

EU-China Relations: Competition and Partnership

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Abstract

The study aims to analyze the current state of relations between China and the EU, including the balance of partnership and competition, common interests, and stronger connections. It also seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state of the relationship between China and the EU, highlighting both the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Hence, the study delves on a multitude of topics including China's human rights record, policies on intellectual property, and state-owned enterprises, as well as its growing military and economic influence in the world. The study also investigates the EU's objectives to build a constructive and cooperative relationship with China based on mutual respect and understanding, as well as the actions that both sides implement to address global challenges through international organizations such as the WTO and the UN. The study examines the economic ties between China and the EU, including trade and investment flows. The direction and flow of trade and investments will be explored by referring to statistics from international organizations, especially the World Bank. Literature review on economic, commercial and political cooperation between the EU and China will focus on primary and secondary sources. It is important for both sides to continue to engage in dialogue and cooperation to strengthen their trade relationship and address issues such as market access, level playing field, human rights, and intellectual property rights. For a successful pursuit of these objectives, the EU needs to develop a single rhetoric and adopt common policies.

1 Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the relations between China and the European Union (EU) have been based on a mix of competition and partnership, both in economic and political fields. As major trade partners, their economies have become deeply intertwined, forging extensive interdependencies. They have engaged in a number of collaborative efforts, particularly in areas such as climate change, economic development, and global governance, which have the potential to strengthen their relationship and promote greater stability in the international system (Cameron, 2009). On the other hand, their economic interests do not always overlap, which puts them in a state of rigorous competition. Their differing approach to market access is also problematic: European businesses have long complained about the barriers they face when trying to do business in China, including restrictions on foreign investment, forced technology transfers, and discriminatory treatment of foreign firms. As Brown suggests, the EU has been pushing for greater market access in China, while China has been seeking to maintain control over its domestic markets (2014).

The political realm presents significant challenges as well. The EU has implemented a series of sanctions against China due to human rights issues, prompting retaliatory counter-sanctions from the latter. Geopolitical concerns, including those pertaining to the South China Sea and the broader Indo-Pacific region, have also emerged as significant points of contention. Divergent viewpoints on territorial claims, maritime freedom, and regional security issues underline these disagreements. Yet, here again, divergences accompany collaboration. As elucidated below, the two sides demonstrate shared commitments within multilateral fora. Their pursuit of the Paris Agreement (on climate) and their objective of achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) illustrate this point.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to comprehensively analyze the multifaceted dynamics, challenges, and opportunities inherent in the China-EU bilateral relationship. Consequently, the study will commence by examining the historical background and development of China-EU relations. Then, the areas in which the two countries have established a partnership, competed and confronted will be examined.

2 Historical Background and Evolution of the Relations

Since the 16th century, China and various European countries have occasionally communicated, primarily through trade missions and Jesuit missionaries. However, Western countries did not start to exert considerable influence over China until the 19th century, which culminated in the Opium Wars and the forcible opening of Chinese ports to international trade (Bailey, 1999). As for the relationship between the EU and China, the year 1975 holds a particular significance for it marks the establishment of diplomatic relations between Beijing and Brussels. China thus became the first socialist state to accredit an ambassador to the European Economic Community, making it the sole nation to have this status until 1988 (Christiansen et al., 2019). The Community and China reached a non-preferential commercial cooperation agreement in 1978 whereby they mutually granted each other most-favored-nation (MFN) treatment (Official Journal of the European Communities, 1978). The MFN clause was also the cornerstone of the trade and cooperation agreement of 1985 Agreement (Wong, 2013). The developing relations in the 1980s, however, were marred by a significant political tension. Following the violent

suppression of pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989, the European Community imposed an arms embargo on China, which remains in effect to this day.

After the Cold War had ended and China had begun implementing its reform and opening-up policy, relations between the two sides entered a period of rapid development. The EU's importance in China's foreign policy increased significantly as a result of China's emphasis on domestic economic growth. European countries, especially those in Western Europe, were an important trade and economic partner and contributed significantly to China's opening up (Song, 2012). It seems pertinent to say that the dislocation of the USSR has opened up a new era for Beijing and the EU capitals. Following arduous negotiations throughout the 1990s, China gained a seat in the WTO in late 2001. The EU has endorsed this process for at least three reasons. First, it was in line with the EU's objectives of expanding open markets on a global scale. Second, EU member states expected concurrent economic and political liberalization within China, which would subsequently make China a better partner. And last but not least, trade with the *Middle Kingdom* held immense significance, offering opportunities such as the volume of trade, the supply of raw materials, and the extent of the domestic market.

During the 2000s, China and the EU initiated a series of profound political and strategic meetings, marked by the establishment of the EU-China Strategic Partnership in 2003. As R. Maher reminds, the objective of the partnership was to extend beyond the economic and commercial realm and address the most pressing global issues (2016). The same year, Beijing released a white paper centering on the relations with the EU. This move deserves highlighting for it reflects the first-ever such initiative undertaken by Chinese authorities. In 2006, the European Commission's "EU-China: closer partners, growing responsibilities" communication, together with a policy paper on trade, aimed to complement the strategic partnership adopted three years earlier. As evidence of their joint desire to move forward, the parties launched a round of negotiations in January 2007 aiming a new partnership and cooperation agreement (European Commission, 2012).

A striking episode of the 2000s is indeed the sovereign debt crisis of 2008 during which Chinese large-scale enterprises had the opportunity to invest heavily in the European continent, subsequently strengthening the China-EU interdependence. The Greek case stands out as an illustration of how extensive Chinese investments were in Europe. In addition to massive purchases of bonds and treasury bills with Chinese capital, it was also possible to see the logistics group China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) taking over the Greek port of Piraeus in late 2008. This move was highly strategic as it ensured access for Chinese products into European markets. To note, COSCO Group has been the majority shareholder of the port since 2016.

The following decade witnessed a highly dynamic period for Sino-European relations. In 2013, two significant events garnered attention: the inauguration of Xi Jinping as the Chinese President in March and the adoption of the 'EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation' during the 16th EU-China summit in November. China's evolving cooperation scheme with the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) has also been subject to attention. The China-CEEC cooperation launched in '16+1' format in 2012 with the purpose of "cooperation and common development" between China and 16 states from the European continent, 11 of them being members of the EU. Athens' decision to join the group in 2017 changed the format to '17+1' and brought the number of EU member states to 12 (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia). The non-EU member states were Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia. Lithuania withdrew in 2021, followed by Estonia and Latvia in 2022.

While offering substantial financial opportunities for the development of transportation infrastructure in 17 Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) and Greece, China also ensured the facilitation of exports to the EU territory. In 2016, the European Parliament (EP) refused to recognize China's market economy status as set out in global trade rules via its resolution. Another very important EU document on China was made public by the European Commission in 2019. In a communication of 'strategic vision' on China, the Commission depicted China as being simultaneously a cooperation and negotiation partner, economic competitor and a systemic rival.

As an outcome of a process that started in 2013, the EU and China reached an agreement on investments in December 2020. The *EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI)* encompasses the liberalization of investments and the elimination of barriers, thereby facilitating entry into multiple sectors of the Chinese market, particularly encompassing transportation, automotive, healthcare, and digital industries. Hence, its objective is to address the existing imbalance with Beijing, arising from the disparity between the European market's openness to foreign investments and the barriers and discriminatory practices that European enterprises encounter while seeking to invest in China. To note, it represents the largest investment agreement China has ever concluded with a foreign counterpart.

Yet, over the years, a notable transformation has occurred in the EU's perception of China. The CAI has proven ephemeral, as merely five months elapsed between its signing and subsequent suspension by the European Parliament (McElwee, 2023). The EP froze the ratification of the agreement because of Chinese retaliation to the EU's sanctions over human rights abuses: Four Chinese officials were subject to restrictive measures over large-scale arbitrary detentions targeting in particular the Muslim Uyghur minority in the Xinjiang region. This was the first time that the EU agreed on sanctions against China since the Tiananmen events. The adoption of sanctions

represents a significant departure from the Union's decades-long policy towards the country. At present, Beijing's image is predominantly negative, with a strong focus on the persistent violations of fundamental rights and liberties.

The EU and China's political relations has changed through time and is now defined by a mix of partnership, competitiveness, and occasionally confrontation. However, Europe is beginning to understand that China can no longer be classified as a developing nation due to its fast growth in economic strength and political influence. As a result, the EU seeks to interact with China in a more sensible, aggressive, and multifaceted way that is grounded in well-defined goals and values. The pursuit of more equitable and reciprocal economic circumstances, adaptation to shifting economic conditions, and upholding compliance with EU law, regulations, and policies are all included in this. The EU sees China as a global cooperation partner with shared goals, a partner in negotiations with whom it must strike a balance of interests, a competing system pushing for alternative forms of governance, and an economic opponent in the race for technological supremacy. To accomplish its objectives, the EU must develop a flexible and workable overall strategy that permits the principled defense of its interests and values in a wide range of policy areas and sectors. The Joint Communication also proposes ten specific steps for the European Council to take into account and approve. These include working with China to support effective multilateralism and combat climate change, commitment to international peace, security, and sustainable economic development, building more equitable and reciprocal trade and investment relations, enhancing the competitiveness of the Union, and ensuring the security of vital infrastructure and the technological base (European Commission, 2019).

3 Partnership

China and the EU have had substantial economic and commercial cooperation for more than fortieth years of uninterrupted trade. China and the EU have recently signed many bilateral and multilateral agreements, such as the China-EU Investment Treaty (TIE) and the Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership (CSP) between the two parties. These agreements have played an important role in supporting trade relations between the two parties. Trade cooperation between China and the EU is an important relationship that has grown in recent years. The EU is China's largest trading partner, and China is the EU's second-largest trading partner, after the United States. The two sides engage in a wide range of economic and trade activities, including in the areas of investment, technology transfer, and intellectual property rights.

By giving both parties a forum to debate their concerns and find solutions to trade problems, these cooperation mechanisms have been crucial in fostering trade and investment between China and the EU. They are a crucial component of the broader commercial relationship between China and the EU and contribute to its stability and mutual benefit. Both parties are committed to conducting trade remedy inquiries in accordance with WTO standards, putting trade remedy measures into effect, and conducting anti-dumping and countervailing duty inquiries in a fair, impartial, and open manner. In order to advance concrete, mutually beneficial cooperation between China and the European Investment Bank, they also seek to advance the recently established bilateral currency swap agreement between the Chinese Yuan and the Euro, explore opportunities for increased cooperation with the EBRD to support investment in European nations, and maintain the stability of financial markets.

Furthermore, the EU and China will increase their public procurement policy exchanges, step up multilateral coordination, and fully utilize current bilateral mechanisms in order to improve communication, address significant bilateral trade frictions through dialogue and consultation, and find win-win solutions. They will reaffirm their commitment to international standardization and the notice of any norms that obstruct market access, as well as improve the Intellectual Property Dialogue framework to strengthen collaboration in the fight against piracy and counterfeiting. To boost access to funding for businesses, particularly SMEs, they will also explore novel forms of financial cooperation and share best practices in e-commerce.

The EU and China have been actively involved in diplomatic efforts to address international issues like climate change, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation. They also participate in a number of multilateral organizations and forums, including the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the G20. Recognizing the value of multilateralism, both the EU and China have been actively participating in several international organizations and forums to advance international cooperation and handle shared concerns. For instance, both parties have been collaborating to further the objectives of the Paris Agreement on climate change and to support peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. Along with these, they have collaborated on public health, disaster assistance, and efforts to reduce poverty. In general, the EU and China have underlined the value of multilateralism and have collaborated on international institutions and platforms. They have synchronized their stances on a variety of topics, including the World Trade Organization (WTO) reform, the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and improving collaboration within the framework of the United Nations (Commission of the European Communities, 1998).

In his 2018 New Year's speech, President Xi Jinping emphasized that China tends to expand its circle of allies by considering economic diplomacy, digital diplomacy and the defense of political interests. China continues to draw in and interact with other areas despite a fall in its reputation in Europe and other Western nations. China

aims to reduce economic ties with adversaries, place a premium on independence, and reorganize commercial relations with countries including Russia, Iran, North Korea, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Particularly in the area of semiconductors, China views US trade and technology restrictions as a chance to lessen its long-term reliance on foreign markets and technologies. In order to influence global standards and marginalize concepts and definitions believed to be of Western origin, China wants to strengthen its position as a technology exporting power and take a leading role in international organizations. This involves promoting an Internet that is state-run and sovereign, in opposition to the idea of a globally free and open Internet (RFI, 2023).

The EU and China engage in regular political dialogues at various levels to promote trade and investment, discuss bilateral issues, and address global challenges. The EU-China Summit and the EU-China High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue (HED) serve as the primary examples of these discussions. As for the EU-China Trade Dialogue, it provides a platform for high-level discussions on trade and investment issues, including market access, technical barriers to trade, and intellectual property rights. The EU-China Investment Dialogue focuses on investment issues, including investment liberalization, protection, and facilitation.

While trade cooperation between China and the EU has been a source of competition and tension at times, the two sides have also worked together to address global challenges such as climate change and sustainable development, which obliges countries to minimize the negative impacts on the environment of sectoral economic activities required by economic cooperation and development. They have launched joint initiatives to promote the use of clean energy and to develop sustainable cities. Both parties collaborate to advance environmentally friendly and low-carbon technology and, thus, lower CO₂ emissions.

The EU-China Summit is a key gathering of top officials from the EU and China that happens once a year or every two years. This summit offers a chance for in-depth debates on a variety of subjects, such as political, economic, and strategic challenges. The Summit, which come before the three High Level Strategic Dialogues, address the most important topics, such as crisis management, shared stances, or challenges affecting bilateral, regional, and global relations. Every conference is completed with a joint statement, which outlines the participants' positions and the mutually agreed-upon course of action. There are more than fifty separate discussions for each pillar, covering a wide variety of subjects including intellectual property rights, human rights, regional security, and education and culture (Sajdak, 2013).

The annual EU-China summits are the highest-level meetings between the EU and China, where leaders discuss and set the direction for the partnership. In addition to the summits, there are regular meetings at various levels, including ministerial meetings, senior officials' meetings, and expert-level dialogues. These meetings provide a platform for the EU and China to discuss and address shared concerns, strengthen cooperation, and deepen understanding. It also includes the establishment of dispute resolution mechanisms. Ministerial meetings involve high-level officials from specific ministries, such as foreign affairs, trade, and finance, and provide a forum for discussions on specific topics of mutual interest. These meetings enable direct exchanges between officials responsible for policy areas and contribute to the development of bilateral cooperation. Senior officials' meetings and expert-level dialogues are also important components of the EU-China political relationship. These meetings involve officials from relevant departments and agencies who work together to address shared concerns, discuss specific issues in depth, and explore areas for collaboration. They provide opportunities for technical discussions and the exchange of expertise, allowing for a deeper understanding of each other's positions and perspectives. The establishment of dispute resolution mechanisms is indeed essential in the EU-China relationship. Disputes may arise in areas such as trade, investment, or intellectual property, and having mechanisms in place helps to address and resolve these issues. The parties can resort to various mechanisms, including bilateral negotiations, consultations, or utilizing international frameworks such as the WTO, to find solutions and mitigate conflicts.

On April 1, 2022, China and the EU convened their 23rd bilateral summit via videoconference. China's arbitrary penalties, including those against members of the European Parliament, and coercive actions against the EU Single Market and Member States were condemned by the EU as being disappointing. It urged China to stop taking such acts in order to have a more fruitful dialogue that would be advantageous to both parties. The EU and China have had discussions and worked together on global health issues. How essential it is for China and the EU to collaborate on global trade regulation has been further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to supply chain disruptions, trade restrictions, and the necessity for a coordinated global response to health and economic issues, the pandemic has brought to light these issues. The leaders talked about collaborating on the immunization campaign and restarting the economy. The EU reaffirmed its intention to collaborate on a new agreement on pandemic prevention, readiness, and response with China and other World Health Organization members. In order to ensure a balanced trade and economic relationship, the EU emphasized the need to address long-standing concerns about market access and the investment opportunities in China. Both China and the EU have stated their commitment to preserving open and fair trade and to cooperating to solve the difficulties brought on by the pandemic.

The High-Level Trade and Economic Dialogue has been required by leaders to provide specific strategies for advancement on these topics. They decided to soon add more provisions to the EU-China Agreement on the Protection of Geographical Indications. The leaders committed to keep working together to address climate change

and the energy transition, which is essential to addressing this pressing global issue. In the lead-up to COP 27 in Sharm-El-Sheikh, the EU emphasized the significance of extra steps, particularly phasing out coal. At the COP15 in Kunming, the EU and China will collaborate to establish a strong and ambitious new global biodiversity framework. The EU emphasized the value of an open, competitive environment for the digital economy as well as reliable, moral, and ethical applications of AI. It voiced alarm over growing cybersecurity dangers and demanded responsible governmental behavior online. The High-Level Digital Dialogue will get resume between the EU and China. The EU underlined its worries about the human rights situation in China, notably how minorities and human rights advocates are treated, citing specific incidents, as well as about the disintegration of the "One Country Two Systems" in Hong Kong. The EU anticipates that the start of a serious Human Rights Dialogue will address these issues. The EU expressed worry about rising cross-strait tensions while reiterating its adherence to its One China policy. The conditions in Afghanistan, Myanmar, and the Korean Peninsula were also discussed by the leaders (European Commission, 2022).

By having regular meetings and established dispute resolution mechanisms, the EU and China aim to foster a constructive and stable political relationship. These platforms facilitate dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperation on shared concerns, contributing to the overall development of the EU-China partnership. The HED is one of them. Introduced in Beijing in April 2008, the HED's goal is to address strategic problems that are vital to trade, investment, and economic ties between the EU and China. It acts as a forum for actual advancement in sectoral conversations, facilitating talks on particular topics of shared interest. The HED gives both parties the chance to communicate and work together on a variety of economic and trade-related issues. It seeks to deepen comprehension, pinpoint issues of shared interest, and promote collaboration across different fields. Market access, investment regulations, intellectual property rights, and other trade-related topics might be discussed during HED meetings. The HED will offer a larger forum for discussion on topics that concern both Europe and China on a wide range of economic and trade concerns under the new Commission. The second and third meetings of the HED were held in Brussels on May 7-8, 2009, and December 20–21, 2010, respectively (ECRAN, 2023).

The 9th HED, which took place on July 19, 2022 was successful since both parties came to agreements and consensus on a number of crucial subjects. The macroeconomic policy coordination, supply chain and industry collaboration, WTO reform, market openness, geographical indications, animal and plant inspection and quarantine, financial sector opening, and regulatory cooperation were the main topics of the dialogue. The discussions gave China-EU cooperation stability and fresh energy, highlighting the significance of working together to handle global issues, strengthening supply chain cooperation, and preserving the stability of the world financial and economic markets. Both parties vowed to respect the multilateral trading system's norms, encourage trade and investment liberalization, fair competition, and the protection of intellectual property rights (Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union, 2022).

In Figure 1 below, the EU-China summit is divided into three pillars. Three pillars make up the partnership's structure: the political pillar, the economic and trade pillar, and the pillar for intercultural interaction. Pillar I tackles the EU-China's strategic partnership, security challenges, and political concerns. Discussions may touch on issues including fostering peace and stability, resolving conflicts, and regional and global security. Pillar II includes broader economic cooperation and partnership, beyond trade and investment. Both the EU and China recognize the importance of addressing climate challenges and may discuss cooperation on clean energy, emission reduction targets, green technologies, and sustainable development goals. Discussions on coordinating economic policy, financial collaboration, infrastructure development, and fostering sustainable economic growth may be covered. Pillar III places a focus on strengthening people-to-people ties between the EU and China as well as cultural and educational exchanges. It strives to improve intercultural connections, academic exchanges, tourism, and mutual understanding.

China, the largest developing nation and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, considers it to be its moral obligation to help other developing nations achieve sustainable development. A notable example is China's assistance to Africa, which is where the majority of developing nations are found. Initiatives for development cooperation have been jointly undertaken by the EU and China, particularly in Africa. In order to encourage sustainable development in African nations, they have worked to promote infrastructure development, investment, and capacity-building initiatives (Snyder, 2009).

China and the EU have also been working together on sustainable development initiatives with raised concerns about the environmental and social impact of some of the projects under the initiative, such as the BRI. The BRI is a global infrastructure and investment program launched by China in 2013, with the aim of promoting economic development and connectivity across Asia, Europe, and Africa. The EU has expressed interest in working with China on the BRI but has raised concerns about the environmental and social impact of some of the projects under the initiative. The two sides have been working to address these concerns, and to promote sustainable and inclusive development under the BRI (Wang and Wang, 2022; Men, 2021).

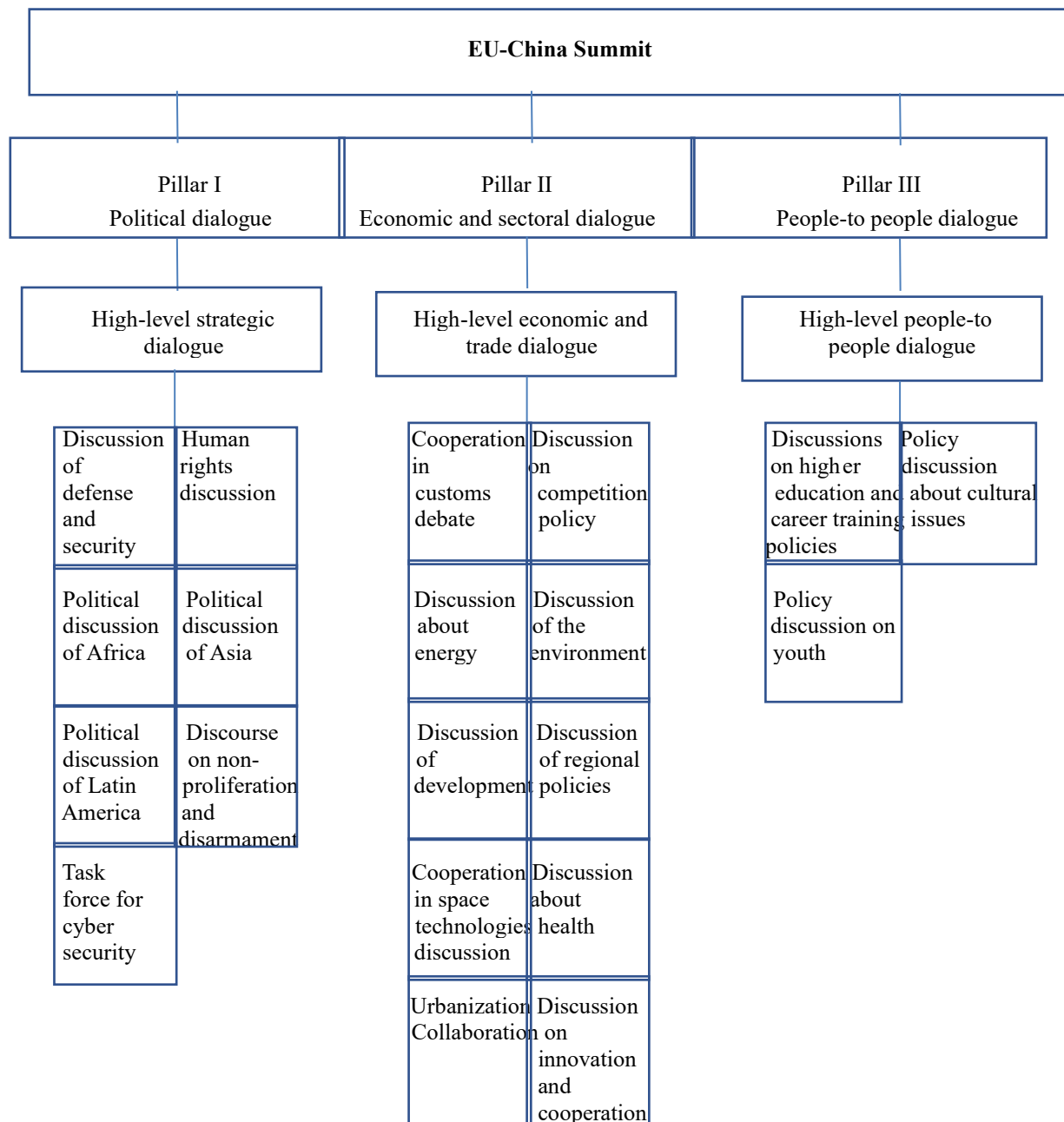


Figure 1. Design of the bilateral Strategic Partnership between the EU and China **Source:** (Stahl, 2017).

The 2015-founded EU-China Connectivity Platform seeks to promote cooperation between the BRI and the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) of the EU. It seeks to improve connectivity on all three fronts—physical, digital, and interpersonal—while upholding and advancing sustainable and ecologically friendly practices (European Commission, 2023).

The EU's best practices are better be used to the Chinese commitment to advance regional peace and sustainable development through the BRI project, particularly with reference to the Joint Plan of Action for Central Asia under the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy, which emphasizes conflict prevention and resolution, sustainable development, resolving socioeconomic issues, promoting adherence to the rule of law combating radicalization and recruitment, and fostering intercultural and religious understanding in order to address the factors that contribute to the spread of terrorism and to increase state capability and the UN's influence to help members improve their ability to thwart and combat terrorism (Arduino, 2016).

Climate change is another crucial area for China and Europe to expand their mutual cooperation. China and the EU are both working to change the current development paradigm in order to make economic growth more sustainable, inclusive, and environmentally friendly. The EU's sustainable transformation objectives and China's "innovative, coordinated, green, open, and shared" new development conceptions have many characteristics, which bodes well for their reform collaborations. China has pledged to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 and has established the objective of low-carbon transition as a goal. China and the EU may benefit from each other's

cooperation in the green transformation of the EU and the development of China's ecological civilization (He and Li, 2022; Feng, 2022).

The European Union Chamber of Commerce in China (EUCCC) aims to improve the business climate and promote fair competition on behalf of European companies doing business in China. It acts as a forum for communication between European businesses and Chinese government officials (EUCCC, 2023).

China and the EU have worked together to develop renewable energy sources like wind, solar, and hydroelectricity. In the fields of clean energy, they have encouraged technology transfers, financial investment, and teamwork in research. The EU and China have worked together to develop and implement clean technologies. This covers projects for sustainable urbanism, carbon capture and storage, and energy-efficient technology (Nötzold, 2011). The EU and China have also supported initiatives in Green Finance, such as the creation of green bonds, the creation of sustainable Finance Guidelines, and the backing of green investment Projects.

In September 2020, China and the EU held a virtual summit and issued a joint statement pledging to strengthen their cooperation on climate change and work towards a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The two sides committed to advancing their respective climate targets under the Paris Agreement, and to working towards a successful outcome at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow in November 2021 (British Council, 2023). The Paris Agreement, which aims to tackle climate change and keep global temperature rise well below two degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels, has been ratified by both the EU and China. They have made a commitment to promote sustainable development and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. The EU has established challenging goals for lowering greenhouse gas emissions and is a major proponent of the Paris Agreement. China, as the biggest emitter of greenhouse emissions in the world, has also made considerable pledges in accordance with the Agreement.

The EU and China, as major global economic and trade powers, share the responsibility of maintaining the credibility of the multilateral trading system and successfully completing the Doha Round despite their differences in terms of development level, culture, history, and policy priorities. Both parties should work to prevent the Doha Round's collapse, which would have severe negative effects on the multilateral system. In order to find a solution that is agreeable to all sides, Europe, China, and other significant trading partners must work closely together. Success at the Doha Round is crucial because it reflects a critique of the reliability and efficiency of the multilateral trade system. It could be advantageous for both the EU and China to have a discussion on the future agenda of the WTO and global economic governance in general given their roles as major trading powers inside the WTO. Such a discussion, based on mutual understanding, is essential for the organization's survival and required to increase political confidence between China and Europe. Another opportunity for strong collaboration between the EU and China is the fight against trade protectionism. Both sides may set a good example for the rest of the world by treating bilateral trade issues in a spirit of negotiation and compromise. Finally, the EU and China should examine the future agenda of the WTO and debate options for developing a more effective and efficient global governance framework for international trade with other key players in the multilateral trading system. The EU and China have the potential to take on this duty for the system's future given their size and significance. This project is both doable and time-sensitive, necessitating swift action (Wang, 2012).

Cultural exchanges are also a significant part of the connection between the EU and China and are included in the people-to-people exchange component of the EU-China Strategic Partnership. The goal of cultural exchanges is to improve collaboration in the cultural and creative industries as well as to advance mutual respect and understanding between the peoples of the EU and China. Enhancing cultural and educational cooperation, promoting tourism, and facilitating people-to-people contacts between the EU and China are the goals of the people-to-people exchange pillar of the EU-China Strategic Partnership. This pillar acknowledges the significance of fostering greater understanding and closer ties between the citizens of the EU and China. Tourism is supported by the people-to-people exchange pillar as a crucial tool for fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding (ING, 2023). There are numerous initiatives and programs within this pillar that cover a variety of activities, such as academic and student exchanges, cultural and artistic events like exhibitions and film festivals. The Erasmus+ program, which offers money for professionals and students from the EU and China to pursue study, teaching, and training opportunities abroad, is one such program. The EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue, which was started in 2012 and brings together representatives from academia, civil society, and cultural organizations from various countries and cultures to engage in debates about education, culture, and youth, is another noteworthy effort (European Commission, 2016; Santiago, et al., 2022).

4 Competition

The economies of China and Europe, which together make up a third of the world economy, are two of the most significant in the world. China and Europe both require a free and law-based global economic system. Through multilateral collaboration, China and the EU can take the helm in a new wave of fair and inclusive globalization. China and Europe must assist one another, band together, and work together in the unique moment of global

economic slump brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic in order to revitalize and enliven the global economy and serve as two engines for its recovery.

Chinese manufacturers are becoming more competitive, but there have also been cases of overproduction in China and consequent accusations of product dumping on international markets, which have resulted in regular clashes between authorities on both sides. This is demonstrated by the fact that China is the subject of some active anti-dumping investigations by the European Commission. European governments and companies frequently criticize China for not having completely opened its economy to outside investment. Foreign investment is still subject to limitations in many areas of the Chinese economy. Governments and businesses in Europe are urging China to reciprocate, particularly with regard to government procurement initiatives. The EU has had to deal with pressure from China to grant its market economy status (MES) under the conditions of its membership in the World Trade Organization, and it is in this context that some Europeans are doubting whether a balanced and mutually beneficial economic relationship with China is even possible. A new comprehensive bilateral investment treaty (BIT) is currently being negotiated between the EU and China (Christiansen and Mayer, 2017).

However, Europe is beginning to understand that China can no longer be classified as a developing nation due to its fast growth in economic strength and political influence. As a result, the EU seeks to interact with China in a more sensible, aggressive, and multifaceted way that is grounded in well-defined goals and values. The pursuit of more equitable and reciprocal economic circumstances, adaptation to shifting economic conditions, and upholding compliance with EU law, regulations, and policies are all included in this. The EU sees China as a global cooperation partner with shared goals, a partner in negotiations with whom it must strike a balance of interests, a competing system pushing for alternative forms of governance, and an economic opponent in the race for technological supremacy. To accomplish its objectives, the EU must develop a flexible and workable overall strategy that permits the principled defense of its interests and values in a wide range of policy areas and sectors. The Joint Communication also proposes ten specific steps for the European Council to take into account and approve. These include working with China to support effective multilateralism and combat climate change, commitment to international peace, security, and sustainable economic development, building more equitable and reciprocal trade and investment relations, enhancing the competitiveness of the Union, and ensuring the security of vital infrastructure and the technological base (European Commission, 2019).

In the globalization process, it is clear that the search for new markets has increased, and the developments in transportation networks and information technologies have increased the importance of international trade. Comparison of the growth rates in the economies of the USA, Germany and Japan, which are considered both as the central-industrialized countries of different continental blocs since the 1980s and as constitute the three other largest economies together with China, which annual GDP growth rate was 8.1%, while the world's GDP rose by 5.9% (World Bank, 2023a), and the economy has a current account surplus of 317.3 billion US dollars (World Bank, 2023b), despite the COVID-19 pandemic as of 2021. At this point, China's integration with the world economy and becoming a global power in the 21st century is an important economic success. Before discussing how this success was achieved, it would be useful to give information about the relative success of China's main macroeconomic indicators.

China constitutes 18.4% of the world's total GDP with 17.7 trillion US dollars by 2021 and it has the second largest economy in the world after the USA, which has a production output of 23.3 trillion US dollars, and which makes up 24.2% of the world's total GDP (World Bank, 2023c). 14 of the 100 largest companies in the world, which created a huge market value of over 30 trillion US dollars in terms of market capitalization as of March 2021, are of Chinese origin (PWC, 2021). Although China is composed of companies with 334 billion US dollars of FDI inflow in 2021 and is the second country with the highest FDI net inflow after the USA with an FDI inflow of 448.3 billion US dollars (World Bank, 2023d). It exhibits positive indicators in terms of macroeconomics. In terms of 12,556 US dollars GDP per capita in 2021, it lagged far behind industrialized-central countries such as the USA, Germany, and Japan, which countries' per capita income is respectively 70,248 US dollars, 51,203 US dollars and 39,312 US dollars (World Bank, 2023e).

As a twist of fate, the first country where factories were closed and production came to a standstill with strict measures against COVID-19 was China, which became the world's factory in the 21st century, obstacles have been encountered in the supply chain stages at many points, from the automotive factories to the companies that operate globally in the coffee and food sector and have many stores in China.

With its attractiveness to attract foreign direct investments, increasing commodity imports and export power, China has become the production center of multinational companies (Jilberto, et. al, 2007). At this point, the desire of transnational companies to benefit from the cheap labor force of countries that have adopted a Chinese-like development model should also be taken into account.

Within the conditions, where the COVID-19 pandemic has restrictive effects on international mobility and trade, and the total exports of the world's countries have decreased by approximately 9.5 percent in 2020 compared to 2019, the export of goods and services of China between the said years has increased by 3.5 percent. With this

success of international trade, China is a country that maintains its position as the largest exporter of goods that it caught in the last decade with its exports of 3.6 trillion US dollars by 2021 (World Bank, 2023f).

In fact, China's success can be attributed to the bilateral Reform and Opening (Gaiige Kaifang) process, which began to be implemented in 1978, when the planned commodity economy and socialist market economy began to form a new model together. While the share of China's total trade in GDP remained below 10% before the reform process, this rate increased to 12.4% in 1980, 24.3% in 1990, 39.4% in 2000, 50.7% in 2010 and relatively decreased to 37% in 2021 (World Bank, 2023g).

Trade and investment flows between China and the EU are enormous and have grown over time. China puts the EU among its top trading partners, and it is one of its most important business partners. An analysis of the relations in this field entails six points of attention. *Trade volume and balance* is one of them. Trade between the EU and China has increased significantly. China was the EU's second-largest trading partner in 2022. The two partners' combined goods trade was worth more than 696.2 billion euros. While the EU exported € 223.6 billion to China, it imported € 472.6 billion from China (Eurostat, 2023). When it comes to *trade in goods*, a variety of industries, including machinery, automobiles, chemicals, textiles, and electronic equipment captures attention. The EU imports a lot of commodities from China, while China imports a lot of things from the EU, including machinery, transportation equipment, and chemical items. Because China exports to the EU more than it imports from there, *trade imbalance* has been consistently alarming for the Europeans, raising concerns about market access, fair competition, and the defense of intellectual property rights. A closely related topic is the *Chinese Investment in the EU* that has steadily and significantly grown over time -especially in sectors including energy, infrastructure, telecommunications, and real estate. Chinese companies have partnered with European companies and made investments in them. As for the *EU Investment in China*, automotive, industrial, and service sectors have seen the majority of the EU capital in China. European companies have established production facilities, R&D centers, and distribution networks in the country in order to access the Chinese market and utilize its industrial capabilities. The EU has also established *investment-screening measures* in line with national security considerations and with the purpose of safeguarding its strategic assets. These systems seek to evaluate and conceivably limit foreign investments, particularly Chinese ones, in areas deemed crucial or delicate.

To improve their trade, investment, and economic ties, the EU and China have explored economic integration and cooperation initiatives through a number of channels. The CAI is among them. It represents an accord between the European Union (EU) and China, with the overarching objective of deepening and rebalancing their relationship. This accord seeks to generate new market opportunities and establish a fair and competitive business environment, as stated in the European Commission's Communication of 2016. The EU has identified the CAI as its utmost priority and demonstrated its willingness to move forward. Considerations on a free trade agreement (FTA) exhibit that China shares the same will. Deepening customs and trade facilitation cooperation, concluding a geographical indications agreement based on the highest levels of protection internationally, exploring the opening of investment negotiations with Hong Kong and Taiwan, expanding the network of investment agreements in the region, and pursuing dialogues with China on standards, regulation, and conformity assessment pro The EU further highlights how important it is for China's economic transition and its future ties for China to reform its banking system, limit security-related assessments of EU investments in China to genuine national security considerations, and uphold its WTO notification subsidy obligation. The document outlines the EU's priorities regarding its relationship with China, with a focus on promoting a level playing field for businesses, deepening trade and investment cooperation, and addressing concerns over industrial over-capacity in China, particularly in the steel sector. The EU seeks to negotiate a CAI with China, which could open up new market opportunities and pave the way for a broader Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The EU also aims to broaden its network of investment agreements in the region, exploring negotiations with Hong Kong and Taiwan. In order for China's reforms to be successful overall, the EU also emphasizes the need for legal reform and the need to strengthen the rule of law in China (European Commission, 2016).

The discussions between China and the EU about the CAI are taking place in a complicated local and global environment. On the one hand, China's economy is transitioning structurally from one that is based on low-wage labor and capital-intensive production to one that is based on innovation and consumer demand. The Chinese government is actively pursuing an industrial policy designed to create globally competitive local businesses in high-tech industries in order to bring about this change. International trade and investment will be impacted by the CAI. The CAI makes use of a negative list approach. It applies to both the service sector and the manufacturing sector. According to estimates from the European Commission, half of EU investment in China goes to industrial sectors such those that produce chemicals, medical equipment, transportation and telecommunications equipment, etc. Only EU investors will be given market access by the CAI in particular industries. For the first time, China has also implemented a negative list in the service industries. The CAI's negative list of investment opportunities in the service industries, notably the financial industry, might potentially be advantageous to investors from countries who are members of the Most Favored Nation (MFN) (Chen, 2022).

As European member states weigh the possible effects on market competition, social stability, and national security, Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have been the focus of increased scrutiny in recent years. One

of the main worries is that these investments can result in the transfer of domestic technology, assets, and employment from Europe to China, undermining the growth of regional firms and communities. These issues demonstrate the interconnectedness of political and economic anxieties regarding Chinese SOEs' investment activities in the EU, even if some of them may be exaggerated. In order to address these worries, the EU has taken action, such as by adopting a new framework for vetting foreign investments in vital industries that went into effect in 2019. This framework enables member states to assess the potential effects of foreign investments on their national security and public order and to take appropriate measures to mitigate any identified risks. Moreover, the EU has sought to promote a level playing field for foreign investors in China, including SOEs, by negotiating the CAI with China. If successfully concluded, the CAI would provide greater access to the Chinese market for EU companies and offer more significant protection for their investments in China. At the same time, it would provide greater transparency and predictability for Chinese investors in the EU (Spano, 2019).

The CAI, as a new generation investment agreement, establishes high criteria for regulatory framework, sustainable development, and investment liberalization, among other things. Being in the process of evolving, China's openness policy is built on the idea of "learning by doing" and its reform agenda is based on general systematic design. The beginning of the 14th Five Year Plan for China in 2021 and the beginning of a new phase of growth show that China is committed to high-quality development, not only in the economic but also in the social spheres (Chen, 2022).

However, the negotiations face several challenges, such as the EU's demand for greater access to the Chinese market, China's demand for a level playing field in investment, and labor standards. Therefore, the negotiations will require both sides to compromise and find common ground to reach a mutually beneficial agreement (Poletti et al., 2023).

The EU and China have both made investments in the advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) because they understand its significance. While the EU has developed initiatives like the European AI Alliance and the AI4EU project to stimulate innovation and moral AI development within the EU, China has established lofty aims to become a global leader in AI by 2030 (Roberts, et al., 2023). China and the EU also have made investments in the study and advancement of quantum computing. Although there is competition, there are also chances for cooperation and knowledge sharing in this industry (Acin, et al., 2018)

5 Confrontation

Compared to other facets of their relationship, the EU and China's security cooperation has been modest. Limited security cooperation between the EU and China has been established, with the main emphasis being on non-traditional security issues like counterterrorism, peacekeeping missions, and maritime security. On this matters the EU has attempted to engage China. On some security-related issues, nevertheless, there remain disagreements and mistrust between the two parties. For instance, China has questioned the EU's participation in regional security matters while the EU has voiced worries about China's activity in the South China Sea and its military modernization plans. The EU has called for the peaceful resolution of disputes in the South China Sea and has expressed support for the principle of freedom of navigation.

The EU's stance toward China has been increasingly assertive in recent years. Along with the aforementioned actions, the EU has been aggressively advancing its own vision for a more rules-based international order and working to form coalitions with other like-minded nations to further this goal. As a reaction to China's expanding influence in the area, this has included fortifying connections with nations in the Indo-Pacific region.

The EU and China have significant differences in their respective political systems, values, and priorities, which have led to tensions and competition in their relationship. While China has adopted a different stance, emphasizing sovereignty and refraining from meddling in its internal affairs, the EU has continuously underlined the significance of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (Farnell, 2016).

The treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang is one issue that has caused significant concern for the EU. The EU and its member states have condemned China's alleged human rights violations in Xinjiang, including the use of forced labor, mass detentions, and restrictions on religious and cultural freedoms. The EU has also imposed targeted sanctions on Chinese officials and entities over their role in these abuses. As a response to these concerns, the EU has imposed sanctions on several Chinese officials and entities involved in human rights abuses in Xinjiang, as well as on individuals involved in the crackdown on democracy in Hong Kong. China has strongly criticized these actions and has imposed sanctions on several EU citizens and organizations in retaliation (Zhang, 2012).

The EU and China have also had disagreements over issues such as cybersecurity, technology transfer, and climate change. For example, the EU has expressed concern about China's alleged cyber espionage and theft of intellectual property and has called for greater reciprocity and transparency in technology transfer. China, for its part, has accused the EU of using environmental concerns to block Chinese investment in Europe, and has criticized the EU's carbon border tax proposal.

China's state-run economic model and policies supporting domestic industries have led to concerns in Europe that Chinese companies are receiving unfair advantages in areas such as subsidies, access to capital, and market access. In addition, there have been allegations of intellectual property theft by Chinese companies, which has raised concerns among European companies about sharing their technology and know-how with Chinese partners. In response to these concerns, the EU has introduced stricter rules on foreign investment, particularly in strategic sectors such as technology, and has taken measures to protect its own companies from Chinese competition. For example, the EU has introduced a new foreign investment screening mechanism, which allows EU member states to review and potentially block investments from non-EU countries in sensitive sectors.

The need for the EU and China to cooperate on matters pertaining to human rights and democratic values is highlighted by these conflicts. While the two sides have different political systems and values, they have also expressed a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue to address these issues and to promote mutual understanding and respect.

The EU's position on China's human rights is also intricately intertwined with media coverage. The public's perception and the political environment in which the EU formulates its foreign policy may change over time as a result of media coverage. Media attention may be used as a tactic to hold decision-makers accountable and put pressure on them to address human rights issues. Regarding the specific issue of human rights in China, media coverage can raise public awareness of the problem and put pressure on the EU to act more adamantly in relation to human rights in its relations with China. The EU can make policy decisions by using the facts and analysis provided by media coverage on specific human rights abuses, such as how racial minorities are treated or how dissent is silenced. On the other side, how the EU regards China's human rights may have an impact on media coverage. For instance, increased media coverage of China's human rights transgressions may occur if the EU adopts a strong human rights position in its policies against China. On the other side, media coverage of human rights abuses may decrease if the EU takes a more accommodating approach toward China. In general, media coverage and the EU's China human rights policy are linked in a complex and dynamic way. The political decisions made by the EU may have an impact on media coverage, which has the ability to alter public opinion and pressure decision-makers to take action (Zhang, 2011).

6 Conclusion

As China's economic and geopolitical influence continues to grow, it will be increasingly important for the EU to find a balance between working with China as an economic partner and protecting its own interests and values.

With Xi Jinping, China has manifestly departed from Deng Xiaoping's "hide your strength and bide your time" doctrine. In the new era, the EU must be prepared for a new, more powerful China while supporting wisely -and, if necessary, discretely- the reforms in the country (Christiansen, et al., 2019; Feng and Huang, 2021; Freeman, 2021; Lai, 2023).

The EU and China have a complex and multifaceted relationship, with both cooperation and competition playing a role, depending on the specific issue and the broader geopolitical context. While the two sides have significant economic ties, they also have significant differences in their political systems and priorities, which have led to tensions and disagreements.

The EU and China are both members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and they have been working together within this framework to promote global trade liberalization and address unfair trade practices. Both sides have also engaged in negotiations to deepen their economic cooperation and have signed a number of agreements, including the CAI in December 2020.

On a variety of issues, including climate change and environmental protection, the EU and China have also formed strategic partnerships. Both sides have pledged to work together to address the global challenge of climate change and implement the Paris Agreement on climate action. They have initiated a variety of joint initiatives to enhance renewable energy, sustainable development, and green technologies.

In general, the EU has adopted a pragmatic approach to its relationship with China, seeking cooperation in areas of mutual benefit while also standing firm on issues of concern. The EU has been looking to build its own strategic autonomy and strengthen its international role. This has been apparent with the EU's recent moves toward a more assertive policy on China, ranging from the imposition of sanctions to the launching of a new investment screening mechanism.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global economy and trade, including China-EU economic and trade relations. The pandemic has led to disruptions in supply chains, reduced demand for goods and services, and travel restrictions, all of which have affected trade between the two sides. It remains to be seen how the pandemic will shape the future of China-EU economic and trade relations, but both sides will need to work together to address the challenges and find new opportunities for cooperation.

In the context of the global economy, the interconnection of the two sides has increased. Despite recent trade and economic concerns, both parties recognize the need of maintaining a steady and constructive partnership.

Working together to tackle issues like climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and economic recovery is crucial for China and the EU in the coming ten years. To achieve a win-win situation for China and the EU, both parties should also intensify their economic and trade cooperation, encourage investment, and improve mutual understanding.

Two of the biggest economies in the world are those of China and Europe, which together account for a third of the global economy. Both China and the EU need a free, legally-based international economic system. China and the EU are taking the lead in a new phase of just and inclusive globalization through multilateral cooperation. To revivify and invigorate the global economy and act as two engines for its recovery, China and the EU must cooperate, support one another, and join together at this unprecedented time of global economic downturn brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

China's expansive BRI project aims to improve connectivity and infrastructure development across Asia, Europe, Africa, and other continents. In order to promote transparency, sustainability, and fair competition principles in initiatives of mutual interest, the EU has engaged China on the BRI.

It is important for both sides to continue to engage in dialogue and cooperation to strengthen their trade relationship. By cooperating, China and the EU can create a more solid and advantageous trading partnership that will support economic expansion and prosperity on both sides.

The EU will need to continue to engage with China on a wide range of issues, including trade, investment, and global governance, while also addressing concerns about human rights, intellectual property theft, and unfair competition. The EU's approach will likely involve a combination of dialogue, cooperation, and strategic competition, with the aim of promoting a more balanced and sustainable relationship with China that reflects European interests and values.

The establishment of dispute resolution mechanisms is indeed essential in the EU-China relationship. Disputes may arise in areas such as trade, investment, or intellectual property, and having mechanisms in place helps to address and resolve these issues. The parties can resort to various mechanisms, including bilateral negotiations, consultations, or utilizing international frameworks such as the WTO, to find solutions and mitigate conflicts.

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