at the forefront of the bilateral relationship. However, while this was a strong overarching theme of the EP resolutions, as well as the *Elements* and *Strategic Outlook* documents (which criticised China's misbehaviour), in other communications (i.e. the *Strategic Agenda* and the summit statements), this issue was more or less briefly mentioned and framed as a reminder of both entities' continued adherence to UN values, the rules-based world order, and commitment to multipolarity. In other words, while the EP criticised China's behaviour for lack of adherence to internationally recognised rules in its resolutions, the EC in *Strategic Agenda* and summit statements spoke of the need to improve various issues and mutual cooperation rather than criticising China's behaviour. The latter case is in stark contrast to the EU's unilateral communications (the EP documents, the *Elements* and *Strategic Outlook*), which offer a substantive assessment of China's transgressions and list very specific issues to be resolved and why.

4. EU'S NARRATIVES IN RELATION TO CHINA: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Narrative analysis is a qualitative research method that focuses on the examination and subsequent interpretation of text and other relevant data. It is used to analyse the structure and content of narratives and to discover different themes, meanings and the context in which they appear. For the purposes of this

thesis, strategic narratives are analysed inductively, based on close readings of the documents collected. The aim of this analysis is to identify, name and explain the EU's strategic narratives in relation to China, and to examine how they are constructed and how they envisage EU-China strategic engagement. Through close reading, the author seeks to identify patterns and themes, to analyse how they are presented, how the narrative evolves over time, what the perceptions of China and its goals are, whether strategic cooperation with other actors (e.g., other states or international organisations) is considered, which institutions deploy particular narratives, and any other relevant issues that may be identified. An important part of the analysis focuses on understanding the context in which these narratives present certain events. It should be noted that the plots and other components of the narratives of different EU institutions are likely to overlap. The aim of this paper is neither to list all the narratives and their components nor to unravel them completely. Rather, the aim is to identify the most prominent narratives (and their key components) used by different EU institutions over the period considered, to analyse the different plots, messages and language of persuasion, and to examine how these vary from narrative to narrative and from institution to institution. This analysis draws on the findings of the content analysis and is undertaken to answer the remaining sub-questions and, ultimately, the main research question of this thesis.

4.1 Search for the European Union's 'One Voice'¹²⁸

*"[EP] Stresses the need for EU Member States to speak with one voice to the Chinese Government, particularly in view of Beijing's present diplomatic dynamism and reshaping of the global governance architecture."*¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Also referred to as 'One Voice'.

¹²⁹ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2015 on EU-China relations (2015/2003(INI))," *Official Journal of the European Union* 60, no. 2017/C 399/10 (2017): 97, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015IP0458&qid=1690557237969>.

Narrative summary

The European Union is a supranational international organisation with 27 member states. It is therefore not surprising that it has sometimes been accused of a lack of coordination between governments as well as the various institutions that govern the EU, and quite rightly so. It is perhaps for these reasons that the EP has increasingly called for the EU to speak with 'one voice'. In this narrative, the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the EEAS expressed the need for EU's member states to speak with 'one voice' when engaging with the Chinese government in order to achieve better internal EU coordination. Subsequently, the aim of this narrative was to increase the projected unity of the EU as one entity, achieving both institutional and member state coordination. The focus of this narrative in the earlier years was trade and investment policy. The EP was the main actor, devoting more and more space to the 'one voice' narrative in its resolutions, starting with a weak presence and slowly picking up the urgency of the need for the EU to negotiate with China as one entity. Therefore, the overall plot of the narrative could be described as slightly confrontational. Additionally, the main actor was the EU itself, for the narrative focused on the question of EU unity. The EP's narrative shifted from a focus on trade policy and a weak presence to a narrative that included both trade policy and defence issues, the promotion of European values, and a rules-based multilateral world order. The narrative of the EC and the EEAS, on the other hand, was mainly preoccupied with China as an economic partner and issues of policy fragmentation. In terms of these two actors, the narrative remained with low presence and no development, as it was only briefly mentioned in the documents.

Explaining the narrative logic

The issue of the disparity between the EU's many voices has been very slowly recognised by the EU. In 2013, the EP mentioned that member states were 'expected' to speak with 'one voice' when engaging with the Chinese government in order to achieve better internal EU coordination, as it called for "the EU to implement a long-term strategy towards China, ensuring operational coordination both between the institutions of the Union and between the Union and its member states".¹³⁰ In the years that followed, the EP continued to assert that the EU and its member states needed to find common responses to an increasingly assertive China under the leadership of President Xi and his economic and diplomatic initiatives, but the narrative was still weak in both force and presence in EP's resolutions. Similarly, at this point in time neither the EC nor the EEAS were enthusiastic narrators of this narrative, simply stating that "dealing with such a comprehensive strategic partner as China requires a 'whole-of-EU' approach".¹³¹ The position of the EC and the EAAS was that the EU should maintain its relations and cooperation with China, especially with regard to its commercial interests; but that such cooperation should not get in the way of upholding the EU's values in its relations with Beijing. Therefore, while agreeing with the EP that the EU must uphold its values and maximise its cohesion and effectiveness in pursuing an ambitious agenda of cooperation with China, and that the rules-based international order must be protected, the EC was mostly preoccupied with the EU's economic interests.

In the years that followed, the EP remained the sole narrator. The focus of the narrative remained on trade policy as lack of 'close coordination' with the

¹³⁰ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2013," 131.

¹³¹ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Elements for a new EU strategy on China*, 17.

Chinese government was commented on, especially as Beijing was engaged in its efforts to reshape the global governance architecture, both in terms of trade and investment policy in connection with the AIIB, as well as the then-recently developed 16+1 initiative. It was at this point that the narrative slowly started to resemble that of 'China as a Threat'.¹³² The EP thus called for a unified economic strategy and repeatedly expressed its concern that the participation of some member states in the 16+1 initiative could jeopardise the EU's ability to speak with 'one voice' vis-à-vis China and thus divide and weaken the EU's position. Following the development of China's narratives, the EP took note of "the great importance that Xi's leadership attaches to bolstering its global security interests through economic means, for example by 'better serving' BRI".¹³³ Unlike the EC and the EEAS, there was a clear link between Beijing's changing and increasingly assertive foreign policy and the EP's resolutions, as it called for better institutional and member state coordination, especially on BRI-related events, taking into account both economic and security policy implications. Thus, the focus has shifted from the 16+1 framework alone to BRI-related events in particular, with the EP stressing the need to ensure "institutional coordination between the Commission, the Council and the EEAS before BRI-related events, and cooperating with Member States to ensure that the decisions taken by those involved in the initiative are in line with EU policies and interests and respect fundamental EU values".¹³⁴ The EP recognised the need for the EU not only to present a united front vis-à-vis China, but also to develop an EU-China strategy that would allow us to act in the interests of the EU as a whole, including defending and promoting our values and a rules-based multilateral world order.

¹³² This narrative is described later in chapter '4.3 China as a Threat'.

¹³³ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018 on the state of EU-China relations (2017/2274(INI))," *Official Journal of the European Union* 62, no. 2019/C 433/12 (2019): 115, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018IP0343&qid=1690557294675>.

¹³⁴ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021 on a new EU-China strategy (2021/2037(INI))," *Official Journal of the European Union* 65, no. 2022/C 117/05 (2022): 46, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021IP0382&qid=1690557368954>.

Moreover, the EP recognised that due to China's changing role and growing global influence in multilateral organisations (China ranked second in terms of financial contributions to the UN), not only coordination among EU member states was seen as crucial, but also mutual coordination with other like-minded partners to combine the strength of global liberal democracies (in organisations such as the UN, WTO, WHO, and ICAO). At this point, this narrative also displayed components of the 'Like-Minded Partners' narrative.¹³⁵

Although becoming stronger in its narrative voice and in expressing the urgency of the issue at hand, the 'One Voice' narrative is not yet a strong one. Perhaps for the same reasons that there has not been a strong unifying EU narrative to begin with – the reality of a multitude of EU's member states and their governments, as well as the number of different European institutions dictating EU's foreign policy and speaking of highly intertwined issues but with different narratives. However, the year 2021 marked an important shift in the urgency of the narrative presented. The foreign policy dynamics led to the issue of a single voice for the EU being no longer primarily a question of a common trade policy, but also one of defending and promoting core European interests.

4.2 Unlawful China – Human Rights Abuses¹³⁶

“Remains highly concerned that China is currently the world's largest executioner and continues to impose the death penalty in secret on thousands of people annually, without regard to international minimum standards on the use of the death penalty.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ This narrative is described later in chapter '4.6 EU's Like-Minded Partners'.

¹³⁶ Also referred to as 'Unlawful China'.

¹³⁷ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2015," 103.

Narrative summary

The EU considers itself an advocate of universal human rights. Its 'Unlawful China' narrative reflects this belief and also suggests that China's human rights record would eventually improve through engagement with the EU. This narrative was presented by the EP, EC, and the EEAS, with the EP being the most assertive narrator. Understandably, the plot of this narrative was of confrontational nature. The EU institutions unanimously held the view that prioritising the rule of law and human rights must be at the core of their engagement with China. Likewise, all institutions urged the Chinese authorities to comply with international law and fundamental freedoms as stated in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, alongside other relevant international treaties ratified by the PRC. The UN was therefore a very prominent actor referenced frequently as an important international authority throughout the narrative. However, there was a significant contrast in narrative style and storyline development between EU institutions. As time passed, the EP became more assertive while also recognising the considerable disparities between the EU and PRC, and the impracticality of striving to convert China according to its preferences. Conversely, the EC and the EEAS lacked strong narrative skills and failed to reflect the EP's progress.

Explaining the narrative logic

The primary theme throughout all resolutions adopted by the EP was undoubtedly that of 'Unlawful China', as evidenced by its prevalence in various other narratives. The EU sees itself as a champion of human rights, democracy, and adherence to international norms and the rule of law. Any abuse of power or restriction on freedoms and political liberties is thus a matter that the EU cannot ignore. However, engaging with autocratic or oppressive regimes is not

out of the question for the EU, as was evident, in particular, during the initial years of this narrative. The EU aimed to encourage China to adopt a societal approach that upheld universal human rights. This was done through engagement rather than disengagement, as it was believed that China would gradually improve its human rights record through this approach. The EP criticised the Chinese leadership numerous times for its lack of tangible results in accepting the universality of human rights even though it has opted into the international human rights network and voluntarily became a part of it. While advocating for Beijing's endorsement of universal values, the EP also recognized the divergent European and Chinese perspectives on human rights, highlighting that "in the official Chinese view universality is questioned on grounds of cultural differences".¹³⁸

The EC and the EEAS adopted a comparable approach, albeit with a focus on engagement rather than critique of the PRC. They declared that the EU and its member states would undertake the promotion of human rights through constant interaction with Beijing in line with EU laws, regulations, and guidelines; stating that "the promotion of human rights will continue to be a core part of the EU's engagement with China".¹³⁹ The narrative has two main aspects. First, the EC and the EEAS (in accordance with the EP) claimed that the EU's external action is governed by "democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for the principles of the UN Charter and international law",¹⁴⁰ principles reflected in both China's Constitution and various international frameworks that Beijing has voluntarily joined, yet principles that Beijing refuses to comply with. At this point (similarly to the EP), this narrative slightly resembled that of 'Great

¹³⁸ Ibid., 103.

¹³⁹ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Elements for a new EU strategy on China*, 5.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

Power, Great Responsibility'.¹⁴¹ Second, the institutions criticized Beijing's authoritarian response to domestic dissent, citing it as a hindrance to establishing the rule of law and ensuring individual rights in China. China's purported pledge to uphold international law came under scrutiny once more as a result of Beijing's ongoing crackdown on civil rights defenders, including lawyers and journalists, as well as its enactment of numerous national security laws and regulations with implications beyond its borders (i.e., extraterritorial dimensions).

Although the EC and EEAS provided some criticism of the PRC's conduct, their focus was mostly on facilitating engagement. The EP's approach was much more critical of the PRC's conduct. The EP fiercely criticised not only China's non-adherence to internationally recognised rules and norms and the Chinese leadership's unwillingness to change, but also the continuous deterioration of the remnants of civil liberties in the country. The Chinese government under the leadership of President Xi has become more assertive both domestically and internationally. As a result, the civil society's freedoms have been restrained in an unprecedented way, leading to a continuous decline of the human rights situation. Beijing's then-newly enacted legislation, which essentially granted more power to the authorities to further restrict civil liberties, drew criticism from the EP. For instance, the then-recently implemented national security law in China defined Beijing's national security interests in an ambiguous manner. This has granted "Chinese authorities virtually unrestricted powers to move against actions, persons or publications they disapprove of"¹⁴² as, for instance, even 'harmful cultural influences' are deemed a potential threat. Among the frequently cited examples of China's human rights violations was the unlawful use of the death penalty. China currently has the highest execution rate in the world, with Beijing alone carrying out more death sentences than all other

¹⁴¹ This narrative is described later in chapter '4.4 Great Power, Great Responsibility'.

¹⁴² European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2015," 100.

countries combined - 2,000 executions in 2016 alone. Moreover, the Chinese government imposes the death penalty secretly on thousands of people annually. Additionally, there is systemic persecution of minorities, limited freedom of religion, and repression in Tibet and Xinjiang. Hong Kong's civil freedoms are diminishing, and the 'one country, two systems' principle is gradually eroding. Other frequently mentioned issues were, for instance, prison camps, flawed Chinese jurisdiction and the compulsory oath of allegiance of lawyers to the CCP rather than the Constitution, internet freedom restrictions such as censorship and surveillance, and the ineffectiveness of the established EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, as well as harassment of foreign journalists. It was at this point that especially in the case of the EP, elements of 'China as a Threat' narrative were increasingly intertwined with this 'Unlawful China' narrative.

While the EU's understanding is that socio-economic, civil, and political rights are all fundamental, in Beijing's view socio-economic rights are clearly prioritised. While acknowledging these conceptual differences, the EP (in line with the EC and the EEAS) consistently reiterated that "promotion of human rights and the rule of law must be at the core of the EU's engagement with China"¹⁴³ and called on the Chinese authorities to respect "international law, democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, in accordance with the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international instruments signed or ratified by China".¹⁴⁴ However, seeing a complete lack of improvement, by the 2020s the EP finally saw through China's supposed commitment to the universality of human rights and recognised that China did not want to transform its society into one where universal human rights are protected. Instead, it wants to pursue its own version of human rights, which does not meet international standards. Rather than abide by its international legal

¹⁴³ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018," 111.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

obligations, China has instead focused its efforts on trying to change the current rules that it does not want to abide by, such as by submitting “resolutions to the UN Human Rights Council aimed at making ‘sovereignty, non-interference and mutual respect’ fundamental, non-negotiable principles that override the promotion and protection of the human rights of individuals”.¹⁴⁵ As the EP noted, “Chinese domestic censorship, now being exercised, inter alia, at the UN, aims to manipulate procedures to minimise scrutiny of China’s conduct”.¹⁴⁶ Here we see an example of China's push to reform global governance, as in order to further its long-term geopolitical strategy, instead of conforming to the current globally accepted frameworks, China seeks to reshape the norms and current standard global practices.

At this point, the plot of EP’s narrative was highly intertwined with the ‘China as a Threat’ narrative. Finally, the EP noted the fundamental differences in the values that the two entities are determined to protect, with the PRC, as a one-party communist state committed to Marxism-Leninism, not sharing the democratic values and individual freedoms that the EU is determined to uphold.¹⁴⁷ The EP’s evolving and more assertive narrative can also be seen in two other instances that occurred in 2021. First, the Tiananmen massacre of 1989 was referred to, for the first time, as a ‘massacre’ rather than a ‘crackdown’. Second, phrases such as ‘crimes against humanity’ and ‘alleged genocide’ (i.e., much stronger language than before) were used to describe the situation (serious human rights violations) in Xinjiang. Monitoring the developments in China, the EP urged “the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to launch independent legal investigations into alleged genocide, alleged crimes against humanity and human rights violations”.¹⁴⁸ The EP’s push for such an investigation leads us to

¹⁴⁵ European Parliament, “European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021,” 42.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

argue that the inclusion of the '1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide' in the first part of the resolution of 2021 for the first time was no mere coincidence, but rather a way of expressing the institution's increasingly stronger stance.

4.3 China as a Threat

“whereas largely ignored in Europe, the Chinese leadership has gradually and systematically stepped up its efforts to translate its economic weight into political influence... in order to shape perceptions about China and convey a positive image of the country...”¹⁴⁹

Narrative summary

With China's rise, many western liberal-democratic states have shifted from a policy of active cooperation to one of growing concern about Beijing's increasingly assertive foreign policy. This is reflected in this narrative, which begins with a weak presence and grows stronger over time as it describes China's threatening behaviour and its possible implications for Europe. The narratives of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the EEAS have evolved significantly in response to China's investments, Xi's increasingly assertive foreign policy, and China's growing efforts to translate its economic weight into political influence. The EP was the main narrator, both in terms of the scope of the narrative and its high presence in EP's resolutions. This narrative has a very confrontational nature which was intensified as the situation evolved. Eventually, it became intertwined with the 'Unlawful China' and the 'EU's Like-Minded Partners' narratives.

¹⁴⁹ European Parliament, “European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018,” 106.

Explaining the narrative logic

Beijing's international behaviour was not seen as threatening in the early 2010s. Although there were some concerns about China's growing political power and military build-up, the economic, social and environmental impact of its investments, and its friendship with the DPRK and Russia, the EU's focus remained on active and increasing cooperation with China in virtually all possible areas. During these years, it was the theme of 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' that was prominent in EU's communications.¹⁵⁰ In the mid-2010s, however, the EP began to actively voice its concerns about Beijing's behaviour, noting its shift from 'responsive diplomacy' to 'proactive diplomacy,' and stressing that "China's persistent rise as a global power requires a continuous and rapid reconsideration of Europe's strategic priorities in its relations with China, as a matter of urgency," especially as "President Xi's 'Chinese Dream' of national rejuvenation foresees a stronger and more proactive role for China in the world".¹⁵¹ In addition, China's refusal to accept the jurisdiction of UNCLOS and its increasing assertiveness on maritime issues was portrayed as a threat to Europe's vital interest in freedom of navigation in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, especially in light of China's intentions to expand its navy and broaden its scope of operations from 'offshore waters defence' to 'open seas protection' (as stated in China's White Paper on military strategy), marking an unprecedented preoccupation with maritime issues in Beijing's foreign policy.¹⁵²

The EP's perception of Chinese investment in Europe has slowly changed as the institution noted both "the high priority given by Xi Jinping to foreign policy as part of his vision to turn China into a global power by 2049" as well as the

¹⁵⁰ This narrative is described later in chapter '4.5 EU-China Strategic Partnership'.

¹⁵¹ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2015," 101.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 102.

geopolitical and security-related dimensions of the BRI and the 16+1 initiative.¹⁵³ There was a visible shift in the perception of the BRI from the previous years, as the EP noted China's increasing efforts to translate its economic weight into political influence, and now called the BRI a very powerful narrative and “the most ambitious foreign policy initiative the country has ever adopted, comprising geopolitical and security-related dimensions and therefore going beyond the claimed scope of economic and trade policy”.¹⁵⁴ In addition, the EP called on EU member states participating in the 16+1 format to ensure that their involvement in these infrastructure projects does not compromise “national and European interests for short-term financial support and long-term commitments to Chinese involvement in strategic infrastructure projects and potentially greater political influence, which would undermine the EU’s common positions on China”.¹⁵⁵

The EC and the EEAS were not strong supporters of the narrative for they still mostly propagated mostly the ‘EU-China Strategic Partnership’, but they did later on acknowledge that over the past decade “the balance of challenges and opportunities presented by China has shifted” as “China's economic power and political influence have grown with unprecedented scale and speed, reflecting its ambitions to become a leading global power”.¹⁵⁶ The EC took note of China’s ambitions to have a greater say in global affairs, as well as the dangers of China’s investments, warning of the high-level indebtedness and possible transfer of control over strategic assets resulting from Chinese investments in developing countries. In addition, the EC considered it “necessary to identify how the EU could appropriately deal with the distortive effects of foreign state ownership

¹⁵³ European Parliament, “European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018,” 115.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁵⁶ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *EU-China – A strategic outlook*, 1.

and state financing of foreign companies on the EU internal market”.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, the EC and the EEAS also acknowledged that Beijing’s growing military capabilities and ambitions to have the most technologically advanced armed forces by 2050, as well as its increasing assertiveness in the South and East China Seas and its refusal to abide by internationally recognised norms and frameworks such as the UNCLOS, create additional tensions that further affect sea-lanes of communication that are perceived as vital to EU’s economic interests. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, China was described as “a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance,” marking a shift in the perception of China by the EC and the EEAS.¹⁵⁸

The EP eventually concluded that China’s growing aspirations for a global role have made it clear that the “existing EU-China strategy has revealed its limitations in the light of global challenges posed by China and needs to be updated”.¹⁵⁹ This new strategy must not only unite all member states, but must also be designed to help shape the relationship in the interests of the EU as a whole and to defend the EU’s core values and the rules-based multilateral world order that the EU promotes. In 2021, the EP went to describe China not only as a “cooperation and negotiating partner” but also as an “economic competitor and a systemic rival in an increasing number of areas”, marking a shift in the EP’s foreign policy narratives.¹⁶⁰ This resolution marked the first time that the EP referred to China as a competitor and, most importantly, as a rival. Albeit the EC and the EEAS were the first ones to describe Beijing as a rival, it was the EP that

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁵⁹ European Parliament, “European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021,” 42.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 42.

led a much more confrontational narrative against China. China's economic growth and assertive foreign policy agenda, in particular its investment strategy (Going global, Made in China 2025, BRI), through which it seeks a stronger global role as an economic power and foreign policy actor, became a prominent issue in this narrative as it has significant consequences for the current world order (for it is a serious threat to rules-based multilateralism and core democratic values). Similarly, the EP drew attention to the links between economic dependency and external political leverage and stressed the importance of strengthening the EU FDI Screening Regulation to block investments that could pose a threat to the EU's security and public order, particularly those involving state-controlled enterprises.

In addition, the EP recognised that “Chinese domestic censorship, now being exercised, *inter alia*, at the UN, aims to manipulate procedures to minimise scrutiny of China’s conduct”¹⁶¹ which poses a threat to our democratic values and societies. To counter these threats to freedom of expression, the EP encouraged the Commission to develop an EU-wide regulatory system to prevent media companies funded or controlled by third-country governments from acquiring European media companies to preserve independent and free media reporting in the EU. In addition to its behaviour at the UN, China's increasing involvement in other multilateral organisations such as the WTO, WHO, ICAO and many others is a means of reshaping current norms and furthering China's long-term geopolitical strategy and economic interests. There is also a growing threat from the ‘export’ of China’s domestic unlawful practices to the international arena, such as growing digital authoritarianism and the global promotion of its own digital governance model, surveillance, or the curtailment of academic freedom, for example through the activities of Confucius Institutes. Previously more of an

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

issue in China itself (and thus covered in the 'Unlawful China' narrative), some of these practices were now being exported to the rest of the world, posing a direct threat to Europe and its values.

Moreover, in the light of the developments described above, the EP called for greater cooperation among its partners (discussed mainly in the 'Like-Minded Partners' narrative). China's ambitions were no longer framed only as a threat to the EU, but more broadly as a threat to the EU and its partners. For example, the need to increase digital and technological sovereignty was narrated both as a step to increase the EU's strategic autonomy and to eliminate "the risks that NATO members and its partners may be exposed to with the integration of China's 5G technology into the telecommunication networks, as such action could erode the future of democratic governance".¹⁶² The threat narrative now included a rationale for allies to work more closely together - perhaps to gain more support from other liberal democracies in calling China out for its misdeeds. This is all the more evident as the EP called for greater EU-NATO cooperation on Chinese security challenges and recommended that EU-NATO cooperation on security challenges with China be taken into account in the elaboration of the EU Strategic Compass and the review of the NATO Strategic Concept.

4.4 Great Power, Great Responsibility

*"whereas [the EP] expects China to assume responsibilities in line with its global impact and to support the rules-based international order from which it, too, benefits"*¹⁶³

¹⁶² Ibid., 51.

¹⁶³ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018," 105.

Narrative summary

As discussed in the 'Unlawful China' strategic narrative, the EU has sought to achieve China's compliance with international law and the UN Charter, and thus the protection of universal human rights. In this narrative, the EU goes one step further, seeking not only China's compliance with internationally accepted norms, but also China's assumption of its responsibilities as a global power. In short, the EU believes that China must adhere to the rules set. The justification of this narrative stems from the fact that China, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), is subject to legal obligations stemming from these roles it has voluntarily assumed. It is mainly because of China's permanent membership at the UNSC that the PRC is being urged to use its global position more responsibly and to cooperate in resolving major global security concerns, ranging from security threats to climate change. Therefore, the UN, as an important international authority, is an actor central to this narrative. All EU narrators – the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the EEAS – use the same logic and reasoning, as well as a similar narrative style and content. The plot is both positive/promising and confrontational in nature, for some narrators believe more in engagement, whereas others see Beijing more as a threat that increasingly refuses to engage on issues of global importance. Over the years, this narrative evolved significantly as EU actors became more assertive and confrontational about China's international behaviour. It was mainly the EP that maintained a strong presence of this narrative in its communications, and it was arguably the most confrontational, even sharing elements with the 'China as a Threat' narrative.

Explaining the narrative logic

As a beneficiary of the rules-based international order, China has a responsibility to contribute to the same order from which it has benefited. In the early years of this narrative, the EP called for China's active and transparent participation in world affairs, close cooperation with the EU and a "review its policy of 'non-interference in countries' internal affairs' in cases of severe breaches of international humanitarian law".¹⁶⁴ The EP argued that both the EU and China have a mutual responsibility to protect universal values. The framing of this responsibility as 'mutual responsibility' was arguably intended to convince the audience that the EU was not being hypocritical and would continue its current efforts, but also to convince the audience that it was only fair for China to join these efforts. However, alongside its criticism of its counterpart's lack of action, the EP also acknowledged some of Beijing's positive contributions on the global stage, citing peacekeeping efforts, anti-piracy efforts and China's role in the Six-Party Talks (although it was also reminded that the DPRK's survival depends on China's support). Subsequently, a very interesting dynamic emerged in the narrative in which the EP was at the same time concerned about China's newly acquired proactive and stronger role on the global stage under the leadership of President Xi and his 'Chinese Dream', claiming that this development called for a rethinking of Europe's strategic priorities; while expressing the hope that China would use this newly acquired power to become a responsible stakeholder, contributing constructively to solving global challenges and to "take its place among the world's leading countries, acting according to the rules set for all".¹⁶⁵ The most prominent EU argument, and one that resonated throughout the narrative, was that China's increased engagement must benefit the international community, and that Beijing must abide by its international legal and human

¹⁶⁴ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2013," 135.

¹⁶⁵ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 16 December 2015," 101.

rights obligations stemming from its voluntary ratification of international legally binding treaties. As the EP noted, these roles carry with them a status and confer on China a certain international prestige, which in turn carries with it considerable responsibilities, such as respect for legal obligations. In other words, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the Human Rights Council, Beijing has an undeniable obligation to support the three pillars of the UN (as the core of the international rules-based order); to ensure respect for international law, democracy and fundamental human rights and freedoms “in accordance with the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international instruments signed or ratified by China”.¹⁶⁶

Similar to the EP's narrative, the EC and the EEAS noted that China has changed significantly over the last decade, both internally (with the change of leadership in 2013) and in terms of its foreign policy, as it now emphasises its 'going global' strategy, through which it seeks to take on a more prominent role in global affairs and subsequently influence various global governance systems in line with Beijing's interests. In other words, “China sees itself as emerging from its past passive participation to take on a leading role in global affairs consonant with its economic size”.¹⁶⁷ However, there was an overarching belief that China's growing assertiveness poses a major challenge, but that Beijing could also offer opportunities if the EU can persuade it to play by the rules. There is much to gain from China's rise, but only if the conditions are right. The Commission and the EEAS also noted that China has yet to deliver on its promise to make the BRI an “open platform which adheres to market rules and international norms in order to deliver benefits for all”.¹⁶⁸ Beyond the mild criticism of China's behaviour, the Commission and the EEAS also acknowledged China's increasingly important

¹⁶⁶ European Parliament, “European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018,” 109.

¹⁶⁷ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Elements for a new EU strategy on China*, 10.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

role in international development cooperation, contributions to climate change and the Paris Agreement, conflict resolution, providing global security as a public good, peacekeeping in the Middle East, and others.

Over time, China has been steadfastly reluctant to accept the responsibilities and accountability that come with its growing role, while repeatedly calling for reform of global governance. As a result, the EU has become increasingly sceptical about China's behaviour and willingness to act as a responsible global power. For example, the EC and EEAS expressed their dissatisfaction by accusing China of being selective and choosing to uphold some norms while ignoring others, thereby weakening the rules-based international order. However, despite criticism of Beijing's behaviour, this narrative was not as prominent in the EC and EEAS's communications as before. The EP, on the other hand, remained a moderately enthusiastic narrator of this narrative. By 2021, there was a realisation that Beijing was neither willing to 'play by the rules' nor to 'take its responsibilities' as the EU had imagined. The EP recognised "the importance of the EU remaining attentive to China's changing role and growing global influence in multilateral organisations, including the UN, to which China is the second biggest financial contributor", and noted the need "to ensure better coordination among the Member States and like-minded partners towards combining the strength of global liberal democracies, in order to respond to this development".¹⁶⁹ Therefore, in the second decade of the 21st century, elements from the 'China as a Threat' and 'Like-Minded Partners' narratives became prominent. The EP noted that instead of increasingly accepting its position in the international rules-based order as a responsible stakeholder, China has been engaged in efforts to reshape norms and practices in international institutions to further its long-term geopolitical strategy and economic interests, even using its

¹⁶⁹ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021," 47.

domestic censorship practices at the UN to manipulate and minimise scrutiny of its conduct.

4.5 EU-China Strategic Partnership¹⁷⁰

“As important actors in a multipolar world, the EU and China share responsibility for promoting peace, prosperity and sustainable development for the benefit of all. They agree to continue to consolidate and develop their strategic partnership to the benefit of both sides, based on the principles of equality, respect and trust.”¹⁷¹

Narrative summary

This narrative captures the dynamics of the EU-China Strategic Partnership and the changing positions of EU institutions and their varying engagement with the PRC. The focus of this narrative is on celebrating the EU-China Strategic Partnership, all its milestones and achievements, and the growing economic and other cooperation between the two entities. Underlying this narrative is a belief that engagement and close strategic cooperation with China would eventually bring about the desired changes in China’s economy, political systems, and practices, and thus bring about democratic values and changes in Beijing’s policies. This narrative was one of great importance in the EU’s strategic communications. Overall, the EU was convinced that it could secure its interests, promote universal values, and help define China's growing role in the international arena. It started with a very positive and promising outlook on the future of EU-China relations across the EU institutions – the European Parliament, the European Commission, the EEAS, and the European Council;

¹⁷⁰ Also referred to as ‘Strategic Partnership’.

¹⁷¹ EU-China Summit, *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* (2013), 2.

however, the subsequent development of the narrative was very much tied to each actor involved in the narrative. The EC was the main actor, focusing on economic cooperation. However, there was a big difference between the EC's narrative in relation to the EEAS, and in relation to the European Council and the PRC. For the EC and the EEAS, there was a visible setback in their perception of the PRC and its actions over time, leading to a somewhat more cautious approach to cooperation; however, they remained committed to EU-China cooperation and arguably to a high degree of interdependence. On the other hand, as far as the EC and the EEAS in cooperation with the PRC are concerned, the narrative and the perceived goals of their strategic partnership hardly evolved since the establishment of the narrative. Subsequently, there were certain contradictions in the EC's narrative, with and without the PRC's involvement, which could be seen in documents adopted jointly (with the PRC) or individually (by the EU). With regard to the EP, which focused substantially on China's political system and civil liberties, this narrative was arguably the one with the greatest development, with the institution gradually abandoning the narrative and eventually replacing it with one of 'Like-Minded Partners'.

Explaining the narrative logic

Following the establishment of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2003, the EU and China have become increasingly interdependent in a wide range of areas. Committed to advancing this strategic partnership in the decade ahead, both sides put forward their respective strategic development plans, hoping to explore potential synergies that would enhance cooperation and contribute to 'win-win' outcomes. As a result, both sides jointly adopted the *EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation*. Adopted in 2013, the *Strategic Agenda* was the epitome of the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the second decade of the 21st century. The narrative in this jointly adopted document

is very one-sided and, unsurprisingly, focuses on enhancing cooperation between the two entities as much as possible, in all possible areas and by all available means. The narrative holds a very promising outlook, underlined by a plethora of positive action words used throughout the document to describe the bright future of the EU-China partnership, as the EU and the PRC have committed themselves to: strengthening, promoting, facilitating, enhancing, reinforcing, cooperating, welcoming and implementing both new and old ways of working together.

At the beginning of this narrative, the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' was seen mainly as a means to address common challenges and increase cooperation by seeking synergies between China's 12th Five-Year Plan and the Europe 2020 Strategy. China was portrayed as a partner in addressing a wide range of global concerns. All the institutions expected the EU's "relationship with China to be one of reciprocal benefit in both political and economic terms", in line with a "genuine implementation of the Chinese slogan *win-win co-operation*".¹⁷² The EU often reiterated the need to ensure that their relationship was reciprocal and fair, with a level playing field in all areas of their cooperation, and that the EU's interests were safeguarded. One of the overarching areas where reciprocity was lacking was in economic cooperation, as EU companies did not have equal access to the Chinese market compared to Chinese companies' access to the European market. Just as the EU welcomed Chinese investment in Europe (subject to compliance with EU laws and regulations), it expected EU investment to be equally welcome in China. One of the EU's top priorities was to encourage the reform of the Chinese market to make it more sustainable and more open to foreign investment, products, and services.

¹⁷² European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Elements for a new EU strategy on China*, 4.

As regards the EC and the EEAS, there was a strong conviction that the EU should take greater advantage of the opportunities offered by the growth of the Chinese economy, namely the establishment of the new EU-China Connectivity Platform. They sought a high degree of interdependence between the EU and the PRC, but also recognised the need to manage differences constructively, as “given the rapid pace of change in the EU and China over the past decade, it is time to re-assess and reaffirm the principles underlying the relationship”.¹⁷³ Some aspects of the 'China as a Threat' narrative were also intertwined with this 'Strategic Partnership' narrative. For example, the EC and EEAS emphasised that enhanced cooperation on Beijing's BRI initiative should be linked to China's (actual rather than stated) adherence to established international norms, provided that the initiative would bring benefits to all parties concerned. This was the first time that the EC and EEAS noted the geostrategic implications of the BRI. In addition, the EC and the EEAS stated that it was crucial for the EU to ensure that “it has a clear understanding of China's defence and security policies in order to inform its engagement with China”,¹⁷⁴ and suggested that the EU-China dialogues should be regularly reviewed to ensure their effectiveness and added value to the mutual relationship and to assess whether they contributed to the EU's objectives. In the EC and EEAS' *Strategic Outlook*, the balance of challenges and opportunities once again shifted as China sought to become a global power following its unprecedented growth in economic power and political influence. The EC and the EEAS criticised China's protectionism and preservation of its domestic market and stated that China must deliver on its promises and existing EU-China joint commitments to achieve a more balanced and reciprocal economic relationship. To achieve the EU's objectives in working with China, the Union must act as one and ensure that China complies with EU laws and principles. The 'Strategic Partnership' narrative gradually became less

¹⁷³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 13.

prominent in the communication, as well as there was a slight increase assertiveness. As indicated in the 'China as a Threat' narrative, China was now referred to not only as a cooperation and negotiating partner, but also as an economic competitor and systemic rival. However, this shift towards a more assertive approach to China was virtually the only development in the narrative, as the other issues of concern remained unchanged, as the EC and EEAS claimed that the EU would continue to strengthen its cooperation with China.

The EP's narrative style also changed over time, and even more so than that of the EC and the EEAS. The EP's narrative of the 'Strategic Partnership' gradually weakened, with the focus shifting from celebrating the supposed successes of the partnership to criticising China's reluctance to engage in a reciprocal relationship, its reluctance to engage in constructive dialogue and cooperation, and the EP's constant reminders of China's unfulfilled commitments. The EP's earlier ubiquitous wishful thinking and assumption that its strategic partnership could succeed in bringing about change in China began to fade with the realisation that Beijing did not want to change. The first sign of the wavering of the strategic partnership was the mention of Xi's 'Chinese Dream' of national rejuvenation and the rise of China's global economic and political weight as a reason to rethink Europe's strategic priorities, especially as China was reluctant to play by the rules. While the narrative of cooperation on issues of mutual interest and global challenges remained strong, it was stressed that the interaction between the two entities should be practical and contribute to the promotion of the EU's economic and political interests. The EP suggested that the EU should use its collective bargaining power and the political and economic weight of its member states to promote the EU's interests and defend "its

democracies so as to better face up to China's systematic efforts to influence its politicians and civil society".¹⁷⁵

Not only did the 'Strategic Partnership' narrative weaken year by year, but the EP eventually effectively swapped it for the 'Like-Minded Partners' narrative as the EU began to seek strategic partnerships with countries other than China. It was only in 2021 that the real recognition of the incompatibility of the two entities in a wide range of areas, such as their respective economic systems, was made. Most importantly, it was mentioned for the first time that China, as a one-party communist state (adhering to the values of Marxism-Leninism), does not share the EU's democratic values, marking a huge shift from the previous narrative of an eventual change in Beijing's political system and values through engagement with the EU. Moreover, the EP recognised that the "existing EU-China strategy has revealed its limitations in the light of recent developments and the global challenges posed by China and needs to be updated",¹⁷⁶ and that China was in fact both a partner and "an economic competitor and a systemic rival in an increasing number of areas",¹⁷⁷ as was already described in the 'China as a Threat' narrative. While maintaining a certain level of partnership with Beijing, the focus shifted to finding alternatives and building partnerships with like-minded partners and cooperating on protecting human rights, defending liberal democracy in the world and addressing Chinese security challenges.

The EC and the PRC as joint narrators

In contrast to the communications adopted by the EU institutions described above, where we could see a clear shift in the narratives disseminated, the

¹⁷⁵ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018," 110.

¹⁷⁶ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021," 42.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

documents adopted jointly by the EC, the European Council and the PRC showed no such development. The joint statements adopted by the trio over the years always presented a broad agenda of cooperation and a desire to strengthen cooperation with China in all possible areas (namely through dialogues and other frameworks), which was interwoven with mentions of past and present successes of the partnership. Throughout the documents, there are frequent references to the closely intertwined interests of the two entities, as well as to important progress and growth achieved, such as the creation of new dialogues for future cooperation. Both entities repeatedly reaffirmed their determination to uphold the rules-based international order, with the UN at its core, and their commitment to an open global economy.

The trio repeatedly “applauded the important progress achieved in the development of EU- China relations in all fields and agreed that their comprehensive strategic partnership has grown both in width and in depth”.¹⁷⁸ Both sides spoke of opportunities to strengthen EU-China cooperation as the interests of both entities have become more closely intertwined. The leaders also spoke of the importance of responding to each other's concerns; the important role of the various summits and dialogue mechanisms in place; economic cooperation, trade and investment as a cornerstone of the strategic partnership; their commitment to an active process of multilateral trade liberalisation and counter-protectionism; and the need to strengthen dialogue and cooperation to promote global peace and security and to address various global issues. Celebrating “significant strides in the political, economic, social, environmental, and cultural fields”,¹⁷⁹ both entities also reaffirmed their mutual interest in each

¹⁷⁸ EU-China Summit, *Joint Press Communiqué of the 14th EU-China Summit (ST 6474 2012 INIT)* (2012), <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6474-2012-INIT/en/pdf>, 1.

¹⁷⁹ EU-China Summit, *EU-China Summit joint statement: The way forward after forty years of EU-China cooperation* (2015), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23732/150629-eu-china-summit-joint-statement-final.pdf>, 1.

other's flagship initiatives (such as the BRI and the Investment Plan for Europe), in promoting peace, prosperity and sustainable development for the benefit of all, as well as their shared commitment to an open global economy. In addition, "the EU supported China's commitment to deepening reform comprehensively as well as China's goal of building up a moderately prosperous society in all respects".¹⁸⁰ This shows an unwavering (at least stated) belief in the eventual reform of the PRC. The non-progressiveness of the storyline can be further illustrated by commenting on the latest joint statement adopted at the 21st Summit in 2019, where both sides once again reaffirmed the strength of their strategic partnership and further declared their commitment to multilateralism, respect for international law and international norms with the UN at its core, as well as virtually all the other aspects mentioned above. The EU and China also "reaffirmed that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated".¹⁸¹ This essentially means that at the same time as the EC, EEAS, and EP were warning about China's behaviour in this and other narratives, the joint statement adopted by the EC, the European Council and the PRC did not reflect this development, but rather further reaffirmed the strength of the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership'.

4.6 EU's Like-Minded Partners

*"[The EP] Underlines the importance of the EU remaining attentive to China's changing role and growing global influence in multilateral organisations..., and to ensure better coordination among the Member States and like-minded partners towards combining the strength of global liberal democracies, in order to respond to this development"*¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹⁸¹ EU-China Summit, *Joint statement of the 21st EU-China summit* (2019), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39020/euchina-joint-statement-9april2019.pdf>, 3.

¹⁸² European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021," 47.

Narrative summary

This narrative was told exclusively by the European Parliament. There was a major shift in EP communications from a focus on the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' to a focus on building closer relations with other partners, and finally to building strong partnerships with 'EU's Like-Minded Partners'. In less than a decade, the presence of this narrative went from non-existence to prominence in EP's resolutions. From virtually no mention of its liberal democratic allies in communications in the early 2010s, the EP went to refer to them as the EU's 'Like-Minded Partners' and actively pursued joint development on issues of mutual interest to better counter China's subversive practices and make our democracies more resilient.

Explaining the narrative logic

In the early 2010s, the EP's (EU-China focused) resolutions were very much focused on the EU's relations with China, with little (if any) consideration given to the EU's other partners. Moreover, there was initially very little interest in the Asia-Pacific region, with very few, almost no mentions of the EU's interest in security and stability in East Asia. The dialogue on the EU's partners slowly began to change with new developments in China's foreign policy, such as Xi's 'Chinese Dream' of national rejuvenation, which signalled a stronger, more proactive China. As China's rise as a global power accelerated, the EP recognised the necessity to rethink Europe's strategic priorities. The EP therefore called for a more active EU approach in the Asia-Pacific region, both in terms of cooperation with China and other regional actors, as well as for greater cooperation with the US in exploring a common approach to China in the light of the 'Chinese Dream'. However, this development was accompanied by the continued importance of mutual trust between the EU and China in addressing global security issues, as

well as the hope that China would support EU- and US-led initiatives to end violations of international law and to restore the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, thus demonstrating substantial remnants of trust in the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership'. It was only in 2018 that the need for the EU's China policy to be part of a well-rounded policy approach to the Asia-Pacific region was emphasised, with the EU stating that it should make full use of its "close relations with partners such as the United States, Japan, South Korea, the ASEAN countries, Australia and New Zealand".¹⁸³ The EU's focus thus shifted from a China-centred policy to one that looks at the much wider Asia-Pacific region.

In 2021, the (by now frequently mentioned) phrase 'like-minded partners' was used for the first time, not just once, but repeatedly throughout the resolution,¹⁸⁴ making it one of the most prominent issues discussed. This change in the narrative shows two important developments. First, it shows a strong and growing EU preoccupation with the Asia-Pacific region, which, as noted above, is a major development in the EU's China policy. Second, it shows a shift from the EU's previous (very prominent) preoccupation with increasing cooperation with China, while convincing it to adhere to the internationally recognised rule of law and the universality of human rights, to almost abandoning these efforts (as described in the 'Strategic Partnership' narrative), and instead seeking close cooperation with its partners who share the same values - i.e., its 'like-minded' partners. This is not to say that the EU has abandoned its values - far from it. It seems that the EP has finally realised that China's adherence to universal values would not be easy to achieve, perhaps even impossible, and that it might be more beneficial to maintain dialogue with China (maintaining relations and trying to pursue reciprocal and balanced cooperation, preferably in line with EU values),

¹⁸³ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2018," 110.

¹⁸⁴ The phrase was used a total of 13 times.

but to seek the promotion and universality of human rights and the rule of law through partnerships with its "like-minded partners" who are already committed to upholding these very values. Not surprisingly, therefore, the EP called for "stronger cooperation with other democratic and like-minded partners such as the US, Canada, the UK, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and Taiwan"¹⁸⁵ and for greater coordination on issues such as the protection of human rights and the defence of liberal democracy in the world.

Moreover, the final resolution on EU-China relations, also for the first time, underlined the importance of promoting the EU-US partnership based on their shared history, values, and interests, to demonstrate the united strength of global liberal democracies and to further promote their common values. Moreover, given the growing concerns about hybrid attacks and Chinese industrial espionage and cyber theft, the EP underlined the importance of strengthening cooperation with NATO and G7 countries to counter Chinese security challenges such as hybrid threats and disinformation campaigns emanating from China, as well as the need to promote strategic autonomy in dimensions such as digital and technological sovereignty with like-minded partners, and to develop a common approach among the EU's like-minded partners in the WTO to address Chinese unfair trade practices. This marked a clear setback in terms of the previously pursued strengthening of the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership', which has (following the rise of 'China as a Threat' narrative) been exchanged for the EP's growing preoccupation with strengthening partnerships with the 'EU's Like-Minded Partners'.

¹⁸⁵ European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021," 47.

4.7 Concluding Comments

As can be seen from the analysis, the narratives identified do not exist in isolation. They often overlap in terms of narrative style, argumentation, strategic themes and language of persuasion. Table 7 summarises the results of the narrative analysis, which are then commented on.

Narrative name	Narrated by (actor)	In	Prominence
SEARCH FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION'S 'ONE VOICE'	European Parliament	EP resolutions	Low to Medium
	European Commission, EEAS	Elements (2016)	Low
UNLAWFUL CHINA – HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AND ABUSES	European Parliament	EP resolutions	High
	European Commission, EEAS	Elements (2016)	Medium
CHINA AS A THREAT	European Parliament	EP resolutions	Low to High
	European Commission, EEAS	Strategic Outlook (2019)	Low
GREAT POWER, GREAT RESPONSIBILITY	European Parliament	EP resolutions	High
	European Commission, EEAS	Elements (2016), Strategic Outlook (2019)	Medium to Low

EU-CHINA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP	European Parliament	EP resolutions Elements (2016), Strategic Outlook (2019)	Medium to Low
	European Commission, EEAS	Strategic Outlook (2019)	High to Medium
	European Council, European Commission, and the PRC	Strategic Agenda (2013)	High
	European Council, European Commission, and the PRC	Summit documents	High
EU'S LIKE-MINDED PARTNERS	European Parliament	EP resolutions	Low to High

Table 7: Main findings of the narrative analysis

Source: Author's own analysis

As can be seen from the results in Table 7, a total of six narratives were identified. The EP was the narrator of all identified narratives, while the EC and the EEAS were the narrators of all narratives except 'EU's Like-Minded Partners'. In the case of the EP, the narratives were present in virtually all published resolutions (albeit to varying degrees). In the case of the EC and the EEAS, however, some narratives were present in only one of their documents, showing a lack of continuity in the narrative. The values underpinning all the narratives were virtually the same for all the narrating institutions. For example, a very common theme was criticism of China's domestic and international behaviour. This stems mainly from Beijing's voluntary ratification of UN treaties and its permanent membership of the UN Security Council, but its refusal to abide by the norms

and rules that have been established and its rejection of the obligations that this status entails. There was also a recognition that a greater role for China in global affairs and governance should go hand in hand with greater adherence to international norms and rules. Another theme was Beijing's protectionist tendencies and the unequal bilateral trade relationship between the EU and China. However, there were major differences in how the institutions presented these narratives, how strongly they objected to China's behaviour, and how present these narratives were. A particularly interesting narrative case is the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership', which will be discussed later.

The European Parliament was undoubtedly the strongest European narrator, both in terms of the number of narratives told and the strength of the language of persuasion used. Moreover, the EP's narratives always referred to and responded to new developments that led to changes in the narratives. Virtually all of its narratives focused on China's adherence to international legal frameworks, especially the universality of human rights. Similarly, the EP's most prominent narrative in all of its resolutions, the 'Unlawful China' narrative, is primarily a narrative of Beijing's lack of adherence to the overarching principles on which the EU was built - the universality of human rights, democracy and adherence to the rule of law. Beijing's increasing crackdown on political freedoms and its appalling track record of human rights abuses was therefore something the EP could not ignore. It is also a narrative that uses the strongest narrative voice and language of persuasion. For example, the most recent resolution (EP of 2021) used phrases such as 'Tiananmen massacre' (previously called 'crackdown') and 'alleged genocide' to describe Beijing's behaviour, using a more aggressive narrative style than before.

Perhaps most importantly, the EP also demonstrated that it was fully aware of the differences between the human rights approaches of the EU and other liberal

democracies and those of China. While strongly advocating Beijing's acceptance of universal values, the EP also recognised the conceptual differences between European and Chinese perceptions of human rights, with universality being questioned in China on the grounds of cultural differences; it also noted that the PRC and its Chinese Communist Party, committed to Marxist-Leninist values, do not share the EU's democratic and individual freedoms. Acknowledging this inherent difference in values between the two entities, it is arguably for this reason that the EP ultimately called for greater partnership with the 'EU's Like-Minded Partners', recognising that China's non-adherence to universally accepted values is unlikely to change in the near future and that cooperation with others is therefore urgently needed given China's changing and more assertive global role. Likewise, most EP narratives contain an inherent plot that could be described as a 'failure of shared values' in relation to international norms, with the EP becoming increasingly disillusioned with Beijing's aims and aspirations. This disillusionment can be seen in an ever-diminishing desire for EU-China cooperation and an increasing reluctance to engage.

Similarly, essentially all EP narratives calling for greater caution or greater adherence by China to global rules and norms either increased in presence over time or remained classified as 'high'. The only exception was the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership', which decreased in presence and was slowly replaced by other narratives. However, the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' was the only narrative calling for greater partnership with China, and its decreasing presence therefore means that the EP followed the same pattern of increasing caution towards China's behaviour. A decrease in the overall presence of this narrative therefore again shows a certain decoupling from China. This shows not only continuity in the EP's narrative style, but also a tangible development linked to China's increasingly assertive behaviour.

As noted above, most of the narratives identified were also narrated by the European Commission and the EEAS. However, the narratives were much less present in the communications and narrated with much less force in terms of narrative style and language of persuasion compared to the European Parliament. The focus of their narratives was very much on economic issues, with no narrative being significantly more prominent than others. Most of the issues raised by the EP were also commented on, but with much less urgency. For example, in the 'Unlawful China' narrative, the EC and EEAS stressed the need for Beijing to abide by established international rules and norms, as well as treaties to which China has voluntarily subscribed. They also criticised Beijing's domestic behaviour, in particular its human rights abuses and crackdown on civil liberties, and stated that the protection of human rights would remain at the core of the EU's engagement with China. However, there was a clear difference in narrative style between the EC and EEAS and the EP, with the EP being much more critical of China's abuses. Overall, there was a growing caution towards Beijing's actions as China was portrayed as an increasingly active and aggressive global player, demanding a greater say in global politics and economic governance as its global influence grows, but the shift in narratives was much less pronounced than in the case of the EP.

In addition to different narrative styles and levels of assertiveness, other discrepancies between the narratives of different institutions were identified. For example, at the same time as the EP portrayed China as a human rights violator and the world's biggest executioner, other EU institutions celebrated the mutual commitment of the EU and China to the UN framework and human rights values. At the same time as the EP warned of the geopolitical consequences of the BRI, other institutions reaffirmed their interest in the BRI as Beijing's flagship initiative and sought to find synergies with EU development projects. While the EP deplored Beijing's continued crackdown on political freedoms at home and

its efforts to reform global governance in multilateral institutions, other EU institutions reaffirmed their common interest in promoting peace and a rules-based international order with the UN at its core. Moreover, at the same time as the EP was commenting on Beijing's rejection of international arbitration and UNCLOS, other EU institutions reaffirmed the EU's and China's mutual commitment to that very treaty, and so on and so forth. This shows a complete discrepancy in the narratives deployed by different EU institutions in the same timeframe.

'EU-China Strategic Partnership'

As mentioned above, a very interesting narrative case to analyse is that of the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership', because this narrative was present in all the communications analysed and was thus narrated by all the EU institutions, albeit with different language of persuasion, argumentation, and development of the storyline. The mere presence of this narrative in all communications was quite predictable, as the EU and China are still "committed to a comprehensive strategic partnership".¹⁸⁶ What makes this case interesting, however, is that it provides an opportunity to comment on the narrative formation of the various EU institutions in relation to this single narrative, and their respective responses to the changing balance of challenges and opportunities presented by Beijing.

For the European Parliament, the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' narrative was the only one to show a decline in importance, but it is also the one that has probably evolved the most. It started with a substantial presence and then slowly declined as the narrative was effectively swapped for the 'Like-Minded Partners' narrative in response to Beijing's increasingly assertive behaviour and reluctance

¹⁸⁶ European Union, "The European Union and China," EEAS (2023), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/european-union-and-china_en?s=166.

to abide by established norms and rules. For the EC and the EEAS, the presence of this narrative in strategic communications declined over time from 'high' to 'medium' presence. The 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' was expected to be fair and mutually beneficial, both politically and economically, a partnership of 'win-win' cooperation, but it was noted that Beijing had not fully delivered on its promise. Similar to the EP's narrative, the EC's main challenge was to channel China's participation in global affairs into positive cooperation on various issues of mutual interest. While continuing to promote the mutual partnership between the two entities and reaffirming the EU's commitment, the EC and the EEAS also noted that the balance of challenges and opportunities had shifted as China aspired to become a global power following its unprecedented growth in economic power and political influence. The prominence of this narrative diminished as the EC became more cautious about Beijing's behaviour and the 'China as a Threat' narrative emerged. Despite these developments, the overall tone of the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' remained positive. The final group of narrators were the representatives of the European Council, the European Commission, and the People's Republic of China. In both the *Strategic Agenda* and all Summit communications, the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' was not only consistently prominent, it was also the only narrative identified in all communications. There was virtually no development of this narrative, as EU and Chinese leaders agreed to strengthen cooperation in a wide range of areas, reaffirmed their mutual respect and appeared to base this relationship on the principles of respect, equality and trust.

The narrative of the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' is a crucial case to comment on because of the inherent discrepancies in the narrative styles of the institutions. For example, the European Parliament's narrative of the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' is quite different from the narratives of the European Commission and the EEAS, as well as the narratives of the European Council, the European

Commission and the People's Republic of China. While the presence of the EP's narrative of the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' in its resolutions continued to decline sharply, and that of the EC and the EEAS declined slightly, the narrative in the hands of the European Council, the European Commission and the People's Republic of China remained unaffected. In other words, there was a lack of coherence in the narrative style and development of the narratives depending on who the narrator was. Apart from the discrepancies between the different EU institutions and their narrative styles, the even bigger problem were the discrepancies found between the narratives of one single institution - the European Commission. The EC adopted the *Elements* and *Strategic Outlook* with the EEAS, and the *Strategic Agenda* and Joint Summit Declarations with the European Council and the People's Republic of China. The 'EU-China Strategic Partnership' was narrated in all the above communications, but with major differences.

In 2019, for example, the European Commission and the EEAS described China as a systemic rival that promotes alternative models of governance and refuses to abide by established norms and rules. At the same time, however, the EC, in cooperation with the European Council and the PRC, reaffirmed the EU-China commitment to the norms and values of the current rules-based international order. Moreover, at the same time as the EC and the EEAS criticised China's protectionism in its domestic market and described Beijing as an economic competitor, the EC and the European Council celebrated the EU's and China's mutual commitment to an open global economy. Moreover, at the same time as the EC and the EEAS commented on Beijing's voluntary accession to various international human rights frameworks, such as the UN Charter, and yet its refusal to abide by these frameworks, as seen for example in Beijing's authoritarian response to domestic dissent, the EC, in cooperation with the European Council, reaffirmed its mutual commitment with China to the very

values and frameworks that Beijing has broken. Moreover, at the same time as China's growing assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific and its military modernisation ambitions were being portrayed by the EC and the EEAS as a threat to the EU, the EC and the European Council reaffirmed the EU's and China's determination to work together for peace, prosperity and sustainable development, and their commitment to multilateralism and respect for international law. And so on and so forth.

CONCLUSION

The EU has maintained an ongoing discourse with Beijing over the years. However, with the rise of China and its increasing assertiveness in global affairs, the EU-China discourse has changed. China's rise has been accompanied by an increasing number of strategic communications that frame the EU's strategic approach to Beijing and the EU-China relationship. The aim of this paper was to analyse the presentation of the EU's strategic narratives towards China in its EU-China strategy and foreign policy documents published or adopted between 2012 and 2022, and to examine how these narratives envisage EU-China strategic engagement. To this end, complementary content and narrative analyses were conducted. Following these analyses, numerous strategic themes and a total of six narratives were identified, with varying degrees of presence, narrative style and development in the communications. The most common themes identified were Beijing's reluctance to adhere to the current liberal international world order, its increasing domestic (and international) crackdown on political freedoms and human rights, and the lack of reciprocity in EU-China relations, particularly in terms of trade and investment. The most prominent narratives identified were those of 'Unlawful China', 'China as a Threat', 'Great Power, Great Responsibility', and 'Strategic Partnership'. However, different European institutions showed varying degrees of assertiveness in formulating strategic

narratives towards China, as they reacted in different ways to Beijing's emergence as a global player. Moreover, some of the institutions were more 'interventionist', such as the EP, which was most critical of domestic issues in China, namely in terms of the 'Unlawful China' narrative, while others focused primarily on international aspects and/or the overall state of global affairs, such as the EC and the EEAS, which were more concerned with the international aspects of Beijing's behaviour.

It is neither surprising nor wrong that different EU institutions have different priorities, which are reflected in their respective narratives. For example, the narratives of the EC and the EEAS focused mainly on issues related to investment and economic cooperation, while the EP focused mainly on non-compliance with established human rights frameworks and declining political freedoms. In fact, diversifying the narratives so that each institution can focus on issues of a specific area and expertise, perhaps related to its institutional prerogatives, could prove beneficial in achieving partial successes and even a more coherent overall institutional cooperation. However, the discourse used by the different EU institutions must not be contradictory, as was sometimes the case. To give some examples, this contradiction can be seen in the narrative of 'Unlawful China', where the EU has been unable to formulate a coherent narrative. For one institution to criticise China's behaviour and argue that Beijing should change its behaviour to comply with human rights frameworks, and for another institution to argue at the same time that Beijing is doing a commendable job of complying with these frameworks (even stating that the protection of human rights would remain at the core of the EU's engagement with China, and celebrating Beijing's commitment to the UN human rights framework) sends mixed signals to the recipients of the narratives, to say the least. In this particular case, if one institution is highly critical of Beijing's approach, while the other is much more conciliatory, there is virtually no pressure on China in the area of human rights,

and the EU also loses some of its credibility as an institution. Another example is the narrative of the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership', where at the same time some EU institutions distanced themselves from China, while others argued for more cooperation.

As seen in the literature review on EU narratives, scholars have been highly critical of the EU's inability to speak with 'one voice', which is arguably largely due to the hybrid institutional structure of the EU as an entity. Nonetheless, and perhaps contrary to what the critics of EU discourse in the literature review have argued, there is arguably no need for the EU to speak with a completely unified voice. In fact, it might even be advantageous to speak with several voices at times, as has been discussed. There is, however, a clear need for greater coherence in the EU's narratives. Given the number of different issues of interest to the EU (as reflected in its strategic communications), it might be beneficial to the EU's objectives for its institutions to engage in discourse with China on several fronts and with several voices at the same time. Similarly, the fact that the EU's narratives often overlap could also prove supportive of a particular cause. However, this would only work if the narratives were based on the same inherent values (as they currently are) and, most importantly, did not contradict each other. Contradictory narratives are very damaging for a number of reasons. First, they can confuse the recipients of the narrative as to what the narrator is actually trying to achieve – the narrator's intentions are not clearly stated, nor are its policy rationales and objectives. Maintaining a coherent discourse is crucial because it is the easiest way to avoid misunderstandings – but this discourse must be clear. Second, the recipient might take advantage of the conflicting narratives and try to achieve its respective policy goals on multiple fronts, i.e., choose the front where it is easiest to achieve the said goals. Therefore, conflicting narratives could weaken the narrator's discourse power and ability to achieve its policy goals.

It is not only the form of these strategic narratives that matters, but also the fact that these narratives foreshadow possible policy options. Different narratives imply different policy approaches towards China. Based on the narrative analyses conducted, there is currently no single vision for EU-China strategic engagement. For example, some narratives resemble a form of appeasement, such as the 'EU-China Strategic Partnership', while others are much more critical of Beijing's behaviour at home and abroad, such as the 'Unlawful China' or 'China as a Threat' narratives. As explained in the theoretical framework of this paper, strategic narratives serve the purpose of making sense of one's strategic situation. They are a communication tool used to influence a particular target audience. They have explanatory power and can be used as an instrument of persuasion because they serve as a rationale for one's foreign policy and are used to seek or maintain common understanding. However, this is increasingly difficult to achieve when there are too many conflicting voices, as the explanatory power of the actor's strategic values and policy objectives is lacking. In such cases, because conflicting narratives limit the explanatory power of the strategic narratives that emerge, the intrinsic purpose of narratives is not adequately achieved.

A coherent strategic narrative, on the other hand, enhances the EU's credibility and demonstrates a clear, consistent message embedded in the narratives. In addition, a coherent narrative could help the EU present a united front to its like-minded partners. If the EU's partners shared the EU's narrative, it would strengthen their collective voice and thus potentially increase their bargaining power. The EU could also be seen as a more reliable actor if it presented consistent messages – if the messages are multiple and contradictory, it could hamper the EU's potential to be influential on the global stage. Some may even misunderstand the EU's true objectives if there are more narratives – effective communication is needed when presenting shared strategic values and key policy objectives. The EU needs to improve its narrative power in order to protect

its interests and values, and to gain a better bargaining position in achieving desired outcomes in global affairs. Although its hybrid structure makes this incredibly difficult, especially when compared to the PRC's state apparatus, the EU must increase its narrative power and project narratives that would enable us to protect our values and the rules-based international order. It may not be necessary for the EU to speak with 'one voice', but an EU-wide approach without contradictory narratives is a necessity to increase our political legitimacy and narrative power. A greater degree of alignment and internal coordination of the institutions' respective strategic narratives could therefore effectively increase the overall impact of EU foreign policy in global affairs, including vis-à-vis the PRC.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The full list of authors of all EU-China documents collected

Document	Author	Type of document	Year published	By
Main Strategic Documents				
Strategic Agenda	President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, and Premier Li Keqiang of the State Council of the PRC	Jointly adopted strategy	2013	EU-China
Elements	European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy	Joint communication	2016	EU
Strategic Outlook	European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy	Joint communication	2019	EU
EU-China Summit Communications				
14 th Summit	President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Commission,	Joint press communiqué	2012	EU-China

	José Manuel Barroso, and Premier Wen Jiabao of the State Council of the PRC			
15 th Summit	President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, assisted by the High- Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Catherine Ashton, and Premier Wen Jiabao of the State Council of the PRC	Joint press communiqué	2012	EU- China
Summit of 2014	President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, and President Xi Jinping of the PRC	Joint statement	2014	EU- China
17 th Summit	President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, President of the European Commission, Jean- Claude Juncker, and Premier Li Keqiang of	Joint statement	2015	EU- China

	the State Council of the PRC			
20 th Summit	President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and Premier Li Keqiang of the State Council of the PRC	Joint statement	2018	EU-China
21 st Summit	President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and Premier Li Keqiang of the State Council of the PRC	Joint statement	2019	EU-China
European Parliament Resolutions				
EP of 2013	European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs	Own-initiative resolution	2013	EU
EP of 2015	European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs	Own-initiative resolution	2015	EU
EP of 2018	European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Committee on International Trade, Committee on the	Own-initiative resolution	2018	EU

	Environment, Public Health and Food Safety			
EP of 2021	European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Committee on International Trade	Own-initiative resolution	2021	EU

Source: Author's own list