



International diffusion and response : The social dimension of the EU-China relationship

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Abstract

The studies of political science and social policy have a strong tradition of analyzing the role of developed countries and the organizations like the European Union (EU) in shaping international diffusion of social policy. However, in-depth research focusing on the response of developing and emerging countries, in particular China, is lacking. Therefore, this dissertation presents an original analysis of the involvement of EU and China in bilateral and international social policy diffusion/transfer. It highlights the relational nature of the normative power Europe (NPE) and the impact of the recipient country China on the NPE. The dissertation conceptualizes the response of recipient countries to international diffusion and develops a typological framework of it. The dissertation refines the existing theoretical framework of policy learning by highlighting the complexity of learning through trial-and-error processes. It also illustrates the usefulness of careful case study design and content analysis in researching bilateral relations and refining the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of international diffusion.

The analysis of the social dimension of the EU-China relations indicates that the EU's mixed approaches combine pragmatic and normative concerns. The typological framework of the variability of response (VOR) introduced and developed in this dissertation is more capable of mapping China's mixed response than the existing linear conceptual frameworks. China's learning from European expertise in social security since late 1990s results from its reflections on the undesirable social consequences of neoliberal-oriented reforms since 1970s and has been reinforced by its successful cooperation with the EU in the past decade. The labour provisions travelling through free trade agreements from the EU has been restrained by some recipient countries including China. The findings unveil the complexity of the social dimension of the EU-China relationship due to each party's mixed approaches. The findings indicate that the others' positive perceptions of the EU are crucial for the success of the NPE. The dissertation accentuates complex causality in international diffusion including policy learning, which requires better understanding by taking different causal factors into consideration and refining existing theoretical frameworks including typological theories.

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List of abbreviations

AIIB	Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BIA	bilateral investment agreement
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CLS	core labour standards
DG	Directorate General
EC, Commission	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EP, Parliament	European Parliament
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
FTA	free trade agreement
G20	Group of Twenty
G8	Group of Eight
GSP	Generalized System of Preferences
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	International Relations
ISA	International Studies Association
ISSA	International Social Security Association
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
NDB	New Development Bank
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
RECP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SDOG	the social dimension of globalization
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
VOR	variability of response
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

Part one

Part one is dedicated to the introduction of this doctoral research, providing an overview of the topic, the state of the art, research design and articles included in this dissertation.

Introduction

Social policies have an impact on the lives, education and work of many people in this world. Traditionally, social policies developed within nation states. However, after the Second World War, the diffusion of social policy from developed countries in the West to other countries have been occurring. In 2010s, the (re-)emergence of the rest represented by the emerging countries including China and India began to play active roles in international social policy diffusion and transfer. A general question is how are the West and the rest involved in the international transfer of social policy. The interactions between them are of significance not only for the development of the West and the rest respectively but also for their relations and global social governance (and global governance as a whole).

It is necessary to pay more attention to how are emerging countries in particular China involved in international diffusion of social policy. Firstly, while the literature of developed countries and organizations is burgeoning, in-depth research focusing on this topic is virtually absent. Without studying developing countries, especially emerging countries, it is hard to fully understand their interactions with developed countries. Secondly, China has been increasingly involved in international affairs including social issues. Yet, little literature has addressed China's involvement in international diffusion of social policy and global social governance.

The purpose of this doctoral research project is to improve our understanding of global social governance by investigating how actors such as China and the European Union (EU) are involved in the international diffusion of social norms and policy. Specifically, this dissertation has four objectives. Firstly, at an empirical level, it aims to accumulate empirical knowledge about the international diffusion of social policy between the EU and China. Secondly, it attempts to advance the conceptualization of the response of the recipient countries, allowing us to better understand interactions between the EU as policy diffusion entrepreneur and China as a recipient country. Thirdly, this dissertation aims to test the existing theoretical frameworks on international diffusion in European Studies, international relations (IR) as well as comparative politics. Fourth and final, in order to facilitate the dialogues between different research themes, it attempts to highlight the links between research of international diffusion in EU Studies, IR, comparative politics, and social policy studies.

This research is based on iterative engagement with empirical phenomenon and existing conceptual and theoretical frameworks. This project started with an open research design allowing exploratory efforts to embrace the empirical phenomenon of interest. Qualitative inquiry approaches fit well this task, including case study methods and content analysis. At later stages, I tried to use existing conceptual and theoretical frameworks to explain the findings and puzzles emerging during data collection and analysis. Through these iterative processes I began to identify the room for conceptual and theoretical advancement. As a result, I made progress in conceptualizing the response of the recipient countries to international diffusion and developed a typological framework for it. I also highlighted two causal factors to refine one recent theoretical typology of policy learning developed by Dunlop and Radaelli (2013).

This doctoral dissertation is structured as follows. The first part introduces the research topic, the state of the art, research design and methodology. The second part includes four articles. Article 1 explores the evolution of social dimension of the EU-China relations and tries to understand the increase in significance of social issues in this relations since mid-1990s. It also examines the EU's approach in this dimension. It presents basic empirical basis and puzzles. Article 2 moves from the EU perspective to China's perspective to explore how China responds to the EU's efforts to engage China in the field of social policies. Article 3 focuses on the area of social security, motivated by the fact that EU-China cooperation on this topic is fruitful. Article 4 focuses on including labour provisions in free trade agreements (FTAs), stemming from the fact that the EU and China thus far failed to reach a common ground for cooperation on this topic. The final part of this dissertation presents (i) a synthesis of the main findings in the four articles, (ii) discusses the contributions of this research project to the broader research literature, (iii) puts forwards a number of policy implications and (iv) limitations of the study and future research.

1. The research problem

1.1. Research problem

1.1.1. International diffusion and response: social policy

Since the end of the Second World War, the developed countries or the Global North have been playing leading roles in formulating national social policies and promoting consensus on

social policies across national borders. The developing countries or the Global South have been subject to the diffusion of social norms and policies favored by the North. Two competing major approaches have been shaping international debates on social policy in the past decades: the neoliberal social policy, advocated by the United States (US) and the Bretton Woods institutions such as World Bank, and the social-democratic social policy, suggested by the EU and some UN agencies including the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Deacon, 2007).

Changing international landscape in late 2000s led to the expanding international coordination networks. Leading industrialized countries in Group of Eight (G8) began to have dialogues with some developing countries such as China and India which are nowadays widely recognized as emerging countries, “to build trust and identify common approaches to pressing problems”(Andrew F Cooper & Antkiewicz, 2008). The processes from G8 to Group of Twenty (G20) (Bradford & Linn, 2004; Eichel, 2004) were to promote global economic governance(Saguier, 2011; Wouters & Ramopoulos, 2012) and global governance in general (A. F. Cooper, 2013; Shorr & Wright, 2010; Vestergaard & Wade, 2012). Yet it remains to be seen to what extent the G20 arrangement may span the pre-existing rifts and enhance consensus between the developed countries and developing countries on a wide ranges of issues (Knaack & Katada, 2013).

Meanwhile, some emerging countries began to play more active roles in international social policy diffusion. For example, five emerging countries have attempted to enhance their coordination through BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) mechanisms in the social field. The theme of 2014 BRICS Summit was “Inclusive Growth: Sustainable Solutions”, stressing the inclusive macroeconomic and social policies¹. A study from the International Social Security Association (ISSA) recognized BRICS countries as playing pioneering role of extending social security to millions².

Scholars from different disciplines have recognized the importance of this theme. The existing literature has not fully investigated the interactions on social issues between the developed countries and their organizations like the EU on the one hand and developing and

¹ See more details in the Sixth BRICS Summit – Fortaleza Declaration, July 2014.

² ISSA study: BRICS countries pioneering extension of social security to millions (February 07 2013), <http://193.134.194.37/News-Events/News2/ISSA-study-BRICS-countries-pioneering-extension-of-social-security-to-millions> (accessed 10 November 2014).

emerging countries on the other hand³. *A general question is how are the governments from developed world and developing world involved in the international diffusion of social policy. Specifically, how do they deal with the transfer processes of social policy? Which factors have important impact on their behavior and the transfer process? What are the implications of their interactions for international social policy issues and global social governance?*

In particular, it is important to *pay more attention to the recipient side of international diffusion*. The proliferating studies have reported the roles of countries and international organizations in the developed world in diffusing social policy towards others. These studies tend to assume a linear process of international diffusion from the sending side or deliver (some developed countries and some international organizations based in North Atlantic region) to the recipient side or receiver (mainly developing countries). However, in-depth research focusing on how the developing countries, in particular emerging countries, are involved in the international diffusion remains markedly insufficient. Further, the existing literature did not shed much light on the autonomy of the recipient or target countries of international diffusion. Thus, few studies uncovered the impact and implications of the recipient side on the sending side of international diffusion and the international diffusion as a whole⁴. One of the main concerns of this dissertation is to gain deeper insights of the international diffusion through conceptualizing and theorizing the response of recipient countries.

1.1.2. International diffusion of social policy and China

Long before developed countries began to diffuse their versions of social policy and norms to China, the latter has developed its own social security discourse and practices. Some Chinese scholars hold that China's "thousand-year-long social security system", which could be traced back to Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE), features "multiple welfare philosophies, abundant practicality and unique institutional mode" (see overview in 功. 郑, 2014). In the past two centuries, China's social policy has been influenced by ideas and policy initiatives outside its borders. During 1950s-1970s, the People's Republic of China emulated modes in social policy of the Soviet Union. During that period, China's social policy was subjected to planned-economic system, stressing equalitarianism and basic living securities (吴 2004) .

³ See more details in the section of 2. the state of the art in this Introduction Chapter.

⁴ See more details in the section of 2. the state of the art in this Introduction Chapter.

Public sectors shouldered main responsibility for providing primary social welfare and services such as health, education and housing (李 2012).

China's social policy development from 1980s until present involves two directions of policy diffusion: domestic and international. Policy diffusion within China refers to the diffusion among subnational units such as regions and local governments. China's economic reforms required complementary reforms in social policy to facilitate the whole process of reforms. Reforms in China since 1980s have witnessed the processes of marketization in economic field and societalization in social field (Guan, 2000). Government at national and local levels in China have to address new problems and challenges in reforms. National government allows local governments to conduct policy experiments to find solutions and gain experience (Sebastian Heilmann, 2008). Some noted policy diffusion among regions in China in social policy areas such as urban pension reform and the introduction of the Minimum Living Standard Scheme (Shi, 2012).

China's social policy development also has international aspects. On the one hand, foreign initiatives and advices have been playing important roles in social reforms in China. The worldwide trends of market-oriented reforms in 1980s and neo-liberal initiatives mainly from the US and its influenced Bretton Woods institutions were involved in the reduction of public investment in the social welfare system (Guan, 2000). Since the 1990s, Chinese government has had exchanges and cooperation in social policy with more than 50 countries including those in Asia, Europe, North and South America⁵. China also established relations with various international organizations including the ILO and the ISSA. Chinese scholars have discussed on diverse social policies and/ or models in other countries (纪. 刘, 2004; 存. 张 & 焦, 2008; 盈. 张, 2014; 房, 2012; 春. 李, 2005; 沈, 2004; 赵, 王, & 马, 2015; 功. 郑, 2012; 秉. 郑, 2011; 秉. 郑 & 史, 2001; 魏, 2014; 安年黄, 1998).

In particular, welfare regimes and social policy in Europe received much attention from China. Firstly, since mid-1980s, Chinese scholars and officials have paid attention to European welfare states and social policy (余 & 冯, 2009; 刘 2015; 弘. 周, 1989, 1996; 浚. 张, 2014; 金. 张, 2015). Motivated by learning "from Europe for the sake of China's reform", Chinese researchers from different disciplines such as economics, sociology and political science have been discussing European social policy (H. Zhou, 2004, p. 415). In particular,

⁵ See details at the official websites of European Commission and Ministry of Labour and Social Security of China, http://www.cnss.cn/yjpt_zt/web/center/guojisi.html (accessed 21 April 2015).

the discussion of social policies in Northern Europe and others like Germany have been popular in Chinese literature (建. 丁, 2003; 凤. 刘, 2011; 玉. 刘, 1993; 穗. 周, 1999; 佳. 张, 2013; 徐 & 朱, 2014; 珍. 李 & 周, 2010; 解. 杨, 2008; 鹏. 杨, 2011; 毕, 1995; 王, 2004; 甄, 2009; 罗, 2001; 许, 2012; 安邈 黄, 1989). Secondly and closely related to Chinese intellectual attention to social policy in Europe, Chinese government also attached much significance to exchanges with European governments in social policy. Of China's bilateral projects, those with European partners including the EU and its member states are of the most important ones in terms of investment and outcomes. These projects represent the broader dialogues which facilitate social policy transfer from Europe to China on issues such as employment and labour, occupational safety and health, as well as social security and social inclusion.

On the other hand, China's social policy has international implications through its recent active involvement in international relations. Since 2013, the new leadership in China has demonstrated a more active attitude to China's external relations in particular in economic, trade and investment areas. In 2013, China raised the initiatives of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road mainly covering countries in Eurasia and the Pacific and Indian Ocean (the "one belt, one road" plan). China has also raised the Silk Road Fund to support the "one belt, one road" plan. In 2015, China's initiative of establishing the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank(AIIB) turned to reality. In addition, the New Development Bank (NDB) entered into force after the 7th BRICS Summit in June 2015. Meanwhile, in addition to its current negotiations of bilateral investment agreements (BIAs) including China-EU BIA (2013- present) and China-US BIA (2008- present), China has been playing important roles in negotiating free trade agreements(FTAs) in Asia such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the China-Japan-South Korea FTA. All of these activities will have impact on social issues such as employment, labour, social security and social development in countries involved in Asia and other continents.

Moreover, China's increasing economic ties with the developed world have also indicated the potential impact on social issues in Europe and North America. Some authors have noticed the increasing weight of China's investment in the world and called attention to Chinese firms as global players engaging in labour issues (C. K. C. Chan & Nadvi, 2014). In fact, the trade unions in the US have already voiced on the impact of China's trade on job loss in some industries in the US. Similarly, regarding China's policy on labour, the European

Parliament has suggested to link its Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) to labour issues⁶. The EU institutions such as the Commission and the Parliament have urged to incorporate labour protection issues in the EU-China BIA negotiations⁷. In addition, the European Trade Union Confederation(ETUC) has expressed its concerns about labour rights in China, and has kept an eye on the EU-China BIT negotiations⁸.

1.1.3. Research questions

This dissertation focuses on the politics of the EU and China in transnational social policy diffusion. Specifically, it addresses a series of questions at governmental level : *what are interactions between the EU and China on social issues over time? How could we understand the social dimension of the EU-China relationship ? What are the roles of the EU and China in transnational social policy transfer and why ? What are the implications of these interactions for broader themes such as international transfer of social policy and global social governance?*

This study focuses on the EU and China for several reasons. Firstly, studying both the EU and China is of policy significance. It is not difficult to understand that the EU is one of several leading actors in the Global North in shaping international affairs including social policy diffusion. Yet, one question is *why to view China as a developing country*. Today some may not view China as a developing country anymore because of China's rapid economic development and impressive size. It is true that China is one of largest emerging countries with largest population and economic size.

However, while China is not less developed or poor country, it remains far from developed in many ways. In social field, China is still facing urgent challenges to formulate proper policies in social welfare system construction, social development and social

⁶ The EP has condemned 'the existence of the Laogai labor camps across the country' and "reeducation through Labor" system. See European Parliament Resolution on EU–China Relations (2005/2161(INI).

⁷See the Commission, Commission Staff Working Document, impact assessment report on the EU-China investment relations, Brussels, 23.5.2013, SWD(2013) 185 final; European Parliament, European Parliament resolution on the EU-China negotiations for a bilateral investment agreement 2013/2674(RSP) (1 Oct. 2013) B7-0436/2013.

⁸ See, for example, the ETUC project "EU-China Investment Policy – consequences for workers", <http://www.etuc.org/call-subcontractor-provide-expertise-part-implementation-etuc-project-%E2%80%99Ceuchina-investment-policy-%E2%80%93> (accessed 21 April 2015).

inclusion⁹. As indicators of development in social security indicate, China's social welfare development remains far from advanced level(苗, 杨, & 丁, 2013). China is faced with a variety of challenges in social field (F. Wu, 2010; Zhao, 2009). Although China is not a less developed country or small developing country, its relatively low level of development in social field links it closer to many developing countries than developed countries or the Global North. More importantly, China tends to group itself as "one of largest developing countries" and representing the interests of developing countries or the Global South in international relations. Therefore, it makes sense in this dissertation to view China as a developing country at least in social field. Although the EU-China relations may not be view as typical North-South relations, the investigation of the policy behavior of the EU and China would help understand how the influential actors from the North and the South have been involved in international diffusion of social policy.

Secondly, few studies have focused on the involvement of the EU and China in international social policy diffusion¹⁰. Two levels of interactions between them may be examined: bilateral and multilateral. At bilateral level, although Chinese researchers have paid great attention to the social policies in Europe, they have not concentrated on the bilateral interactions between the EU and China in social field. Similarly, while scholars of the EU studies have examined the external dimension of the EU social policy/model, few have included China in their research. In addition, little literature of the EU-China relations has shed light on the social dimension of this relationship. At multilateral level, little literature has documented how the EU and China are involved in making social policy in multilateral organizations such as the ILO.

Thirdly, the original analysis of the interactions between the EU and China will also provide empirical evidence to test the existing conceptual frameworks and theoretical arguments on the EU's shaping international affairs including social policy diffusion. For example, academics have identified various features of the EU such as normative power Europe (Manners, 2002, 2008, 2013) and pragmatic power Europe (Wood, 2011). While the discussion of these conceptual frameworks have comprised empirical studies of the EU's near neighboring countries(Jan Orbie et al., 2009) and other countries such as India (Orbie & Khorana, 2015), it remains unclear whether and to what extent the case of China may differ

⁹ Most of scholars on China's social policy would not disagree that although China is still at the stage of exploring and forming its social policy(e.g.C. K. Chan, Ngok, & Phillips, 2008; 继. 刘, 2011; 李 2012) .

¹⁰ For comprehensive discussion, see the section of 2. state of the art in this Introduction Chapter.

from other cases. In addition, it is to be researched whether the involvement of the EU and China on social issues differ from their interactions on other issue areas such as politics, trade and climate change.

In addition, studying the EU and China involves engagement with several research traditions or themes such as EU Studies, norms diffusion in IR, comparative politics and social policy studies. Although some authors in these research themes have studied the EU's exporting social policy, the dialogue between them is largely lacking¹¹. Finally, as a student from China conducting research in Belgium, I am equipped with background knowledge and language skills to study China as well as access to resources to study the EU.

1.2.Key concepts and research focus

1.2.1. Key concepts and issues

International diffusion and response

Scholars from various research communities in public policy, comparative politics and international relations have noted the phenomena of the travelling of policy, norms and ideas across national borders. These studies from different research groups may have different perspectives, focuses, approaches and accordingly labels of their accumulated literature, such as policy transfer (e.g.D. P. Dolowitz & D. Marsh, 2000), policy diffusion (e.g.Beth A Simmons & Elkins, 2004), and norms diffusion (e.g.Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

One way to define *international diffusion* is to view it as process through which one group or population may influence others. David Strang defined diffusion as “[a]ny process where prior adoption of a trait or practice in a population alters the probability of adoption for the remaining non-adopters”(Strang, 1991, p. 325). As some noted, “[I]nternational policy diffusion occurs when government policy decisions in a given country are systematically conditioned by prior policy choices made in other countries”(B. A. Simmons, Dobbin, & Garrett, 2006, p. 787). Recently, scholars have attempted to advance more sophisticated conceptualization of international/transnational diffusion. For example, Etel Solingen

¹¹ For comprehensive discussion, see the section of 2. state of the art in this Introduction Chapter.

identified four main ingredients of transnational diffusion: the initial stimulus, the medium, agents, and outcomes (E. Solingen, 2012, p. 632).

While scholars may have different definitions of international diffusion from different perspectives, the phenomenon under analysis share the same nature: diffusion cross borders. While it is important to acknowledge their divergence in vocabulary, it is more important to identify and contribute to “shared building blocks” (E. Solingen, 2012, p. 632). Recently, scholars have called more attention to advance conceptual frameworks of international diffusion (E. Solingen, 2012; Etel Solingen & Börzel, 2014). The studies of international diffusion also have “common challenges and cross-fertilizations”(Marsh & Sharman, 2009)¹². This dissertation pays more attention to the common and substantial aspects of international travelling of policies, norms and ideas, than to the subtle differences in academic vocabulary used to describe this phenomenon. Namely, this dissertation uses the following terms interchangeably : international diffusion, international norms diffusion, or transnational policy transfer.

Regarding international diffusion of social policy, scholars have asked whether international policy transfer has impact on national policy, for instance, the early stages of social policy (David Collier & Messick, 1975). In the past decades, some have attempted to investigate the relationship between international policy transfer and social welfare development (Obinger, Schmitt, & Starke, 2013, pp. 118-119). While some would not attribute the adoption of welfare programmes to international connections (e.g. Abbott & DeViney, 1992), others shown that globalization as a form of diffusion has impact on social expenditure rates in developed states(Jahn, 2006).

The existing literature of international diffusion did not shed much light on the *response* of recipient side of the diffusion. Recently, some began to note different response of recipient countries, such as adoption, adaption, localization, resistance, rejection and subsidiarity (Acharya, 2011; Björkdahl, Chaban, Leslie, & Masselot, 2015a). However, few studies have defined and conceptualized the response. To better understand the target or recipient countries’ response to international diffusion, this dissertation introduces an concept : variability of response, which refers to the quality and ability of actors to respond to international diffusion of norms and policies in order to shape preferred outcomes¹³.

¹² See more discussion in the section of 2. State of the Art in this Introduction chapter.

¹³ See more details in Article 2 in Part two of this dissertation.

The social dimension of the EU-China relationship

The “social dimension” has often been discussed vis-à-vis economic dimension of human activity at various levels. In the context of European integration, for instance, the ***social dimension*** refers to “areas of SOCIAL POLICY[capital in original] competence where minimal standards are set at the EU rather than national level” (Alcock, Erskine, & May, 2002, p. 230). Since the 1970s, the social dimension has included two aspects: workers’ mobility between member states of the EU and labour market related issues including equal treatment, health and safety, and working conditions (Alcock et al., 2002, p. 230). At global level, the ILO has urged attention to the social dimension of globalization, by establishing the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization which issued the report *A fair globalization: Creating opportunities for all* (2004). ***The social dimension of globalization*** “refers to the impact of globalization on the life and work of people, on their families, and their societies”(Gunter & van der Hoeven, 2004, p. 1).

This dissertation analyzes the relations between the EU and the People’s Republic of China (1975-2015). The published academic literature has not offered definitions on the social dimension of the EU-China relations. In this dissertation, ***the social dimension of the EU-China relationship*** refers to the social aspect of this relationship, namely the interactions between the EU and China on a range of social issues, including employment, labour, social welfare, health, and education. This dimension is interrelated and overlaps with political, economic and other aspects of EU-China relations. This dissertation focuses on a couple of key issue areas such as labour rights and social security.

Social problems, social policy, social norms, interests

There is no single definition of ***social policy***. Rather, “there are many ways to define” it (Fitzpatrick, Kwon, Manning, Midgley, & Pascall, 2006, p. 1280). For some, social policy “refers both to the process of developing and implementing measures to combat SOCIAL PROBLEMS[capital in original] in society, and to the academic study of these measures and their broader social context”(Alcock et al., 2002, p. 240). Similarly, there is no single definition of social problems. In societies, private difficulties or troubles may enter public realm and become public issues requiring social interventions. ***Social problems*** are “often

defined as conditions that pertain to society as a whole, or large sections of it, which are a collective source of concern, and open to social interventions”(Alcock et al., 2002, p. 214).

Social policy is closely connected to norms and values. Although there could exist different ways to define norms, many scholars would agree that a *norm* could be defined as “ a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given id entity” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 891). Norms could be understood “ to be social attitudes of approval and disapproval, specifying what ought to be done and what ought not to be done” (Sunstein, 1996, p. 11). *Social norms* “identify those behaviors that are preferred and desirable, compared to those that not preferred and undesirable”(Perrucci & Perrucci, 2014, p. 252). Social policy “seeks to prescribe how things should be and describe how things are” (Alcock et al., 2002, p. 168). This is closely related to *values* which are sets of beliefs on what is right or wrong, good or bad, fair and unfair, and “serves as consistent guides for behavior” (Etzioni, 2009; Perrucci & Perrucci, 2014, p. 252). As scholars noted, “social policies are always value-oriented”(Fitzpatrick et al., 2006, p. 1280). One influential author saw social policy “to be beneficent, redistributive and concerned with economic and non-economic objectives”(Titmuss, 1974, p. 30).

Arguably, social policy is the formulation and realization of *social norms* through policy measures or instruments. Although there is no single agreed definition of social norms, the objectives and purposes of social policy often reflect the normative concerns such as “promoting equality, welfare and well-being” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2006, p. 1280). In a sense, values and norms constitute the legitimacy basis of social policies and are embedded in social policy programmes. It is difficult to isolate ideational elements or value strata of social policies. The social policy could be understood as visible and tangible extension of those social norms and values such as equality, well-being and social inclusion. In this sense, the international diffusion/transfer of social policies and practices (the tangible level) is inevitably accompanied with the travelling of values and norms underpinning them (the invisible level) from one population to others.

Another related concept is *interests*. The debates around norms and interests in the sub-discipline of international relations have been going on for decades (e.g.Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Klotz, 1999; Morgenthau, 1952; Widmaier & Park, 2012). Norms and interests follow different logics. When people comply with norms, they tend to stress the appropriateness of human behavior. When people seek interests, they follow the logic of

rationality, which involves the benefit-cost calculation¹⁴. Thus, norms and interests are not necessarily coherent in human behavior, including that in policy diffusion (e.g. Börzel & Risse, 2012a). It is possible that norms are opposed to interests. As norms and interests may overlap in reality, it is not easy to draw a sharp line between them at abstract level. Yet, it is possible to discuss the difference between them in concrete contexts. For instance, when the EU diffuses social norms such as labour rights through trade agreements, it may use its market access to persuade the third party to accept labour rights as norms. Thus, the EU may face a trade-off between the success of norms diffusion and the costs resulting from its concession in opening its market access for third countries .

National, regional and global

Social policy is traditionally treated as a domestic affair within nation-states. Literature has documented social policies in specific countries such as the United Kingdom (e.g. Fraser, 2009) and the US (e.g. Murray, 1984). The view that social policy is to be formulated by the nation states is called ‘methodological nationalism’. In addition, scholars also take comparative perspective, to compare different models of social policy among countries. Comparative social policy and comparative politics have accumulated studies on the types, formulation and evolution of social policy and their relations to politics and economic development in different countries and regions. Therefore, the contents of social norms and policies may vary from country to country.

It is important to note Europeans and Chinese may have *different understandings* of social norms and social policy. For instance, at member states level, European countries have different welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen, 2013). At European level, as mentioned above, the EU has promoted two minimum standards on labour mobility and labour market related issues. While the EU endorses the core labour standards which the ILO has advocated, China does not ratify all of them. In addition, there are differences between the contents of corporate social responsibility encouraged by the EU and China¹⁵. Being aware of the possibility of different understanding of social norms by the EU and China is of importance in

¹⁴ For example, numerous authors of the literature of realism and neorealism in IR have discussed this logic.

¹⁵ See more discuss in Article 2 of this dissertation.

going beyond superficial insights from the analysis of official documents containing social norms¹⁶.

The changing international context of social problems has an impact on social policy. In the past decades, various international actors and processes across national boundaries have been involved in shaping social problems and social policy making. Scholars have noted the impact of regional integration and examined regional social policy such as European social policy (e.g. Geyer, 2013), and social policies in Africa, Asia and Latin America (e.g. Deacon, Macovei, Van Langenhove, & Yeates, 2009).

Meanwhile, some authors also paid attention to the relations between globalization and social policy (Midgley, 1997). It is noted that globalization and increasing interconnectedness result in “a set of global social problems” and that “a series of global processes have reconfigured the boundaries of social policy” (see overview in Fitzpatrick et al., 2006, pp. 544-549). International actors such as the ILO have called attention to the impact of globalization in social field including “unemployment, poverty and marginalization” (Gunter & van der Hoeven, 2004). Moreover, the past two decades saw the rise of “the study of global social issues” or global social policy studies (Deacon & Stubbs, 2013)¹⁷.

1.2.2. Research focus : “Know more and more about less and less”?

Any efforts to narrow down from general research background in social science to specific research themes have to clearly define the scope, the focus and key concepts. Social scientists, in particular political scientists, from 20th century to 21st century, from America to Europe, have been well aware of the challenge they may face: “know more and more about less and less” (Corwin, 1929, pp. 569-570; Lehrer, Leschke, Lhachimi, Vasiliu, & Weiffen, 2007, p. 52). Indeed, one doctoral dissertation could hardly address each and every important issue in the world. Nor could it answer all important questions in one discipline of social science. This dissertation does not aim to satisfactorily answer all important questions. Just as previous research have contributed to the body of knowledge, this dissertation has its unique added value. Given limited time, budget and resources, this dissertation has feasible goals and

¹⁶ In this dissertation, the content analysis of official documents is complemented with other data sources and methods like interviews and case study.

¹⁷ Scholars noted two approaches to this study : global social policy studies (Deacon, 1997, 2007; Yeates, 2002, 2014) and the world society theory: the former focuses on actors, conflict and contestation in specific policy areas; the latter pays more attention to the processes of cultural dissemination, convergence and homogenization in certain policy field (see discussion in Deacon, 2014; Deacon & Stubbs, 2013).

answerable questions but still aims to yield relevant and interesting findings and contribute to the body of knowledge in a variety of ways.

Perspective

It is important to firstly note what this dissertation is not about. It is *not* a study of social policy or comparative social policy . While it concerns social policy transfer processes in which the EU and China have been involved, it does not examine the details of policy issues or transfer processes from the perspective of social policy or sociology. Instead, from the perspective of political science, it focuses on the context and conditions which influence the policy transfer processes, such as the EU-China relations, EU's China policy, China's EU policy, and their policy positions on social issues. It pays more attention to casual factors related to power relations between the EU and China in specific context of international diffusion than the details of policy initiatives themselves.

Level/unit of analysis

This dissertation concentrates on the top level of governmental-actors on both China and the EU side. The purpose of focusing on top level as level/unit of analysis is to facilitate the exploration of the topic of this dissertation, on which the existing literature did not shed much light. Thus, it would be more feasible to examine the governments on both sides, the most visible actors, than others in the EU-China interactions in social field. Unless otherwise specified, China refers to the central government of China rather than local governments including provincial and lower levels. Regarding governmental institutions in the EU, this study focuses on the EU supranational institutions which represent the EU in external relations, such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, the European Council, the Court of Justice and the European External Action Service (EEAS). These are the most visible actors in international policy diffusion between the EU and China.

It is important to note the limits of this decision in choosing level/unit of analysis. In fact, other actors including EU member states and their local governments, Chinese local governments, and non-governmental actors may have significant influence in subnational, transnational and global social policy development. In China, local governments and pressure

groups such as All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC) as well as European Chamber of Commerce in China (EUCCC) have impact on China's national social policy formulation and implementation including labour issues (Friedman & Kuruvilla, 2015; Hui & Chan, 2014). Meanwhile, it is important to acknowledge the role of EU member states in shaping the EU-China relations. In fact, some of the EU member states have their own bilateral dialogues and cooperation with China covering social issues, such as the United Kingdom (UK)¹⁸, France¹⁹ and Germany²⁰. It is also important to note the role of non-governmental actors and/or civil society actors in the whole EU-China relations. The organizations such as the EUCCC and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) also keep one eye on labour issues in the EU-China relations²¹. In summary, both the EU and China have complex "domestic" actors and dynamics among them rather than are monolithic or single entities.

One advantage of concentration at macro level of analysis is to portray the most visible part of the empirical phenomenon of interest. For exploratory research, this is the most helpful and feasible step in terms of data collection and analysis. It is better to firstly examine the most visible and observable components of the phenomenon under analysis before introduce more actors and related activities. This analysis at the top level of governments, the macro level, paves the way for more detailed research at meso and micro levels in later stages. After all, as mentioned above, one dissertation should not be expected to solve all problems. In this sense, this decision is not an ideal but inevitable choice for this dissertation between complexity and parsimony.

In addition, this dissertation focuses on *bilateral* level rather than *multilateral* level of the EU-China interactions in social policy for several reasons. Firstly, for an exploratory study,

¹⁸ For instance, the UK-China Social Enterprise and Investment Dialogue was held in 2013 on their cooperation in "tackling some difficult social and environmental challenges". See "UK-China dialogue to develop global social investment market" (Wednesday 04 December 2013), the British Council, <http://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/press/uk-china-dialogue-develop-global-social-investment-market>, (accessed 22 October 2015).

¹⁹ For instance, the France-China High Level Economic and Financial Dialogues (HED) (held in 2013, 2014, 2015) cover social issues such as social security and corporate social responsibility. See joint statement/fact of each dialogue.

²⁰ For instance, the China-Germany High-Level Financial Dialogue (2015) noted to exchange views on the impact of demographic changes on the social system. See Joint Statement of the 1st China-Germany High-Level Financial Dialogue (17 March 2015).

²¹ For instance, the ETUC expressed its concerns of labour rights in China, and have kept paying attention to the current EU-China negotiations on bilateral investment treaty(since 2013). See, for example, the ETUC project "EU-China Investment Policy – consequences for workers", <http://www.etuc.org/call-subcontractor-provide-expertise-part-implementation-etuc-project-%E2%80%9Ceu-china-investment-policy-%E2%80%93> (accessed 21 April 2015).

it is important to firstly focus on the most visible part of phenomenon under research before move on to its more complex portions. Although EU-China interactions on social issues within the ILO, WTO and other UN institutions constitute an important part of the social dimension of the EU-China relations, their bilateral dialogue and cooperation on social issues are the most visible aspects. Focusing on the bilateral level makes sense in terms of data collection and gaining basic insights of their interactions. Thus, it is preferable to trace more direct evidence of international diffusion by concentrating on their bilateral interactions on certain social issues through dialogues and cooperation than by studying their interactions in multilateral organizations such as ILO. Secondly, focusing on bilateral levels would also be helpful to identify strong evidence to test existing conceptual frameworks such as the normative power Europe and international diffusion. To assess some causal factors of interest, it is better to control contextual factors by selecting “simpler” context where researchers do not expect to introduce other causal factors. It is important to firstly examine direct international diffusion between the EU and China before introducing the third actors like the ILO or contextual factors such as institutional environment within the ILO.

Again, it is important to knowledge that the multilateral level of the EU-China relations in social policy is one component of their interactions in the diffusion of social policy. It is possible that delegates from the EU and China in in multilateral organizations such as the ILO, WTO and other UN institutions dealing with social issues exchange ideas on social issues. Those delegates and experts may constitute the international networks of epistemology influencing the transnational diffusion of social policy.

Policy domain and issue areas

This dissertation focuses two specific issue areas in social field, namely social security and labour issues in trade agreement, for two main reasons. Firstly, the development cooperation (including assistance in social field) and the trade are two strong domains of the EU’s external policy. The EU plays important roles in providing development assistance to developing countries and in promoting labour rights protection through trade. That is, the EU’s influence is remarkable in international diffusion on these two issue areas. Secondly, the EU and China have more consensus on social security than on linking labour issues to trade. While China seeks to learning European expertise in social security, it takes a reluctant

position on including labour provisions in trade agreement. China's contrasting positions on these two issue areas provide more details on its response.

It is important to note the limits of examining the effect of international diffusion on the two issue areas in this way. It should not be ignored that policy domains such as development cooperation/aid and trade may have different impact on the effects of international diffusion in issue areas. After all, as development cooperation initiatives are softer than trade negotiations, the former may meet less resistance from the developing countries than the latter. Consequently, policy diffusion through aid, cooperation and dialogue may be easier and smoother than that through trade negotiations which often involve bargaining in material interest. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the impact of policy domain (e.g. trade and development cooperation) on the effect of international diffusion in specific issue areas such as social security and labour²².

2. State of the art

This section surveys China's involvement in international social policy diffusion, in particular China's interactions with the EU. It reviews the existing literature related to this phenomenon, including the literature on the EU-China relations, EU studies, international diffusion studies in IR, policy transfer research in public policy and comparative politics, as well as social policy transfer literature. It summarizes the contributions of the previous studies and highlights what further contribution this dissertation can make.

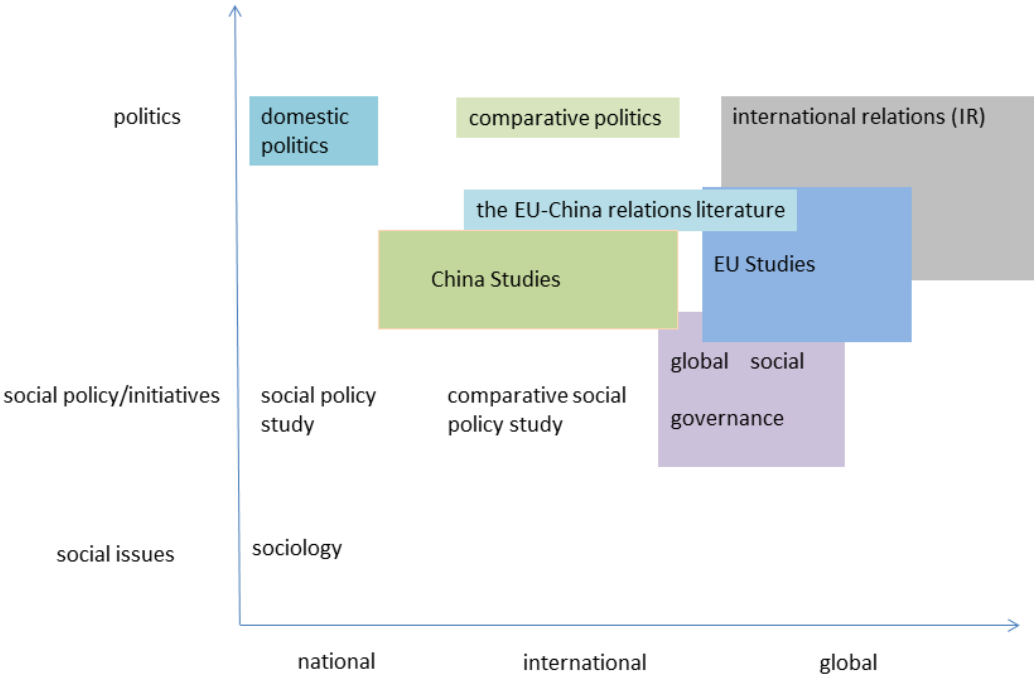
2.1.Framing the field

One way to map the existing studies which are relevant for this dissertation is to use two dimensions: the unit/level of analysis and the policy significance of issues (see Figure 1). In this figure, the horizontal axis represents the unit/level of analysis, from national to

²² See more discussion of China's response to the diffusion from the EU in the two issue areas through two policy domains in the section of 3.3 research design in summary in this Introduction Chapter and the section of 1.5 Linking two issue areas: broader observations in the Conclusion chapter.

international and global scale. The vertical axis represents the policy significance of issues, from social issues and social policy (“low politics”) to politics. The relative positions of these research themes or sub-disciplines illustrate their relations.

Figure 1. Relevant academic studies



The transnational transfer/ international diffusion of social policy has become an exciting theme of in a variety of research traditions including 1) sub-disciplines of political sciences such as comparative politics and IR, 2) and of social policy such as comparative social policy as well as 3) inter-disciplinary research themes such as EU Studies, global social governance, and the study of global social issues (including global social policy studies and world society theory)²³.

²³ In addition, some authors of development studies and China Studies also paid attention to international diffusion. However, to my knowledge, China Studies literature focuses more on China’s domestic social policy than China’s involvement of international social policy diffusion. Therefore, this dissertation does not zoom in the literature of China Studies.

These sub-disciplines and research traditions have contributed to the international transfer/diffusion of social policy in different ways. Firstly, scholars have paid attention to the role of the western actors in shaping the debates and diffusion of social policy, and well documented many interesting empirical phenomena and accumulated various data and case materials. Secondly, scholars in these research fields have proposed useful concepts and analytical frameworks to capture the diffusion processes and causal mechanisms. For example, scholars have noted the inter-relations or linkages between social policy issues such as labour protection and foreign policy, international commercial relations, trade and investment (Agusti-Panareda & Puig, 2015), finance, development aid and other policy areas.

Along these research traditions, scholars have called more academic attention to emerging fronts such as policy diffusion and policy transfer. With regard to social policy studies, scholars have called for going beyond “methodological nationalism” to embrace policy diffusion and policy transfer (Obinger et al., 2013). Similarly, two recent special issues in leading English-speaking journals of political science have called more attention to international diffusion of policies and norms²⁴. Some proposed to rethink globalization as “a form of diffusion” (Jahn, 2006).

Regarding the empirical phenomena under research, the existing literature did not fully examine the impact of the developing world, including emerging powers. It remains not very clear how southern actors affect the domestic diffusion in their countries and how developing countries influence international social policy debates. Some identified social policy in East Asia as productivist welfare capitalism (Holliday, 2000). Only recently, few noted the impact of “rising powers” on labour and environmental Standards “ (Nadvi, 2014), the implications of rising power clusters on “local and global standards” (Knorringa & Nadvi, 2014), and the influence of “rising power firms” in developmental issue areas (Yamin, Sinkovics, Roberts, & Roberts, 2015). Emerging powerings have been involved in the evolution of corporate social responsibility disclosures and corporate governance (Khan, Muttakin, & Siddiqui, 2013), influencing international health policy reforms and the World Health Organization (WHO) (Gautier, Harmer, Tediosi, & Missoni, 2014).

Although these different research traditions and sub-disciplines address the phenomenon of social policy across national borders, the lack of sufficient dialogue prevents them from common vocabulary and analytical frameworks for accumulating knowledge. The

²⁴ See 2012 (Börzel & Risse, 2012a) *West European Politics*, 35(1); 2014 (Etel Solingen & Börzel, 2014) *International Studies Review* (2014) 0.

interdisciplinary dialogues are far from satisfactory among social policy research and sub-disciplines of political science including comparative politics and international relations. For example, some noted that labour issues have not been included in sessions of International Studies Association (ISA) Convention until 2006 (Lethbridge, 2007).

Regarding research methods, qualitative analysis with details on emerging powers such as China remains little. Many studies in international diffusion research have reported the general impact of social policy travelling. For instance, in the debates of labour protection and trade as well as investment (the race-to-the-bottom or race-to-the-top) authors tend to use quantitative methods to analyze a number of countries, especially developing countries. (e.g. David Collier & Messick, 1975; Davies & Vadhnamanati, 2013; Duanmu, 2013; Olney, 2013). While quantitative analyses are helpful to portray a general picture of a number of states, it informs us neither the details of a specific country such as China nor the causal mechanisms under the correlated phenomena. Others have employed qualitative methods such as case study methods to focus on specific countries or country groupings to identify concrete conditions and causal factors in the transfer process in concrete context like South America (Orenstein, 2008; Weyland, 2010; K. G. Weyland, 2005). However, up to date few studies have focused on China's involvement in social policy and norms travelling across borders.

The following sub-sections will focus on several research themes with which this dissertation directly engages with. They are the studies of the EU-China relations, EU Studies, IR, and comparative politics.

2.2. The literature of the EU-China relations

Authors of the EU-China relations have scarcely examined the social dimension of the EU-China relations. It remains unclear how both sides frame their dialogue and cooperation in the social field. Furthermore, it also remains unclear whether those insights on the EU-China relations based on observations of other fields would fit the situation in social field.

In contrast to wide discussions of the impact of China's rise to the US positions, the literature on the EU-China relations only burgeoned in the past two decades. As some leading authors observed, "the Sino-European relationship has blossomed – even boomed – since the mid-1990s, the academic world has failed to keep up with it" (Shambaugh, Sandschneider, & Hong, 2008, p. 3). The existing literature of the EU-China relations has covered an increasing number aspects of this bilateral relationship. The majority of studies

focus on those aspects which have received attention for years, such as general and political relations (Barysch, Grant, & Leonard, 2005; Dai, 2006; Feng, 2007; Glen & Murgu, 2007; Holslag, 2011; M. J. Li, 2009; Men, 2012; Men & Pardo, 2014; Sautenet, 2007; Taneja, 2010; Umbach, 2005; 冯, 2011; 吴, 2005; 石 & 李, 2005; 陈, 戴, 潘, & 丁, 2013), economic and trade ties (Algieri, 2002; Grosse, 2014; Horng, 1998; Luo, 2007; D. Scott, 2014; Shan, 2000; M. Smith, 2014; Zeng, 2009; L. Zhang, 2007), international affairs (Callahan, 2007; Casarini, 2009; F. Liu & Kerr, 2007; Narramore, 2008; Otero-Iglesias & Zhang, 2014; Pardo, 2014; D. A. Scott, 2013; Michael Smith, 2014; Wissenbach, 2009), and to less extent other issues including culture (Y. J. Zhang, 2014), education (Pinna, 2009), environmental protection (D. Scott, 2009), climate (e.g. Belis & Schunz, 2013; Bruyninckx & Qi, 2013; Men, 2014), science and technology (e.g. Brauner, 2013; A. C. Li, 2014).

The existing literature has paid attention to factors which may influence the EU-China relation. Two of them received much attention: differences between the EU and China in many ways and power relations between them. A number of authors have noted the impact of these two factors on the EU-China relations and tend to take a pessimistic view on this bilateral relationship (e.g. Holslag, 2011; Men, 2012). For some, a rising China is a “problem” for the EU as they may have battles over norms (Kaya, 2014). The situation in political relations, human rights issues and the EU’s images in China seemly contain evidence for these pessimistic observations (Balducci, 2010; K. Chan, 2010; Mattlin, 2012; Shen, 2013; Taneja, 2010). Some also noted the limits of economic diplomacy in this bilateral relationship (e.g. M. Smith, 2014).

Whether these views fully capture the whole growing bilateral relationship remains a question. Scholars have recently noted exchanges and cooperation in other fields such as science and technology and urbanization, suggesting the possibility of more optimistic elements (Kunzmann, 2015; A. C. Li, 2014). In particular, some Chinese scholars seemly have more confidence regarding the development of this relationship (see chapters in H. Zhou, 2013). In addition, in contrast with relatively cautious opinions of this relationship among academic community, policy makers on both sides have pledged since November 2013 to further deepen their cooperation in many fields by issuing the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation to guide the future relations.

Therefore, one of the questions is whether the EU-China relations are as simple as some claimed. Is this relationship that straightforward so that we can view it in a simple black-and-

white way? Some has called attention to the complex nature of the EU-China climate relations, which involves both conflicts and common ground. (Bruyninckx & Qi, 2013). While the differences between the EU and China in many ways may lead to different goals and approaches to the issues of climate change, both side are also facing common threats, challenges and problems which may encourage their cooperation on climate change (Bruyninckx & Qi, 2013). It is important to investigate what happened in social field to test whether pessimistic views hold in the social dimension of the EU-China relations. It is more important to identify the causal factors and mechanisms underpinning the social dimension of this relationship, and to examine whether this dimension is different from other aspects.

2.3.EU studies

Europe has a long history of external norms diffusion and this has close connections to its self-image and identity. There is long-term debates about Europe's self-image with the process of European integration from Duchene (1972) to Bull (1982) to a number of labels have been coined for the EU to differentiate it from traditional power²⁵.

The Normative Power Europe approach

Since 2002, one of the widely discussed concepts of what EU represents in the world is Normative Power Europe (NPE), introduced by Ian Manners (Manners, 2006a, 2006b; Manners, 2002, 2008). Manners argues that the EU 'exists as being different to pre-existing political forms' and 'act[s] in a normative way,' thus it can be viewed as a normative power (Manners 2002, p242). In his later works, Manner endeavored to develop a broad normative power approach to examine 'soft' dimensions of EU foreign policies with a focus on its norm diffusion in the world (2006, 2008, 2009). In the theorizing of the EU's self-image in the world, the NPE approach does capture some aspects of the EU such as its constitutional uniqueness as resources and basis of normative power, and its emphasis on dialogue and engagement as major instruments in solving international problems.

Although the NPE has attracted significant academic attention and sparked debates, it is facing challenges that are both empirical and theoretical. The mixed empirical evidences in

²⁵ Such as 'magnetic force' (Rosecrance 1998), a 'gentle power' (Padoa-Schioppa 2001), a 'quiet superpower' (Moravcsik 2003), a 'post-modern state' (Cooper 2003), a 'Kantian paradise (Venus)' (Kagan 2004).

specific areas indicate the inconsistency of the NPE. Others noticed that the ‘individual normative ambitions’ of its member states makes the EU a ‘divided’ not ‘strong normative power’ (Wagnsson, 2010). One paper (Forsberg, 2011) summarized three criticisms of the current NPE literature: ‘a political rather than an analytical concept’; no clarification of relations between the NPE and the EU’s use of economic and military instruments like other great powers; and little investigation of the ‘real impact of the EU’.

Two issues of the NPE approach are of special interest in this dissertation. Firstly, the existing NPE literature relies heavily on the efficiency of the EU itself, leaving little attention to the constraints on its efforts. After all, normative power does not occur in vacuum. The NPE approach represents a liberal-idealist conceptualization of the EU, with little weight on the EU’s realist security concerns in practice (Young, 2004). It also neglects the EU’s external context: systematic constraints from structural distribution of power in the world (Hyde-Price, 2006). For instance, in a realist world, the EU’s projection of norms and promotions of global governance face challenges from the US (M. E. Smith, 2011). Indeed, the success of norm diffusion in the world is not an easy task, as it depends on many conditions. The examination of these conditions is very important for assessing the policy and behavior of NPE. The present NPE approach does not fully take the possible constraints into consideration.

Secondly, it is important to know how others perceive the EU. The outside perceptions of and the feedback to the EU did not receive adequate academic attention. By labeling the EU as a normative power, the NPE discourse faces the risk of implying that other powers are not normative (Diez, 2005; Merlingen, 2007; Scheipers & Sicurelli, 2007). In fact, the international identity of any international actor has a relational nature. That is, EU’s international identity is socially constructed by the EU and others. This dichotomy may bring tensions between the identities of the EU and others, by ignoring others’ perceptions of the EU. As Emilian Kavalski (Kavalski, 2013) rightly noted, normative power needs recognition by others. As recent empirical surveys on the EU’s external perceptions have indicated, different countries, in different periods, have different perceptions of the EU (Chaban, Elgström, Kelly, & Yi, 2013; Chaban & Holland, 2010). The difference between the EU’s self-image and its perceptions of others would raise serious questions on the ‘real impact’ of NPE. While the EU believes its norms diffusion is an effort of great cause and pursuit of justice, not all of others think so. To what extent the EU can successfully export its values and beliefs to the world depends not only on the EU itself, but also on others’ domestic situation

and perceptions of the EU (Chaban, Masselot, & Vadura, 2015). If there is no consensus among others on whether the EU is a normative power, then a self-claimed normative power is not unquestionable. Without sufficient discussion of the response of others, it would be difficult to offer convincing explanations of why the EU is a normative power, thus why the NPE is a relevant concept.

These issues have consequences in researching the EU's impact outside Europe. It would be not easy to better understand the EU's roles and identity in the world without paying more attention to their relational and contextual nature. The empirical studies in the existing NPE literature did not shed sufficient light on the recipient side of norms diffusion. As some analyst observed,

the existing literature is dominated by examples of the EU's influence (however understood). When inferences are drawn from this skewed set of cases, the extent of the EU's influence is exaggerated. ... Establishing how the EU causes others to change their ways requires analysis of examples of both success and failure so as to be able to identify those factors that correlated with the different outcome (Young, 2015a, p. 1239).

Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the recipient side of norms diffusion. Recently, some authors called for more attention to the recipient side of the EU's norms export (Björkdahl, Chaban, Leslie, & Masselot, 2015b; Chaban et al., 2015).

With regard to the research topic in this dissertation, two steps are needed at two levels. Firstly, at empirical level, it is important to accumulate knowledge of the EU's diffusion of social norms to China. Previous research of the EU's external social policy has examined the EU's global role and impact outside its borders (J. Orbie et al., 2009; Orbie & Tortell, 2009) through trade (Van den Putte, Bossuyt, Orbie, & De Ville, 2013) and development policy (Orbie & Babarinde, 2008). Recently, some authors also examined the EU's impact on Asia in social field through trade policy, for instance, the EU-India trade agreement negotiations (Garcia & Masselot, 2015; Orbie & Khorana, 2015). However, research on the EU's promotion of social norms towards China is scarce. While some authors have documented the EU's promotion of political values including human rights towards China (Balducci, 2010; Mattlin, 2012; 洪, 2010), the social norms have received little attention. Just as little literature on the social dimension of the EU-China relations, few studies which employ or discuss the NPE framework have focused on the EU's diffusion of social norms towards China. More empirical studies, including case studies, are needed to test and refine the NPE approach (Shen, 2015). Therefore, two questions need answers: whether the EU's norms diffusion in

social field is different from other fields, and whether the stories in China differ from those countries that have been studied.

Secondly, at conceptual level, it is necessary to problematize and conceptualize the recipient side of norms diffusion. In a sense, the current NPE framework remains an incomplete one – unduly focused on ‘norm entrepreneurs’ – which could not capture the relational and contextual nature of the role of norm promoter. In fact, recipient countries such as China may not be only passive receivers of the EU norms. For instance, with thousands of years history and rich cultural traditions, China has been actively importing wisdoms from the world and also made its own contribution to Asia and the world. In a broader sense, without further conceptualizing the response of the recipient side, it would risk ignoring the actorness of countries outside Europe. The existing framework of the NPE may face a set of questions: how could we understand the role and impact of the non-western actors as new actors in the international diffusion of social policy?

2.4. International diffusion in IR

Scholars of IR seek explanations of international transfer of policy and norms from a variety of perspectives. Those adherent to realism/ neo-realism believe that powerful actors, including states and international organizations, diffuse certain policies and norms through taking advantage of their capacities vis-a-vis other countries. Some authors noted the USA’s hegemonic strategy in forcing other countries to accept certain policies. Others found the impact of World Bank and IMF in diffusing policy towards recipient countries.

Scholars within liberalism have noted the impact of interdependence and institutions in facilitating policy and norms diffusion, for instance relations between domestic institutions and interdependence (Farrell & Newman, 2014). As far as international/supranational institutions are concerned, the EU is a good example to global governance, including trade (da Conceição-Heldt, 2014) .

Constructivists have stressed ideational factors in international norms diffusion. Some have identified three generations of constructivism (for detailed discussion see Widmaier & Park, 2012). While the first generation constructivists noted the ideational structure in shaping international relations, the second generation noticed the efforts of strategic socialization and integration driven by some norms entrepreneurs, including governmental and non-governmental actors towards the whole world (Widmaier & Park, 2012, pp. 124-126).

Finnemore and Sikkink's norm life cycle (NLC) model and criticism

Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink made pioneering attempts in theorizing social construction and norms evolution in international politics, by inducting patterns from empirical research on norms (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). They examined three aspects of norms evolution, namely, the origins of norms, the mechanisms of norms influence and the conditions of norms diffusion. They proposed a three-stage "life cycle" (NLC) of how norms evolve: norms emergence, norm cascade and internationalization. In the first stage, norm entrepreneurs initiate norms through persuasion with organizational platforms like international (non-)governmental organizations. In the second stage, states and international organizations may, in turn, take leading role to promote these norms through socialization and institutionalization, as well as demonstration to generate peer pressure. In the Final stage, the established norms will be "taken-for-granted" almost automatically by actors. The NLC model underscored the strategic social construction driven by norm entrepreneurs, which helps to explain the change of political phenomena.

Finnemore's and Sikkink's work represents a great efforts of strategic constructivists, the second generation of constructivists, in explaining political change (Widmaier & Park, 2012)²⁶. Moving from structure to agents, the NLC model focused on the role of critical agents such as norm entrepreneurs and states, in driving norm diffusion process. While Finnemore's and Sikkink's work enhanced constructivism's explanatory power in political change, their NLC model remained preliminary and not inclusive due to its inductive nature. This inevitably posed related limitations in ontology, epistemology, methodology and theoretical framework, that are evident, and that constrain the NLC's interpretation ability.

This model represents the first wave of constructivists efforts in theorizing international norms evolution (Sikkink, 2011). The first wave of norms scholarship also has serious limitations: static view of norm content (Krook & True, 2012; Sandholtz, 2008; Van Kersbergen & Verbeek, 2007; Zwingel, 2012) and linear model of global-to-national cause-effect logic (Zwingel, 2012). This is partly due to little theoretical room for problematizing the variation of norms targets' behavior. While the NLC model focused on the role of norm entrepreneurs in driving norm diffusion process, the target actors in this model remains

²⁶ Wesley W. Widmaier and Susam Park (2012) identified three shifts in constructivists camp, which emphasized three different factors: structural constraints, strategic practices and sentimental forces. Three shifts resulted in three generations of constructivism (Widmaier & Park 2012).

passive or inactivated. Although this partial move from structural level to agent level enhanced constructivism's explanatory power in political change on norms entrepreneur side, it fails to offer sufficient theoretical accounts for variability of target actors. This linear perception of international norms evolution fails to capture the complexity of interactive processes among norms entrepreneurs/promoters and target actors, such as norms localization and subsidiarity (Acharya, 2004, 2011). In fact, norms entrepreneurs don't live in a vacuum but in a mutual constructed world where target actors are not always passive to be disciplined but also in turn influence or construct norms entrepreneurs themselves (Bell, 2012).

Interestingly, the NLC model and the NPA literature in the EU Studies share similar features. Firstly, both of scholarship seemly take a cosmopolitan worldview (Acharya, 2004). The norms to be diffused are claimed as "universal", "international" or for everyone. The norms promoters are motivated by altruistic, empathy, ideational, and/or moral commitment. Secondly, they also presume dichotomies in norms and norms actors. The dichotomies are set between norms which are claimed universal and those local (whether they are regional or national). Thirdly, the above dichotomies set up the international norms hierarchy that justifies diffusion process, which leads to homogenized behavior of international actor.

In addition, both approaches assume a one-way international norms diffusion which involves norms spreading toward norms acceptance. Both the NPA and the NLC approaches release the explanatory power by problematizing the behavior of norms entrepreneurs in international system. That is, through partially moving from structural level to agent level, both are able to explain the political changes driving by norms entrepreneurs. Yet, they do not exhaust the theoretical efforts of moving from structural level to agent level as they left the behavior of target actors without being problematized.

2.5. Policy diffusion and transfer studies in other research themes

Compared with the NPE framework in the EU Studies and the NLC model in IR, other research traditions have already paid more attention to the varying response of recipient side of international diffusion. Researchers of American Politics have been interested in policy learning among local governments within the US Federal system (e.g. C. R. Shipan & Volden, 2006, 2008). That is, rather than being passive receiver of policy advices, governments may actively learn from each other. Meanwhile, scholars with the background of comparative

politics and international relations have also noted the phenomena of policy and norms transfer in the international level (David P Dolowitz & David Marsh, 2000; Fabrizio Gilardi, 2012; B. A. Simmons et al., 2006). Authors have noted transfer mechanisms include emulation, learning, competition and coercion (e.g. Dobbin, Simmons, & Garrett, 2007; D. Dolowitz & D. Marsh, 1996)²⁷.

Learning or lesson-drawing is an important way for governments to better address the challenges (Rose, 1991, 1993, 2004). Governments tend to learn those policies which have been proven successful in other states and countries (F. Gilardi, Fuglister, & Luyet, 2009; Volden, 2006). Scholars have examined a variety of conditional factors which may influence learning processes, including policy background, the capacity of policy makers, and the characteristics of the policies themselves (see Charles R. Shipan & Volden, 2012, for review). Policy circumstance may concern geographic or spatial distance (e.g. Walker, 1969), international policy advocate networks (e.g. Haas, 1992), and domestic situation like the relations between the state and society (Kim, 2008). Many studies have suggested that geographical proximity, similar language and cultural background, similarities in political, ideological and economic aspects, and close economic relations would facilitate the policy diffusion and transfer. For example, geographical, lingual, cultural, educational, institutional similarities may facilitate policy transfer (Rosecrance, 2014). In addition, policy makers' cognitive biases and heuristics (e.g. K. Weyland, 2005) and political motivations such as expectations for success in elections may influence their capacity of learning (e.g. Fabrizio Gilardi, 2010). Finally, the characteristics of the policies themselves are related to whether they are general principles or specific programmes, or whether they are politicized or technological issues. The research identifying these conditional factors helps under basic causal impact and mechanisms in learning process. Still, complex causality in learning process are unclear, such as what the relations among these factors, how they interact each other.

Drawing on adult education research, scholars recently developed an explanatory typology²⁸ of policy learning which along two dimensions: problem tractability and the certification of actors, categorizes four basic learning genera, including reflexive learning,

²⁷ For more discussion of causal mechanisms in policy diffusion and transfer see (Börzel & Risse, 2012a).

²⁸ Explanatory typology, or typological theory, is a typology in which different combinations of dimensions of the typology (as independent/explanatory variables) lead to different cells of the typology (as dependent variables). In this way, it deals with complex causation or causal mechanisms. For comprehensive discussion, see (Elman, 2005; George & Bennett, 2005, chapter 11).

epistemic learning , learning through bargaining, and learning in the shadow of hierarchy (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). By introducing two other dimensions to each basic learning genera: learner's control over learning objectives/ends and over learning contents/means, Dunlop and Radaelli divided them into sixteen species of learning(Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). One of the advantages of this typology is to enable researchers to specify concrete learning types to more precisely fit the real learning situation. Another is to suggest explanations of types of learning which could be tested against specific contexts. For example, if both problem tractability and certificate of actors are high, this typology would suggest that that policy learning belongs to the type of learning in the shadow of hierarchy(Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). Yet, Dunlop and Radaellie also called for testing the their arguments on learning and its conditional factors through empirical studies in specific contexts. Similarly, scholars have suggested to carefully examine the impact of these two sets of factors : domestic situation and the characteristics of transferred policies themselves (e.g.Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Obinger et al., 2013).

International diffusion and transfer research is facing challenges at both empirical and theoretical levels. Firstly, it is important to note the issues of scope of empirical studies and case selection on the theme of international policy transfer and diffusion. The existing studies “ suffer from skewed case selection with, in particular, too little attention paid to developing countries”. (Marsh & Sharman, 2009). Some literature reviewers have stressed:

The states of Africa, the Middle East and most of Asia are either considered only in so far as they are present in global data sets, or ignored altogether. This failure is particularly damning as it relates to policy transfer scholars, whose case study approach could be productively applied even in environments where detailed quantitative data are absent. In part, this neglect reflects the fascination with the topics of Europeanization and globalization writ large in the 1990s. This pronounced selection bias is an important shortcoming for a number of reasons (Marsh& Sharman 2009, p.280).

Regarding international transfer of social policy, it is necessary to consider more empirical evidence outside the West (Obinger et al., 2013). Regarding studies on China's involvement in international diffusion, in particular, few studies have focused on social issues. The existing literature has examined China's response on some issues areas such as finance (S. Heilmann & Schulte-Kulmann, 2011), low-carbon agenda (Hofem & Heilmann, 2013), tobacco control (Jin, 2014), or academic, scientific, and business norms (Zweig & Yang, 2014). In these studies, Chinese government was viewed as passive receiver of norms or

advices from abroad. Yet, social policy have received little academic attention in this research theme. Also, it remains unclear whether China plays an active role in learning social policy.

Secondly, there are several challenges at theoretical level. First of all, the limits in empirical research have consequences on theory. Scholars noted that the interaction between diffusion effects and domestic politics “remains both an important and challenging research frontier” (Etel Solingen & Börzel, 2014, pp. 13-14). In fact, “the idea of why countries reject outside models and stick with local solutions has received relatively little attention” (Marsh & Sharman 2009, p 281).

More importantly, it is questionable to take it for granted that norms travel from some developed countries to the rest of world. Some questioned the way of thinking African countries ones as just actors which agencies can “act upon” rather than actors which actually can act by themselves (Brown, 2012). Scholars have noted that the “global-to-national causal-effect logic” may not be able to capture complex process of norms travelling between global, regional and local (Zwingel, 2012, p. 118). Others, stress further the necessity of rethinking the life cycles of international norms (Krook & True, 2012). Indeed, socialization may not be a one-way process, but a “two-way process” in which emerging powers may not be passive receivers of normed diffused towards them (Xiaoyu, 2012). Some authors argued that emerging powers can also act as normative agents (Erthal Abdenur, 2014).

Scholars have brought attention to dialogues between different research traditions. Some found that the distinctions between policy diffusion and policy transfer more at methodological level than substantial empirical phenomenon (Marsh & Sharman, 2009). While researchers on the former often employ qualitative research and case studies of policy traveling between a few countries, those on the latter are inclined to use quantitative analysis methods to portray the whole patterns of international diffusion across the world. Recently, some call for dialogues between Europeanization research and diffusion literature (Börzel & Risse, 2012a). Others tried to propose a common conceptual framework on diffusion (E. Solingen, 2012; Etel Solingen & Börzel, 2014).

One particular issue with this field is the lack of conceptualization of response of recipient countries to international diffusion. While the criticisms elaborated above have rightly pointed out the lack of attention to recipient side of international diffusion, they did not clearly advance further towards the conceptualization of recipient side’s behavior. It is indeed important to accumulate empirical knowledge of developing countries as recipient side of international diffusion. It is more important to conceptualize their behavior, namely to use

particular academic concepts to systematically name their response and develop conceptual frameworks to categorize different response. Without conceptualization of recipient countries' response, it is hard to systematically organize the specific findings and insights in scattered empirical studies of developing countries, particularly those using small-N case studies.

2.6.Summary

The literature that systematically addresses China's involvement in international social policy exchanges and debates is scarce. The below table summarizes key issues in these themes to be addressed(table 1).

Firstly, there is a need for empirical research on China's involvement in international social policy diffusion, in particular its interactions with the EU. Specifically, several what/how questions are to be answered: What has happened in the social field of the EU-China relations? What are the EU's approaches towards China in social field? What are China's responses to the EU's policy in social field? How to understand their interactions on certain social issues?

Secondly, at conceptual level, it is needed to problematize and conceptualize the response of China as a "recipient country" of international diffusion. It is necessary to develop concepts and conceptual frameworks to systematically map China's response.

Thirdly, at theoretical level, it is important to investigate why China responds in certain ways. Researchers have to answer which factors influence China's reaction to international diffusion of norms including that driven by the EU. Also, whether China's story is different from stories in the previous studies, and why and how is it different?

Table 1. Issues in relevant literature

research themes	Issues to be addressed
the EU-China relations	<p>How to understand the social dimension of EU-China relations?</p> <p>Whether bilateral interactions in this dimension have been influenced by two factors: differences and changing power relations between them?</p> <p>What are the causal factors and mechanisms underpinning the social dimension of this relationship?</p>
the NPE literature in EU Studies	<p>Whether the EU acted as normative power in the social dimension of EU-China relations?</p> <p>How to understand the EU's approach in diffusion of social norms towards China?</p> <p>Which factors influence the EU as a normative power in diffusion of social norms towards China?</p> <p>How to understand China's response?</p>
the NLC framework in IR policy diffusion/transfer	<p>How to understand the behavior of target actors or recipient countries? or</p> <p>How to conceptualize the response of recipient countries to international diffusion?</p> <p>More empirical studies of developing countries are needed.</p> <p>How to understand the response of developing countries in international diffusion?</p> <p>What are the roles of developing countries in international diffusion that remain under-researched?</p> <p>What is the impact of the developing countries on international diffusion?</p>

3. Research design: methodology and research methods

3.1. Methodology: philosophical basis

In the past decades philosophers of science have debated the criteria of inquiry and focused on the question how to judge whether a research is good or bad. Social scientists tend to take paradigms in their research, which involves positions at ontological, epistemological and methodological levels (see overview in Norman K Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, Chapter 6). Summarizing these debates in Anglo-American philosophical circles, some methodologists pointed at the challenges of empiricists and their fundamental epistemology, and recognized that “we no longer can talk in terms of a fundamental epistemological and a direct ontological realism” (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 880). They acknowledged that “with the demise of empiricism and the methodical stance, any discussion of criteria must come to terms, in one form or another or in one way or another, with the issue of relativism” (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 880). For non-fundamentalists, “relativism is not a problem, it is just the inevitable result of the fact that we, as human beings, are finite ---- a finite we should learn to live with and not lament” (J. K. Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 894).

In this dissertation I have taken a mid-position in this debate on the criteria of inquiry. At ontological level, my research is based on the assumptions of realism, according to which a reality exists out there. Accordingly, at epistemological level, the aim of inquiry is to seek explanation with prediction and control. Meanwhile, I acknowledge the inevitable limits of inquiry in social sciences even though researchers have tried to conduct research as rigorous as possible. That is, those hypotheses which have passed through previous tests may be facts or laws before more evidence to be collected to test those hypotheses in further research. It is likely for social scientists to retest the findings, observations and arguments in previous studies with newly collected data or evidence. Accordingly, this dissertation does not aim to produce “absolute truth”, “immutable laws”, “unchallengeable claims” or any kind of “perfect knowledge”. Instead, it undertakes a closer examination of detailed data, involving iterative comparison of the existing knowledge and the accumulated evidence over time. This process involves induction, deduction and abduction and combines different research methods. In this sense, this dissertation also follows the advice of pragmatism (Feilzer, 2010; Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009). Therefore, the research in this dissertation is open to any criticism based on sound logic and robust evidence.

3.2. Research design process

The research design of this dissertation has been developed through an iterative process during which I engaged alternatively at the empirical, conceptual and theoretical levels. This means repeated renegotiations between my initial research purposes and planned strategies on the one hand, and progress and difficulties in data collection (e.g. data-access) and analysis, improved knowledge of the research themes, methodology and research methods, and new ideas on the other hand. During the past three years, the objectives of this dissertation have evolved from a merely empirical contribution to a conceptual and theoretical contribution, as well as from an exploratory study (including idiographic case study) to an explanatory study (including nomothetic case study).

3.2.1. Exploratory efforts: what questions and idiographic research

The initial design involved an *exploratory* study (in 2012 and first half of 2013), motivated by the observation that little literature prior to 2012 had directly addressed the social dimension of EU-China relations. Exploratory research requires a flexible research design which relies on qualitative methods in data collection and analysis. During this period of exploratory research, my research purpose was idiographic, including a focus on one single case which would stand as the end of research. Hence, my research could be framed as an intrinsic case study (Stake 2000, p 437-8), a single-outcome study (Gerring 2006, single-outcome studies) or an idiographic case study (Levy 2008, p 4). I had to explore a largely new and original perspective of the EU-China relationship, namely its social dimension. I have tried to define the scope of this dimension, to portray its historical evolution over four decades, to identify key issue areas within it, and to examine how it was framed by policy makers. In sum, I had to answer a set of what-questions in order to establish the foundation of my research theme.

Another important issue during that period was the employment of a conceptual framework to explain the accumulated data. At the beginning, after discussions with my supervisor, I tried to use Normative Power Europe (NPE) to frame the research. The literature review on the debates on NPE and other identities of the EU broadened my perspective on the EU-China dialogue and cooperation. The conceptual frameworks including NPE and

pragmatic power Europe seemed helpful to explain their bilateral interactions in the social field and their bilateral relations in general.

Meanwhile, I have also tried to employ quantitative methods (statistical analysis) to analyze the data and to organize my research. After a trial-and-error process of nearly one year (2012 July-2013 July) using quantitative methods for the content analysis of official documents on social issues in EU-China relations, I realized that quantitative methods were not suitable for my research purpose. Instead, qualitative data collection and analysis seemed more appropriate and I started looking for methods which could enhance my analysis. I had a general idea that mixed-methods or multi-methods could be more powerful than the use of only one single method. Hence, I attended the Winter School in Vienna in 2013, where I took the course of mixed-methods. While I learnt that this approach would not fit into my initial research design, the course inspired me to rethink my research design, data collections and analysis. Although my research is still qualitatively oriented, and not a real combination of quantitative and qualitative methods as I had in mind at the outset, the idea of using mixed-methods to solve the problem broadened my horizon and kept me enthusiastic in my attempts to learn and incorporate different methods into my research.

The exploration work proved worthwhile for my whole research project. After a time-consuming process of data collection and analysis during two years (September 2012-September 2014), I gained a detailed knowledge of the evolvement of social issues in EU-China relations from 1975 until the mid-2010s. In September 2014, I became more confident than ever about my knowledge of this theme and the ideas generated from it. I finally wrote article 1, which focuses on the social dimension of EU-China relations, and submitted it to the journal of European Foreign Affairs Review, after discussion with my supervisor.

Based on the data collection and analysis in the previous two years, I found it increasingly interesting to go beyond the social dimension of EU-China relations and to engage with the broader literature and debates on EU-China relations, international diffusion and transfer of norms and policy, and global social governance.

3.2.2. Explanatory work: why and how questions, engaging with theoretical explanations

At the same time, I gained more knowledge of methodology and research methods. I paid special attention to qualitative methods, including qualitative content analysis, case studies and multi-methods research, in addition to useful approaches in social sciences and political

science and international relations in particular, such as the use of explanatory typologies in developing explanatory ideas and hypotheses. These methodological approaches have been encouraging and helpful in my efforts to think deeper in more theoretically driven and methodologically self-conscious manners. Consequently, my original thoughts about exploratory research increasingly accommodated elements of *explanatory* research (in second half of 2013 and 2014).

Thus, in the second half of my doctoral period (in 2013, 2014 and 2015), I began to consciously reframe my empirical study as a case study to test existing concepts, conceptual frameworks as well as theoretical predictions. For instance, in article 1, I used the social dimension of the EU-China relations as a case to test the explanatory power of the NPE and the pragmatic power Europe. I also found that the existing conceptual frameworks such as the NPE and the NLC could not predict China's varying response to the social dimension of globalization. This led me to problematize the response of the recipient country to international diffusion, and developed a conceptual framework based on the Variability of Response (VOR) in my second article, which may serve as a heuristic device to systematically map a recipient country's specific response on different issue areas. When developing and applying the VOR framework, I found it necessary to focus on specific type of response such as learning and resistance. I chose two specific issues area in social field: social security and labour issues in trade agreement²⁹. Examining China's response on the two issues areas may be useful to test the VOR framework developed in article 2.

By linking my empirical analysis to the conceptual and theoretical literature, I have tried to engage with the current debates in related research communities such as the literature on EU-China relations, Normative Power Europe, international diffusion and transfer, as well as on global social governance. Specifically, I have tried to test concepts, conceptual frameworks and theoretical arguments based on my empirical analysis and findings about the social dimension of EU-China relations. Furthermore, I have also considered using explanatory typologies, as suggested by Elmann (2005), Collier (2012) and Bennett (2013).

As a result, my research purposes have gone beyond the mere understanding of one single case. By testing and generating hypotheses I have tried to derive insights from my single case for a better understanding of others cases and more general and abstract phenomena (Stake

²⁹ For reasons, see "policy domains and issue areas" in the section of 1.2.2 research focus in this Introduction Chapter.

2000). That is, in addition to the idiographic goals, my research also included more nomothetic elements at conceptual and theoretical levels (Levy 2008). I attempted to conduct an instrumental case study and move towards a collective case study (Stake 2000, p437). The Table 2 summarizes the research practice. These research practices finally produced four articles included in this dissertation³⁰.

Table 2. Research design and research practice (July 2012 - 2015)

	July 2012 - July 2013	July 2013- July 2014	July 2014 – July 2015	July 2015 -
Research design	Exploratory	Exploratory Explanatory		
Research focus	The social dimension of the EU-China relations	Two issues areas: social security and labour		
Theoretical background	NPE	NPE, international diffusion of norms (IR) International diffusion/transfer of social policy (comparative politics and social policy studies)		
Contribution	Empirical studies	Developing conceptual framework Identifying causal factors		
Output	Drafts of article 1	Article 1 Drafts of article 2, 3 and 4		

3.3. Research design : outline

Throughout the research process mentioned above, I was trying to answer a set of research questions³¹. First of all, I used qualitative inquiry approach to investigate 1) *what are the interactions between the EU and China on social issues over time* and 2) *how could we*

³⁰ See briefs of each article in the section of 4. Articles in in the dissertation in this Introduction Chapter.

³¹ See specific research questions in the section of 1.1.2 International diffusion of social policy and China in this Introduction Chapter.

understand the social dimension of the EU-China relationship. Secondly, in order to understand the EU-China interactions in social field, I examined each side respectively. This reductionist approach helps focus on one side at one time. When examining *the role of the EU* in diffuse/transfer social policy to China, I tested the conceptual frameworks of the NPE and its rivalry concept: pragmatic power Europe. When studying *China's behavior* in social policy transfer from the EU, I developed a typological framework of VOR.

Thirdly, to scrutinize details of China's response to the social policy diffusion driven by the EU, I zoomed into specific issue areas. I chose two issue areas : social security and labour. Two small steps are used. The first step was to understand China's response within each issue area. That is, each issue area as a idiographic case to analysis³². Moreover, each case can also be used to test causal hypotheses generated in the existing literature of the NPE and international diffusion. Specifically, in the case of social security, I tested the existing hypotheses of learning and advanced the typological framework developed by Dunlop and Radaelli (2013). In the case of labour, I tested the hypothesis of labour provision travelling from the EU's FTAs to its FTA partners' subsequent FTAs, suggested by Postnikov and Bastiaens (2014).

The second step was to use these two issue areas as two cases to further examine China's response. Cross case analysis may help control some contextual factors which may lead to spurious effects. Thus, the idea is control as many as contextual factors, leaving variation in few causal factors of interest in this study. The ideal situation is that the only independent variables are China's positions on specific issue area and its relative power relations with the EU. The dependent variable is China's response. Comparing China's positions on the two issue areas may control some spurious effects.

One way to compare is to illustrate full range of the variation of dependent variable (China's response)³³. China is interested in dialogue and cooperation on social security but reluctant to include the issue of labour protection in dialogue or economic relations. The issue

³² In this dissertation, I refer to "case" at different levels of context. At dissertation level, I view each issue area as case to understand. However, within each issue area, there are sub-cases or more detailed empirical phenomena to be analyzed in articles, which I also call as "case". The case study design in the section of 3. Research design focuses on cases within issue area (at article level rather than dissertation level).

³³ Although I used the typical language of quantitative methods, the purpose is not assess the "net effects" of some independent variables on the dependent variables, which usually it is the strength of large-N analysis through statistical methods. Instead, the idea is to examine the international diffusion and response in few extreme situations. The case-oriented analysis, are more suitable than variable-oriented methods to gain deeper insights based on the details of a few situations of interest (Ragin, 2007) .

of social security appears mainly in EU-China dialogue and development cooperation but not an important issue in economic relations. In contrast, the issue of labour rarely appear in dialogue and development cooperation but constitutes an important issue in EU-China investment negotiations and trade relations. Regarding the impact of policy domain on the effect of social policy diffusion on specific issues³⁴, the issue of social security in dialogue and development cooperation and the issue of labour in trade negotiations may provide the “extreme cases” of China’s response at two ends.

Yet, it is worth noting the limits of this way of facilitating comparison by maximizing dependent variable : involving other possible causal factors. The impact of different combinations of policy domains and issue areas on policy diffusion should not be ignored. It is possible the development cooperation facilitate their cooperation in social security. It is also possible that trade as a sensitive policy domain, in which neither China and the EU would easily make concessions, stimulates China’s reluctant positions on labour issue.

Moreover, regarding the analysis of labour issues in the EU’s and China’s FTAs, one practical concern is that there are no outcomes of negotiations between the EU and China in trade and investment. The EU-China Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) negotiations started in 2006 but have halted since 2011. The EU-China bilateral investment agreement (BIA) negotiations started in 2013, in which the EU aimed to incorporate labour issues. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on indirect diffusion, namely, from the EU to third parties to China. It is possible that China takes varying response on this issue when it faces different trade partners. For instance, China may make more concessions on labour issues in its negotiations with the EU than those with some small countries.

Therefore, when understanding China’s response to transnational diffusion of social policy from the EU, it is important to take these factors into account. The first set of factors concern the possible impact of policy domain on international diffusion and response. The second set of factors are related to the whether China responded directly or indirectly to the EU’s promotion of labour issues in economic relations include trade and investment³⁵.

³⁴ See discussion in “policy domains and issue areas” in the section of 1.2.2. research focus of this Introduction Chapter.

³⁵ The section of 1.4 Two issue areas in the Conclusion Chapter of this dissertation presents detailed discussion on these factors.

3.4. Qualitative inquiry approach : case study design

3.4.1. Why qualitative methods?

The philosophical basis and the research design of this dissertation require suitable research methods to answer what-questions at first and then also why- and how-questions. Qualitative methods fit well with the positivist position and the needs of exploratory work in political science. More specifically, qualitative methods are powerful in achieving three objectives of this dissertation: accumulating empirical knowledge on specific cases, advancing conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and enhancing links between different research traditions and themes.

In the past decades there have been debates on the advantages of quantitative and qualitative methods in political science in particular and social science in general. Some have argued that there is only one single logic of causal inference, and that quantitative methods are more powerful in identifying causal inferences through large-N analysis. They suggested that qualitative research should employ the same or a similar logic as quantitative researchers (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994). Others contended that an epistemological common ground is more important than methodological differences (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). Even others prefer methodological pluralism, stressing the different logics of causal inference of qualitative methods (Brady & Collier, 2010).

Scholars have defined the advantages of qualitative methods. Firstly, qualitative methods mostly involve the use of thick analysis. As some noted, “whereas the precision and specificity of statistical tests are a distinctive strength of quantitative research, the leverage gained from thick analysis is a characteristic strength of qualitative research.” (Collier, Brady & Seawright 2004, p 249, in Brady and Collier eds. 2004). Thick analysis involves thick description (Geertz, 1973) based on detailed knowledge of cases and their contexts, and thick concepts (Coppedge, 1999) capturing the contextual elements embedded in small-N cases which quantitative analysis of large-N observations may find difficult to address.

Secondly, qualitative methods may also help to use in-depth knowledge of small-N cases to test theories. While quantitative methods can use data-set observation (thin analysis) to generate correlation-based causal inference, qualitative methods can use thick analysis such as causal-process observations to produce process-oriented causal inference. The detailed knowledge of causal processes may help to “carefully rule out alternative explanations” (Collier, Brady & Seawright 2004, p 249, in Brady and Collier eds. 2004). Regarding the

internal validity of qualitative analysis, scholars have pointed at the “ability to test causal statement through tracing the processes that lead to a certain outcome” (Kittel & Kuehn, 2013, p. 2).

Thirdly, qualitative methods can also help to build theories (Andersen & Kragh, 2010). Although external validity and generalization in qualitative research remain under debate (Kittel & Kuehn, 2013), analysts have recognized the ability of qualitative methods to gain external validity (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). Importantly, qualitative methods use different models of generalization than quantitative methods (Polit & Beck, 2010). While quantitative methods follow classic sample-to-population (statistical) generalization, qualitative methods may use analytic generalization and case-to-case transfer (transferability)(Polit & Beck, 2010). Scholars have proposed suggestions to enhance generalization along different models such as planned replication, sampling strategies, systematic reviews, reflexivity and higher-order conceptualization and thick description (Polit & Beck, 2010).

In the past decades of debates and practice, scholars have developed and sharpened qualitative methods and techniques (and software packages) and made them more rigorous and more valid (Creswell, 2012; Norman Kent Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Flick, 2014; Gilbert, Jackson, & di Gregorio, 2014; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013; R. E. Stake, 1995). Scholars have recognized the important contribution of qualitative methods in social science in general (Berg & Lune, 2004) and political science in particular including international relations (IR) (Bennett & Elman, 2006b; Brecher & Harvey, 2002).

Qualitative and quantitative methods may complement each other. Recently, international diffusion scholars have called for more attention to the use of qualitative methods, including cross-case analysis, within-case process tracing and counterfactual reasoning (Starke, 2013).

3.4.2. Study design: case study method

As mentioned in previous sections, my research has been evolving over the past years. With the progress in data collection and analysis, my research design transformed from an explorative study (during 2012-2013), into a design which also accommodates explanatory elements (during 2014-2015). Throughout these periods, the basic method of my research design is case study.

The case study method includes different meta-physical assumptions and positions. Scholars have developed two major approaches to case study: one from a constructivist perspective, the other from a positivist viewpoint (Hyett, Kenny, & Virginia Dickson-Swift, 2014). This dissertation adopts the positivist approach of case study, as advocated by Yin (R. K. Yin, 2014) and Flyvbjerg (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Case studies are popular in qualitative studies. There are different types of case studies (Thomas, 2011). Some proposed have three types: intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies (R. Stake, 2000). When it comes to the research purpose, we can distinguish between two basic types: idiographic case studies (to explain one single case) and case studies aiming to generalize to other cases such as hypothesis generating, hypothesis testing, and plausibility probes (Jack S Levy, 2008).

As an influential methodology book summarized (R. K. Yin, 2014), the strengths of case studies include the ability 1) to answer questions of how and why; 2) to analyze relevant details through thick description and thick data ; 3) to test hypotheses; and 4) to develop theories. Many in social sciences would agree with the first two strengths while some may doubt the utility of case studies for testing hypotheses and developing theories. Indeed, during the past decades mainly quantitative methods have been developed and used to test hypothesis through large-N analysis. However, thanks to the efforts of methodologists to advance case study methods (R. K. Yin, 2014), recently social scientists increasingly recognized that case studies are able to test hypotheses, and that even a single case can be powerful in ruling out alternative hypotheses (J. S. Levy, 2007; Jack S Levy, 2008; Siggelkow, 2007). Meanwhile, the usefulness of case studies for testing hypotheses has been accepted by ever more scholars in social sciences (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

For this dissertation I conducted both an idiographic case study which focuses on understanding a single case, and an instrumental case study which aims to engage with general phenomena and theories. In order to answer specific research questions at the outset of this dissertation, I have used a single case study, within case study and multiple-case study.

3.4.3. From a single case study to a multiple-case study

My research is based on qualitative methods of data collection and analysis and the research design has evolved from a single case study to a multiple-case study. By employing the case study method I have been able to develop my research from an exploratory into an

explanatory study. This evolution is visible throughout my different working drafts, some of which eventually constitute the four articles in this dissertation (see table 3).

Table 3. Research design of articles in my dissertation

	Research questions	Purposes	Outcomes	Articles
Single-case	What are the interactions between the EU and China on social issues over time?	To do idiographic case study	Accumulated empirical knowledge	1
	How have both sides framed social issues in their bilateral relations? How to understand the EU's approach?	To use Crucial case study to test the NPE and/or pragmatic power Europe?	Found evidence of both the NPE and pragmatic power Europe	
	How to understand China's response to the international social policy diffusion ?	To test conceptual frameworks	Developed Conceptual framework	2
Within-case	Why has China been learning European expertise in social security since late 1990s?	To open the black box to examine the causal mechanisms	Identified causal factors in learning	3
Multiple-case studies	Have labour provisions in the EU FTAs travelled to those of China and others?	To use least-likely cases and most-likely cases to test hypothesis and specific predictions To eliminate alternative explanations	Tested hypotheses and predictions Identified the impact of factors of interest	4

3.4.4. Single case study

Single case studies can be idiographic or nomothetic (Jack S Levy, 2008). The former refers to the studies in which understanding the case is as end in itself. The latter refers to those studies aiming to engage with other cases or general phenomena and theories.

Social scientists use single case studies to achieve a variety of purposes (J. S. Levy, 2007). Firstly, the thick description of the particular phenomenon of interest (Siggelkow, 2007) enables scholars to conduct an in-depth analysis, which helps them to improve their measurement of the key hypothesized variables and trace the intervening causal mechanisms (Ray, 1995). Secondly, investigators can use single case studies to test hypotheses and theoretical predictions. Scholars have noticed the utility of a single case to “test a hypothesis that posits necessary or sufficient conditions—or, more generally, any theory that provides precise predictions” (J. S. Levy, 2007).

Indeed, even a few cases or a single case study can yield theoretical insights by testing empirical hypotheses and offering persuasive explanations (Rueschemeyer, 2003, pp. 327-330). Methodologists have identified several rationales for using a single case study: critical case, unusual case, common case, revelatory case and longitudinal case (R. K. Yin, 2014).

Article 1 and 2 in this dissertation use a single case study. In article 1, I firstly explored the social dimension of the EU-China relations since 1975, which was understood as an idiographic case. In explaining the features of that dimension, I used it as a critical case to test the conceptual frameworks of Normative Power Europe (NPE) and pragmatic power Europe. The second article presents China’s varying response to the international diffusion of the social dimension of globalization, which the existing empirical observations on China’s response did not fully anticipate. I also use this case to test the conceptual frameworks of NPE and EU external governance, making use of a conceptual typology of the variability of response. Hence, the case illustrated the advantage of the newly developed conceptual framework.

3.4.5. Within-case study

The in-depth analysis of a single case can unveil more details than a cross-case analysis. These details are useful to “(a) gain a more precise measurement of the key hypothesized variables and (b) trace the intervening causal mechanisms”(J. S. Levy, 2007, p. 202).

Methodologists have developed methods such as causal-process observations or process tracing to seek empirical evidence related to causal factors and compare them with theoretical predictions in the causal chains (Brady & Collier, 2010; D. Collier, 2011; George & Bennett, 2005; Kittel & Kuehn, 2013; Mahoney, 2012).

The third article in this dissertation used within-case analysis to open the “black box” of one case, namely the EU-China exchanges and cooperation in social policy. China’s learning from Europe regarding social security since the late 1990s require explanations. Using process tracing methods helped comparing the details within this case with suggested observations from existing alternative causal accounts in policy learning, including those based on single factors such as geographical or cultural similarities and those from more sophisticated and newly developed typological frameworks of learning (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). Process tracing also calls our attention to the temporal dimension or the impact of time, which was not elaborated in Dunlop and Radaelli’s framework but is actually very important in the learning process of China’s social security policy development.

3.4.6. Multiple-case study

A multiple-case study refers to a study using more than one case, which help to test hypothesis and develop new concepts and hypotheses. Compared with single-case studies, multiple-case studies provide more confidence in theory testing and building (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; R. K. Yin, 2014).

A multi-case study may use crucial cases to test a hypothesis, such as least-likely cases and most-likely cases. If a hypothesis pass the least-likely cases, then its plausibility is enhanced. If that hypothesis fail the most-likely cases, then its plausibility is eliminated. The forth article in this dissertation uses crucial cases to test one hypothesis of labour provisions travelling through free trade agreements against alternatives.

A multi-case study also use a quasi-experimental analysis of two sets of cases: one set as control group and the other as treatment group within which the cases differ from those in the control group in specific attributes of interest. Comparison the two groups can identify the impact of specific factors of interest. The article 4 in this dissertation use this comparison to examine the impact of the EU, the US and China in including labour provisions in FTAs.

A multi-case study may also examine cases in temporal order to examine the temporal patterns of these cases. The article 4 in this dissertation examines the FTAs in chronological order in order to isolate the EU's impact on labour provisions travelling from others, including the US and Canada which may have similar results with the EU, and India and China which may produce the opposite results.

It is important to note the difference between the quantitative analysis of large-N observations and multiple-case study of small-N cases. While the former follows the sampling logic to represent the population to yield statistical generalization, the latter follows the similar logic of experimental design, namely to yield analytical generalization through replication logic (Polit & Beck, 2010; R. K. Yin, 2013). In other words, multiple-case study is analogy of experimental design or quasi-experimental design, focusing on the impact of the treatment (differences between the control group and the other group). The results of multiple-case study needs further tests by using more cases or large-N observations.

3.5. Qualitative content analysis method

This dissertation also uses other methods to enhance data analysis including content analysis. Content analysis is a “systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories” (Stemler, 2001). Methodologists have had fruitful discussions on the application of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2012). This method is helpful to observe trends and patterns in documents (Stemler, 2001). One typical content analysis is to check key word in the text, or corpus-bases content analysis to examine the variation of key words in different texts.

The first article in this dissertation uses key word analysis method to identify the appearance of key words of social issues in the EU-China Summit statements from 2001-2014. This analysis helps portray the evolution of social issues (represented by key words) in that bilateral policy agenda since 2001. The table of the frequency of key words of social issues visualizes the chronological patterns of social issues in those bilateral summits.

The fourth article in this dissertation uses key word analysis method to examine the labour provisions in China's FTA, and its FTA partners' FTA with the EU and others. It firstly sets up a framework of scale (0 - 3) representing different levels of details of labour provisions to code the labour provisions in FTA texts. This framework or category helps to

transform the text of labour provisions into figures to facilitate comparison in tables and visualization in figures.

3.6.Data collection and sources

The data collection work has been conducting throughout the whole process of this research project. Along with the evolution of my research design from exploratory to explanatory stage, the data collection and analysis work are interrelated and interweaving.

At the exploratory stage, I was trying to get access to information to answer a set of “what” questions. Those questions include ones like what are the key social issues in the agenda of bilateral dialogue and cooperation, what has the EU done to engage with China on social issues, and what is China’s response. I have inquired government documents including policy papers, achieves, reports, working documents, statements, official speeches, press release, memorandum, and trade agreements. I get access to these documents from government official websites, media, think tanks, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations and civil society groups. Meanwhile, in Europe I had some interviews with officials from the EU, the ILO and China’s mission to the EU. In addition, I also had personal conversations with experts and practitioners in Europe, who has detailed empirical knowledge on the EU-China interactions in social field. Due to time and practical constraints, I did not manage to conduct interviews with officials in relevant government branches in China. Nor was I able to access to specific and detailed Chinese archives or records on the bilateral ties in social field.

At the explanatory stage, I was trying to get information to answer a variety of “why” questions. Those “why” questions were mainly from the analysis of empirical data collected on international diffusion of social policy in which the EU and China are involved. I read widely academic literature to seek useful conceptual frameworks and theoretical hypotheses. Meanwhile, I iteratively compare the concepts and theoretical predictions with the data I have accumulated. That process also encouraged me to recheck the details of what I have acquired previously. That is, repeated engagement with concepts and theories as well as empirical evidences motivated me to conduct the triangulation of the data to enhance its validity.

The primary data used in this research project was from

- Interviews with officials of the EU institutions in Brussels from Wednesday 10 to Tuesday 16 October 2012. I interviewed officials who have much knowledge on the EU-China

interactions on social issues, including those from the Unit “Far East” in the Directorate General (DG) Trade of the Commission, the Unit for External Relations, Neighbourhood Policy, Enlargement in the DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the Commission, DG for Enterprise and Industry of the Commission, the Unit for Geographical Coordination for Asia and the Pacific in the DG for Development and Cooperation- EuropeAid Office of the Commission, the Human Rights Unit in the DG EXPO of the Parliament, the External Relations’ Unit of the European Economic and Social Committee(EESC).

- Interview with official of ILO office for the European Union and the Benelux countries Brussels on 6 May 2013
- Interviews with official of China’s mission to the EU on 18 November 2014
- Question and Answer sessions, and personal conversations with practitioners and experts at various occasions including
 - o conferences, lectures and seminars organized by international organizations , such as Panel discussion: Meeting Jobs Challenge, World Development Report 2013 on 27 November 2012 (by World Bank Brussels Office), and the Jean Monnet Conference 2013 in Brussels during 14-15 November 2013); the EU and Emerging Powers Conference during 29-30 April 2013 (by the European Parliament) and during 27-28 April 2015(by the EESC).
 - o and other numerous events organized by think tanks and other institutions in Europe such as the European Institute for Asian Studies (EISA), Friends of Europe, European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), European Centre for International Political Economy (ECIPE) (Brussels).

I collected primary data through interviews and conversations with semi-structured questions, to which I have tried to find answers during my exploratory research period. The information gained through interviews and conversations is useful for me to proceed through my exploratory stage. In particular, open questions I asked are very helpful to allow interviewees or informants to freely express their own observations, views and ideas which often surprise me and broaden my horizon on the topics of interest.

Secondary material have been accessed from official websites, data bases and media, including

- governmental websites such as those of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of EU, , European External Action Service (EEAS) and EUR-Lex of the EU; and governmental websites of Brazil, Chile, China, Costa Rica, India, Peru, Singapore, South Korea and the US.
- websites of organizations such as the UN, World Bank, IMF, WTO, ILO, OECD, G20, BRICS, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Pacific Alliance.
- professional websites supplying information such as Agence Europe, EurActiv, TheParliamentMagazine.eu,
- data bases such as the global preferential trade agreement database of the World Bank (<http://wits.worldbank.org/gptad/library.aspx>), the FTA database at the Asia Regional Integration Centre (<http://aric.adb.org/fta>), the Organization of American States Foreign Trade Information System(SICE) (<http://www.sice.oas.org/>), the FTA datasets of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (http://www.apec.org/Groups/Other-Groups/FTA_RTA.aspx), and the FTA database of the bilaterals.org (<http://www.bilaterals.org/?-ftas->),
- and datasets set up by scholars such as Tristan Kohl (<http://www.tristankohl.org/datasets>).

4. Articles in the dissertation

This dissertation includes four articles (see table 4).

Table 4. Four articles

Article	Title	Co-author	Status
1	The Social Dimension of the EU-China Relationship: A Normative and Pragmatic European Approach?	Prof. Dr. Jan Orbie	European Foreign Affairs Review 20, no. 3 (2015): 337–356
2	Framing states' response to international diffusion: the social dimension of globalization in EU-China relationship	Prof. Dr. Jan Orbie	To submit to academic journal soon
3	Learning through trial-and-error process: China's social reform and European Expertise	Prof. Dr. Jan Orbie	Submitted to <i>The British Journal of Politics and International Relations</i>
4	Do EU labour provisions travel to others through an intermediate landing?	Prof. Dr. Jan Orbie	To submit to academic journal soon

4.1. Article 1

This article contributes to the whole dissertation and the body of knowledge at two levels. At empirical level, firstly as an idiographic case study, this article provides empirical basis for the following research in this dissertation. It presents the systematic investigation of social issues in the EU-China relations and provides rich empirical facts to be understood in other articles in this dissertation. It also identifies links between the social aspect and other aspects such as political and economic ones. In this way, this article helps unveil the multifaceted nature and complexity of this relationship which has not received sufficient academic attention in the research of the EU-China relations.

At theoretical level, this study may also serve as an extreme case study and deviant case study to test the prevailing hypotheses of the Normative Power Europe(NPE) and Pragmatic Power Europe(PPE). Firstly, China as one of largest and rapid-growing developing countries, its relations with the EU could serve as an extreme case (in terms of its size and status as independent variable) to help fully examine how far the impact of the NPE could reach. Secondly, if the impact of the NPE could be found in this case, then it could also challenge the hypothesis that the rising power might have negative impact on the NPE (2014). Based on our empirical exploration, we did find the impact of the NPE in social field, namely, China has been learning social policy expertise from Europe through bilateral dialogue and

development cooperation projects. This fits one theoretical prediction of the NPE: the EU could live as an example for others.

4.2. Article 2

This article notes China's varying response to the EU's diffusion of social policy and norms including issues of the social dimension of globalization (SDOG). This empirical phenomenon requires more efforts to problematize the issue of states' response to international diffusion of norms and policies. After iterative efforts to seek, employ and refine the existing conceptual framework such as the NPE and the NLC model, I began to conceptualize the response of the recipient or target states.

That conceptualization innovation firstly involves naming and defining the response of target states. This article introduces a concept : the variability of response (VOR), and developed a conceptual framework of VOR to map the specific response along two dimensions of direction and strength. The findings in this article demonstrates that this conceptual framework help systematically identify China's positions on the diffusion of the issues of SDOG by the EU. More importantly, this in turn enables us to conduct comparison study on China's different positions to identify causal factors and contingent explanations.

4.3. Article 3

It focuses on social security issue, on which China has demonstrated much interest in learning from European expertise. In order to understand China's choosing to learn from the EU and continue learning in social policy since late 1990s, it tests alternative accounts including those focusing on single causal factors and the existing typological framework of learning developed by Dunlop and Radaelli (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). This crucial case study illustrates the advantage of explanatory typology over simple causal accounts in identifying specific types of policy learning and their causal factors. The analysis of China's policy learning offers opportunities to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon of policy learning which involves complex causality.

This single case study of China's learning for European expertise in social security also indicates two ways to refine the conceptual framework of policy learning. To understand the trial-and-error process of China's learning needs to differentiate the levels of policy learning and to examine their interactions over time. Highlighting these two issues

helps to refine the explanatory typology of learning developed by Dunlop and Radaelli (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013).

4.4. Article 4

While the EU and many developed countries including the US promote including labour provisions in FTAs, China and other developing countries take opposing positions due to their economic interests based on low labour costs. However, the findings show that China's FTAs contain labour provisions in varying ways. This puzzle stimulates efforts to examine whether the EU or the others have impact on China's including labour provisions in its FTAs.

This article tests a hypothesis from the existing literature that the EU has "positive and gradual impact" on its FTA partners to pass on labour provisions to others through FTAs (Postnikov & Bastiaens, 2014). The findings indicate that the impact of the EU and others are not very relevant for China to include labour provisions in China's FTAs. It is China's flexibility on including labour provisions in its FTAs that determines the extent of incorporate labour provisions. This case study indicates the response of recipient country should not be ignored, in particular when there is no consensus between the EU and recipient countries on certain issues.

Part two

Part two is reserved for four articles, each of them addressing a particular aspect of the general topic of this dissertation. The first two articles concerns the social dimension of the EU-China relationship, including the EU's approaches and China's response in general. The rest two articles respectively address one particular issue area: social security and including labour provisions in trade agreements.

Article 1

The Social Dimension of the EU-China Relationship: A Normative and Pragmatic European Approach?

Hang Yuan & Jan Orbie

Abstract

Recent decades have seen an expansion in EU-China relations. While this phenomenon has been examined extensively in the existing literature, bilateral interactions in the social field remain largely unexplained. This article investigates the evolution of the social dimension in EU-China relations and finds that social issues receive little attention until the mid-1990s, but increase in importance thereafter. To explore this phenomenon, we found both explanatory power and limits in the ‘normative power Europe’ versus the ‘pragmatic power Europe’ perspectives. Pragmatic concerns help to explain why social issues have become more closely linked to economic than to political ties. Yet they fail to account for the EU’s relatively successful export of social security norms to China. The EU’s normative power could be enhanced rather than inevitably threatened by China’s rapid development. Analysing the social dimension also throws light on the complexity of the EU-China relationship; a complexity that is largely ignored by existing observations.

Keywords: social dimension, EU-China relations, policy learning, normative power Europe

Introduction

Recent decades have seen an expansion in EU-China relations. Yet pessimistic views of this relationship seem to have increased. Scholars have noted the many divergent traditions that emerge from the EU and China, such as historical development, political systems, the economy and foreign policy, and these have often resulted in dispute³⁶. Given China's rapid development and the EU's financial crisis and economic recession, it appears that China's rise has negatively affected the EU's ability to act as a 'normative' power, such that China is a 'problem' for the EU³⁷. However, EU-China relations extend beyond the fields of politics, economics and trade, on which the existing literature focuses. To what extent these studies reflect the true nature of bilateral relations between the EU and China is unclear.

To enhance their 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership', both sides have recently signed up to the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation³⁸. Sustainable development has for the first time become a major theme, alongside three other policy areas, and receives more attention than the other three areas in terms of both issue points and word length³⁹. Within the field of sustainable development, social issues including employment and social security have received growing attention. Yet few studies seem to have investigated the social aspect of the EU-China relationship or considered how and why both parties have addressed social issues in their bilateral relations.

This study explores the evolution of EU-China relations in the social field during 1975-2015, with a focus on the issues of employment, labour and social security⁴⁰. In the next section we investigate how both sides have framed social issues in their bilateral relations. We find that China and the EU attached little attention to social issues until the mid-1990s, but expanded and deepened the bilateral dialogue and cooperation on these issues later. More specifically, both sides reach more consensus on employment and social security affairs than on labour

³⁶ See, e.g. Jonathan Holslag, *The Elusive Axis: Assessing the EU-China Strategic Partnership*, 49(2), *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 293-313(2011); Jing Men, *The EU and China: mismatched partners?*, 21(74), *Journal of Contemporary China*, 333-349 (2012).

³⁷ Ayse Kaya, *The EU's China problem: A battle over norms*, 51(2), *International Politics*, 214-233(2014).

³⁸ See, e.g. *Celebrating 40 years of EU-China diplomatic relations (12/02/2015)*, http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/press_corner/all_news/news/2015/20150212_en.htm?utm_source=CRN+EUROCHINA+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=e600915cde-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2814b93a1f-e600915cde-16990513 (accessed February 17 2015).

³⁹ See The EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation (November 2013). The other three themes are peace and security, prosperity, and people-to-people. The theme of peace and security contains thirteen issue points (on two pages); the theme of prosperity twenty-eight points(four pages); sustainable development forty-one points(six pages); people-to-people exchanges ten points (two pages).

⁴⁰ We analysed the available data up to February 2015.

issues. Moreover, they have linked social cooperation more closely to economic than political issues. In particular, China has shown interest in learning from EU expertise in matters of social security and workplace health and safety.

Existing arguments in terms of Europe's 'normative power' and 'pragmatic power' are useful but also have their limits as an explanation of these findings. While arguments stressing the EU's pragmatic approach help to explain why the EU links social issues more to economic than to political matters, they fail to account for the EU's export of social models to China, which have partially led to an expansion in bilateral dialogue and cooperation in the social field this century. Interestingly, China's learning from EU social security expertise supports the latter's normative power rather than poses a threat to it. We conclude with views on the likely future of bilateral relations.

1. Studies on EU-China Relations

The social aspect of this relationship has not been studied. Firstly, scholarship of political science, international relations and international political economy focuses on aspects such as political relations (including human rights)⁴¹, economic and trade ties⁴², international affairs⁴³, and to a lesser extent, other issues including environmental protection and climate⁴⁴, science

⁴¹ See, e.g. Mingjiang Li *China-EU Relations: Strategic Partnership at a Crossroads*, 7(2), *China-an International Journal*, 227-254(2005); Jing Men & Pardo, R. P, *Convergence and divergence between the EU and China*, 12(1-2), *Asia Europe Journal*, 1-3(2014); Antoine Sautenet, *The current status and prospects of the 'strategic partnership' between the EU and China: Towards the conclusion of a partnership and cooperation agreement*, 13(6), *European Law Journal*, 699-731(2007); Frank Umbach, *Strategic partnership of multilateral kowtow? The EU-China relations and the abolition of the embargo*, *Internationale Politik*, 60(3), 70-77(2005).

⁴² See, e.g. Tomasz Grzegorz Grossea, *Geoeconomic Relations Between the EU and China: The Lessons From the EU Weapon Embargo and From Galileo*, 19(1), *Geopolitics*, 40-65(2014); Michael Smith, *EU-China relations and the limits of economic diplomacy*, 12(1-2), *Asia Europe Journal*, 35-48(2014); David Scott, *Trust, structures and Track-2 Dialogue in the EU-China relationship: resetting and resettling a 'strategic partnership'?* 12(1-2), *Asia Europe Journal*, 21-34(2014); Yan Luo, *Engaging the private sector: EU China trade disputes under the shadow of WTO law?*, 13(6), *European Law Journal*, 800-817(2007); Franco Algeri, *EU economic relations with China: An institutionalist perspective*, (169), *China Quarterly*, 64-77(2002).

⁴³ See, e.g. Miguel Otero-Iglesias & Ming Zhang, *EU-China Collaboration in the Reform of the International Monetary System: Much Ado About Nothing?*, 37(1), *World Economy*, 151-168(2014); William A. Callahana, *Future imperfect: The European union's encounter with China (and the United States)*, 30(4-5), *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 777-807(2007); Uwe Wissenbach, *The EU's Response to China's Africa Safari: Can Triangular Co-operation Match Needs?*, 21(4), *European Journal of Development Research*, 662-674(2009); Terry Narramore, *China and Europe: engagement, multipolarity and strategy*, 21(1), *Pacific Review*, 87-108(2008); David Scott, *Multipolarity, Multilateralism and Beyond ... ? EU-China Understandings of the International System*, 27(1), *International Relations*, 30-51(2013).

⁴⁴ See, e.g. David Scott, *Environmental issues as a 'strategic' key in EU-China relations*, 7(2), *Asia Europe Journal*, 211-224(2009); Jing Men, *Climate change and EU-China partnership: realist disguise or institutionalist blessing?*, 12(1-2), *Asia Europe Journal*, 49-62(2014).

and technology⁴⁵, as well as culture and education⁴⁶. Secondly, and linked to this, few EU and China scholars have systematically investigated bilateral interactions in the social field. Even those authors who provide a comprehensive overview of several aspects of the EU-China relationship do not cover social aspects⁴⁷. One recent study investigated five main sectors but did not address the social aspect as an independent one⁴⁸. Thirdly, sociologists, who customarily conduct domestic and comparative social policy analysis, have paid little attention to the international and global dimension of China's social policy⁴⁹. While some studies document international influence on China's social policy, such as the United Nations; the International Labour Organization (ILO); and the World Bank (WB)⁵⁰, EU influence remains relatively unexamined. Further, it is unclear whether the EU itself has benefited from exchanges and cooperation with China in social policy.

Limited research of the social aspect has at least two consequences. Firstly, existing literature offers no direct answers to questions concerning bilateral interactions in the social field. It remains unclear how both sides frame their dialogue and cooperation in the social field in their general relations, and how and why these interactions have on the increase. Secondly, it is uncertain to what extent these observations reflect other dimensions of bilateral relations, and whether the views based on the study of other fields would provide useful analysis of the social aspect of EU-China relations. Studies of political ties would stress political differences between the two sides and reveal the difficulties of bilateral dialogue and strategic partnership⁵¹. Insights from an economic angle would no doubt reveal a growing number of exchanges based on common interests⁵². It is therefore important to survey the existing observations and arguments regarding this relationship to understand how they might elucidate social phenomena.

⁴⁵ Oliver Bräuner, *Beyond the Arms Embargo: EU Transfers of Defense and Dual-Use Technologies to China*, 13(3), *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 457-482(2013).

⁴⁶ Zhang Yongjin, *Culture, knowledge and diplomacy in contemporary EU-China relations-reflections on the legacies of Matteo Ricci*. 12(1-2), *Asia Europe Journal*, 5-19(2014); Cristina Pinna, *EU-China relations in higher education*, 7(3-4), *Asia Europe Journal*, 505-527(2009).

⁴⁷ See (2014) 19 (1) EFA Rev special issue.

⁴⁸ Holslag, *supra* n. 2.

⁴⁹ Herbert Obinger, Carina Schmitt & Peter Starke, *Policy Diffusion and Policy Transfer in Comparative Welfare State Research*, 47(1), *Social Policy & Administration*, 111-129(2013).

⁵⁰ See, e.g. John B. Williamson & Catherine Deitelbaum, *Social security reform: Does partial privatization make sense for China?*, 19(2), *Journal of Aging Studies*, 257-271(2005); as is 刘冬梅, *论国际机制对中国社会保障制度与法律改革的影响*, (5), *比较法研究*, 22-36(2011).

⁵¹ See, e.g. Pradeep Taneja, (2010). *China-Europe relations: The limits of strategic partnership*, 47(3-4), *International Politics*, 371-387 (2010); Men, *supra* n.2.

⁵² See, e.g. Li, *supra* n. 7; Scott, *supra* n.8.

Scholars have sufficiently explored the EU's perspective. Current accounts of EU external relations encompass positions between the two limits: they either emphasize the EU's capability to socialize others, or underscore the limits of this socialization. On the one hand, some EU scholars have noted that in an increasingly interdependent world, the EU has been actively exporting its norms through European external governance or Europeanization⁵³. Some have stressed the uniqueness of this bloc, such as its particular constitutional nature and the normative underpinning of its external actions, and tended to view Europe as a 'civilian power' or a promoter of 'normative power Europe' (NPE)⁵⁴. Ian Manners argues that the EU 'exists as being different to pre-existing political forms' and 'act[s] in a normative way', meaning that it can better be viewed as a normative power rather than as a civilian or military power⁵⁵. These liberalisms or liberal justifications of EU external action suggest that it is the 'duty' of the EU to advance certain liberal norms outside its borders in order to shape the world⁵⁶. Indeed, the EU has been trying to promote the so-called European social model and international social initiatives advocated by the ILO and the OECD, including the social dimension of globalization in the world⁵⁷. Literature has documented the EU's varying degrees of success in exporting European norms to its 'near abroad', its neighbouring countries, through integration, enlargement and neighbourhood policies⁵⁸.

These approaches would suggest that the EU has been promoting its social norms towards China. For example, an NPE would act through 'living by example' in principles; 'being

⁵³ See, e.g. Sandra Lavenex, *EU external governance in 'wider Europe'*, 11(4), *Journal of European Public Policy*, 680-700(2004); Sandra Lavenex & Frank Schimmelfennig, *EU rules beyond EU borders: theorizing external governance in European politics*, 16(6), *Journal of European Public Policy*, 791-812(2009); Frank Schimmelfennig, *Europeanization beyond Europe*, 4(3) *Living Reviews in European Governance*, (2009).

⁵⁴ See, e.g. François Duchene, *Europe's role in world peace*. *Europe tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans look ahead* (RJ Mayne, Fontana, 1972); Ian Manners, *Normative power Europe: A contradiction in terms?*, 40(2), *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 235-258(2002); Ian Manners, *Assessing the decennial, reassessing the global: Understanding European Union normative power in global politics*, 48(2), *Cooperation and Conflict*, 304-329(2013).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Manners 2002, p. 242.

⁵⁶ Ben Rosamond, *Three Ways of Speaking Europe to the World: Markets, Peace, Cosmopolitan Duty and the EU's Normative Power*, 16(1), *British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 133-148(2014).

⁵⁷ See, e.g. Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission: the Social Dimension of Globalization - the EU's policy contribution on extending* (18 May 2004) COM (2004) 383 final; Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission: Promoting decent work for all: the EU contribution to the implementation of the decent work agenda in the world* (24 May 2006) COM(2006) 249 final; Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission: Renewed social agenda: opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st century Europe* (2 July 2008) COM(2008) 412 final; Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission: a renewed EU Strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility* (25 Oct. 2011) COM(2011) 681.

⁵⁸ See, e.g. Jan Orbie, Lisa Tortell, Robert Kissack, Sieglinde Gstöhl, Jan Wouters, & Hachez, Nicolas. *JESP Symposium: The European Union's global social role*. 19(2), *Journal of European social policy*, 99-116(2009).

reasonable' in actions, and 'doing least harm' in consequences⁵⁹. Accordingly, the EU should demonstrate the attractiveness of its social models to the world. These models include welfare systems, policies to protect social rights, and initiatives to promote corporate social responsibility. The EU should also persuade China to accept these norms and policies through bilateral dialogue and cooperation as well as other policy instruments, preferably embedded within international agreements such as the ILO conventions. Finally, the EU's efforts to export its social norms should also do the 'least harm' to China's society.

On the other hand, scholars have contended that the EU's ambition to socialize China has been faced with difficulties such as differences in political values and systems, the rising power of China, and the EU's shrinking leverage in comparison⁶⁰. The EU's confidence in socializing China has not resulted in the expected convergence of the two on the norms enshrined by Europe⁶¹. The normative or idealist perspectives do not explain why the EU has failed to convince China on political values and human rights⁶². The EU is facing an 'uneasy coexistence between normative concerns and material interests' in its policy on China's human rights issues⁶³. Some authors have identified the EU as a 'pragmatic power' rather than a 'normative power' in the case of China⁶⁴. They note that the EU is formulating a more pragmatic policy towards China⁶⁵ – from a values-based to an interests-based engagement⁶⁶. Further, some argue that China is a 'problem' for the EU because the former's rise is negatively affecting the EU's ability to act as a 'normative' power⁶⁷.

These authors would expect the EU to take a pragmatic approach that balances normative and material objectives. Since the EU has been frustrated in its attempts to increase political pressure on China in recent years, it would lose too much if it continued to confront this emerging power. Instead, if the EU takes a soft approach or employs constructivist

⁵⁹ Ian Manners, *The normative ethics of the European Union*, 84(1), *International Affairs*, 45-60(2008); Ian Manners, *The social dimension of EU trade policies: reflections from a Normative Power Perspective*, 14(5), 785-802 (2009) *EFA Rev.* For studies on social dimension of EU trade policies, see (2009) 14 (5) special issue.

⁶⁰ See, e.g. Giuseppe Balducci, *The limits of normative power Europe in Asia: The case of human rights in China*, 27(1), *East Asia*, 35-55(2010); Kenneth Chan, *Images, visibility and the prospects of soft power of the EU in Asia: the case of China*, 8(2), *Asia Europe Journal*, 133-147(2010); Holslag, *supra*. n.2 ; Mikael Mattlin, *Dead on arrival: normative EU policy towards China*, 10(2-3), *Asia Europe Journal*, 181-198(2012).

⁶¹ Holslag, *supra* n. 2.

⁶² Mattlin, *supra* n.26.

⁶³ Wenwen Shen, *EU-China Relations on Human Rights in Competing Paradigms: Continuity and Change*. The Palgrave Handbook of EU-Asia Relations (Thomas Christiansen, Emil Kirchner & Philomena B. Murray, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁶⁴ Steve Wood, *Pragmatic power Europe?*, 46(2), *Cooperation and Conflict*, 242-261(2011).

⁶⁵ Scott, *supra* n.8.

⁶⁶ Paul Irwin Crookes, *Resetting EU-China relations from a values-based to an interests-based engagement*, 50(5), *International Politics*, 639-663(2013).

⁶⁷ Kaya, *supra* n.3.

engagement, it would both integrate China through exercising its normative power and enjoy the economic returns of cooperation with China. Accordingly, this would suggest a shift in the EU's emphasis from political pressure to a more pragmatic approach, focusing on dialogue and cooperation in the social-economic sphere.

2. The Social Dimension of EU-China Relations

The social dimension of EU-China relations refers to their bilateral interactions on a range of social issues, including employment, labour, social welfare, health, and education. This dimension is interrelated and overlaps with political, economic and other aspects of EU-China relations. We focus in this article on two issues: employment and labour, and social welfare. Employment and labour issues include workers' rights and conditions in the workplace. Social welfare includes social security, social inclusion and social development.

We investigated how policy-makers have framed social issues over time. We examined both policy documents and events with the basic assumption that if some issues have been conceived important and urgent to address, both sides would probably move forward from rhetorical commitments to action. The general trend of social issues in EU-China relations proves to be as follows: they received little attention in the first two decades since bilateral relations were established in 1975, but increasing attention in the second two decades (1995-2015), in particular during the years since 2003.

Social issues, in particular those of employment, social security and labour, received little attention prior to the mid-1990s. Trade relations were the centrepiece of bilateral ties during that period. Yet no special clauses addressed these issues in the two major bilateral legal documents which were signed during this period and have been shaping the EU-China relationship – the Trade Agreement of 1978 and the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation signed in 1985. Neither have other legal documents on specific issues, such as the EU-China Agreement on textile trade signed in 1979, or bilateral meetings between governmental branches, given particular attention to these issues, such as the inter-parliamentary meeting⁶⁸ or political consultations at ministerial level⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ The first inter-parliamentary meeting was held in Strasbourg between 16th-19th June 1980.

⁶⁹ The first political consultations at ministerial level in the context of European Political Cooperation were held in 1984.

In the years since the mid-1990s, however, we witness increasing attention to social issues. The framework of a structured EU-China political dialogue was established in 1994 and upgraded in 1998, 2002 and 2010. The current bilateral political dialogue framework consists of Annual Summits⁷⁰, annual ‘executive-to-executive’ meetings and other regular dialogues at various governmental levels, covering a wide range of issues. Social issues appear in a number of concrete channels, including Human Rights Dialogue, Sectoral Cooperation and Dialogues on Employment and Social Affairs, Development Aid projects, as well as various bilateral academic seminars on specific issues including employment, working conditions and the CSR⁷¹. The remainder of this section focuses on this phase. We firstly examine official documents to see how policy-makers view the social dimension of these bilateral relations. We also survey the bilateral actions taken in the social field.

We analysed official documents through automatic content analysis on key terms and hand-coding (substantial reading). The documents under automatic content analysis include the Joint Statements (or Communiqués) of the 4th-15th EU-China Summits (2001-2012); the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation issued after the 16th Summit (2013); the Joint Statement: Deepening the EU-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for mutual benefit (2014)⁷². These documents have clearly organized common concerns and consensus in different fields, despite varying word lengths, drafting styles and even structures from year to year. While they would not necessarily reveal the precise ways in which top leaders conceive and frame social issues in their minds, they still provide us with a good reflection of policy-makers’ perspectives on these issue and priorities in the policy agenda⁷³. Specifically, we assume that: 1) the issues appearing in the joint press statements usually reflect the common concerns of both sides; 2) the issues which have been intensively discussed and/or agreed on actions were often mentioned in sufficient detail with specific terms in the joint press statements, and vice versa. The coding scheme of automatic content analysis includes general terms, which refer to social issues such as social reform and social development, and specific/technical terms, which focus on three issues: employment, social welfare and labour

⁷⁰ It is the Chinese Premier who usually attends these Summits.

⁷¹ For the whole dialogue architecture, see European External Action Service, *EU-China Dialogue Architecture*, http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/eu_china_dialogues_en.pdf (accessed 25 February 2015).

⁷² The Joint Statements of the EU-China Summits before 2001 are not available. The latest formal Summit Chinese Premier attended is the 16th (November 2013) which did not issue a joint statement, only a press release and the Strategic Agenda, which could be viewed as a joint statement in terms of structure and word length. The Joint Statement in April 2014 was issued after Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Brussels, which was not the 17th bilateral Summit.

⁷³ The existing research has analysed these joint statements for different purposes. For instance, Jonathan Holslag examined seven statements (2001-2007) to assess how the EU-China strategic partnership had been formulated in general. Yet that study did not focus on the social dimension of this relationship. See Holslag *supra* n.2.

(see Table 1, in the Annex)⁷⁴. In this way, we try to capture the whole status of social issues in the bilateral relations while focusing on three issues of interest.

Our automatic content analysis indicates the general trend of attention paid to social issues. The terms referring to social issues increased during 2001-2007 and 2012, but did not appear in three summits in 2009, 2010 and 2014 (see Table 1, in annex). There are interesting changes in general terms. China's 'economic and social reform' was mentioned until 2004, but never appeared again in subsequent years. By contrast, 'economic and social development' appeared in 2006 and 2007, as well as 2012. The year 2013 witnessed new terms such as 'social progress', 'social policy' and 'social challenge'. In addition, the frequency of specific terms has indicated more detailed trends on three issues. Employment was mentioned between 2003 and 2007 (except in 2006) but not in the following three summits until the 15th in 2012 when it was stressed again. Specific terms around labour and social security increasingly appeared during the 7th-10th (2004-2007) and 15th-16th (September 2012-2013) summits, indicating that these years were of interest. Social security issues were mentioned only in 2004, 2007 and 2012-2013. Some specific labour-related terms also received much attention, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), decent work and CSR. In summary, the frequency of terms on social issues help to highlight a couple of interesting time points such as 2003, 2007 and 2012.

To further reveal how social issues have been framed in the EU-China relations, we conducted intensive text analysis of these and other official documents. We identified three features of bilateral dialogue and cooperation in the social field.

Firstly, compared to political, economic and trade ties, the social dimension remains small, but has been extending in more issue areas, deepening (from general concerns to more specific and technical topics) and materializing (from rhetorical commitments to actions and projects). China's 'economic and social reform' had been mentioned until 2004, but in the following years 'sustainable development' began to appear. The social issues discussed here have been viewed as components of the inter-sectoral dialogue and cooperation, later labelled

⁷⁴ We generated this scheme after iterative efforts to both keep the original use of these terms in the joint statements and to keep our aforementioned research focus.

as the second pillar of the EU-China dialogues. These issues have usually been framed around the theme of ‘sustainable economic and social development’⁷⁵.

Since the 2004 Summit, leaders decided to take concrete steps to facilitate China’s social reform. They endorsed the EU-China Social Security Reform Co-operation Project, one of the four financial agreements for China’s economic and social reform, through providing European expertise (points 14 and 18). They also emphasized the initiative on establishing an EU-China dialogue and co-operation mechanisms on employment and social affairs, including a regular dialogue between the civil society organizations of both sides, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the China Economic and Social Council (CESC) (point 16). At the 2005 Summit, the two sides endorsed a Memorandum of Understanding on labour, employment and social affairs⁷⁶. In 2006, they continually stressed exchanges and cooperation in fields such as environmental protection, labour and social affairs (point 30), as well as energy to support sustainable economic and social development (point 21).

The 2007 Summit issued the longest joint statement of the period of study, with a number of details in all fields, including social issues such as social security, labour law (labour dispute settlement), health and safety at work, social assistance, social welfare and social affairs. Both sides expressed their satisfaction with cooperation in the field of employment and social affairs, ‘as an important element of the dialogue on sustainable development and decent work’ (point 41). They emphasized the contribution of the 2nd High Level Round Table on Social Security in Berlin (2007) to China’s reforms. They took note of the cooperation in the field of labour law, and the exchange of experience in labour dispute settlement in Beijing (2007), and pledged to establish a structured dialogue in the field of health and safety at work, and to sign a Memorandum of Understanding in early 2008. Further, the two sides agreed to strengthen cooperation on social assistance, social welfare and social affairs (point 41). Additionally, they stressed the need to support sustainable development through more support for corporate social responsibility (point 19) and attention to the energy issue (point 23). Meanwhile, both sides also noted the importance of the exchange of best practice in economic and social management and public service (point 26).

⁷⁵ This theme also includes associated issues such as China’s economic and social reform, energy and cyber issues.

⁷⁶ The Memorandum of Understanding on Labour, Employment and Social Affairs was signed by Commissioner Vladimír Špidla and the Chinese Minister of Labour and Social Security, Tian Chengping at the EU-China Summit in Beijing on 5 September 2005.

The summits between 2008-2011 (there were no summits in 2008 or 2011) did not mention social issues. However, the two summits in 2012 highlighted social issues again. In the 14th summit (2012 February), the EU and China express the importance of bilateral strategic cooperation for both their sustainable economic and social development and for addressing common challenges facing the world (point 1). They also took note of the status cyber issues in promoting economic and social development (point 21). In the 15th Summit (September 2012), they were satisfied with ‘exchanges of policy experience in social security, occupational safety and health, youth employment, inclusive growth models and labour relations’. They explicitly referred to the ILO as the framework to promote a decent work agenda, through the cooperation project on occupational safety and health in high-risk sectors and continuing cooperation on social security, pensions and social inclusion. (point 30). While the Joint Statement by Presidents issued in 2014 did not explicitly mention social issues, it contained some points on sustainable development.

Secondly, within the social field, social security and employment have become two key themes. As one of the bilateral sectoral dialogues, cooperation on employment and social affairs has advanced remarkably since the signature at the 2005 Summit of the MoU on Labour, Employment and Social Affairs. In 2009, another MoU on Health and Safety at Work was signed, focusing on the pressing problem of safety in the coalmine sector in China⁷⁷. Moreover, the biannual EU-China Round Table, the semi-official dialogues (viewed as organized by civil society) co-established by the EESC and the CESC since 2007, have intensively discussed environment and social development, economic and social rights⁷⁸.

They also launched development projects to facilitate exchange of experience and best practices on social issues. These led to the transfer of expertise and experience from the EU to China. On social security, they launched the EU-China Social Security Reform Project (2006-2011) targeting China’s policy development and capacity building through the EU’s expert assistance in four areas: pensions benefiting both urban and rural residents, and health, unemployment and work injury insurance schemes. This project, which is the largest in China’s external cooperation in the social field, has been viewed as ‘one of the flagship

⁷⁷It was signed by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission and the State Administration of Work Safety of the People’s Republic of China, to set up a policy dialogue and cooperation in the field of health and safety at work.

⁷⁸ They held thirteen meetings up to February 2015.

cooperation projects between the two sides’⁷⁹. This cooperation has stimulated more platforms for China’s learning from European expertise, such as the EU-China High Level Round Table on Social Security (2006-2011) and the China Social Security Forum (2006-2013). Both sides are continuing their cooperation through the EU-China Social Protection Reform Project (2013-2018) to ‘support China in further developing social equality’⁸⁰. In addition, based on the two MoUs signed in 2005 and 2009, they are implementing the EU-China Occupational Safety and Health Project in High Risk Industries (2012-2016) to facilitate China’s improvement in workplace safety and health.

Third, social issues have recently been linked more closely to non-political issues – more specifically to economic ones⁸¹. While the Summit documents often mention international human rights standards, they do not explicitly include labour rights and standards when discussing human rights affairs. Similarly, as one channel of bilateral political dialogue, EU-China human rights dialogues have barely discussed social rights or labour rights⁸². Further, as mentioned above, both sides have shifted wording from ‘China’s economic and social reform’ to ‘sustainable economic and social development’ since 2004.

In particular, social issues have recently been linked to trade and investment. We found no direct evidence of incorporating social issues such as labour standards into the EU-China negotiations on China’s accession to the WTO in 2000 or the 2005 EU-China Textile Agreement. Yet the High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue has incorporated the social dimension as a sustainable development issue in bilateral economic cooperation since 2007⁸³. Bilateral negotiations on the new bilateral trade agreement and bilateral investment (BI) agreement, which began in 2006 and 2013 respectively, have also covered issues of sustainable development, including social standards and corporate social responsibility⁸⁴.

⁷⁹ Tan Yingzi, China Daily, *China, EU focus on social security schemes*, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2009-10/19/content_8812676.htm (Updated: 2009-10-19 11:05) (accessed 10 January 2013).

⁸⁰ The institutions involved include China’s National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Ministry of Commerce (MOC), Ministry of Finance (MOF) and Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA) as well as members of EU consortium, mainly from Fornez Institute of Italy. See also *EU-CHINA - Social Protection Reform*, <http://www.fornez.eu/node/1603> (accessed 10 Sept. 2014).

⁸¹ Social issues are also linked more to the cultural field. But compared to their relations to economic issues, the link to the cultural dimension is of marginal importance.

⁸² We gained this observation by analysing available documents released after the 27th-33rd EU-China Human Rights Dialogues during (2009-2014) and discuss them in more detail in the next section.

⁸³ Four meetings were held up to February 2015. See *Inaugural meeting of the EU-China High Level Economic and Trade Dialogue Mechanism (HLM): 25 April 2008*, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2008/april/tradoc_138632.pdf (accessed 2 February 2013).

⁸⁴ Four rounds of negotiations were held on the bilateral investment agreement up to February 2015.

3. European Perspective: Pragmatic and Normative

Understanding the social dimension of this relationship, including its general trends and features, involves seeking answers to a number of questions. We focus on two here: why have social issues received increasing attention since the early 2000s and why have both sides linked social issues more to economic than to political affairs? Answering these questions would have implications for at least two research themes: EU external relations and EU-China relations.

We found both explanatory power and limits within the literature on EU external relations. On the one hand, arguments stressing the EU's pragmatic approaches can help to explain why social issues have been linked more closely to economic affairs than to political affairs. They denote a shift in the EU's emphasis from political pressure on China to a more pragmatic approach focusing on social-economic dialogue and cooperation. In fact, in its China policy papers in the 2000s, the EU began to stress improving the efficiency and effectiveness of encouraging China's social reform and development through expanding sectoral dialogues⁸⁵. Our analysis of the EU-China summit statements also indicates a shift in the linkage of social issues to other fields, from high political issues such as human rights to low political and more technical issues. Since 2004, as mentioned above, both sides have shifted from stressing 'China's economic and social reform' to realizing 'sustainable economic and social development'. While these documents have often mentioned international human rights standards, they have not explicitly referred to core labour standards. The ILO has only recently been referred to (since 2012) but not in direct relation to core labour standards.

Although the EU-China Human Rights Dialogues sometimes noted certain social rights such as women's rights and the right to housing⁸⁶, they did not stress core labour standards as fully as political and civil rights. There are a few exceptions, for instance when the EU mentioned re-education through the labour system in China⁸⁷, and when China expressed its concern

⁸⁵ See European Commission, *EU Strategy towards China: Implementation of the 1998 Communication and Future Steps for a more Effective EU Policy* (15 May 2001) COM(2001) 265 final; European Commission, *A maturing partnership - shared interests and challenges in EU-China relations* (10 Sept. 2003) COM(2003) 533 final.

⁸⁶ See, e.g. Press Release, EEAS, *33rd EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights (09/12/2014)*, http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/press_corner/all_news/news/2014/20141209_en.htm?utm_source=CRN+EUROCHINA+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=f745e68b4e-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2814b93a1f-f745e68b4e-16990513 (accessed 25 January 2015).

⁸⁷ See *The EU and China hold the 29th round of their Human Rights Dialogue*, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/droi/dv/droi_20100715_4china3_/droi_20100715_4china3_

about the social rights situation in Europe⁸⁸. The EU also noted progress in completing the social security system in China⁸⁹. The relatively infrequent mentions of labour issues and labour rights denotes less emphasis and little consensus on these issues.

This is in accordance with assessments stressing the EU's pragmatic concerns when dealing with disagreements with China on differences in their political and social system. While the EU recognizes economic and social rights as components of human rights⁹⁰, it has not attached sufficient importance to these issues when engaging with China. Although the EU could raise social rights issues in bilateral dialogues with China, it did not take the opportunity to do so in recent years. By contrast, the EU often attempts to highlight civil and political rights issues, which dominate the agenda of human rights dialogues⁹¹. In a sense, this is not surprising because it has tried to balance the ideal objectives of promoting human rights and political values on the one hand, with keeping open dialogue and cooperation with China in economic and other fields on the other⁹².

Yet scholars noting realistic aspects of this relationship might find it hard to understand why China has valued European expertise in sustainable development and social policy. Literature from this perspective would not sufficiently explain why China would choose to draw policy lessons from EU expertise in the social field, especially in social security and social inclusion. In fact, China has shown interest in EU models and expertise⁹³, especially in economic and social policies⁹⁴. This offers the EU opportunities to demonstrate and enhance its normative power. These observations would challenge the current argument that China's development is a threat to the EU's 'normative power'⁹⁵.

en.pdf (accessed 2 January 2013); 2013, Press Release, EEAS, *EU Special Representative for Human Rights visits China*, Brussels, 20 September 2013, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/130920_02_en.pdf (accessed 4 October 2013).

⁸⁸ At the 32nd round of the "EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights" in Guiyang (Guizhou), China, 25 June 2013. See *EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights*, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137607.pdf (accessed 1 September 2013).

⁸⁹ At the 30th Round of the EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights. See *EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights (16/06/2011)*, http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/press_corner/all_news/news/2011/20110616_01_en.htm (accessed 15 November 2012).

⁹⁰ See the Council of the European Union, *EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (11855/12)*(Luxembourg, 25 June 2012).

⁹¹ We gained this observation by analysing available documents released from the 27th-33rd EU-China Human Rights Dialogues during (2009-2014).

⁹² See, e.g. Mattlin, *supra* n.26.

⁹³ Xinning Song, *European 'models' and their implications to China: internal and external perspectives*. 36(3), *Review of International Studies*, 755-775(2010).

⁹⁴ Hong Zhou, *EU social policy studies in China*. 2(3), *Asia Europe Journal*, 415-427(2004).

⁹⁵ Kaya, *supra* n.3.

Moreover the expanding and deepening ties in the social field also indicate that interpretations from a purely political perspective would run the risk of simplifying our understanding of the complexity of this bilateral relationship. While differences in the political field might result in disagreements and disputes on certain human rights issues, social development is not necessarily the source of dispute or tensions between the parties. Overstating the differences between the two sides would lead to an unnecessarily pessimistic assessment of their relations. Differences in the social field can offer opportunities for policy learning and interdependence. China's learning from the EU in the social field actually becomes a driver for continuous bilateral dialogue and cooperation. Therefore, the observations based on either political or economic aspects of bilateral relations can be different from those made on social phenomena. Research into the social dimension can in turn enrich our understanding of the complex nature of this bilateral relationship.

On the other hand, EU external governance and the NPE perspectives have explanatory power in predicting the normative efforts of the EU, which facilitated the trend of a growing social dimension in EU-China relations in the 2000s. The EU has issued a series of official papers towards China since 1995 that have demonstrated its intentions and strategies to engage China through encouraging stable reform, good governance and sustainable development⁹⁶. In these official papers, the EU noted the social situation in China and urged social reforms in areas including social rights, social security and social cohesion. For instance, on social security and social cohesion, regarding the potential consequences of economic and social reform in China, the EU suggested that it could 'help China address'⁹⁷ social issues such as social cohesion and social stability by providing expertise to 'reduce side-effects of company restructuring, notably welfare reform'⁹⁸; and search for 'new models of welfare'⁹⁹; and by developing cooperation to 'reduce regional disparities, alleviate poverty and improve social cohesion'¹⁰⁰. On social rights, in particular labour rights, the EU mentioned the lack of 'adequate social protection including freedom of association for employees' and the use of

⁹⁶ The EU has explicitly claimed these objectives and strategies in a series of official documents on policy towards China. See, e.g. European Commission, Communication from the Commission: *a long term policy for China-Europe relations* (1995) COM(95)279 final; European Commission, *Building a comprehensive partnership with China* (1998) COM(1998) 181 final; European Commission, *supra* n.52; European Commission, *EU – China: Closer partners, growing responsibilities* (2006) COM(2006) 632 final; The Council of European Union, *EU-China Strategic Partnership* (2006); European Parliament, *EU foreign policy towards the BRICS and other emerging powers* (2012) 2011/2111(INI); European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2013 on EU-China relations* (2013) 2012/2137(INI).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, European Commission, (1998), p19.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p22.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p19.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p 22.

enforced prison labour in China¹⁰¹. The EU expressed its concerns about ‘China's failure to observe internationally agreed core labour standards as set out in the relevant ILO Conventions and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work’¹⁰².

The EU has policy instruments at its disposal such as dialogue, development cooperation, trade and investment to pursue its objectives. Since 1995 it has tried to update and improve dialogues with China including the human rights dialogue and sectoral dialogues to promote China’s reform and transition. In enhancing the effectiveness of dialogue, it has also attempted to extend bilateral development cooperation projects and assistance programmes to cover issues such as social security and social development¹⁰³. Chinese scholars have noted European experience/approaches in the social field and have called upon officials to learn from international expertise, particularly those models in Europe¹⁰⁴. The EU also considered using trade to promote social norms and standards. China was the main beneficiary of the EU’s GSP system¹⁰⁵ but has never been eligible for GSP+. Recently, the EU has placed emphasis on including social standards and corporate social responsibility in the topics of sustainable development in negotiations on the bilateral investment agreement¹⁰⁶.

In addition, the EU has stressed its cooperation with the UN system and other organizations. Since 2000, the ILO and other UN agencies on labour and social affairs have been involved in offering suggestions for China’s economic and social policy¹⁰⁷. The UN has had influence on China’s social security, through development assistance frameworks for China and the synthesis of UN activities with China’s national plans¹⁰⁸. Since the 1990s, the ILO has offered technical assistance for China’s legislation and reforms around employment, social insurance, pensions as well as promoting a decent work agenda, through signing the MoU and country

¹⁰¹ See European Commission,(1995);(1998), *supra* n.63.

¹⁰² See European Commission, (2000), p 6, *supra* n.63.

¹⁰³ The current major cooperation projects in social field include the EU-China Social Protection Project(2013-2018).

¹⁰⁴ See, e.g. as is 周建明, 社会政策: 欧洲的启示与对中国的挑战(上海社会科学院出版社,2005);周弘, 国外社会福利制度(中国社会出版社,2002); 王卓祺 & 获加, 西方社会政策概念转变及对对中国福利制度发展的启示, 社会学研究, (5), 44-50(1998); 田德文, 欧盟社会政策和欧洲一体化(社会文献出版社,2005).

¹⁰⁵ The Commission Regulation 1421/2013 removed China from the list of GSP beneficiaries from 1 January 2015. See European Commission, *Amending Regulation (EU) No 978/2012 of the European Parliament and the Council as regards the vulnerability threshold defined in point 1(b) of Annex VII to that Regulation* (9 Feb.2015) C(2015) 596 final.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution on the EU-China negotiations for a bilateral investment agreement* 2013/2674(RSP) (1 Oct. 2013) B7-0436/2013; European Commission, *Follow up to the European Parliament resolution on the EU-China negotiations for a bilateral investment agreement, adopted by the Commission on 29 January 2014* (6 March 2014) SP(2014)61.

¹⁰⁷ See. e.g. as is 刘冬梅, *supra* n16.

¹⁰⁸ These plans were designed for the periods of 2001-2005 and 2006-2010.

programme with China¹⁰⁹. This cooperation and the dialogue on social affairs constitute an important context and the foundation for more attention to be paid to sustainable development by China's policy-makers.

The EU has therefore exercised its normative power towards China in the social field through dialogue and cooperation. In encouraging China's economic and social reforms, it has made efforts to promote social norms and policies towards China. While notable differences between the EU and China in the social field exist, the EU has managed to exhibit and export its social security expertise to China through dialogue and cooperation projects, which are welcomed by China as it experiences rapid economic and social development¹¹⁰. Interestingly, China's rapid economic and social development did not ultimately have a negative impact or threaten the EU's normative power. Instead, it is bringing opportunities for the EU to transfer its expertise to China.

Conclusion

This article found that the social dimension of the EU-China relationship has been expanding since the early 2000s. Although there has been more emphasis on employment and social security than on labour related issues, and even though social issues have been framed more in terms of economics than human rights, the growing relevance of social aspects is certainly remarkable. It has been argued that both pragmatic and normative approaches contribute to explaining these findings. Importantly, and contrary to what has been suggested in the literature, this implies that the EU-China relationship is not merely based on pragmatic concerns. We have indeed identified indications of learning processes, most notably in the area of social security.

China's process of learning from European practices is facilitating exchanges and cooperation with the EU in a range of areas. Despite having achieved formidable economic development, China remains a developing country in many ways and will need expertise to address various social problems and challenges in its process of industrialization and urbanization in the

¹⁰⁹ In May 2001, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security on behalf of the Government of China, and the ILO signed an MOU, defining the mutually agreed objectives and priorities for cooperation within each of the four strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda. Since 2006, China has issued two decent work country programmes (DWCP) for 2006-2010 and 2013-2015 respectively.

¹¹⁰ One related example is the current EU-China partnership on urbanization. See *the Joint Declaration on the EU-China Partnership on Urbanization* (3 May 2012).

coming decades. This will potentially bring more opportunities for the EU to export its established practices and models.

Further research should elaborate on the different social aspects of EU-China relations, on the various types of norm diffusion (e.g. learning, emulation and socialization), and on the different mechanisms behind these processes. In doing so, particular attention should be paid to the Chinese perspective, thereby showing China to be neither merely a passive receiver nor a fierce opponent of EU norms. It would seem more fruitful to examine the dynamic complexities of the interrelationship of both parties, considering the various ways and extents through which EU and Chinese norms interact¹¹¹. A better understanding of China's perspective would help to avoid an oversimplification of its response as either rejection or acceptance of norms and policies advocated by the EU, and would further capture the truer relational nature of bilateral relations.

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¹¹¹ See Annika Björkdahl, Natalia Chaban, John Leslie & Annick Masselot, *Importing EU norms? Conceptual Framework and Empirical Findings* (Springer Publisher, 2014).

Table 1. Word Frequency in EU-China Joint Statements (2001-2014)

Summit	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th	14 th	15 th	16 th	
Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2009	2009	2010	2012	2012	2013	2014
(month)								(May)	(Nov)		(Feb)	(Sep)		(April)
Human rights	2	6	7	6	6	11	11		4		3	3	2	3
Social reform	1	1		3										
Social development							1	2			2			
Social progress														1
Social policy														1
Social challenge														1
Employment			1	1	1		1				2	5	3	
Social welfare								1						2
Social security				1				1				2		2
Social inclusion												1		1
Social cohesion														1
Social assistance								1						1
Labour					1	1	2							1
Core labour standards														
Decent work								1				1		2
Occupational Safety and Health												2		2
CSR								1						
ILO													1	1

Note: The positive figures in the table represent the frequency of terms that appeared in the documents under analysis. If a certain term did not appear in one document, then the frequency is zero, here left blank, in order to visually contrast with the positive figures.

Article 2

Framing states' response to international diffusion: The social dimension of globalization in EU-China relationship

Hang Yuan & Jan Orbie

Abstract:

The relations between international diffusion and state behavior have been puzzling political scientists for decades. Whereas prevailing academic literature has examined the impact of international diffusion on state behavior, states' response remains under-researched. To explain varying positions of the target state, this paper introduces the concept of the variability of response (VOR) and its typology. The application of this framework to China's response to the social dimension of globalization in EU-China relations indicates that these theoretical apparatus can systematically identify all of China's positions, which conventional linear frameworks are not capable to capture. This study uncovers the complexity of China's responses which are mainly influenced by international power relations and China's preference. The VOR framework helps avoid simply judgments of China's response to international diffusion. Further, this study also indicates the complexity the EU-China relations. Finally, theoretical apparatus advanced in this paper would facilitate further theorizing of international diffusion of norms and policies.

Keywords: international diffusion, variability of response, social dimension of globalization, EU-China relations

Introduction

The past decades witnessed the rise of China and the West's efforts to integrate/socialize China to the existing international system. For instance, the European Union (EU) has been trying to encourage stable reform, good governance and sustainable development in China¹¹². One of relevant issues of EU external policy is the social dimension of globalization (SDOG) (Jan Orbie et al., 2009), which concerns the impact of globalization on the life and work of people, their families, and the societies (Gunter & van der Hoeven, 2004)¹¹³. When engaging with China, the EU promotes key initiatives including core labor standards (CLS), decent work agenda, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). China's response on this issue area comprises a variety of positions: it favors some of the labor standards but not others; seeks to learn EU expertise in employment and social affairs but also stresses Chinese contexts; supports exchanges on CSR with the EU and others but also contributes its own initiatives with Chinese characteristics. As the SDOG connects political, social and economic fields, investigating China's reactions on this issue would reveal broad patterns of its behavior. It is important to systematically survey China's positions on this issue and why it takes this selective approach.

While there are debates on China's being socialized, the complexity of its responses is little addressed. The existing literature has discussed the impact of external pressure on China's domestic changes (e.g. S. Heilmann & Schulte-Kulmann, 2011; Johnston, 2008). However, China's responses involve not only its domestic affairs but also external relations. As a rising power, China can probably reshape the international diffusion of norms and policies. In broader scholarship on international diffusion of norms and policies, systematic theoretical accounts on states' responses also remain little, in spite that prevailing literature in International Relations (IR), European Studies and Comparative Politics has examined the impact of international diffusion on state behavior, stressing external pressure on target states like China and tending to expect the convergence of states behavior through international diffusion. Yet without sufficient light on the later, they could hardly offer satisfactory explanations on the variation of target states' feedbacks. Therefore, it is necessary to develop theoretical frameworks on the reasons and results of varying positions of a given state towards international diffusion of norms and policies.

¹¹² The EU has explicitly claimed these objectives in a series of official documents on policy towards China. See for example, Commission (1995, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2006); Parliament (2012a, 2013); T. C. o. E. Union (2006).

¹¹³ The SDOG was also stressed in the report from ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. See Globalization (2004).

This paper tries to problematize the issue of states' response to international diffusion of norms and policies. It firstly discusses why the existing theoretical approaches could not offer sufficient explanations for a wide range of states' responses. To address this issue, it introduces a new concept : the variability of response (VOR) and develop a typology of it. Then it applies these theoretical apparatus to systematically identify China's positions on the diffusion of the SDOG by the EU, which includes three key initiatives such as the CLS, decent work and the CSR. Within-case study, especially comparison cross sub-issues, generated interesting insights on causal factors of China's selective approach. The findings uncover the complexity of China's responses which are influenced mainly by international power relations and China's political preference. Chinese elites attach more importance to domestic factors including domestic legitimacy than international legitimacy. China, as a rising state, apparently has much autonomy to choose positions to react, influence and even reshape international diffusion driven by the EU and others. Finally, the article concludes that the theoretical apparatus advanced in this paper would not only help understand China's behavior, but also facilitate further theorizing of international diffusion of norms and policies.

1. International diffusion and states' response

International/transnational diffusion refers to processes of spreading many things, including norms and policies, across national borders, in spite of minor differences in the existing definitions (Fabrizio Gilardi, 2012, pp. 2-3; E. Solingen, 2012, p. 632). The existing theorizing of international diffusion are from two levels. Some IR scholars tend to stress the structural constraints like the inter-subjective structure (Wendt, 1999) and the "logic of appropriateness" which states are expected to follow (e.g. March & Olsen, 1998). Others have highlighted the roles of some agents in socializing others (e.g. Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998), such as hegemons (e.g. Ikenberry & Kupchan, 1990; Thies, 2010) and/or international actors as "teachers of norms" (e.g. Keck & Sikkink, 1999; Park, 2006). Similarly, scholars of European Studies have underscored the role of the EU in Europeanization and external governance (e.g. Börzel & Risse, 2000, 2007; Diez, Stetter, & Albert, 2006; Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003; Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009) and Normative Power Europe's (NPE) efforts (Manners, 2002, 2008, 2013). Both Europeanization research and the NPE represent special instance of broader studies of international diffusion (Börzel & Risse, 2012a; Lenz, 2013). These approaches tend to stress the external pressure on target states to follow and

import the norms diffused by the EU or others. These approaches attaches little attention to the autonomy of the recipient or target states.

Theorizing international diffusion without sufficient light on target actors would risk of underplaying their autonomy. This easily leads to assume a linear diffusion process following top-down logic (Bulmer & Burch, 2005; Radaelli & Pasquier, 2007; Zwingel, 2012), failing to capture dynamic interactive processes among actors and holding a static view of norm content and converging outcomes (Krook & True, 2012; Sandholtz, 2008). Fully capture of the complexity of international diffusion requires more attention to target actors (Cortell & Davis, 2000). In comparative politics, the transnational transfer analysis literature has noticed target actors' voluntary learning foreign practices (Benson & Jordan, 2011, p. 357; 2000; D. P. Dolowitz & D. Marsh, 1996; Rose, 1993, 2004; Wolman, 1992). Scholars have noticed the compatibility of Europeanization studies and diffusion research through establishing broader analytical frameworks(Börzel & Risse, 2012a, 2012b). Recently, some have paid more attention to the recipients of EU norms, examining "when, how and why EU norms are imported"(Björkdahl et al., 2015a). While they set up a conceptual frameworks of the response of recipient countries comprising adoption, adaption, resistance and rejection (Björkdahl et al., 2015b), they have not fully problematized the autonomy of target actors. That framework still cannot capture a wide range of positions such as subsidiarity (Acharya, 2011), which means the recipient side diffusing norms different from those being diffused by others. Deeper understanding of motivations of target states like China requires systematical analysis of the autonomy of states facing international diffusion which needs sufficient theoretical room.

To this end, this paper introduces a concept : *the variability of response*, which could have a working definition as *the quality and ability of actors to respond to international diffusion of norms and policies in order to shape preferred possible outcomes*. This concept assumes that the international actors are able to play certain roles in the interactions of international diffusion. For the purpose of analysis, here we only focus on states as target actors.

The concept of variability of response (VOR) could have two dimensions: direction and strength. Direction here refers to the direction of intentions of actors, which could be inward-looking or outward-looking, as inspired by Acharya (2011, p. 97). The inward-looking means

the actor's allowing the diffusion into its territory, while the outward-looking involves its efforts to resist the inward diffusion and/or export alternative norms and policies. The second dimension concerns the willingness or strength of reactions in dealing with diffusion: passive and active. While passive actions means low intention and resources which states spend on coping with diffusion, active actions indicate states' more efforts for higher goals.

Table 1. The VOR: a typology and analytical framework

Dimensions	Types	Logic of action	Causal mechanisms
Inward-looking	type I Internalization emulation adaptation adoption	Appropriateness consequence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International legitimacy oriented • Consequence oriented
	type II Translation localization lesson-drawing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International legitimacy oriented • Domestic legitimacy oriented • Consequence oriented
Outward-looking	type III Resistance, non-transfer	Consequence arguing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic legitimacy oriented
	type IV Subsidiarity Rivalry		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic legitimacy oriented • Consequence oriented

Based on these two dimensions, the VOR could serve as an umbrella term under which we can develop a typology to categorize varying kinds of reactions in a systematic way¹¹⁴. This typology has four types of VOR, which could group the identified responses in the

¹¹⁴ Scholars of policy transfer/diffusion analysis have tried to arrange types of responses. For example, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) established a continuum of policy transfer from lesson-drawing to coercive imposition, and Richard Rose (2004) developed more detailed subtypes of learning process. However, their categories are lack of types identified by IR scholars.

existing literature¹¹⁵ (see Table 1). The type I which is passive inward-looking, contains internalization, emulation, adaptation and adoption which refer to states' conformity to the diffused norms and ideas. The passive inward-looking response may be ascribed to international peer pressure or external pressure imposed by some powers (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The type II which is active inward-looking, includes translation, localization and lesson-drawing. Translation means transforming external norms through contextualization and/or domestication (Zwingel, 2012, p. 124). Similarly, localization refers to the "active construction (through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors" to strengthen their traditions and authority (Acharya, 2004). Lesson drawing involves actors' learning lessons from abroad to solve their domestic problems (D. P. Dolowitz & D. Marsh, 2000; Rose, 2004, pp. pp.80-83). The type III, being passive outward-looking, contains resistance and non-transfer. Actors could hinder, resist or reject the international diffusion, by setting up firewalls to against dominoes, leading to non-diffusion (E. Solingen, 2012). The fourth set, which is active outward-looking in the type IV, includes subsidiarity and rivalry (competition). Actors may also take more active steps to export their local norms to support or challenge internationally established norms through norms subsidiarity (Acharya, 2011). Rivalry occurs when states favor and export different norms or policies (Kavalski, 2007).

This typology would inform several points. Firstly, it enables to systematically identify and compare the types of the VOR. Secondly, it helps map the existing literature : the prevailing literature has discussed the first two types of the VOR, leaving the rest two under researched. Thirdly, it indicates that the VOR is different from the domestic changes of target states. As the outward-looking dimension indicates, the VOR is much more than domestic issues. Forth, although the causal mechanisms of the VOR are related to those of international diffusion and those of domestic changes, but they are different frameworks. While the mechanisms of diffusion and domestic change follow an external-to-domestic logic, the ones of the VOR would go beyond these and include the domestic-to-external or outward-looking dimension.

It is important to explore the causal mechanisms of VOR. This would probably trigger a new research agenda. Due to the space constraints, this paper doesn't aim to find systematical exploration of causal mechanisms. Here we would generate preliminary insights

¹¹⁵ It is important to note that this is also an open typology which allows more types of the VOR to be identified and added in.

on causal factors of the VOR based on empirical studies. We also partly draw on analytical framework on international diffusion by Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse's (2012a)¹¹⁶: the logic of consequences, the logic of appropriateness and the logic of arguing. The third logic involves communicative rationality, based on which actors reflect, challenge and validate the rationale of norms and claims when communicating with others¹¹⁷. These logics are also useful to explain the VOR(see Table 1). The type I is chosen, when a state recognizes the legitimacy of the diffused norms or policies (the logic of appropriateness), or external pressure is adequate to force it to accept the diffused (the logic of consequences). A state take type II, when it believes the usefulness of foreign practices to solve its domestic problems and enhance its domestic legitimacy. If target actor does not favor the legitimacy of the diffused, it tends to adopt outward-looking measures either to resist them (type III, the logic of consequences) or argue for alternatives to reshape the external situation(type IV, the logic of arguing). Still, more detailed insights on causal factors and scope conditions of causal mechanisms need to be inductively generated from empirical studies.

2. China's variability of response : case studies

The social dimension of globalization (SDOG) has been discussed in a series of global meetings¹¹⁸. In the past decade, the EU has been actively participated in these global debates and promoted three key issues of the SDOG to China, including the CLS, decent work, and the CSR. On bilateral occasions, the EU employ the current pillars in the EU-China ties including bilateral political dialogues, the development cooperation programmes and trade policy. On multilateral fronts, the EU highlights the role of the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) which viewed by the EU as providing "a new dimension to the EU-China relationship"(Commission, 1998). Since 2006 the final documents of ASEM meetings have been making clear references to the ILO initiatives¹¹⁹. China's responses on this issue will be identified below.

¹¹⁶ However, their framework was to explain institutional changes in target states, not for the VOR. But the three logics they mentioned are useful for analyzing the VOR.

¹¹⁷ For discussion on the logical of arguing or communicative rationality, see Habermas (1981); Risse (2000). Habermas, J., J. Habermas, S. Philosopher, J. Habermas and S. Philosopher (1981). *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Suhrkamp Frankfurt.

¹¹⁸ For example, the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and the 2000 World Summit in New York identifying the UN Millennium Goals.

¹¹⁹ See the in the Chairman's Statement of the 4th -8th ASEM Summits and the Chairman's Conclusions of 1st -4th ASEM LEMC.

2.1. The CLS

The CLS refers to four fundamental labour rights coded in eight ILO Conventions¹²⁰. EU officials generally raise these issues in various contacts with the Chinese authorities. In EU-China bilateral Summits, both sides pledged to respect these international recognized norms under the title of human rights including the CLS¹²¹. At the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, EU representatives have concerned the issue of forced labour in China, such as the system of 're-education through labour' (RTL), also called "laodong jiaoyang"(E. Union, 2012). In 2002 the Parliament clearly signalled that products from forced labour camps in China should be rejected by the EU(Parliament, 2002, point 37). Yet up to date the EU has not taken legal actions to support its rhetorical objections to those products, in spite of years of internal discussions on this topic.

In past decades, China participated in international progresses for social justice (see Table 2). It took steps in the abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation. China ratified the ILO Conventions on child labour (N°s 138 in 1999 and N°s 182 in 2002) and elimination of discrimination at work (N°s 100 in 1990 and N°s 111 in 2005). On eliminating forced labour, it recently decided to abolish the RTL system¹²². In addition, by issuing its two human rights action plans and its first decent work country programme, China sought to improve its international image on human rights¹²³. On the other hand, China's positions on the freedom of association remain unchanged. China has not ratified those conventions on the rights to association and collective bargaining as well as on the prohibition of forced labor¹²⁴. Interestingly, its DWCP shown commitment to facilitating collective bargaining and ratifying conventions on forced labour issue¹²⁵. Still, there are serious problems in the implementation of ILO conventions in China by members in intellectual, business, trade union circles (利. 张, 2006, p. 109).

¹²⁰ N°s 87 and 98 are on the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; N°s 29 and 105 on the elimination of forced or compulsory labour; N°s 138 and 182 on the effective abolition of child labour; and N°s 100 and 111 on the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation. See Office (2002); Organization (1998).

¹²¹ For example, the 4th and 9th EU-China Summits. See Council (2001, 2006)

¹²² China's legislative body has decided to end the system. See (2013)

¹²³ See, for example, (2009, 2012; 2007)

¹²⁴ However, in November 2013 China had decided to abolish the RTL. See the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform) Adopted at the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on November 12, 2013, see http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2014-01/17/content_31226494.htm (accessed 27 May 2015).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

The above survey on the CLS shows that China traditionally took selective but passive positions between internalization (type I of the VOR) and resistance (type III of the VOR). China signed and ratified four conventions which concerns child labour and discrimination, illustrating its favor of these standards. While freedom of association remains outside of priority, China has shown determinations to abolish the system of forced labour and to promotion of collective bargaining. China’s selective and passive approach on the CLS could be explained through within-case comparison on varying specific sub-issues. The below discussion indicates that China mainly concerns political/social sensitiveness and stability.

Table 2. China’s ratification of related international laws and standards

ICCPR, ICESCR and CLS	Sensitiveness	Sign /Ratify
the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).	High	No
The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	Low	Yes, in 1997/ 2001
N°s 87 and 98 on the rights to association and collective bargaining	High	No
N°s 29 and 105 on the prohibition of forced labour	Low	No (In 2013 China decided to abolish the RTL)
N°s 138 and N°s 182 on child labour	Low	Yes, in 1999/2002
N°s 100 and N°s 111 on elimination of discrimination at work	Low	Yes, in 1990/2005

Notes: The data in this table was collected by the author.

The basic difference between the ratified four conventions and the other four are the degree of sensitiveness. While the former has political and social implications, which are viewed as high sensitive issues, the other four are on the social and economic rights as well as the rights of vulnerable groups such as child and women¹²⁶, which are low sensitive issues. On high sensitive issues, China tends to take resistance to external pressure, while on low sensitive issues it shows great flexibility through internalization and emulation. This reflects China’s positions on broader issues (Table 2). For instance, China signed (in October 1997) and ratified (in March 2001) the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

¹²⁶ Economic, cultural and social rights as well as the rights of vulnerable groups such as child and women are the second and third generations of human rights. See(Gropas, 2006).

(ICESCR), placing reservations, however, on the application of Article 8.1 (a) which is on freedom of association and trade union membership¹²⁷.

2.2. Decent work

Decent work was initiated by the ILO in 1999 and the decent work agenda is a policy instrument to achieve the CLS¹²⁸. The decent work agenda has four strategic objectives including the CLS, social protection and social security. To realize these objectives, the ILO offered assistance to China after the MOU in May 2001¹²⁹. China has created a system of tripartite consultation in August 2001 and concluded its two editions of decent work country programme (DWCP) based on negotiations among tripartite partners and endorsed by the ILO¹³⁰. These editions of DWCP are closely linked to China's the 11th and 12th Five Year Development Plans (2006-2015) and its ministerial level Programmes, listing priority areas including employment, labour relations, social security and labour rights, and also stress the significance of cooperation with the ILO, the UN system and others.

China shows much interest in the EU's experience and technical assistance in decent work and other social issues. In China's only EU policy paper, China expressed its cooperative attitude to the protection of the rights and interests of migrant workers and the coordination in international labor affairs¹³¹. The joint statements of the EU-China Summits represent the bilateral consensus on constructive roles of the engagement on the issues such as employment and social affairs as well as decent work¹³². Both sides also highlight the significance of the political dialogue in promoting "their compliance with international human rights standards and co-operation with UN bodies and mechanisms in this field"¹³³. The concrete results of the EU-China political dialogue in this field include the Memorandums of Understandings (MoUs) signed in 2005 and 2009 respectively¹³⁴. The two MoUs led to a series of seminars, round table talks and cooperation projects covering employment, labour and social protection

¹²⁷ For China's statement on this issue, See .

¹²⁸ For more details defined by the ILO, see (Organization, 2008).

¹²⁹ The MOU was signed between the Ministry of Labour and Social Security on behalf of the Government of China, and the ILO in May 2001. The MOU defines the mutually agreed objectives and priorities for cooperation within each of the four strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda.

¹³⁰ See note 12.

¹³¹ See *China's EU Policy Paper*, 13 October 2003.

¹³² See for example, joint statements of the 4th, 7th, 9th, 10th, 15th and 16th EU-China summit.

¹³³ See Joint statement of the 4th EU-China summit.

¹³⁴ The first is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Labour, Employment and Social Affairs, signed on 5 September 2005, at the EU-China Summit in Beijing. The second MoU, signed in 2009, was to set up a policy dialogue and cooperation in the field of health and safety at work.

issues¹³⁵. One comment indicated that the EU was trying to 'export' the European social model, or at least elements thereof, to China¹³⁶.

Especially, during the 7th EU-China Summit in 2004, they signed the financing agreement for the EU-China Social Security Reform Cooperation Project (EUCSS)¹³⁷. This five-year project was launched in 2006¹³⁸, aiming to improve China's policy development and capacity building in social security through EU's expertise assistance. This cooperation covered four areas: pension benefiting both urban and rural residents, and health, unemployment and work injury insurance schemes. The EUCSS project was welcomed and attached importance by Chinese authorities at various levels¹³⁹. Yin Weimin, Minister of Human Resources and Social Security, recognized that the project "played a positive role in the cultivation of talent with a global vision, in the understanding and learning of EU experience and in the promotion of China's security system construction"(Y. Liu, 2011). Chinese media viewed it as "one of the flagship cooperation projects between the two sides" (Tan, 2009).

The project provided advices for China's social policies. The EUCSS organized a series of Social Insurance Legislation Consultation seminars to advice Chinese legislators, regulators and administrators on a range of issues including Social Insurance Law¹⁴⁰. In 2010, China's top legislature adopted the Social Insurance Law "after reading it four times and receiving feedback on the draft from the general public"¹⁴¹. The project also facilitated transferring international expertise to improve performance of the founded projects at national and provincial levels¹⁴². In addition, this cooperation promoted broader dialogue among policy makers, administrators, experts in social fields. From 2006 till 2011, as a part of the

¹³⁵ For example, EU-China High Level Round Table on Social Security. A five-year EU-China Social Security Reform Cooperation Project(2006-2011), a joint EU-China euro 40 million technical assistance project.

¹³⁶ The aim was to help form China's own social security system. See ("EU/China: EU 'exports' European social model," 2005).

¹³⁷ The European Commission and the Chinese government jointly provided financing of 40 million euros (\$57.2 million). China and the EC respectively contribute € 20 million

¹³⁸ The project was launched in April 2006 and ended with the closing ceremony and information dissemination workshop in July 5 2011.

¹³⁹ Gao Fengtao, Vice-director of the rule of Law, State Council, noted that the sound experiences of most developed countries in legislation of social insurance law could be viewed as reference for making China's social insurance law(author's translations). See 人民网 (September 22, 2007).

¹⁴⁰ During the legislative process of Chinese Social Insurance Law, Chinese legislative body organized several times special consultations with the Project experts. See Liu (2011).

¹⁴¹ A social insurance law was firstly proposed and planned by the National People's Congress(NPC) in 1994. See Xinhua (2010).

¹⁴² Provincial level includes Beijing and 5 provinces such as Jilin, Hunan, Shandong, Gansu, Sichuan.

project, the annual EU-China High Level Round Table on Social Security have been held alternating between China and Europe¹⁴³.

The above survey indicates that China showed much flexibility on the issues of decent work through internalization, translation, localization and active lesson-drawing (type II of the VOR). It actively addresses a wide range of issues including social security, social inclusion as well as sustainable economic and social development. Through signing and implementing its DWCP, China officially accepted the principles of decent work. In particular, China proactively cooperated with the EU on social security to learn EU expertise. Meanwhile, basing its DWCP on its national development plans, it aimed to localize those principles and practice.

2.3. The CSR

The CSR involves the initiatives encouraging companies' voluntary efforts to improve labour rights and benefits of their employees in the work. The EU committed to initiatives on the CSR by the UN and OECD and stressed them in its external relations, including EU-China contacts¹⁴⁴. In the 10th EU-China Summit (2007), both parties pledged to “support corporate social responsibility and sustainable development, including through sustainable production and consumption patterns and a more efficient use of natural resources.” EU-China Trade Project has been carried out since 2004 with EUR 20.6 million in joint-funding, to “transfer know-how from the EU on trade-related issues”¹⁴⁵. China also has realized CSR initiatives as useful tools to promoting “harmonious labour-management relations”, one of four priorities in its DWCP (Office, 2007, p. 8). Chinese government mentioned CSR issues firstly in the new Company Law(2005) and later in Labour Contract Law (2008) and other laws. It also stressed the capacity building of the China Enterprise Confederation (CEC) in this field and established some institutions like Global Compact Network China (GCNC) within the CEC in 2011.

In China, public sectors are playing leading roles in promoting the CSR initiatives and identified a state-centric model of CSR in China, which is different from those models in the

¹⁴³ The annual meetings have been held for six times, including those in Beijing(2006, 2008, 2010), Berlin(2007), Stockholm(2009) and Prague(2011). These meeting were addressed by high level officials from China and the EU as well as EU Member States.

¹⁴⁴ The relevant documents include, for example, Commission (2011), Parliament (2012c) and (Parliament, 2012b).

¹⁴⁵ For more information of this project, see ChinaCSRMap (2004).

US (market-based model) and Europe (relational model)(Ho, 2013). Chinese government has issued guidelines for state-owned enterprises(SOEs) on CSR and developed Chinese version of reporting standards (Shin, 2012). Studies have indicated that the CSR in China remains at a “preliminary stage”, influenced by social and cultural background (J. Yin & Zhang, 2012). While Chinese recognized some features of the CSR including economic, legal and environmental responsibilities, they also identified unique CSR dimensions such as good faith (business ethics), jobs creation, social stability and progress, with little concern on other features “shareholder interests” and “equality” which are stressed in western countries(S. K. Xu & Yang, 2010).

Therefore, Chinese authorities promote CSR initiatives through internalization, lesson-drawing and rivalry, covering the type I, II and IV of the VOR. China’s cooperation with the EU, ILO and the UN enabled Chinese public and private sectors to attach importance to the CSR. For businesses, positive response to the CSR initiatives would involve a “legitimate concern” (X. Liu, Jia, & Li, 2011). Through the CSR reporting, Chinese government guides and encourages enterprises to adapt to national industry policy reforms and sustainable development strategy(海. 李, 2013). The EU and others have successfully lectured Chinese public and private sectors on this issue through various channels, encouraging them to emulate western-style CSR norms from Europe and others. Many Chinese companies have joined international CSR initiatives such as UN Global Compact.

Meanwhile, China’s CSR is also embedded in its domestic context and driven partly by competition for international market. As Chinese businesses face dilemma of competitiveness due to low cost in labour and environment areas on one hand and good CSR reputation on the other hand, China realized the importance of shifting “from standard taker to standards-setter” (Gugler & Shi, 2009). China encourages its own versions of CSR initiatives. As a result, China’s CSR standards have been developed through both learning and innovation. In addition, Chinese versions of CSR has impact in other regions including Africa (Tan-Mullins & Mohan, 2013). Some viewed China as a new shaper of international development (Urban, Mohan, & Cook, 2013). Still, Chinese elites’ ambitions in setting international standards in this field is limited.

3. Causal factors of China's positions

The above case study shows China's positions on the SDOG, which covers all four types of the VOR. The conventional linear frameworks of international diffusion, which stress structural/international pressure, would not be able to explain the varying response of China. Realistic accounts(e.g. Thies, 2010) which stress external coercive imposition in diffusion would fail to explain China's selective positions on the CLS, including resistance. Similarly, the normative perspectives including the NPE(e.g. Manners, 2008), Europeanization and EU external governance, would also fail to explain some of China's responses including resistance and innovations. International legitimacy matters but seems not so important for China as these approaches would anticipate.

The above results would be better understood from agent/state perspective. In China, the political elites play dominant roles in many areas, so that China's behavior could be explain mainly by its political reference, which basically involves political structure and domestic silence of norms and policies (Cortell & Davis, 2000). China's political reference are embedded in its "core interests", which was officially formulated in *China's Peaceful Development*, a policy document issued in September 2011:

China's core interests include national sovereignty and security, territory integrity, national unification, national political institutions set by the constitution of China as well as the stability of society and fundamental guarantee for sustainable economic and social development¹⁴⁶.

This definition of China's core interests represents China's long term political preference in coping with external affairs including international diffusion. Regarding political structure, national political institutions refer to the regime lead by the Communist Party of China (CPC). This structure determines the domestic silence of norms and policies (Cortell & Davis, 2000) as well as ideological positions and prior beliefs about policy reform (Fabrizio Gilardi, 2010; Volden, Ting, & Carpenter, 2008). In short, the core interests of China stress the importance of political and social stability on the one hand, and sustainable economic and social development on the other hand. These objectives have been emphasized in a variety of policy documents in past decades. The above empirical study has shown China's concerns of political and social stability (high sensitiveness)and emphasis on economic and social development (low sensitiveness). On high sensitive issues, China often insists on its own

¹⁴⁶ This is author's translation. See 国务院新闻办公室 (2011).

positions, taking resistance to external pressure (type III). On low sensitive issues, it can show great flexibility in the VOR including type I, II, IV.

Therefore, two key factors are important to explain China's responses: international power relations and China's political preference. Firstly, a rising China can enjoy more autonomy when facing international diffusion. It has potential to alter or reshaping the diffusion course to make it fit its expectations through transiting from a rule-taker to a rule-setter. For instance, China downplayed the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue by reducing its frequency¹⁴⁷. Little visible achievement in this subfield and lack of leverage have stimulated the EU officials' feeling of disappointment and frustration¹⁴⁸. In addition, China has tried to become a responsive speaker rather than a passive audience of human rights, through actively participating in rethinking the related notions(Chen, 2012) and developing alternative approach to make the international debates on human rights "less unbalanced" (Shi-xu, 2012).

Secondly, domestic legitimacy is more important for Chinese political elites than international legitimacy. States take domestic legitimacy more seriously than international legitimacy, when there are differences or conflicts between them. As case study shows, the sensitiveness of the diffused norms and policies would be a useful indicator to anticipate whether China will take inward-looking positions. China tends to favor those ideas which are low sensitive and helpful for economic and social development. This is fully reflected in China's learning international practices in social policy in accordance with Chinese scholars' calling (Chen, 2012; P. 李. Li, Wang, Liang, Zhou, & Zhang, 2004; Z. 王. Wang, 卓祺] & Huo, 1998; H. 周. Zhou, 弘], 2002, 2003). In addition, China's domestic legitimacy would probably requires its resisting those diffused which it doesn't favor, or the subsidiarity of the norms and practices they value to enhance their international positions, especially when facing "great power *hypocrisy*" (Acharya, 2011, p. 100).

Conclusion

The empirical study in this paper shows China's varying positions on sub-issues of the SDOG. The conventional linear frameworks fail to predict all of these positions. The introduction of the VOR and its typology prove to be helpful to address this issue in three ways: to clearly

¹⁴⁷ The EU was disappointed by the fact that "China had not agreed to a second session of the dialogue in 2010 and 2011". See Delegation of the European Union to China (2012) .

¹⁴⁸ This observation is based on the author's interviews (in October 2012) with some EU officers.

identify state's specific positions on specific issues, to uncover the relations between these positions, and to systematically survey the distribution of the positions. Compared with traditional linear models, this typology could better frame the variation of states' response to international diffusion. More importantly, this in turn enables us to conduct comparison study on China's different positions to identify causal factors and contingent explanations. The above within-case comparison helps uncover two main causal factors for China's mixed response: international power relations and political preference. Chinese political elites attach more importance to domestic legitimacy over international legitimacy. China, as a rising power, has much autonomy to react, influence and reshape international diffusion driven by the EU and others.

This study has important policy implications as it unveils the complexity of the interactions between China and the EU on the SDOG. It indicates that China-EU relationship and China-West relations in general are beyond what traditional approaches would anticipate. Regarding the debates on China's integrations, it would suggest to avoid any simple judgment and assertion based on single angle or narrow analysis of single issue as they would fail to capture the wide scope and interweaving dynamics of these relations. It would be misleading to perceive international relations in a black-white binary way.

This study would enhance the research of non-Western states' influence on international diffusion which remains scarce. Without deep analysis of these states' reactions to international diffusion, it is unlikely to capture the entire processes of international diffusion. Moreover, the theoretical apparatus advanced in this paper would also facilitate theorizing of international diffusion which seems to need to go beyond conventional linear perceptions of international diffusion and to capture dynamic mutual construction among actors in international diffusion. Future research might examine more cases to explore why and under what conditions do states choose specific type of the VOR or some combinations of the VOR.

References

(see the references at the end of this dissertation.)

Article 3

Learning through trial-and-error process: China's social reform and European expertise

Hang Yuan & Jan Orbie

Abstract

Policy learning among governments has attracted scholarly attention for decades. Yet little literature has addressed the complex causality in learning process. This paper explores interactions among causal factors over time through qualitative case study on China's learning from European social policy. This study indicates the limitations of simple causal explanations and the advantage of explanatory typology in identifying specific types of learning and uncovering complex causal mechanisms. We refined the recent framework of explanatory typology by highlighting two issues: learning types at different levels and their interactions over time. This effort helps better understand the trial-and-process of China's learning: its increasingly drawing on European experience in social policy since 1990s is in response to undesirable impacts of neoliberal reforms since 1970s. This case study illustrates that policy learning could be a continuous process through trial-and-error rather than "one shot" operation.

Keywords : learning, trial-and-error process, social policy, China, EU

Introduction

In past decades, China has launched a number of bilateral cooperation projects to facilitate exchanges on social policy experience with others including the United States, Japan, some European countries and the European Union (EU). Through these exchanges, China has been seeking to benefit from the expertise in social policy such as social security from those partners. As elaborated later, those projects with European partners are most significant ones in terms of investment and outcomes. Given the differences between China and these partners in many ways, why and how did learning occur? More specifically, why did China show more interest in cooperation with the EU?

It is possible to understand policy learning through simple or complex causal explanations. Some authors tend to examine certain casual factors which influence learning through employing statistical analysis in cross cases analysis. While these quantitative studies could identify a few potential factors and simple causal inferences, they face difficulty in addressing the complex causality¹⁴⁹ within the cases which may involve interactions among causal factors and dynamic learning mechanisms over time. Furthermore, the current discussions often shed insufficient light on the recipient side. To address the issues of complex causal mechanisms, scholars like Starke (2013) have suggested to use qualitative methods (Starke, 2013) and explanatory typology as an analytical framework (David Collier, LaPorte, & Seawright, 2012; Elman, 2005).

Drawing on an explanatory typology of learning recently developed by Dunlop and Radaelli (2013), this study explores complex causality in learning process. The case is China's learning from European social policy, which involves complex causality or "causal

¹⁴⁹ Causal complexity involves complex causation between independent variables, conditions and dependent variables, which differs from simple causal inference linking single explanatory variables towards outcome often perceived in linear manners by researchers analyzing cross cases comparison and large-N phenomena. See more discussion in Bennett & Elman(2006) ; Levy(2008).

complexity” (Bennett & Elman, 2006a, p. 251). We investigated explanatory power of alternative accounts including simple causal accounts which tends to focus on single casual factors, and the typological framework of learning by Dunlop and Radaelli (2013)¹⁵⁰. This case study indicates the advantage of that typological framework in identifying specific types of learning and understanding configurative causation involving different causal factors. More importantly, to further uncover complex learning mechanisms in this case, we refined that typological framework, by highlighting two important issues: varying learning at different levels and their interactions over time. We argue that taking these two issues into consideration may enable us to better understand the trial-and-process of China’s learning: its increasingly drawing on European experience in social policy since 1990s is in response to undesirable impacts of neoliberal reforms since 1970s. We concluded with theoretical and empirical implications of our refinement of explanatory typology.

1. Policy learning: factors and typology

Policy learning has attracted attentions of scholars in European Studies, Comparative Politics and International Relations. In European Studies, the existing literature has documented the EU’s active role in exporting norms and policies to its accession countries and neighbors through the Europeanization process or European external governance (e.g.Lavenex, 2004, p. 604; Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009) or normative power Europe (e.g.Manners, 2002, 2008, 2013). While the EU indeed have important impact on the neighbours of the Union as well as many other developing countries in the world , the recipient side of European norms and policies often receive relatively insufficient attention in European Studies. It remains to what extent these recipient actors influence the policy transfer process.

¹⁵⁰ Single case study can be used to test certain hypotheses which contain necessary or sufficient conditions, serve as crucial case studies involving most/least likely cases, or contain within-case comparison such as longitudinal comparison. See discussion in Levy (2008).

These studies have connections with the literature on policy diffusion and transfer (Börzel & Risse, 2012b), in which learning is one of four main transfer mechanisms including emulation, competition and coercion (e.g. Dobbin et al., 2007; D. Dolowitz & D. Marsh, 1996). Governments tend to learn those policies which have been proven successful in other states and countries (F. Gilardi et al., 2009; Volden, 2006) to address the challenges (Rose, 1991, 1993, 2004). A variety of conditional factors which may influence learning processes, including policy background, the capacity of policy makers, and the characteristics of the policies themselves (see Charles R. Shipan & Volden, 2012, for review). These factors could be systematically examined in a common framework of four basic components: initial stimulus, medium, political agents and outcomes (E. Solingen, 2012; Etel Solingen & Börzel, 2014). Firstly, the issues of initial stimulus or the characteristics of the policies themselves may affect learning. Some called for investigating the match or mismatch of transferred policy and domestic situation and the needs of target countries (e.g. Cortell & Davis, 2000). Secondly, factors of medium or policy circumstance may facilitate or thwart learning, such as geographic or spatial distance (e.g. Walker, 1969), international policy advocate networks (e.g. Haas, 1992), and domestic situation like the relations between the state and society (Kim, 2008). Many studies have suggested that proximity or similarity in terms of geography, language, culture, political, ideological and economic background as well as close economic relations would facilitate the policy diffusion (e.g. Rosecrance, 2014). In addition, policy makers' cognitive biases and heuristics (e.g. K. Weyland, 2005) and political motivations such as expectations for success in elections may influence their capacity of learning (e.g. Fabrizio Gilardi, 2010). Finally, it is to be researched whether and how the outcome facilitates the learning. The research identifying these conditional factors helps under basic causal impact and mechanisms in learning process.

To explore complex causality in learning process, scholars recently developed an explanatory typology¹⁵¹ of policy learning which along two dimensions: problem tractability and the certification of actors, categorizes four basic learning genera, including reflexive learning, epistemic learning, learning through bargaining, and learning in the shadow of hierarchy (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). The authors introduced two other dimensions to each basic learning genera: learner's control over learning objectives/ends and over learning contents/means, and divided them into sixteen species of learning (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). One of the advantages of this typology is to enable researchers to specify concrete learning types to more precisely fit the real learning situation. Another is to suggest explanations of types of learning. For example, if both problem tractability and certificate of actors are high, this typology would suggest that that policy learning belongs to the type of learning in the shadow of hierarchy (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). In addition, Dunlop and Radaelli called for testing their arguments on learning and its conditional factors through empirical studies in specific contexts. Similarly, scholars have suggested to carefully examine the impact of these two sets of factors: the domestic political institutions and the characteristics of transferred policies themselves (e.g. Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Obinger et al., 2013). Further, regarding the international transfer of social policy, it is necessary to consider more empirical evidence outside the West (Obinger et al., 2013).

2. China's policy learning from Europe in social affairs

In the past decades, China has had exchanges and cooperation in social policy with more than 50 countries and various international organizations including the International Labour Organization (ILO), International Social Security Association (ISSA). Of its bilateral projects

¹⁵¹ Explanatory typology, or typological theory, is a typology dealing with complex causation or causal mechanisms through different combinations of dimensions of the typology (as independent/explanatory variables) producing different cells of the typology (as dependent variables). For comprehensive discussion, see Elman(2005) and George and Bennett (2005).

with others in this field, those with European partners including the EU and its member states are of the most important ones in terms of investment and outcomes (see Table 1).

Table 1. China’s major bilateral projects in social policy .

project	period	partner	funding
Labour and social legislation cooperation project	1994-2003	Germany	4 million Deutsche Mark
EU-China Programme for the Development of Vocational Training for Industry	1998-2003	European Commission	9.7 million euro
Women’s employment project	1999-2006	Germany	(date unavailable)
Public policy project	2000-2001	Canada	0.6 million Canadian dollar
Unemployment insurance project	2003-2006	UK	3 million Great Britain Pound
US-China labor cooperation project	2003-	USA	4.12 million US dollars
EU-China Social Security Reform Project (EUCSSP)	2006-2011	EU	20 million euro
Rural social pension insurance project	2006-2009	Japan	(data unavailable)
Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)	2012-2016	EU	9 million euro
EU-China Social Protection Reform Project (SPRP)	2013-2018	EU	7 million euro

Notes: The data is from the official websites of European Commission and Ministry of Labour and Social Security of China. See more at http://www.cnss.cn/yjpt_zt/web/center/guojisi.html.

The EU-China dialogues facilitated social policy transfer from Europe to China on key issues such as social security, employment and labour, occupational safety and health as well as social inclusion. Since 1990s, China has had cooperation projects and dialogues with the European Commission, Germany and Britain in employment and vocational training, labour and social insurance. On employment and vocational training issues, the EC has developed the EU-China Programme for the Development of Vocational Training for Industry (EC contribution €9.7 million), aiming to improve workers’ skills for EU industries based in China (Commission). Since mid-2000s, the EU and China have updated their bilateral exchanges and cooperation in social security through major projects such as the EU-China Social Security Reform Project (EUCSSP)(2006-2011) and the EU-China Social Protection Reform Project (SPRP)(2013-2018) to support for China’s economic and social reform. The EU-China Summit in 2005 endorsed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on labour,

employment and social affairs, which was followed by another MoU in 2009 on occupational safety and health. These two MoUs led to concrete exchanges through dialogues and projects in social field. They also launched the EU-China Project on Occupational Health and Safety in High Risk Sectors (EUCOHS) (EU grant 9 million, China 2.5 million, 2012-2016) to encourage China to achieve effective standards of work safety and health in the high risk sectors “comparable to those prevailing in the EU” (EEAS, 2012).

China’s learning from European experience since 1990s has three features. Firstly, both sides explicitly expressed the purpose of learning, which is to transfer European expertise to help China to address its economic and social problems in its reforms and development. Secondly, main channels of learning are bilateral dialogues and cooperation projects in social policy, which link European experience closely to China’s social policy development and practice. Thirdly, China’s learning is not a short phenomenon but a continuous process which lasted decades, and is not just a simple copy of European models but through decades’ processes of lesson-drawing from alternatives including those of other developed countries. The next two sections illustrate the above features.

3. China’s learning from European experience: simple and typological explanations

3.1.Simple causal explanations

Etel Solingen developed a framework composed of four components in international diffusion of policy: stimuli, medium, agent and outcome(E. Solingen, 2012). This framework is helpful to identify single causal factors which influence international diffusion. In this study, we use it as a heuristic device to organize our efforts to seek single causal factors.

Firstly, regarding *medium*, it is clear that some of the background elements such as geographical distance and differences in language and cultural background, political institutions and ideological environment, social and economic system have not significantly discouraged? China's learning from Europe. Economic relations between the EU and China seemly would facilitate their exchanges in social field but itself is not sufficient condition. This case indicates that these factors are not necessary or sufficient conditions for China's learning social policy. It is a deviant case for explanations emphasizing these policy background factors.

Regarding political *agents*, as European Studies would expect, the EU has encouraged China to realize stable reform, good governance and sustainable development¹⁵². Yet, the EU's ambition in socializing China is faced with difficulties such as the difference of political systems, the rise of China and the EU's limited leverages (e.g. Balducci, 2010; K. Chan, 2010; Holslag, 2011; Kaya, 2014; Mattlin, 2012). Further, the European expertise is only one of alternatives available for China. The others include the experience of the US, Japan, Singapore and other Asian countries. Thus, the EU's influence seems necessary but not sufficient conditions for China to learn. It remains unclear why did China choose to learn from European expertise in social policy. More comprehensive accounts need to cover China's policy learning behavior and conditional factors.

In addition, the accounts that the European models may better fit China's domestic situation than others could help to explain why did China learn more Europe than others but inform little why did China learn from 1990s. The features of policies may be necessary but not sufficient conditions for China's choice. In fact, the dynamic of learning along temporal dimension may be more complex than static match between the transferred and the domestic

¹⁵²The EU has explicitly claimed these objectives and strategies in a series of official documents on policy towards China. See for example, Commission (1995, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2006), Parliament(2012, 2013), Union (2006) .

situation. Similarly, the impact of the learning outcome on extending learning process also involves complex causation, which simple causal explanations would not capture.

3.2. Complex causal explanations

The simple causal explanations would provide preliminary accounts but leave specific questions unanswered: which types of learning it is, why and how these learning process occurred. Dunlop and Radaelli's framework (2013) appears helpful in answering the first two questions. China's learning from European experience seemly fits the type of epistemic learning, which means that communities of experts offer solutions to technical policy problems that governments face (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013, pp. 603-604). This type of learning involves two dimensions or independent variables : low uncertainty or problem tractability and high certification of actors. Indeed, the certification of actors are relatively high as Chinese traditionally perceive European practices in social policy and welfare regimes as successful or good models, recognizing European experts of social policy as external epistemic communities with legitimacy. The uncertainty or problem tractability is low because Chinese government would expect the results of learning.

Further, within the type of epistemic learning, the cell of contributor apparently fits the role of European experts in this learning (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013, p. 609). As the "weakest species" of this type, contributor here pertains learner's high control over both learning objectives/ends and content/means. In this subtype of learning, learners enjoy autonomy in many ways and treat epistemic communities as one of many teachers (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013, p. 609). In China's learning from European expertise via bilateral dialogues and projects, both learner's control over learning objectives/ends and content/means are high. It is evident that China sets the goals and contents of policy learning from Europe among

knowledge producers such as the US, Japan and the World Bank. Thus European epistemic communities in this learning process exert as a contributor, which means “one teacher among many”, fitting the cell of contributor in epistemic learning type.

Therefore, Dunlop and Radaelli (2013) work, as an explanatory typology, can help map and explain the type and subtypes of China’s learning through two sets of dimensions. However, that typology could hardly inform why European partners enjoy more attention than others and why China’s learning from Europe has been increasing since 1990s. This brings us to refine this typology by addressing ignored issues.

3.3. To refine the explanatory typology: two issues

The typology by Dunlop and Radaelli (2013) was not sufficient to address the following two issues: the possibility of the simultaneous co-existence of types and/or subtypes of learning and the temporal dimension of learning. We argue that taking these two issues into account would help further uncover the complex mechanisms underlying learning process, which could not be simply perceived as “one shot” at one level. The remainder of this article illustrates how taking these two issues into account may help understand China’s learning.

Firstly, while Dunlop and Radaelli (2013) assumed the types of learning to be “mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive”, and suggested to study the travelling of learning types across these categories along time period, they did not note the possible co-existence of types at the same time at different levels. In fact, it is possible that governments appear different types of learning at different levels. For instance, as elaborated in the next section one government may learn from experts on certain issues at policy level (epistemic learning)

while at political level it may be reflexive to its policy learning concerning the consequences on its legitimacy (reflective learning).

Secondly, as learning processes take time, it is important to take temporal dimension into consideration. While the authors suggested to examine the travelling across the cells by conducting cross-case research which might be? “sensitive to the temporal dimension” (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013), they did not explicitly address whether mention within-case research can address this issue through accommodating the temporal dimension in one single case. As temporal dimension may influence all the four explanatory variables in their framework, including the uncertainty, certification of actors, learner’s control of learning objectives and means/content, it is possible to observe the travel of learning types within on case along temporal dimension.

Applying these to the Case of China, we firstly distinguish China’s learning from abroad into political and policy levels. At political level, China tends to stress its autonomy without external interference in its domestic affairs. During the trajectory from planned-economy to market economy, China pursues a principal objective: keeping the balance between reforms, development, and stability. This inevitably involves its decades’ trial-and-error (policy-experiment) process in reforms. China’s learning through trial-and-error fits the type of reflective-learning, which pertains low problem tractability and low certification of actors according to (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013, p. 603). This type of learning is demanding as it involves temporal dimension: it is difficult for Chinese government to anticipate when and in which ways a specific policy should be formulated in advance to keep the balance between reform, development and stability before this balance has been evidently threatened.

China’s learning at social policy level is subject to its reflective-learning at political level. Here, the balance serves both criteria and mechanisms on from which and how to learn

as well as when to learn. While the issues of uncertainty at policy level is low as the Chinese government expect specific policies to support the political reflective learning, the certification of actors depends on the impact of policy advices. Although Chinese government notice Western welfare states, to what extent the policy advices from foreign epistemic communities work in China's context ultimately depends on the policy practices. It is difficult to forecast the exact consequences of a specific learned policy before its feedbacks become evident. Thus, the learning at political and policy levels express themselves and influence each other along temporal dimension.

4. Learning through trial-and-error process since 1970s

4.1. Economic reform and social consequences

China's learning from foreign experience has been through trail-and-error experiments, a long-term processes rather than "one shot". To achieve economic and development goals, China has launched reforms since late 1970s to "absorb and use for reference the advanced technology and managerial expertise of other countries including developed capitalist countries" (Jiang, 1997). Advices from the West, in particular the USA and some international organizations such as World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have had strong impact on China's reform. While the extent to which China's reform is neoliberal remains debatable (G. C. S. Lin & Hu, 2011; Nonini, 2008; F. L. Wu, 2010), many scholars would agree that neoliberal advices have play very important roles in shaping China's reforms (Babb, 2013). The WB has offered neoliberal policy advices on macroeconomic management, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) reforms and social security reforms(D. 刘. Liu, 2011).

China's social policy was traditionally not seen as independent policy area but subordinated to economic policy (Tiankui[景天魁] Jing, 2010; Zheng, 2009). Market-oriented economic reforms stressing efficiency over equality required social policy in 1980s and 1990s to support economic reforms by tackling great challenges such as public expenditure, unemployment, under-employment and social security. Neoliberal advices called for the retreat of government from social welfare system including social security, employment, distribution (Y. 李. Li, 2012,note 21) and social services such as health care (W. Zhang & Navarro, 2014), education and housing (J. Lee & Zhu, 2006; Y. P. Wang, Shao, Murie, & Cheng, 2012). Social welfare system were seen as burden for the government and state owned enterprises (SOEs) and have been undermined (Tiankui [景天魁] Jing, 2008). China's policy making in social services in 1980s and 1990s witnessed the shift of responsibilities for social welfare and development from public sector to private sector through the marketization reforms. The mass have to purchase what were previously seen as public services, such as housing, education, health care, which were often accompanied by profits-driven behavior of hospitals and schools pushing up prices and became the heavy burden of the mass. For example, China's housing policies influenced by World Bank's housing market enabling strategy "have contributed to worsening affordability" in China (Cao & Keivani, 2014).

These reforms have had undesirable impact on China's society (Y. 李. Li, 2012). Regarding social security, the governments' declining roles in welfare system were accompanied with the increasing burden of ordinary families. Neoliberal advices have had much impact on China's partial privatization of national social security system, in particular pension system (Williamson & Deitelbaum, 2005). The reform process has not only imposed challenges to Chinese welfare values (Wong, 2013), but also further widened income gaps,

leaving social vulnerable groups insufficient access to social welfare services and signaling the increasing social inequality in late 1990s (Guan, 2001).

In addition, the market-oriented reforms force governments to stimulate economic growth through measures favoring the capital rather than the labour. The privatization of many SOEs often results in flawed distribution of public wealth among ordinary workers and new owners of the SOEs (Holmstrom & Smith, 2000; Le Mons Walker, 2006). The employment systems reforms of SOEs often lead to job reduction, job losses, exploitative employment conditions in privately owned enterprises (McCann & Schwartz, 2006; Mok, Wong, & Lee, 2002). Low-wage migrants have limited access to the local welfare and benefits of cities where they work, due to the residence system controlling the mobility and municipal public expenses (R. Liu, Wong, & Liu, 2013).

4.2.Social policy development: formative phase and reflections

The accumulated undesirable social consequences of neoliberal-oriented reforms threatened China's social stability and required improvement in social security and social progress. In 1990s, Chinese government gradually noticed this and began to enhance social stability. However, China's social policy was in the formative stages and both Chinese policy makers and scholars were lacking? experience. These are necessary conditions for China to learn from foreign expertise.

The phases of national social policy development may have impact on its learning (Obinger et al., 2013). China's social policy has been in formative phase of the welfare state for decades, focusing on adoption and consolidation of social policies such as employment and labour policy, social rights and benefit generosity. Chinese scholars would view the early 2000s as a key period in China's social policy (e.g.Tiankui[景天魁] Jing, 2010), when China began to attach more importance than ever to the development of social policy (Y. 李. Li,

2012) to enhance the legitimacy of reforms and social stability. In 2002, Chinese leaders have pledged to establish a social security system “an important guarantee for social stability and long-term peace and order in the country’ (Jiang, 2002). The new leadership in China (2003-2013) had tried new ways to address these urgent problems, through the Scientific Outlook of Development (KexueFazhanguan), a new approach on China’s development, which stresses “putting people first as its core, comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development as its basic requirement, and overall consideration as its fundamental approach” (Hu, 2007).

Besides, scholarly reflections of the reforms in social field have also been growing in 2000s (Tiankui [景天魁] Jing, 2008; Tiankui[景天魁] Jing, 2010; Y. 徐. Xu & Zhang, 2005). Partially inspired by the government’s new approach, scholars began to discuss a developmental social policy which fits China’s unique situation rather than merely following neoliberal advices which often neglect the long term contribution of social welfare system for sustainable development (P. 李. Li et al., 2004). Some argued that the balance between economic development and social development requires the reconstruction of the government’s role and capacity building in social policy (e.g.Y. 徐. Xu & Zhang, 2005). Thus, China’s social policy should go beyond a complementary instrument for economic reforms to support for sustainable development in the long run.

However, neither Chinese policy makers nor Chinese scholars had sufficient expertise on developing a comprehensive social policy in 2000s. Chinese officials were more familiar with pushing up annual economic growth ratio than formulating policies to make progress in social field or contemplating how to realize sustainable development. Meanwhile, the under-developed disciplines of sociology and social policy in China hindered their offering effective policy advices (K. 林. Lin, 2008).

4.3. Seeking therapies: European expertise and alternatives

The existing social policy and welfare state models include liberal welfare states represented by the USA and the United Kingdom (UK), corporatist models in Germany and France, social democratic ones in Sweden (Esping-Andersen, 2013), and those in Asia (Holliday, 2000). Two major western approaches to social policy have been influential in past decades: the neoliberal approach advocated by the US and the Bretton Woods institutions, and the social-democratic ones suggested by the EU and some UN agencies including ILO (Deacon, 2007). The social-democratic practices in European welfare states like Germany, France and Sweden attach much importance to social expenditure, social cohesion and inclusion (Deacon, 2007).

European social welfare systems and social policies becoming attractive for China depend on various conditions from both political and policy perspective. At political level, as mentioned above, China stresses its autonomy without foreign interference its domestic affairs and pursues the balance of reform, development and stability. This pertains China's choosing among alternatives is based on its domestic needs rather than being imposed by foreign forces. A very important prerequisite for China's choices is that those can enhance social stability and underpin political legitimacy. China launched a project with the USA to learn from American experience in formulating labour regulations and eventually issued its new Labour Contract Law in 2007 to guarantee workers' legal labour rights. While the neoliberal advices remains influential in China's current reforms especially in economic field, their influence in social field has been declining in 2000s as the consequences of neoliberal reforms became unacceptable in 2000s. More importantly, as the institutions in Washington have been trying to deeply involve China's domestic policy formulation and diffuse neoliberal ideology, this neoliberal approach is incompatible with China's political preferences which stress its autonomy, political stability and independently exploring development path without

foreign control. Thus, a rising China would unlikely allow the Washington's deeper involvement of its domestic politics through coercively imposing policy templates.

In contrast, the past decades witnessed the EU's shifting emphasis from political pressure on China in 1990s to more pragmatic approach focusing on social-economic dialogue and cooperation in 2000s. Some would expect more pragmatic policy towards China (D. Scott, 2014) from a values-based to an interests-based engagement (Crookes, 2013). The analysis of the EU-China summit statements also indicate a shift in the linkage of social issues with other field, from high political issues such as human rights to low political and more technical issues. For example, "social reforms" in China were mentioned prior to 2004 and replaced by "sustainable development" in the following years. In addition, these documents have not explicitly referred to core labour standards. In the documents issued after human rights dialogue, social rights are rarely framed as human rights by both sides. The EU noticed progress in completing social security system in China (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States, 2011).

At policy level, compared with the liberal models, European expertise in social policy seemingly more appealing for China to enhance both its social policy and social stability. Chinese scholars investigating European experience tend to draw lessons for China's economic and social development (see overview in Song, 2010). Since 1980s Chinese scholars have been increasingly researching on European social welfare systems and social policy, which could be important references and models for China (H. Zhou, 2004). Chinese scholars have noticed that European experience/approaches emphasize balance between efficiency (economic growth) and equality (social justice), which become interesting and relevant for Chinese who have been seeking therapies for consequences of neoliberal reforms. Some Chinese scholars have advised officials to learn from international expertise, particularly those models in Europe (Chen, 2012; Z. 王. Wang, 卓祺] & Huo, 1998; H. 周.

Zhou, 弘], 2002, 2003). In addition, China's cooperation with ILO and other UN agencies on labour and social affairs since 2000 is another important contextual factor (D. 文]. Liu, 2011). These dialogue frameworks? and cooperation encouraged Chinese policy makers to pay increasing attention to sustainable development which requires social stability and development in similar spirits with those social-democratic notions.

4.4. Successful cooperation and self-reinforcing effect

The successful exchanges and cooperation between the EU and China in social affairs since late 1990s have encouraged two sides to enhance current exchanges and cooperation. In its first EU policy paper in 2003, China expected bilateral exchanges and cooperation on social issues, in particular on migrant workers' employment and rights, the EU-China social security cooperation project and exchanges on social insurance. Guided by that policy paper, China expanded its ties with the EU and its member states in social field. The EU and China have initiated, planed and reviewed the bilateral exchanges and cooperation projects in social field in the Summits since 2004. The cooperation has not been reversed against the broader backdrop: financial crisis since 2008, social policy reforms in European countries, and changing relative power status between the EU and China. This is due to positive return (path-dependency) effects of China's learning processes from Europe, which is typically reflected in their continuous cooperation on social security.

On social security issues, they have launched two five-year major projects, the EUCSSP (2006-2011) and the SPRP (2013-2018). As one of four financial agreements "within the EU-China development co-operation" endorsed by the EU-China Summit in 2004 (point 14 and 18), the EUCSSP (2006-2011) aimed to improve China's policy development and capacity building in social insurance, including the drafting of China's new Social Insurance Law, through EU's expertise assistance in four areas, including pension benefiting

both urban and rural residents, and health, unemployment and work injury insurance schemes. The EUCSS has contributed to China's social policy development and practice through policy advice, capacity building and policy dialogue. International experts of the project have submitted reports for policy development (People.cn, 2007)¹⁵³. These experts elaborated EU practice which are "important inspirations and references" for Chinese legislators in formulating and reviewing the text of Social Insurance Law and Regulation on Work-Related Injury Insurances, establishing Unemployment Early Warning System and New Rural Social Endowment Insurance for Rural Residents (Yu, 2011)¹⁵⁴. This project also provided Chinese policy makers and experts various training sessions, roundtables and repeated working visits in Europe. Besides, the project has helped to transfer available international know-how and expertise at national and provincial levels¹⁵⁵. Chinese officials are satisfied with China's new Social Insurance Law, which entered into force in 2011, seeing it as China's "first uniform and binding framework legislation for the essential branches of social security" and "a successful conclusion to" the EUCSSR (BMAS, 2011)¹⁵⁶. Mr. Yin Weimin, Minister of Human Resources and Social Security acknowledged the positive role of this project in "the understanding and learning of EU experience and in the promotion of China's security system construction" (Y. Liu, 2011).

The EUCSS project, as "one of the flagship cooperation projects between the two sides" (Tan, 2009), has triggered other platforms of policy learning, such as the EU-China High Level Round Table on Social Security (HLRTSS)(2006-2011) and the China social security forum (CSSF)(2006-2013). The HLRTSS provided good opportunities for experts to

¹⁵³ These research covered special issues including the control of expenditure in extension of urban medical insurance, management models of social insurance funds, and human resource management.

¹⁵⁴ Wang Xiaochu, Vice-Minister of Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security (MOHRSS), which was formerly called the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MOLSS), praised the EUCSSP project and mentioned the fact.

¹⁵⁵ Founded projects were organized in five provinces including Jilin, Hunan, Shandong, Gansu, Sichuan.

¹⁵⁶ Wang Dongjin, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, address at the 6th EU-China High Level Round Table on Social Security(May 2011).

share experiences in social security, social coercion and sustainable development (BMAS, 2011). The 2007 EU-China Summit emphasized the contribution of the 2nd High Level Round Table on Social Security (Berlin, June 2007) to the China's reforms. Meanwhile, the CSSF has become the most influential platform for China's international exchanges including those with European officials and experts on social policy, in particular social security (C. G. o. China, 2007)¹⁵⁷. In the 15th Summit Statement (2012 September), leaders expressed their satisfaction with “exchanges of policy experience in social security, occupational safety and health, youth employment, inclusive growth models and labour relations”(point 30).Both sides have decided to continue their cooperation by launching the SPRP (2013-2018), a new major project to “support China in further developing social equality” such as social insurance, social assistance (formez.eu, 2013)¹⁵⁸. In its recent policy paper towards the EU, China expressed interest in strengthening their exchanges and cooperation on social security, social assistance and other issues (2014).

Conclusion

The above study indicates that China's increasing learning from European social expertise since 1990s were affected by a combination of causal factors rather than any single factors identified in the existing literature. We found that some background factors are not necessary nor sufficient conditions, such as proximity or similarities in geography, language and culture, political institutions, ideological environment, social and economic system. Other factors are necessary but not sufficient conditions in this case, such as the economic relations between

¹⁵⁷ Chinese central policy makers including vice-Premier and Ministers, legislators, officials and experts had exchanged ideas with EU officials and experts on social policy at the annual China social security forum. For example, in 2007 meeting, EU's ambassador to China had introduced EU experience in establishing social security system.

¹⁵⁸ Three important Chinese ministerial institutions joined this project, such as the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA).

the EU and China and the role of the EU in exporting social policy and the characteristics of the policies. The literature of EU external governance and normative power of Europe may highlight the EU's role in socializing China but inform little on the recipient side. Therefore, while simple causal accounts would identify a few causal factors, they can hardly inform us about the complex causality such as interactions among causal factors and temporal dimensions, or the specific type of learning occurred in this case.

Explanatory typology of learning recently developed by Dunlop and Radaelli is useful to map and explain the type and subtypes of China's learning: epistemic learning in which Europe as one contributor. However, it could not further explain why China has been more interested in European expertise than others since 1990s. To refine that framework, we addressed two issues: the possibility of the simultaneous co-existence of types and/or subtypes of learning and the temporal dimension of learning. As our case study indicates, the distinction of China's learning at political and policy levels and concerning time impact on both levels help further uncover the complex mechanisms underlying China's learning processes, which were not "one shot" at any single level. Instead, China's reflective learning at political level largely influences its learning practice at policy level: Europe as one contributor among others. This refinement helps yield two major observations : 1) China's increasingly drawing on European experience in social policy since 1990s is in response to undesirable impacts of neoliberal reforms since 1970s; 2) China's satisfactory learning from Europe in 2000s in turn enhance its continuous learning in 2010s.

Theoretically, this study suggests one alternative to refine explanatory typological to better deal with complex causality, in particular on two issues: the coexistence of different levels of learning process and the temporal dimension within type/subtype of learning. This opens the door for better understanding the complexity of policy learning through trail-and-error processes, when different types of learning at different levels influence each other over

time. Future research may carefully examine the relations between these levels of learning and uncover potential mechanisms in the learning process in specific contexts. Researchers may employ process tracing to demonstrate and test theoretical propositions of causal chains and patterns based on more detailed observable evidence. These efforts would help refine the existing explanatory typology and enhance its explanatory power in complex causality.

Empirically, highlighting China's perspective and revealing the causal mechanisms underlying China's learning from EU in social policy, this study would help further understand China's policy learning behavior and its interactions with the EU and others in policy transfer. Interestingly, many differences between Europe and China do not discourage in China's learning from the former as Chinese policy makers actively seek successful or most suitable models from the whole world. This study indicates the significance of paying more attention to China as an active learner rather than a passive recipient. As China's reflective learning at political level pursues the balance between reforms, development and stability, it is possible for China to keep sustainable development when drawing on both domestic and abroad lessons over time rather than either totally rejecting or simply accepting any policy advice.

References

(see the references at the end of this dissertation.)

Article 4

Do EU labour provisions travel to others through an intermediate landing?

Hang Yuan & Jan Orbie

Abstract

The inclusion of labour provisions in free trade agreements (FTAs) of the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) and its impact on signatory developing countries has already been subjected to an extensive amount of research. Yet, whether labour provisions in these agreements travel to subsequent agreements among developing countries remains an open question. We conducted a qualitative content analysis of labour provisions travelling from the EU's FTAs through some countries such as Chile and South Korea to others including China. The findings indicate that the EU's FTAs are neither necessary nor sufficient for labour provisions travelling to China's FTAs. The impact of the recipient country such as China and India on the outcome matters. In addition, differences in labour provisions in FTAs of the EU and the US have not been fully reflected in subsequent FTAs among developing countries. Therefore, there is a risk of overestimating the impact of the North-South FTAs on the South-South FTAs on labour provisions.

Key words: labour provision, free trade agreement, the EU, China

Introduction

Since the 1990s, efforts to link labour protection to trade have triggered an extensive amount of debate. On the one hand, the developed powers in the North¹⁵⁹ - such as the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) – have tried to incorporate social provisions in multilateral negotiations within the World Trade Organization. On the other hand, developing countries in the South - including India and China - demonstrated their opposition against those initiatives, which they criticize as being ‘veiled’ protectionism, undermining their comparative advantage in terms of lower labour costs (e.g. Haworth, Hughes, & Wilkinson, 2005). Subsequently, developed countries began to negotiate bilateral and regional trade agreements containing labour provisions, with references to initiatives by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Agustí-Panareda, Ebert, & LeClercq, 2014; Horvathy, 2014; Siroen, 2013).¹⁶⁰

Scholars have examined the direct impact of the inclusion of labour provisions in regional and bilateral trade agreements on labour standards in signatory countries (e.g. Kamata, 2014). Some called more attention to the limits of the EU’s influence (Young, 2015a, 2015b). However, the existing literature tells us little on what we call the ‘indirect impact’ of the free trade agreements (FTAs) concluded by the US and the EU. Therefore, the question remains whether their FTA partners continue to include labour provisions in subsequent FTAs with other countries. Or, in a broader sense: whether labour provisions travel from the North-South FTAs to the South-South FTAs.

This indirect impact bears both policy and academic significance. First of all, the number of potential target countries that could be pressurized indirectly for including labour protection is much higher than those that could experience direct pressure. While the EU and the US have respectively concluded 17 and 20 bilateral FTAs, the two have not started negotiations with the majority of developing countries. Therefore, if the FTA partners of the two powers also include labour clauses in their subsequent South-South FTAs, labour provisions within trade agreements could significantly proliferate. This could ultimately lead

¹⁵⁹ In this article, the developed countries or the Global North (the North) refer to the industrialized economies in Europe, North America, Oceanic region and Japan, while developing countries or the Global South (the South) refer to a large number of economies in Asia, Africa and South America, including less-developed countries and emerging markets.

¹⁶⁰ Both the US and the EU have launched various regional and bilateral trade and investment negotiations to cover social issues including labour provision, including the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) (launched in 2013-), the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement (participated in 2009-) , and their bilateral investment treaty (BIT) with China, namely the US-China BIT (2008-), the EU-China BIT (2013-).

to a ‘tipping point’, after which the inclusion of these provisions in FTAs could become standard practice (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

Also, it remains unclear to what extent labour provision in the North-South FTAs have effectively travelled to the South-South FTAs. Recently, some authors described a “positive and gradual impact” of the EU on FTA partners like Chile, which in turn included labour provision in their FTAs with other countries (Postnikov & Bastiaens, 2014). Others nuanced this statement, noting the inconsistency of Chile’s inclusion of labour provisions in its FTAs (Polanco, 2015)¹⁶¹. A thorough comparison of labour provisions in the FTAs of the EU and those of its FTA partners would generate hints on whether labour provisions ‘travel’ throughout FTAs and which factors influence this process. These comparisons may also help estimate EU influence compared to other actors like the US and China.

In sum, this study aims to explore whether labour clauses travel from EU FTAs to those of its trading partners and which factors influence this process. The inclusion of labour provisions in FTAs will be analyzed by setting up a framework of scales, focusing specifically on the *Core Labour Standards (CLS)* and the *Decent Work Agenda*, as advocated by the ILO and the United Nations (UN).. Qualitative content analysis techniques are used, and we focus on some cases which bear both practical as well as theoretical significance, including the FTAs of China, Chile and South Korea¹⁶². China’s FTAs constitute least-likely cases for labour provision travelling. By studying China, we avoid focusing solely on “successful cases” of the EU’s influence beyond its borders, which has “fostered the impression that the EU is particularly influential” (Young, 2015a, p. 1240). In contrast, the FTAs of Chile and South Korea considered as most-likely cases and can help unveiling the chronological patterns of including labour provisions in FTAs. Moreover, these cases can be used for isolating and comparing the impact of factors in the outcomes of labour provisions travelling.

Our findings are mixed. While the cases of China indicate that the EU’s influence is not very important, it is hard to deny the possibility of the EU’s influence. The analysis of the FTAs of Chile and South Korea show the variety in including labour provisions in different FTAs. It also offers new evidence of the inconsistency of Chile in including labour provisions in FTAs. Findings call attention to the impact of recipient countries such as China and India. Interestingly, China demonstrates some flexibility in including labour provisions in some of

¹⁶¹ See more details in the next section.

¹⁶² See more details on case selection in methodology section.

its FTAs. This study provides new evidence into the discussion of the limits of the EU's promotion of labour standards.

1. Labour standards diffusion through trade agreements

Whether globalization creates a *race-to-the-top* or a *race-to-the-bottom* in terms of labour standards remains debatable¹⁶³. Recent research presents strong evidence supporting two of the race to the bottom hypotheses: multinational enterprises prefer host countries with weak standards and countries compete for Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) by lowering standards (Olney, 2013). On the other hand, others authors have noted that international trade and economic relations may facilitate international diffusion of higher social standards. Some have identified the positive impact of importing countries' labour standards on their trading partners (Greenhill, Mosley, & Prakash, 2009). These so-called 'California effect'-hypotheses tend to anticipate improvement in labour standards in importing countries due to internal pressure from consumers and stakeholders as well as external pressure from global institutions.

Scholars have identified both direct and indirect ways in which the EU promotes labour standards. First of all, the EU has an impact on labour issues in its member states, acceding countries and neighborhood countries through the harmonization of regulations and norms (e.g.Kahn-Nisser, 2015; Jan Orbie et al., 2009). Furthermore, the EU also employs the GSP and GSP+ system, and encourages other countries to improve labour protection through its bilateral FTAs (Campling, Harrison, Richardson, & Smith, 2014 ; Van den Putte et al., 2013). One recent study – focusing specifically on the welfare implications of North-South FTAs - differentiates between ex ante and ex post impact of the negotiations of FTAs and suggested that, compared with the US's impact on labour protection during negotiations of PTAs, the EU's distinguishes itself through using PTAs as channels to activate civil societies and state officials in order to facilitate policy learning on labour issues (Postnikov & Bastiaens, 2014). What's even more interesting is the expectance that the EU's FTA partners may continue to diffuse labour standards in their subsequent FTAs. The authors report a “*positive and gradual effect of EU FTA labour standards*” , which in turn brought the Chile government to include labour provisions in its own FTAs “*as a result of policy learning*

¹⁶³ Labour standards here include the core labour standards initiative by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

which has not been a prominent feature of South-South PTAs before” (Postnikov & Bastiaens, 2014, p. 929).

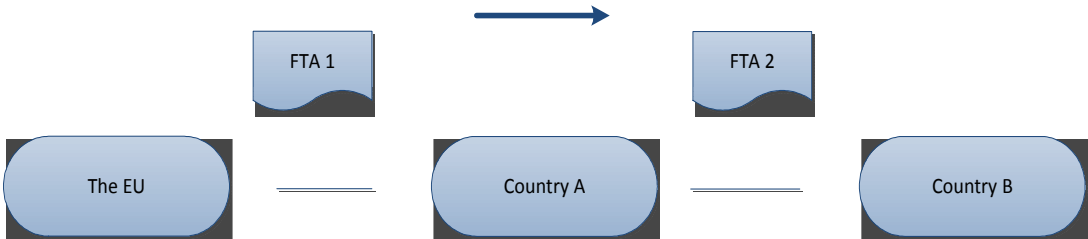
1.1.Hypothesis

Postnikov and Bastiaens (2014) identified – but did not elaborate upon – this highly interesting phenomenon of labour provisions travelling from the EU’s FTAs to other FTAs. The existing literature on the inclusion of labour provisions in FTAs has noted the impact of labour provision inclusion in FTAs on signatory countries, without systematical addressing how this process influences subsequent FTAs as well. Therefore, we construct the following hypothesis:

HYP: the EU’s effort to promote labour norms through including and implementing labour provisions in trade agreements with some developing countries may lead to these countries’ including labour provisions in their subsequent trade agreements with other developing countries.

This hypothesis has been visualized in Figure 1. It involves three actors in the process of labour provision travelling: the originator (the EU), the first recipient country (Country A) and the other recipient country (Country B). However, this hypothesis has two important preconditions. First of all, it is only possible to check whether FTA partners were influenced by the EU if the EU has already attempted to promote labour norms through FTAs. The second precondition concerns the time sequence: it only makes sense to assess the impact of the EUs FTA on subsequent FTAs, if a country has already started FTA negotiations with the EU before concluding its negotiations with others.

Figure 1. The inclusion of labour provisions in FTAs influenced by the EU



Note: In this figure, Country A refers to a country that has signed a trade agreement with the EU; Country B refers to another country having signed a trade agreement with Country A.

Our hypothesis engages with the literature in both political science and law studies concerning legal norm diffusion or legal transplantation in international treaties. Scholars have already addressed the conceptualization and investigation of the transfer/diffusion of laws, rules and norms, as well as its underlying causal mechanisms¹⁶⁴. Recently, some authors described the phenomenon of EU trade mark norms “*returning in a modified form*” to the EU “*through the medium of international treaties*”, calling this a “*(re)transmission of adopted or adapted legal norms*” (Firth, 2015a). This retransmission thesis is inspiring, as it extends the common view of norms travelling via international treaties and domestic legal practices in those countries involved. Therefore, the investigation of labour provisions travelling through FTAs has the potential to broaden our knowledge of the impact of FTAs on labour rights protection.

This article does not aim to examine the entire process of legal norms retransmission. Instead, it focuses on the “‘tangible’ or ‘visible’ level of the (re)-transmission”, namely labour clauses or provisions transmission in the text of FTA documents, leaving future research the tasks of tracing the concrete diffusion processes of labour norms and underlying mechanisms.

1.2. More specific predictions and alternative predictions

In order to operationalize the hypothesis and distinguish it from alternative hypotheses, we identify three sets of factors for three actors in the process. Firstly, factors of the originator or promoter may lead to specific predictions on the labour provisions. Labour provisions in the existing FTAs vary in many regards, including legal implications, normative content and mechanisms of implementation (Ebert & Posthuma, 2011, pp. 2-4). Two distinctions in labour provisions are of special interest in this study.

One is on the FTAs of the EU before and after 2008. The EU’s social commitment in its FTAs in terms of scope, enforcement and promotion increased gradually from 1990 until 2003 and strongly after 2008 (Van den Putte et al., 2013). The EU’s FTAs concluded during up until 2003 often incorporated labour clauses in the chapter of cooperation. The new generation of EU FTAs – concluded after 2008 – can be considered a ‘new generation’ of EU trade agreements, as they contain a separate chapter on sustainable development, which also covers labour issues. These new FTAs include the agreements with CARFORUM (2008),

¹⁶⁴ For latest discussion see (Morin & Gold, 2014). For the EU’s legal transplantation in other countries, see (Firth, 2015b).

South Korea (2010), Colombia/Peru(2012), Central America (2012) and Ukraine (2014). For example, the EU wants to use the text of FTA with South Korea as a template for its subsequent FTAs.

The other is on the difference between the EU and the US. While The EU tends to include *promotional* labour provisions (concerning dialogue and cooperation), the US labour provisions are *conditional* (also incorporating elements such as sanctions and incentives) (Agustí-Panareda et al., 2014, pp. 97-99, 105-106; Siroen, 2013)¹⁶⁵. Also, the US and the EU differs in external labour governance at the *de jure* level: The US' external labour governance can be considered a case of *governance through hierarchy*, while the EU 's can be considered *governance through network* (Oehri, 2014). In addition, while the new generation of EU FTAs include labour provisions within a sustainable development chapter, US FTAs usually contain a specific chapter on labour. Our hypothesis could therefore also have a US version, if we replace the EU with the US in it and its two prerequisites.

These two distinctions concerning labour provisions in FTAs suggest two more specific predictions.:

Prediction 1: *Labour provisions travelling from EU FTAs to others over time demonstrate an increasingly enhanced content in details.*

This prediction allows to check for specific evidence of labour provisions travelling over time. For instance, if both Chile and South Korea have concluded FTAs with China after their FTAs with the EU, then labour provisions that travelled from the EU-South Korea FTA (2010) should contain more substantial content than those travelling from the EU-Chile FTA (2003).

Prediction 2: *if labour provisions travel from the US FTAs, then these differ from labour provisions travelling from the EU's FTAs.*

Prediction 2 allows us to also consider non-EU factors, such as the influence from the US or from international pressure. For instance, if a country has not concluded FTAs with the EU or the US, its FTAs with the FTA partners of the EU should have *promotional* labour clauses, either in a chapter of cooperation or within a chapter on sustainable development. Also, its FTAs with the FTA partners of US should have a specific chapter on labour.

¹⁶⁵ Canada also did in similar ways.

The second set of factors concern the Eus FTA partners, whom may follow two logics: the *logic of appropriateness* – which may lead to include similar provisions in subsequent trade agreements – and the *logic of consequence* – which makes inclusion of labour provisions dependent on calculations of gains or loss in interests influenced by the EU or others. For instance, (Postnikov & Bastiaens, 2014) presented Chile as a positive example of policy learning, as it is said to play an active role in including labour provision in FTAs with developing countries (Addo, 2014, pp. 256-258; Ebert & Posthuma, 2011, pp. 19-20). Thus, Chile’s FTAs seem to be the most-likely cases of our hypothesis. Yet, others noted Chile’s varying policies on including labour issues in dealing with different signatory countries (García Hurtado, 2006; Siroen, 2013, pp. 92-93), pointing at a “inconsistencies” in Chile’s FTAs in terms of varying commitments regarding details and references (Polanco, 2015, p. 21). Therefore, it is possible that Chile has been influenced by its FTAs partners on labour provisions. Some recently underscored, “[E]stablishing how the EU causes others to change their ways requires analysis of examples of both success and failure so as to be able to identify those factors that correlated with the different outcome”(Young, 2015a, p. 1239). Thus, to examine labour provisions in Chile’s FTAS may engage with the above debate.

Third, the other recipient’s response including preference and power leverage vis-à-vis the first recipient matter for the eventual inclusion of labour provisions in these FTAs. Because developing countries do not want to lose their advantage of low labour costs, they may try to avoid the inclusion of labour provision, despite the preferences of FTA partners of the EU or the US. As some big countries such as China and India may use their power to do so, their FTAs are least likely to include labour provisions.

2. Methodology

2.1. Inclusion of labour provision in FTAs : conceptualization and operationalization

This study tests the our hypothesis and its two specific predictions while taking the impact of three sets of factors into account. To examine the extent to which labour provisions are included in FTAs, we set up a framework of scale through iterative processes between content analysis of FTA texts of the EU and consulting existing literature on FTAs (e.g. Agustí-Panareda et al., 2014; Siroen, 2013, pp. 97, 104-106; Van den Putte et al., 2013). This framework consists of three indicators of labour provisions: their legal status, references to international labour instruments and mechanisms of implementation (see Table 1). The

values of each indicator can vary between absent, low, medium and higher levels, represented by ordinal scales from 0 to 3.

Table 1. Three indicators of labour provisions in FTAs

Indicators	Scores	Specification
Legal status	0	No labour provisions in any documents of FTA
	1	Labour provisions included in memorandum of understanding (MOU) on labour
	2	Labour provisions included in a side agreement on labour
	3	Labour provisions included in the FTA text
Reference to labour instruments	0	No reference to international labour instrument
	1	References to “the objective of the ILO”, “internationally recognized labour rights”, “labour standards”, “decent work” or equivalent terms and contents
	2	References to “the four Core labour standards (CLS)”, the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, or equivalent terms
	3	More references, such as references to 2006 Ministerial Declaration on Attainment of Full, Productive Employment and Decent Work adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council
Mechanisms of implementation	0	No any mechanism
	1	Dialogue between governments; Cooperate on labour issues
	2	Intuitional and procedure framework established to implement the treaty; governmental consultation; Civil society involved in dialogue
	3	Group/panel of experts involved in dispute settling; ILO participation ; Sanctions

First of all, the legal status of labour provisions in a FTA is usually reflected in its location within the respective document. Labour provisions may appear within the FTA text itself, or in affiliated documents such as a separate agreement or a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), with the former being more legally binding than the latter.

Secondly, reference to international labour instruments may reveal the importance of labour protection for the signatory countries. Signatory parties often express simple political commitments by general terms such as “*internationally recognized labour rights*”, “*labour standards*” or “*labour matters*”, without explicitly defining their contents. Therefore, more clearly defined international labour instruments illustrate a higher importance of labour

protection. For instance, If a treaty makes explicit reference to the four CLS or the 1998 ILO declaration¹⁶⁶, we assign it a score of 2. If it also refers to the 2006 Declaration on Decent work¹⁶⁷, a score of 3 is given.

Thirdly, mechanisms used to implement the labour provisions vary in four areas; including dialogue, cooperation, monitoring and sanctions. We assign 1 for the presence of dialogue and cooperation between signatory governments, as they are common mechanisms in many FTAs. We assign 2 if treaty explicitly requires the involvement of civil society groups in dialogues or other domestic mechanisms, or established institutions to monitor the implementation of the treaty, or if it explicitly mentions labour-related dispute settlement mechanisms such as governmental consultation. If the treaty also mentions the involvement of expert panels in dispute settling, ILO participation or mechanisms of sanctions, we assign 3 for its mechanisms.

We examine these three indicators in order to code the labour provisions in FTAs. If a FTA does not include any labour provision, then the score for legal status is 0 and – accordingly – the other two indicators are both 0. If a FTA does contain labour provisions, then we measure its score for each indicator. However, it is important to note that in this qualitative study, these scores are not used for the purpose of quantitative analysis. Instead, they allow us to more explicitly discern between the differences of labour provisions by using numbers rather than words.

2.2.Cases, data and research design

In this study, we define cases as *the final documents of trade agreement which have been signed up until July 2015 between two sovereign states or mandated representatives of them* (in the case of the EU). The population of cases consists of all bilateral and regional trade agreements which fit the two requirements of the hypothesis. We consulted databases such as the Trade Agreement Heterogeneity Database (Kohl, T., S. Brakman, and H. Garretsen (2015): which includes 296 Trade Agreements from 1948 up to 2011. In addition, we collected data of the FTAs signed between 2011 and July 2015 from FTA signatory countries' websites. Our

¹⁶⁶ the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 86th Session in 1998.

¹⁶⁷ Ministerial Declaration on Attainment of Full, Productive Employment and Decent Work adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in September 2006.

analysis of the FTAs includes only English versions of both the text and affiliated documents¹⁶⁸.

Our case selection is based on a three-step research design. It is not our aim to simply falsify or confirm the hypothesis for our entire population. Instead, in order to examine the hypothesis and its two predictions in light of alternative explanations (cf. supra), this study focuses on cases which bear both practical and theoretical significance.

The first step is to focus on some least-likely cases. More specifically, we examine whether labour provisions travelled from the EU's FTAs to those of China for two reasons. First of all, the EU does not have FTA with China but some of the EU's FTA partners have concluded FTAs with China. Second, as one of the larger developing countries, China has been opposing linking labour to trade and has capacity to influence negotiation outcomes¹⁶⁹. Therefore, it is likely that labour provisions from the EU's FTAs do not appear in China's FTAs. However, we cannot fully exclude the possibility of labour provisions travelling to China's FTAs, so we argue it makes sense to further test the hypothesis.

Six of the EU's FTA partners have concluded FTAs with China, including Switzerland, Chile, Costa Rica, South Korea, Peru and Singapore (see Table 2). However, both Switzerland and Singapore do not fit the two prerequisites of our hypothesis. Switzerland does not meet the first precondition. The FTA between the European Economic Community and Swiss Confederation (concluded in 1972) contained no labour clauses. The case of Singapore does not meet our precondition of time, which can also be seen in Table 2. The other four countries (Chile, Costa Rica, South Korea and Peru), meet both prerequisites and provide proper cases for this step.

¹⁶⁸ As few of them are originally in Spanish version, we translated those documents into English.

¹⁶⁹ It is widely recognized that China has been one of largest developing countries for decades. Recently, some tend to view China as an emerging market due to its recent rapid development. However, the fact that China remains a developing country in many ways has not fundamentally changed.

Table 2. List of countries having concluded FTAs with both the EU and China

	FTA with EU Time of negotiations (time of signing)	FTA with China Time of negotiations (time of signing)
Switzerland	(1973)	April 2011- July 2013 (July 2013)
Chile	2000- April 2002 (November 2002)	2002- 2003 (November 2005, MOU on labour in 2005) Supplementary agreement (April 2008)
Costa Rica	The trade part in the new EU-Central American Association Agreement 2007- May 2010 (June 2012)	November 2008- 2010 (April 2010)
South Korea	2007-2010 (October 2010)	2012-2015 (June 2015)
Peru	February 2009- 2010 (June 2012)	2007-2009(April 2009 ,MOU 2008)
Singapore	2010-2013	August 2006- September 2008(October 2008)

The second step within our design is to examine factors which may influence the travelling of labour provisions. Since the positions of originators (such as the EU and the US) and that of China on the linkage of labour and trade are clear, we first examine their impact before exploring other actors such as the EU's FTA partners. We examine the EU and the US factor vis-à-vis China in all of China's FTAs with sovereign partners. In order to examine the EU factor, we conducted a quasi-experimental analysis of two sets of cases in China's FTA partners: one group of cases fitting the two prerequisites of the hypothesis and a 'control group' of other cases, including China's FTAs with ASEAN, Pakistan, Singapore, New Zealand, Iceland, Switzerland and Australia (see Table 3). Following the same logic, we also examined whether the US factor has had an impact on China's response (see Table 4).

The third step is to check whether the EU's FTA partners always include labour provisions in their subsequent FTAs. We focus on the two countries which were used in the study of Postnikov and Bastiaens (2014) as examples for illustrating the EU's direct impact : Chile and South Korea. We examine their FTAs in chronological order in order to isolate the EU's impact on labour provisions travelling from others, like the US and Canada (which may generate similar results), and India and China (which may produce opposite results). Meanwhile, selecting these two countries maximizes variations in factors such as 1) regions or geographic locations, 2) time periods and 3) generations of FTAs, in order to compare

and/or control for these factors. In addition, examining Chile’s FTAs also allows us to engage with debates on the role of Chile in promoting labour issues in developing countries.

Table 3. Selecting the FTAs of Chile and South Korea

	Chile	South Korea
Geographic	South America	Asia
Period	EU-Chile FTA (2003)	EU-South Korea FTA (2010)
Generation of FTA	Old generation (before 2008)	New generation(after 2008)

3. Findings and discussion

3.1.From the EU to China: anticipated and unanticipated findings

Table 4 Comparison FTAs of four countries with the EU and China

	Agreement partner	Legal status	References to instruments	Mechanisms
Chile	EU	3	2	1
	China	1	1	2
Costa Rica	EU	3	3	3
	China	0	0	0
South Korea	EU	3	3	3
	China	0	0	0
Peru	EU	3	3	3
	China	1	1	2

Using our framework of labour provision inclusion in FTAs (cf. supra), we examined the FTAs between four countries and the EU/ China. Findings indicates that the hypothesis holds in the cases of Chile and Peru to some extent but fails in the case of Costa Rica and South Korea (see Table 4).

The case of Chile and Peru indicates the possibilities of labour provisions in the EU’s FTAs travelling to those of China in remarkably subtle ways. First of all, regarding the legal

status of labour provisions, the EU-Chile FTA contained articles of labour in the part on social cooperation¹⁷⁰, while the Chile-China FTA contained an article on labour in the chapter on cooperation but left more details in a MOU on labour¹⁷¹. The EU-Peru FTA contained labour articles in the title of trade and sustainable development¹⁷², and the Peru-China FTA contained an article on labour cooperation in the chapter of cooperation and more details on a MOU on labour¹⁷³. It is important to note that the EU's FTAs with Chile and Peru included many details on labour, while China's FTAs with these two countries only briefly mention labour issues in one article, leaving details in separate MOUs on labour issues. To what extent these clauses and the separate MOUs are legal binding remains a question. Secondly, as to the references of labour instruments, all of the four countries' FTAs with the EU have explicitly included the four CLS of the ILO. In contrast, the references to the ILO objectives only appear in China's MOUs on labour issues with Chile and Peru. Third, in terms of implementation mechanisms, the EU FTAs with these countries contain specific articles on dialogue and cooperation as well as other mechanisms. In contrast, if labour clauses with reference to specific mechanisms appear in China's FTAs, they only do so in MOUs concerning exchanges and cooperation initiatives.

Predication 1 fails in all cases of these four countries. There is no real difference in labour provision inclusion in China's MOUs with Chile (2005) and Peru (2008). Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the Costa Rica-China FTA (2010) and the South Korea-China FTA (2015) did not mention any issues related to labour rights or standards. Thus, given the inclusion of labour issues in China's FTAs signed from 2006 to 2014, China's FTA negotiations with Costa Rica and South Korea constitute a notable surprise¹⁷⁴.

3.2. The factors of the EU, the US and China

¹⁷⁰ See Article 43-45 in TITLE V Social Cooperation, PART III cooperation.

¹⁷¹ See Article 108 Labor, Social Security and Environmental Cooperation in Chapter XIII Cooperation.

¹⁷² See Article 267-269, 271, 276-286 in TITLE IX Trade and Sustainable Development.

¹⁷³ See Article 161 Labour Cooperation in Chapter 12 Cooperation.

¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, the China- Australia FTA signed in 17 June 2015 did not mention any labour rights neither. The EU has signed a Partnership Framework with Australia in 2008, which contains claims to support sustainable development in Asia and Pacific Region with attention to social factors but no explicit reference to labour rights. See the European Union- Australia Partnership Framework A strategic partnership built on shared values and common ambition.

Table 5. China's FTAs with sovereign states or mandated representatives until June 2015

	The EU Factor	The US Factor	Also China's negotiations	Joining major	Time signed	Legal status	References to Instruments	Mechanisms
ASEAN	No	No	Yes		2002 2007 2009	0	0	0
Chile	Yes	Yes	No		2005	1	1	2
Pakistan	No	No	No		2006	0	0	0
Singapore	No	Yes	No		2008	0	0	0
New Zealand	No	No	No		2008	1	2	2
Peru	Yes	Yes	No		2009	1	1	2
Costa Rica	Yes	Yes	No		2010	0	0	0
Iceland*	No	No	No		2013	3	0	0
Switzerland	No	Yes	No		2014	2	3	2
South Korea	Yes	Yes	Yes		2015	0	0	0
Australia	No	Yes	Yes		2015	0	0	0

* The Iceland-China FTA noted "the Parties shall enhance their communication and co-operation on labour matters" without any more details.

By analyzing all of China's FTAs, we found that the EU's inclusion of labour provision in its FTA alone is neither necessary nor sufficient conditions in other's diffusion of labour issues (see Table 5)¹⁷⁵. For instance, in both the New Zealand-China FTA and the Switzerland – China FTA, there are also provisions on labour issues and MOUs. But New Zealand has no recent FTA with the EU. The EC-Swiss FTA (1972) does not contain labour provisions, as the European Economic Community did not promote labour norms through free trade agreements until the 1990s.

¹⁷⁵ Until March 2015, China has signed and ratified 11 FTAs with other countries and groups of countries. Of them, only five FTAs contain specific article of labour issues in the text. Four of them mentioned MOUs of laboru issues : the China-Chile FTA(2005), China-New Zealand FTA(2008), China-Peru FTA(2009) and China – Switerland(2013). China- Iceland FTA(2013) mentioned labour issues but without specifical MOU on it.

Moreover, taking the US factor into account yields similar conclusions. For example, as Singapore and Australia have concluded FTAs with the US before their negotiations with the EU¹⁷⁶, China's FTAs with Singapore and Australia can help isolate the US from the EU factor. The result is that neither China's FTAs with Singapore nor Australia contained labour provisions. Furthermore, both the EU and the US had started negotiations with Costa Rica and South Korea before China concluded negotiations with them¹⁷⁷. Yet, the result is that China's FTA with both Costa Rica and South Korea did not contain labour provision. Thus, regardless of whether the US and EU factor are present, it is the China factor that determines the outcome.

Interestingly, there is also a certain variety in the inclusion of labour provisions in China's FTAs (see Table 5). While most of China's FTAs do not contain labour clauses, the FTAs with Chile, Peru, Switzerland and New Zealand do, albeit a short sentence in the text, leaving the details for separate documents. We found that, during their bilateral negotiations with China, these four countries were not involved in the (at that time) major FTA negotiations, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) (launched in November 2012)¹⁷⁸ and the China-Japan- South Korea FTA (launched in March 2013)¹⁷⁹. On the other hand, South Korea and Australia have been included in these negotiations. It seems that China demonstrated some flexibility on including labour provision in FTAs vis-à-vis those countries which were not directly involved in China's major trade negotiations.

3.3. More factors in more cases

The cases of Chile and South Korea in chronological order demonstrate more evidence challenging the hypothesis and its two predictions (see Figure 2 and 3, for more details see Table 6 and 7 in annex). The variety in the inclusion of labour provisions in Chile's FTAs since 2002 indicates that the presence of the EU and US factors have not necessarily led to labour provisions travelling to South-South FTAs. For example, while Chile's FTAs with

¹⁷⁶ The Singapore-US FTA was signed in May 2003. The Singapore- EU FTA was negotiated during August 2006 and September 2008. The Australia-US FTA was signed in 2005. The EU-Australia Partnership Framework was signed in October 2008.

¹⁷⁷ The Costa Rica- US FTA was signed respectively in May 2004. Its FTA negotiations with the EU and China were respectively from 2007 to May 2010, and from November 2008 to 2010. The South Korea-US FTA was signed in June 2007. Its FTA negotiations with the EU and China were respectively from 2007-2010, and from 2012-2015.

¹⁷⁸ In 2014 the negotiations have entered from procedural consultations to substantial negotiations.

¹⁷⁹ First negotiations were in March 2013.

Colombia and Turkey contain detailed labour provisions, its FTAs with South Korea, the EFTA , India, Japan, Ecuador, Malaysia and Vietnam did not mention them at all (Figure 2).

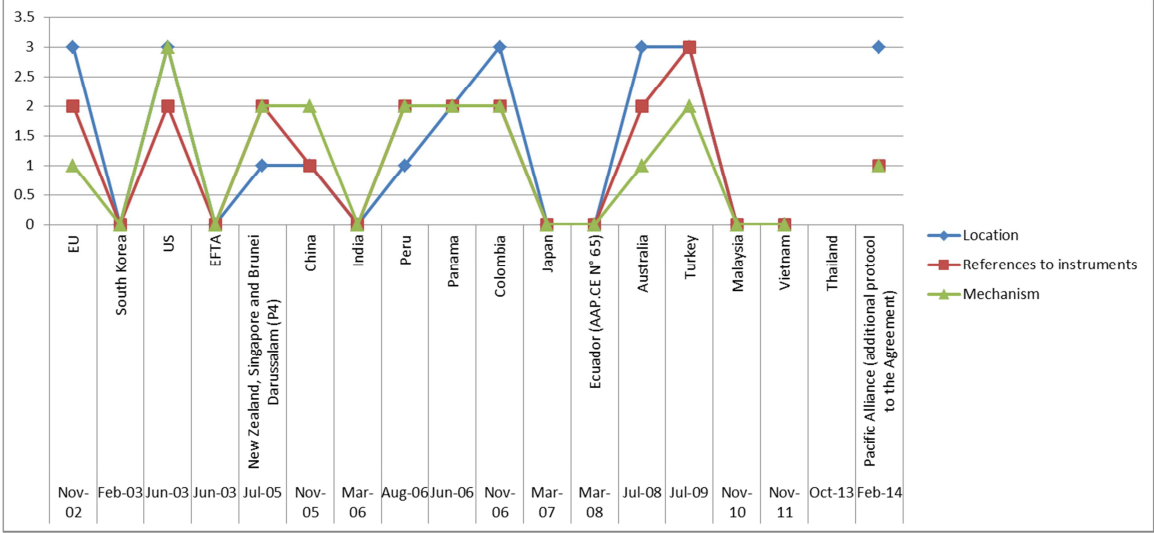
One most-likely case for the hypothesis is the Additional Protocol to the Agreement of Pacific Alliance (2014). All of its four member states have signed FTAs with the EU containing labour provisions: Mexico (2000), Chile (2002), Colombia(2012) and Peru (2012). Yet, the 2014 Protocol only contained a few undetailed references to labour rights within the article on social responsibility policy¹⁸⁰.

Labour provisions did not appear in South Korea's FTAs until 2007. It seems that the presence of the US and EU factors have triggered the processes of including labour provisions in South Korea's subsequent FTAs, like those with Peru, Colombia and Turkey. However, South Korea's FTAs with India did not contain labour provisions. Moreover, despite the trend of including labour provisions in South Korea's FTAs during 2007-2015, the case of South Korea-China FTA indicates the impact of China. Therefore, these observations further indicate that some emerging powers may use their power to eliminate the inclusion of labour provision.

In addition, both the cases of Chile and South Korea challenge the two predictions (for more details, consult Table 6 and 7 in the annex). First of all, neither Chile's nor South Korea's FTAs show an increase in the inclusion of labour provision after 2008. Second, while a labour chapter often appeared in South Korea's FTAs, the FTA partners of the EU did not necessarily differ from those of the US on whether to include labour provisions in a chapter of cooperation, sustainable development or in a separate chapter of labour. For instance, despite the fact that both the US and the EU signed FTAs with South Korea (2006) and Colombia (2012, the Chile-Colombia FTA had one chapter on labour, while the South Korea-Colombia FTA (2013) had labour provisions in the chapter on trade and sustainable development.

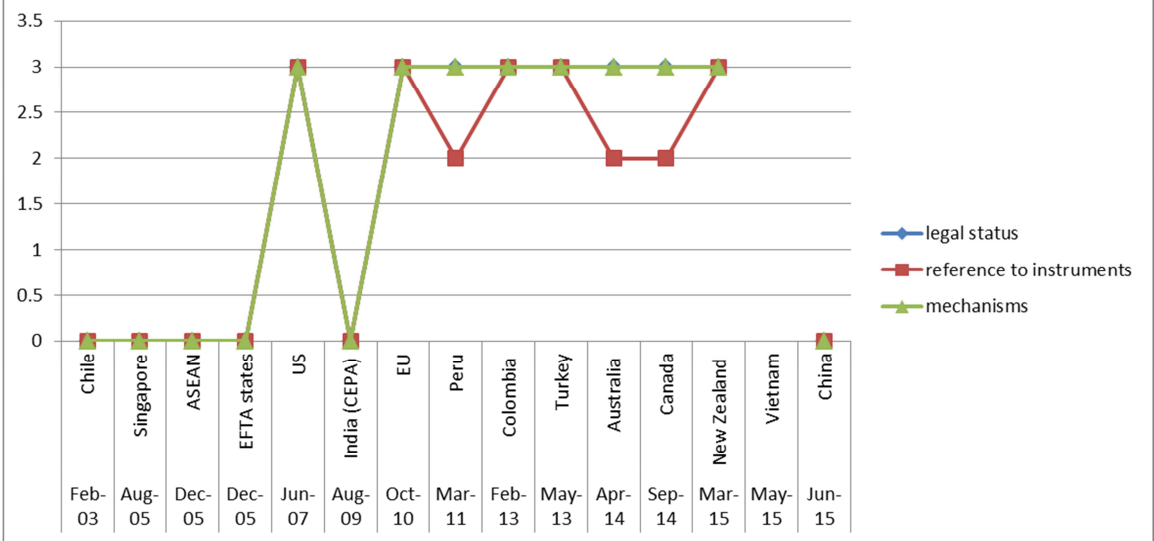
¹⁸⁰ See Article 10.30 Social Responsibility policy.

Figure 2. Varying including labour provisions in Chile’s FTAs with other countries (2002-2014)



Note : the data of the Chile-Thiland FTA is unavailable.

Figure 3. Varying including labour provisions in South Korea’s FTAs (2003-2015)



Note: the data on the South Korea-Vietnam FTA is unavailable.

Conclusion

This study tested the hypothesis that labour provisions travel through free trade agreements from the EU to others. We are left with mixed results, as our findings neither entirely falsify nor confirm that hypothesis. Although China has been opposing the linkage between labour and trade and although it has the capability to influence its FTAs partners on these issues, some of its FTAs contained labour provisions, albeit to a varying extent. These least-likely cases indicate that it is difficult to completely deny the possibility of labour provisions travelling from the EU. However, there is also a risk of overestimating the impact of North-South FTAs on South-South FTAs on the inclusion of labour provisions. The chronological analysis of the FTAs of Chile and South Korea indicates that labour provisions did not always appear in their FTAs, and that there is considerable variety in the inclusion of these provisions. One of the most likely cases, the Additional Protocol Agreement of Pacific Alliance (2014), did not include as much labour provisions as the FTAs of the EU with its member states.

The two predictions of our hypothesis, which stated that differences in labour provisions also travel among FTAs, is also challenged. Our findings from China's FTAs and the FTAs of Chile and South Korea over time illustrate that differences in labour provisions in the EU's FTAs before and after 2008 were not fully reflected in the subsequent FTAs of its FTA partners. No findings in these FTAs support the impact of difference in labour provisions in the FTAs of the EU and the US on subsequent FTAs of their FTA partners. Therefore, these observations further challenge the hypothesis of labour provision travelling from the EU and the US to others.

The influence of some recipient countries on this issue also matters. Our findings from China's FTAs indicate that the EU's FTAs are neither necessary or sufficient for labour provisions travelling to China's FTAs. Despite the presence of the EU and the US factors, China's FTAs with Costa Rica, South Korea and Australia did not contain labour provisions. Although South Korea's FTAs from 2007 onwards often contain labour provisions, its FTA with China did not, demonstrating the impact of China. Furthermore, neither India's FTAs with Chile nor South Korea contained labour provisions, despite the presence of the US factor. These cases further illustrate the remarkable impact of the recipient countries' policy positions on the linkage of labour and trade. Thus, some large developing countries may use their capacity to influence the inclusion of labour provisions in FTAs. Furthermore, this study

also contributes to the debates on global trade as a “*race-to-the-bottom*” or “*race-to-the-top*” regarding labour provisions. We examining labour provisions travelling across FTAs.. In a broader sense, the pressure on including labour provisions in FTAs driven by the EU and the US is still far from generating a ‘tipping point’.

Future research may proceed along at least two lines. First of all, it is important to understand the response of the recipient countries, including emerging powers such as China and India. For instance, while most of China’s FTAs did not contain labour provisions, four of them did. When negotiating bilateral FTAs with China, these four countries did not join China’s major trade negotiations such as the RCEP and China-Japan-South Korea FTA. Future research may investigate whether China demonstrates a slight flexibility in its FTAs with these countries because of their absence in China’s major FTA negotiations. Secondly, future research may investigate the impact of different combinations of factors. For example, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) may systematically investigate the impact of the EU, US, Canada and other countries. Comparative case studies could also take the impact of time into account. Within-case studies using process tracing may generate more detailed accounts of FTA negotiations and their implementation in order to identify the underlying causal mechanisms of labour provisions travelling.

References

(see the references at the end of this dissertation.)

Annex

Table 6. Including labour provisions in Chile's FTAs with other countries (2002-2014)

	Time Signed	Agreement partner	Location	References to instruments	Mechanism
1	November 2002	EU	PART III Cooperation TITLE V Social Cooperation	2	1
2	February 2003	South Korea	0	0	0
3	June 2003	US	Chapter Eighteen Labor	2	3
4	June 2003	EFTA	0	0	0
5	July 2005	New Zealand, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam (P4)	MOU on Labour Cooperation	2	1
6	November 2005	China	MOU on labour and Social Security Cooperation	1	2
7	March 2006	India	0	0	0
8	August 2006	Peru	MOU on Labour Cooperation	2	2
9	June 2006	Panama	Agreement on Labour Cooperation	2	2
10	November 2006	Colombia	Chapter 17 Labor	2	2
11	March 2007	Japan	0	0	0
12	March 2008	Ecuador (AAP.CE N° 65)	0	0	0
13	July 2008	Australia	Chapter 18 Cooperation	2	1
14	July 2009	Turkey	TITLE IV Cooperation ARTICLE 37 Cooperation	3	2
15	November 2010	Malaysia	0	0	0
16	November 2011	Vietnam	0	0	0
17	October 2013	Thailand	-	-	-
18	February 2014	Pacific Alliance	ARTICLE 10.30: Social Responsibility Policy	"labor rights"	

Table 7. Including labour provisions in South Korea's FTAs (2003-2015)

	Time signed	Agreement partner	location	References to instruments	mechanism
1	February 2003	Chile	0	0	0
2	August 2005	Singapore	0	0	0
3	December 2005	ASEAN	0	0	0
4	December 2005	EFTA states (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland)	0	0	0
5	June 2007	US	CHAPTER NINETEEN LABOR		3
6	August 2009	India (CEPA)	0	0	0
7	October 2010	EU	CHAPTER THIRTEEN TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	3	3
8	March 2011	Peru	CHAPTER EIGHTEEN LABOR	2	3
9	May 2013	Turkey	CHAPTER 5 TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	3	3
10	February 2013	Colombia	CHAPTER Sixteen Trade and sustainable development SECTION B: LABOR	3 (1998) "ILO Declaration" the 2006 Ministerial Declaration of the UN Economic and Social Council on Full Employment and Decent Work.	3
11	April 2014	Australia	Chapter 17: Labour	2	3
12	September 2014	Canada	CHAPTER 18 LABOUR	2	3
13	March 2015	New Zealand	CHAPTER 15 LABOUR	3 "ILO")Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-Up, 1998 (hereinafter referred to as the "ILO Declaration"), and the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, 2008;	3
14	May 2015	Vietnam	-	-	-
15	June 2015	China	0	0	0

Part three

Part three presents a summary of the main findings and issues covered in the dissertation, engagement with broader literature, policy implications, reflections and agenda for future research.

Conclusion

The above four articles explore the involvement of the EU and China in international social policy diffusion and the evolution of global social governance. Specifically, they focus on four sets of questions and present answers to them.

This conclusion aims to deepen and broaden the discussion. It consists of three sections. First, it presents the synthesis of my findings in the four articles and answers to the research questions. Second, it engages with broader literature, research traditions and disciplines to further discuss the added value of this dissertation to the existing body of knowledge. Third, it highlights the implications and significance of this dissertation for policy making and the general public audience. This conclusion also reflects on the limits of this PhD project and proposes some avenues for further research.

1. The synthesis of the findings

This dissertation includes original studies with novel empirical data on China's involvement in international social policy exchanges, particularly in relation to the EU. Specifically, the dissertation fills the gaps of the body of knowledge on four interrelated topics:

- The social dimension of the EU-China relationship
- The EU's approaches to China
- China's response to the EU's approaches
- China's role in international social policy interactions and global social governance.

The articles in this dissertation have answered a set of specific questions around the above themes (see table 1). The first article addresses the first two topics by exploring the social dimension of the EU-China relations . The second article addresses the third topic by analyzing China's mixed response to the international promotion of the social dimension of globalization. The third and fourth articles respectively focus on two specific issue areas: social security and labour provisions in trade agreements.

Table 1. Topics in four articles

Topics	Research questions answered	Articles
Social dimension of the EU-China relationship	What are interactions between the EU and China on social issues over time? What framing on social issues have both sides used in their bilateral relation?	1
The EU's approach	How can we understand the EU's approach?	1
China's response	How can we understand China's mixed response?	2
Social security	In which way and due to which causes did China learn from European expertise in social security?	3
Labour	How can we understand the impact of the EU and China in international transfer of labour provisions through FTAs?	4

1.1. The social dimension of the EU-China relation

What are the interactions between the EU and China on social issues? Social issues appear in unilateral, bilateral and multilateral fronts involving the interactions between the EU and China. This study focuses on the unilateral and bilateral levels. The systematic investigation of social issues in the EU-China relation from 1975 to 2015 provides the general context to understand how the social issues have been framed in this bilateral relationship. The findings demonstrate that social issues appear in all of three pillars of the EU-China relations, including political dialogue, economic and sectoral cooperation, as well as people-to-people dialogue. The 17th EU-China Summit was held on 29th June 2015, acknowledging that “the relationship has made significant strides in the political, economic, social, environmental and

cultural fields”¹⁸¹. This means that alongside the political and economic field, the social field has already been recognized by leaders as an important aspect of this bilateral relations.

What framing have both sides used on social issues in their bilateral relation? The EU-China interactions on social issues includes bilateral dialogue, development cooperation and assistance, as well as negotiations on trade and investment agreements. The findings indicate three features of the social dimension of the EU-China relations. Firstly, regarding the historical development of the social dimension, social issues have received little attention from policy makers until the mid-1990s. Yet, as bilateral dialogue and cooperation shows, this social dimension has incorporated more specific issues, moving from general dialogue to more specific and technical cooperation, from commitments to actions and projects. Secondly, social security, employment and labour are the key issue areas in the social dimension of their relationship. The EU and China seemingly have a more similar view on social security and employment than on labour issues. The consensus on social security and employment has led to a variety of dialogues and cooperation projects since 2005. These projects are also the important projects up to date in terms of the involvement of important governmental departments and volume of resources spent by China in bilateral cooperation in social field. In contrast, the lack of consensus on labour issues is reflected in their policy positions on Core Labour Standards and Corporate Social Responsibility. The findings indicate that labour rights issues were not on high priority of the agenda in their bilateral relations. Thirdly, social issues have been linked more closely to non-political topics than political ones. Social issues have been more related to economic growth and sustainable development than human rights. The EU-China Summit Statements have replaced the term of social reform in China with the term of social development during 2005-2015¹⁸². In the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation (signed in 2013) social issues were included within the theme of sustainable development.

These findings have raised more intriguing questions of the social dimension of the EU-China relations. For instance, why has the social dimension been growing since mid-1990s, especially during the 2000s? Why is there more consensus between both sides on employment and social security than on labour ? Why have social issues been linked more closely with non-political topics than with political ones? Articles in this dissertation have

¹⁸¹ See point 2 in the 17th EU-China Joint Statement(issued in June 2015).

¹⁸² The17th EU-China Summit also mentioned “economic and social development”. See point 16 of the 17th EU-China Summit Joint Statement.

offered answers to some of these questions. Article 1 analysed the EU's approach to answer why the EU has linked social issues more closely with non-political topics than political ones. Article 2, 3 and 4 offer analysis on China's response on social issues in general and two issue areas in particular. The findings would also trigger more exploration on the social dimension in broader sense¹⁸³.

1.2. The EU's approach

Examining the EU's approach in the social field may help understand the development of the social dimension of the EU-China relations. How can we understand the EU's approach? The evidence indicates that the EU's approach cannot be reduced either normative or pragmatic manner. Instead, the findings indicate that the EU's approach is a combination of pragmatic and normative manner.

The EU's pragmatic way in social field helps explain the linking social issues more closely to economic than political ties. Although the EU incorporated economic and social rights including the Core Labour Standards into its human rights strategy¹⁸⁴, it has not stressed social rights in its external policy towards China. The EU paid much less attention to social rights than political and civil rights. The available issued statements of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogues show that only on a few occasions the EU explicitly noticed China's situation of social rights such as the Re-education through the Labour system, viewed as one system of forced labour. More importantly, the EU's China policy papers issued in the 2000s paid more attention to the efficiency and effectiveness of its bilateral policy instruments such as dialogue and cooperation. The EU tends to frame social issues within the economic and sectoral dialogue and cooperation, or the second pillar of EU-China relations.

The EU's pragmatic approach towards China also paves the way for its exercise of normative power. Since the mid-1990s, the EU has suggested to provide help and assistance for China to address economic and social issues in reforms towards good governance and sustainable development. By encouraging dialogue and cooperation in the social field, the EU managed to export technical assistance and policy initiative as well as norms towards China. The EU-China cooperation on social issues including on social security, employment and

¹⁸³ See discussion in the section of 2.1 the EU-China relations literature in this Conclusion Chapter.

¹⁸⁴ See the Council of the European Union, EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy(11855/12) (Luxembourg, 25 June 2012).

working safety has proven smoothly and successful. As a result, China has shown interest in drawing lessons from the European model in social policy and sustainable development, and established more platforms to learn from foreign experiences in social policy. China's policy leaning from Europe on social issues provides evidence supporting the predictions of the NPE analytical framework: the EU may "live as an example" for others; promote norms through dialogue and cooperation; and has "least harm impact" to China's society.

The EU's pragmatic and normative approaches in social field serve its objectives including guaranteeing material interests and keeping normative influence on China. The EU has material interests in developing economic and trade ties with China. This encourages the EU to take a pragmatic approach towards China. Meanwhile, the EU also has normative motivations to influence China. The EU appears to be pursuing the both objectives in engaging with China. Interestingly, the outcomes of the EU's norms promotion in the social field seem more successful than those on human rights issues, which the EU stress normative objective than pragmatic concerns and have not been very successful (Kinzelbach & Thelle, 2011; Mattlin, 2012).

1.3.China's response

How can we understand China's mixed response? As findings indicate, China's response is mixed on three specific issues of the social dimension of globalization. China's positions are not simply accepting or rejecting the diffused norms. Instead, China's position on one specific norm or initiative is based on whether that norm fits China's core national interests. This phenomenon indicates the complexity of China's behaviour, which is characterized by at least three features: selectively favouring some international legal document such as ILO conventions, showing flexibility on some issues such as Decent Work and CSR if they fit China's core national interests, and stressing China's interest and autonomy.

Firstly, regarding Core Labour Standards, China took a selective position in ratifying the eight ILO Conventions. China ratified four out of eight conventions: two conventions on the abolition of child labour and two on the elimination of discrimination at work. These four conventions are in accordance with and supported by China's domestic laws and regulations

concerning the protection of women and children¹⁸⁵. While China has not ratified the conventions on the prohibition of forced labour, its domestic laws such as criminal law, labour law and relevant regulations have elements to disallow forced labour. In 2014 China decided to abolish the re-education through labor (RETL) system. While China has not ratified the conventions on the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, its domestic laws protect workers' rights to associate and bargain collectively under the leadership of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU)¹⁸⁶.

Secondly, regarding Decent Work initiatives, China seeks to learn about employment and social affairs but at the same time stresses Chinese contexts. China has demonstrated a positive response to all four objectives including promoting jobs, protecting rights at work, extending social protection and promoting social dialogue. It has participated in cooperation with the ILO, created a system of tripartite consultation and issued two editions of Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP). Furthermore, China has linked these initiatives to its five year development plans during 2006-2015. In particular, China shows a lot of interest in learning from the EU's experience in Decent Work and other social affairs, including protecting migrant workers, social security reform, work safety and health.

Thirdly, it supports exchanges on CSR with the EU and others but also contributes its own initiatives with Chinese characteristics. Chinese social and cultural background influence the contents of CSR in China. The Chinese government plays a leading role in guiding, promoting and monitoring the CSR adopted and issued by large companies including state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Chinese companies have developed Chinese versions of CSR standards.

The concept of the VOR and its typological framework help better understand China's mix positions. China's varying response to the EU's promotion of the social dimension of globalization could not be reduced to any single position such as accepting or rejection. Instead, it is important to systematically map varying positions on different issues. The VOR framework helps map China's positions along two dimensions : strength and direction. This paves the way for identifying causal factors. Findings in article 2 indicate that China's positions on certain issues are closely related to its "core national interests" and its relative

¹⁸⁵ See more in the Labour law of the People's Republic of China, Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women(1992,2005 revision) , Employment Promotion Law (2007), Law on the Protection of Minors (1991), Provisions on the Prohibition of Using Child Labor (1991, 2002 revision).

¹⁸⁶ For example, Trade union law, labour law, labour contract law, collective contract regulation, Law of the People's Republic of China on Foreign Capital Enterprises (1986, 2000 revision).

power relations with the norms promoter (for example, the EU in this study). Although in reality many factors may influence China's positions, the two factors mentioned here can be combined to explain China's response to large extent. In broader sense, compared with the conventional linear framework of international diffusion, the VOR is more capable of capturing varying responses of recipient countries to the NPE.

1.4. Two issue areas

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter of this dissertation, the EU and China have more consensus on social security than on linking labour issues to trade. While China seeks to learning European expertise in social security, it takes a reluctant position on including labour provisions in trade agreement. Each of the two issue areas may provide more details to examine China's respective response to the diffusion of specific social issues. In addition, the two issue areas also provide empirical basis to further elaborate the VOR framework.

1.4.1. Social security : learning

Since the 1990s, China has launched a number of bilateral cooperation projects to facilitate exchanges on social policy experience with other countries. Projects with European partners are the most significant ones in terms of investment and outcomes . Through these exchanges, China has been seeking to learn from expertise in social policy such as social security. China's learning from European expertise science mid-1990s was in response to undesirable impacts of neoliberal reforms since the 1970s. In fact, China's learning from the EU was recent development in China's decades-long trial-and-error process of learning in economic and social policy.

Arguably, China's trial-and-error-process policy learning was the result of complex causality. Two causal factors play an important role: the levels of policy learning and their interaction along temporal dimension of policy learning. Firstly, China's learning from foreign experience operates at two levels: the political and the policy level. At the political level, China stresses its autonomy as a sovereign country without any external interference. Based on its domestic needs, China has been pursuing a balance between reforms, development and stability. This is a type of reflective-learning, based on the learner's self-reflections and adjustments. Secondly, China's learning at the policy level is subject to self-

reflection at a political level. China's social policy reforms in the 1970s and 1980s were subject to its neo-liberal economic strategies. Yet, in the 1990s and 2000s the neoliberal reforms have accumulated undesirable consequences in the social field including a decline in public investment in the social welfare system, an increase in social inequality, a degeneration of labour protection as well as a growing family burden in education, health and housing. These serious consequences have challenged China's social stability and forced wide reflections of neoliberal reforms among Chinese scholars and officials in the 1990s and 2000s. Because the Chinese were lacking experience in developing social policy and because they have well noticed the success of European welfare systems in the past decades, social policy experience in some European countries such as Germany and Sweden have become an attractive source of inspiration for the Chinese in the late 1990s and 2000s. The dialogues and cooperation projects between the EU and China on social security and labour protection from the late 1990s until the 2000s have been successful. This reinforced Chinese confidence in learning from European practice and expertise on social protection from 2010 onwards. Thus, China's learning processes are not a "one shot" but a trial-and-error process that has taken place in the last decades.

The findings indicate that China is an active learner rather than a passive recipient of international diffusion. China's self-reflection and adjustment over time at the political level determines changes in learning at the social policy level. In pursuing a balance between reforms, growth and stability, China's government has been experiencing reflective-learning based on the practice of implementing social policy in China while at the same time keeping an eye on foreign experience. It is China's reflective-learning that enables its flexibility in choosing alternative social policy advices over time.

China's reflective learning is an example of its mixed approach to international diffusion. China's core national interest and autonomy serve as fundamental criteria for its choosing European expertise. China may adopt a selective approach on norms or initiatives diffused by others: favouring European experience over neo-liberal initiatives in social security since 2000s. China's adjustments through trail-and-error process show its flexibility.

1.4.2. labour issues : résistance

China's mixed approach to international diffusion includes another option : resistance. The issue of the linkage between labour and trade policy offer another opportunity to observe the

EU and China's positions in social policy. The EU has been promoting social policy by including social clauses covering labour rights in its bilateral and regional trade and investments agreements. Along with many other developing countries, China opposes the link between labour and trade. China's resistance on labour rights issue is to oppose what it viewed "veiled protectionism" by developed countries, which may undermine its comparative advantage in terms of low labour cost in international competition. Yet, the findings demonstrate that although the EU and China have not concluded any FTA, CPA or BIA up to date, China's FTAs with other countries did include social clauses often in an MoU on labour. It is hard to preclude the EU's impact on labour provision transfer from the EU's FTAs through other countries to China's FTAs. As findings indicate, however, the EU's impact on its FTA partners alone is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for China's inclusion of labour provisions in its FTAs. Indeed, the EU's FTA partners do not always transfer labour provisions in their subsequent FTAs.

Findings indicate that China's positions on whether to include labour provisions in its FTAs are mixed. On the one hand, China's FTAs with South Korea and Australia, both signed in June 2015, did not contain any labour provision. This is accordance with China's opposition to linking labour and trade. On the other hand, some of China's FTAs have included labour issues in MoUs or in separate agreements on labour, such as those with Chile, Peru, New Zealand and Switzerland. This indicates that China did show some flexibility on this issue to some countries which were not participating in China's major FTA negotiations such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RECP) and the China-Japan-South Korea FTA.

China's resistance to include labour provisions in FTAs is another example of its mixed approach to international diffusion. It seems that China's core national interest and autonomy serve as fundamental criteria for Chinese Central Government to decide whether to accept the diffused norms or not. The findings indicate that facing the growing international pressure on linking labour issues to FTAs, China's positions with slight flexibility on this issue shape the final outcomes of its FTAs. That is, in this issue area, it is China's response that determines the results of international diffusion to large extent.

1.5. Linking two issue areas : broader observations

What are the observations across the two issue areas? A couple of observations emerge. First, the power relations between the EU and China may condition the policy diffusion from the former to the latter. The EU has limited policy leverage in the diffusion of social policy towards China. This is partially a result of interdependence between the two sides, particularly in economic and trade fields. The EU tends to take a mixed approach combining pragmatic and normative elements. In social fields, the EU tends to encourage China to launch stable reforms, good governance and sustainable development.

Second, China stresses its autonomy in response to international diffusion. China's preferences on issue areas have important impact on its response. Chinese government tends to take China's core national interest as fundamental criteria to decide whether to adopt or reject the diffused policy and norms from external world. China has been seeking to keep balance between reforms, development and stability. Accordingly, China's response varies across specific issue areas. While China learned from EU expertise in social security to keep social stability in addition to economic development, its resistance on labour rights issue is to keep its comparative advantage in low labour cost in international economic competition.

More comprehensive analysis requires taking more factors into consideration. As noted in the Introduction Chapter, two sets of factors need to be considered when we compare China's response on the two issue areas¹⁸⁷. The first set of factors are the impact of policy domains on the bilateral interactions in issue areas. The second set of factors concern whether China responds directly or not to the diffusion of social policy from the EU.

Firstly, the extent to which the policy domains have impact on China's response to the EU's diffusion is indeed worth careful examination. Development cooperation may have positive impact on donation receiver's response on international diffusion. Trade negotiations as a policy domain in which both parties do not easily make concessions may stimulate their strong reactions. Therefore, it is possible the development cooperation facilitates their cooperation in social security. It is also possible that trade as a sensitive policy domain, in which neither China and the EU would easily make concessions, stimulates China's reluctant

¹⁸⁷ See details in the section of 3.3 Research Design in Summary in the Introduction Chapter.

positions on labour issue. The Table 2 illustrates the possible impact of two policy domains on the two issue areas.

Table 2. Linking issue areas to policy domain

	Development cooperation (+)	Trade (-)
Social security (+)	+	
Labour (-)		-

Note: “+” represents positive impact on China’s positive response to the diffusion. “- ” represents negative impact on China’s response.

The impact of dialogue and development cooperation did have positive impact on the EU-China cooperation in social security. On the one hand, as mentioned above, the EU has suggested to promote China’s reforms in economic and social field. Yet, it is China’s positive attitude that plays decisive part in policy learning through establishing and enhancing dialogue and cooperation projects. The success of bilateral dialogue and development cooperation in social security for more than 10 years gains positive reinforcement, namely, path dependency. On the other hand, the issue of social security is not top priority in the EU-China negotiations on trade or investment. Neither the EU or China has claimed to stress social security issue in their bilateral negotiations. Therefore, the impact of policy domain on the EU-China interactions on social security is evident but limited.

The impact of trade as policy domain on the issue area of labour requires more research. On the one hand, as mentioned above, labour issues only appear for few times in the EU-China political dialogues including Human Rights Dialogue. The EU did not put issues of labour as important as political and civil rights in its policy agenda towards China. The latter has little intention to include labour rights issues in bilateral dialogues. On the other hand, while the EU actively promotes labour protection provisions in its FTAs, China takes opposing positions on linking labour issues to economic area including trade and investment. In both policy domains China’s positions on labour issues are clear and largely unchanged. It is likely that the EU’s promotion of the linkage between labour issues and trade and investment unveils China’s bottom line on this issue.

Secondly, another important question is to what extent the study on the direct and indirect diffusion of labour protection from the EU towards China may yield different observations. It is possible that China takes varying response on this issue when it faces different trade partners. That is, China may make more concession in negotiations with the EU than in those with small countries. In this sense, the observations of China's response to others may not fully reflect its response to the EU.

Notwithstanding, the analysis of China's response to third parties, which the EU may have impact on transferring labour provisions, still clearly illustrates China's position. China's positions on labour issues are clear and strong in its FTAs with some countries such as South Korea and Costa Rica, which had been the FTA partner countries of both the EU and the US before their FTAs with China. In addition, China also recently precluded the labour provisions in its FTAs with Australia (2015), one developed country, demonstrating its clear attitude on the issue of including labour provisions in FTAs. Although these FTAs are not directly involved with the diffusion from the EU to China, They do serve as important references to anticipate China's positions on this issue in the bilateral investment negotiations with the EU.

1.6. Summary

This dissertation contributes to the knowledge on the involvement of the EU and China in international social policy transfer. The table 3 illustrates the contribution at empirical, conceptual, theoretical and methodological levels.

At the empirical, the original analysis of the social dimension of EU-China relations accumulated the knowledge on this specific topic. This dissertation identifies the features of this dimension, including its historical evolution, key issues and the links to political and economic aspects of the bilateral relations. The findings indicate the mixed approaches of each side of the EU-China relations. In its relation to China on the social dimension, the EU uses a mixed approach, thereby combining pragmatic power and normative power. China's reactions is also mixed, through a selective approach and by showing flexibility. Specifically, the study of China's learning from European social policy shows China as an active learner of policy ideas rather than a passive recipient of international diffusion. China's flexibility in policy learning is due to its self-reflective learning and adjustment in policy over time

according to its core national interest. Regarding including labour provision in trade agreements, China demonstrates both constancy and flexibility.

Table 3. Findings and discussions in articles

Levels	Contribution	Articles
Empirical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified the features of the social dimension of the EU-China relationship (1975-2015) Identified the evidence of EU’s approaches : pragmatic and normative 	1
	Comparison of labour provisions travelling in FTAs of the EU, China, Chile and South Korea	4
Conceptual	Engaged with the debate of the NPE and pragmatic power Europe	1
	Developed the VOR framework in international diffusion/transfer	2
Theoretical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discerned two levels of learning : political and policy levels Underscored the interactions between levels of learning over time Refined the typological framework of learning by Dunlop and Radaelli (2013) 	3
	Identified recipient country’s response as important factor of international legal norms transfer (e.g. labour provisions)	4
Research methods	Illustrated the power of (single or small-N) case study to test and generate conceptual frameworks, typological frameworks	1, 2 3
	Indicated the high potential of content analysis in	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> coding and visualizing the evolution of (social) issues in the EU-China relations coding and visualizing (labour) provisions in FTAs 	1, 4

The findings point to future investigation of causal factors underpinning these “complex” phenomena, such as the objectives and resources of policy as well as the flexibility in external policy of the EU and China based on self-reflection and adjustment. The findings also indicate the complexity of the social dimension of the EU-China relations. Because each

party's mixed and flexible approaches towards the other on social issues, the bilateral interactions in social field is dynamic. Moreover, the findings also urge more attention to the complexity of EU-China relations in general. Finally, the analysis of the impact of both the EU and China on international transfer of labour provisions through FTAs underscores the international implication of their policy on labour, in particular China's impact, which the existing literature did not address¹⁸⁸.

These findings and the insights generated from them lead to advances at conceptual and theoretical levels. At the conceptual, the dissertation problematized and conceptualized the recipient side of the international diffusion. The analysis of China's reaction on social security and labour respectively illustrate how China respectively adopted learning and resistance in the two issue areas according to its core national interest. At the theoretical level, this study identifies and highlights two important factors in policy learning: the co-existence of learning at political and policy levels and their interactions over time. Taking these two factors into account helps to deepen our understanding of policy learning. In addition, this research project presents evidence challenging the hypothesis of labour provisions travelling from the EU to others through FTAs. The findings underscore the impact of recipient countries such as China and India on the outcomes of international labour norms transfer.

This dissertation also illustrates the potential of some research methods to test and generate conceptual frameworks and theoretical predictions. As discussed in the Introduction chapter of this dissertation, case study design helps to focus on specific cases of interest which may provide sufficient details of the context and inside stories within the cases. The articles use a so called crucial case to (i) test a prevailing conceptual framework such as Normative Power Europe and Pragmatic Power Europe (see article 1), (ii) test a typological framework of learning (see article 3) and (iii) to use least-likely cases and most-likely cases to test hypotheses generated from the existing literature (see article 4). Articles also employ case studies to (i) develop a conceptual typology such as the VOR (see article 2) and to (ii) identify key factors to further refine typological frameworks of learning (see article 3). In addition, this dissertation also indicates the strong potential of content analysis in coding and

¹⁸⁸ See more discussion in the section of 2. Engagement with broader literature in this Conclusion Chapter.

visualizing the evolution of social issues in the EU-China relations (see article 1) and labour provisions in FTAs (see article 4)¹⁸⁹.

2. Engagement with broader literature

The findings and contributions of the research conducted in this dissertation have implications for the broader literature, including several interrelated research themes such as the EU-China relations in general, EU studies, the international transfer of social policy and global social governance. It is possible to put these themes in this order: from empirical (specific issue area in a concrete context) to theoretical (more general phenomenon at a more abstract level).

2.1. The EU-China relations literature

2.1.1. The social dimension

This dissertation originally explores the social dimension of the EU-China relations, on which previously little literature has focused on. It presents the evolution of the social dimension in the past four decades and the interactions between the EU and China on social issues including social security and labour as two major issue areas. By doing so, this dissertation enriches the academic literature on EU-China relations.

The EU-China exchange and cooperation on social security have been driving the bilateral dialogue and cooperation in general. Few studies in English literature have focused on social security as one issue area in EU-China relations. Some Chinese authors documented Chinese scholars being interested in introducing and researching EU social policy in China during the 1980s until the 2000s (H. Zhou, 2004). Some literature of European Studies published in Chinese language have covered social security issues, such as European social policy and integration (田, 2005), European social governance (蔡, 2013) and European social security system in the sovereign debt crisis (纯. 丁 & 陈, 2012). This dissertation draws attention to the successful and fruitful outcomes of bilateral dialogue and cooperation on social security policy, on which both sides have expressed their satisfaction. In doing so, this

¹⁸⁹ For more discussion on this dissertation's contribution to the using content analysis techniques in studying bilateral relations, see the section of 2. Engagement with broader literature in this Conclusion Chapter.

dissertation accentuates the implications of these positive interactions for enhancing and extending the EU-China dialogue and cooperation in general.

The discussion of the interactions between the EU and China on labour issues underscores the implication of their different policy positions for international transfer of labour norms. While both the literature on the EU's promotion of labour rights (e.g. Garcia & Masselot, 2015; Oehri, 2014) and the literature on China's labour rights development (e.g. C. K. Chan & Nadvi, 2014) are increasing, they scarcely cite each other. The lack of dialogue between these two groups of studies has a consequence: no common vocabulary and conceptual framework available to investigate the interactions between the EU and China on labour issues. Furthermore, although the existing studies of China's labour rights development noticed the pressure from trade unions and consumers' groups in the west to promote CSR and private "soft" regulation, they did not note the governmental efforts in the west to promote labour standards through the FTA and BIA (e.g. Hui & Chan, 2014). In addition, while those studies documented China's domestic situation, in particular the state's "hard" public regulation, they have shed little light on the external dimension of China's policy on labour, in particular on the linkage of labour and trade and investment. Noting different policy positions of the EU and of China on the linkage of labour and trade, this dissertation underscores China's influence on whether to include labour provisions in its FTAs.

The analysis of EU-China interactions on these two issue areas encourages future research on the social dimension of the EU-China relations. In addition to the careful comparison of the interactions between the EU and China on these two issue areas¹⁹⁰, it would also be interesting to examine the EU-China interactions on other issues such as health, gender, immigration, asylum, humanitarian aid and civil protection. Research on these topics may test whether observations based on the two issue areas hold in other areas and further enrich our understanding of the social dimension of the EU-China relations. It would also encourage more investigation of international diffusion of social policy in which the EU and China are involved.

The research in this dissertation also paves the way for a future study of the relations between the social dimension and other dimensions of the EU-China relationship. On the one hand, isolating the social dimension makes it possible to compare this dimension with other

¹⁹⁰ See the section of 1.5 Linking two issue areas: broader observations in this Conclusion Chapter.

dimensions. For instance, comparing the historical development of the social dimension with that of economic cooperation or political dialogue may better unveil how and why these different aspects of relations evolve and give insights in the development of EU-China relations in general. On the other hand, the social issues have been increasingly interconnected with issues in other fields such as politics, economic and trade, as well as sustainable development. To examine how the issues in these fields are connected and enforcing each other may deepen our understanding of the multi-faceted nature and complexity of the EU-China relationship.

2.1.2. The EU-China relations in general: more conceptualizing and theorizing

The research on the social dimension of the EU-China relation draws attention to the conceptualization of the EU-China relations in particular, and bilateral relations in general. That is, how to conceptualize bilateral relationship is an important question, which the literature on EU-China relations nonetheless did not systematically address.

Firstly, the research in this dissertation highlights the multifaceted nature of the EU-China relations. Today's EU-China relationship has extended much beyond the economic and trade ties, which receive considerable scholarly attention. Moreover, recent studies have paid attention to specific fields or issue areas such as climate change, education, cultural ties and scientific cooperation. It is time to go beyond each issue areas to begin to consider them together. It is important to compare the social dimension with other dimensions of the EU-China relation. Whether the EU and China's behaviour vary across dimensions, from social to other dimensions? Whether the observations in other dimensions hold in social dimension of the EU-China relations? It is also important to explore the relations between the social dimension and other issues such as climate change. In addition, it remains unknown the relations between the social dimension and the EU-China relations in general. It is unclear how links between different dimensions constitute the complexity of this relationship.

Secondly, this dissertation demonstrates that the complexity of EU-China relations can express itself in one particular field. As discussed in previous section, the social aspect of the EU-China relations comprises dialogue, cooperation and different policy positions on social issues. In addition to the complex nature of the EU-China climate relations highlighted

by some authors (Bruyninckx & Qi, 2013), this dissertation brings attention further to the complexity of the EU-China relations in social field. While climate change and social policy are related to sustainable development, they are different issue areas. Following the logic of analytical generalization (Halkier, 2011; Polit & Beck, 2010), the complexity or complex nature of the EU-China relations probably also exist on other aspects of this bilateral relationship. Moreover, since one dimension of this relationship could be complex, the whole bilateral relationship could be more complex. That is, the EU-China relations may be much more complex than one could expect at first glance. As the bilateral interactions on the social dimension illustrates, the EU and China may have different combinations of engagement, dialogue, cooperation and competition. If one only notices or expects possible cooperation or conflict on one issues, he or she would risk oversimplifying what happened in this bilateral relationship.

Thirdly, no single causal factor can provide a satisfactory explanation or expectation of the EU-China relations. Previous studies have stressed the two factors in this relationship: differences between the EU and China (e.g. Holslag, 2011; Men, 2012), and shrinking power gaps between the two. As article 1 in this dissertation discussed, the differences do not necessarily prevent China's dialogue and cooperation with the EU in social policy, in particular in social security. China's rapid development or its rise do not necessarily involve the "negative impact on the Normative Power Europe" which one researcher anticipated (Kaya, 2014). Instead, it are exactly China's reform and development that bring opportunities for China to learn from European experience and expertise on issues such as urbanization and social development. That is, China's rapid development may offer platforms for Europe to exercise its normative power. In this sense, China's economic and social development is not a "problem" but a window of opportunity for the EU. This dissertation indicates that it is better to avoid simple insights which often overstate one single causal factor and lead to oversimplified or superficial observations of EU-China relations.

The complexity of this relationship requires taking different factors into account. This dissertation urges to give more attention to the complexity of external policy of the EU and China towards each other. *Two important elements of the complexity* of external policy deserve more attention : the mixed policy positions and the flexibility within these actions. For instance, the EU is aware of China's policy on labour but also knows China's domestic demand for social reform and development. As a result, the EU adopted a mixed policy combining dialogue, cooperation and assistance to China in the social field rather than impose all of its norms or values on China. Similarly, China draws lessons from the European

experience but did not copy or accept everything the EU favours. In the past decades, both sides have been showing their flexibility by adjusting their approach towards each other. It is these two factors that contribute to the dynamic bilateral relationship that has been developing in the past decades.

2.2.EU studies

2.2.1. Case study on China and conditions of the NPE

The studies of interactions between the EU and China in the social field in this dissertation present empirical knowledge of the EU's promotion of social norms towards China. These studies narrow the gaps in the NPE literature and the existing literature of EU Studies in general where there is little research on EU-China relations in the social field. More importantly, the empirical research contributes to the NPE and EU Studies literature by discussing the conditions of the EU's successful norms diffusion.

The dissertation uses the social dimension of the EU-China relations to test the hypotheses of prevailing analytical frameworks including NPE and pragmatic power Europe (PPE) (see article 1). The evidence indicates that the EU did have pragmatic concerns when linking social issues more closely to economic than political concerns. Yet, the evidence also supports the EU's normative role in exporting social security norms and expertise to China. China has been learning social policy expertise from Europe through bilateral dialogue and development cooperation projects. This fits one theoretical prediction of NPE: the EU could live as an example for others.

This case study also indicates that neither norms similarity nor power leverage are necessary conditions for the NPE. As discussed in previous sections, findings indicate that the two often stressed factors – the normative differences between the EU and China and China's rising power – did not prevent China's learning from Europe in social policy, in particular in social security. China's learning from Europe was not because the EU has sufficient policy leverage to impose these advices on China without considering China's positions. Instead, as the power gap between the two has been shrinking, there are not many policy instruments available for the EU to force China to learning social policy. In a broader

sense, it is not the EU's policy leverage but the perceptions of its social policy in China that matters.

The dissertation also highlights that China's positive perception of the expertise of the EU and its member states in certain policy areas could be a sufficient condition for the success of NPE. China learns from the EU in social policy because it values the European experience in social policy as a successful and suitable mode which meets the needs in China's social policy development. Further, China's rising power does not necessarily mean that it finds European experience in certain policy areas useless or obsolete. Instead, as long as China remains a developing country without sufficient experience in developing successful and effective policy in some policy areas, it would seek to learn from developed countries including those in Europe. Therefore, the EU lives as an example in social security policy for China, which is the first stage of NPE. This case indicates that if others recognize the EU as a good example in some policy area, then it is possible for others to learn from the EU. Future research can test this thesis by examining more cases.

The dissertation further highlights the significance of recipient countries' perceptions of the EU on certain issues in influencing the failure of the EU's norms diffusion. There is no consensus between the developed world (including the EU and the US) and developing countries (such as China and India) on the linkage of labour issues to trade. The findings show that although the EU and the US have been promoting labour norms through FTAs, the response of China and India have an important impact on whether to include labour provisions in their FTAs. That is, if there is no consensus between the norm entrepreneur powers and the recipient countries, the impact of the recipient countries on the outcome of norms diffusion deserves special attention. In this situation, others' negative perceptions of the EU regarding its exemplary function may be a necessary (but not a sufficient) condition for the failure of norms diffusion or the failure of the NPE. If the lack of consensus between the EU and a third country on certain issues is combined with other factors such as power leverage of that country, this increases the possibility of failure of NPE. As some argued that the normative power needs being recognized by others (Kavalski, 2013).

Therefore, the case studies in this dissertation on China's response to the EU's norms diffusion in the social field enrich the empirical basis of NPE. These cases contain both success and failure of the EU's norms diffusion. In this way, this dissertation avoids the case selection bias in the NPE literature to which scholars have called attention (Young, 2015a, p.

1239). The analysis of the failure of EU norm diffusion is of theoretical importance in informing the limits of NPE and identifying possible factors leading to the failure. The case studies in this dissertation are useful to identify (combinations of) necessary and sufficient conditions for the success of NPE. Neither norms similarity nor power leverage are necessary conditions for NPE. In addition, others' perceptions of the are crucial.

In addition, the findings of the EU's mixed approaches combining pragmatic and normative approaches towards China call more attention to the complexity of the EU's approaches. Future research may consider answering such questions: how did the EU combine normative and pragmatic approaches? Or how do these approaches relate to each other?

2.2.2. The VOR framework and relational nature of the norms “offer” and “receiver”

This dissertation also made progress in problematizing the recipient side of international diffusion and presented the variability of response (VOR) framework (in article 2). This advancement helps addresses some issues in the current conceptual framework of the NPE and EU external policies.

The VOR framework helps contextualize the interactions between the EU and the recipient country, by pointing out the mutual or relational nature of perceptions and constructions of identities and roles of the norms “offer” and “receiver”. The definition of self and others are dynamic in a number of ways including cultural, material and power relations. The norms “receiver” can have some impact on the “offer”. For instance, if the “receiver” such as China actively learns from the EU in social policy, this enhances the EU as an normative power. It is important to examine the others' impact on the EU's norms projection. As the EU acts in a changing world order, scholars have called for more attention to external variables of EU actorness and effectiveness in the world, and reflect and re-conceptualize the existing research (Niemann & Bretherton, 2013).

More importantly, the EU may also be a “receiver” of norms from others. Traditionally, scholars pay attention to others' responses to the EU, namely, “to take or not take EU norms” (Björkdahl et al., 2015b). However, the distinction of the “offer” and the “recipient” is not fixed: the distinction between them is a fluid contemporary phenomenon, if we think the whole picture of ever changing historical processes produced by all kinds of

actors and factors. In fact, some authors have noted the influence of international institutions on the EU (Costa & Jørgensen, 2012). A recent study has suggested the possibility of norms such as trade mark norms being re-transmitted, in identical or modified form, back to the EU after travelling across countries (Firth, 2015a). In a broader sense, international diffusion of norms is not a linear-way but a process of re-transmission like “viral transfer of genetic code” as illustrated in re-transmission of “adopted or adapted legal norms through the medium of international treaties” (Firth, 2015a).

Therefore, the VOR framework could also apply to the EU itself when we research its response to international diffusion driven by others. In a changing world, it is important for the EU to think about how to respond to international norms diffusion from other powers. In the past decades, the EU was used to diffuse norms to the world. However, the EU cannot totally preclude the possibility of challenges today and tomorrow, including be responding to norms towards itself whether the norms are the modified ones which it has previously diffused to others or new norms innovated by others. In this sense, the VOR framework could be helpful to map the EU’s response and may be a useful guidance for future research.

2.3. On China in international diffusion and global social governance

At the empirical level, the research in this dissertation on China’s involvement in international diffusion/transfer of social policy enriches the literature of empirical studies of China in international norm diffusion. The existing studies on China’s response to international diffusion such as finance (S. Heilmann & Schulte-Kulmann, 2011), the low-carbon agenda (Hofem & Heilmann, 2013), tobacco control (Jin, 2014) and academic, scientific, and business norms (Zweig & Yang, 2014) often portray China as an passive norms or policy receiver. Article 2 in this dissertation has demonstrated China’s varying response to different issues in the social dimension of globalization. Article 3 indicates that China acts as an active learner rather than passive receiver in the social security policy area. These studies in this dissertation unveil the complexity of China’s response, which is much less straightforward and simple than a first glance would capture. In this way, this dissertation avoids the over-simplification of China’s response to international diffusion.

The introduction of the VOR typology (in article 2) contributes to the existing literature on international diffusion in several ways. Firstly, the concept of VOR serves as an umbrella term to connect and organize the existing specific concepts of response of the recipient country. Secondly, the typology serves as a map where researchers may locate one specific term of concept of response and to seek its relations with other related concepts. Thirdly, the typology is also helpful for researchers to seek explanations of one specific response by considering the factors of the recipient country on one specific issue along the two dimensions of the VOR typology.

At the theoretical level, this dissertation highlights the usefulness of looking at combinations of causal factors in explaining policy learning. It is important to refine and develop typological frameworks or theoretical typologies as explanations of complex causality. Article 3 in this dissertation advanced the recent typological framework in policy learning (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). The case of China's learning from European expertise in social security indicates two ways to refine the conceptual framework of policy learning: to differentiate the levels of policy learning and to examine their interaction along the temporal dimension of policy learning. Taking these two issues into account enables us to better understand the trial-and-error process of China's learning. Highlighting these two issues helps to refine the explanatory typology of learning developed by Dunlop and Radaelli (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013) to better deal with complex causality in learning through trial-and-error processes.

Noting that China's learning processes are not "one shot" at one level encourages us to pay more attention to complex causality which may involve complex interactions among causal factors over time. This requires further advancing the conceptualization of policy learning which may be much more complex than what scholars have noted in previous studies. It also requires more research methods such as process tracing to detect causal chains and detailed evidence.

Regarding global social governance, this dissertation draws attention to the impact of developing and emerging countries on international social policy diffusion. For some of them, like China and India, their understanding and perceptions of themselves and others have an important impact on international social policy diffusion. As discussed in previous sections, if China values the EU expertise or experience in certain policy areas such as social security, then it may actively learn from the EU in those areas. If there is no consensus between them

on certain issues such as labour, then the probability of failure of EU norm promotion increases. Thus, China's perceptions of the EU is an important causal factor which influences the EU's promotion of social policies. Although this statement sounds straightforward, it points to the relational nature of the NPE and significance of consensus between the EU and others.

This observation is important for a more comprehensive understanding international social policy diffusion and global social governance in general. It indicates that developing countries, including emerging ones, are not passive "receivers" of international diffusion. As Marsh and Sharman noted, developing countries need more attention than being "present in global data sets, or ignored altogether" (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2012, p. 280). Furthermore, the interactions between the developed powers and developing countries are not as simple as one-way global-to-local logic, on which some authors have already begun to shed doubt (e.g. Brown, 2012; Zwingel, 2012).

Developing countries, including emerging countries, have potential in shaping international social policy diffusion and global social governance. For instance, they may exercise influence on international affairs through their direct involvement in negotiating trade agreements and in cooperation on social policy programmes. Findings also indicate that some large emerging countries have a remarkable impact on whether to include labour provisions in their FTAs. While the impact of the North-South FTAs on the South-South FTAs remain not very clear, it is certain that including labour provisions in trade agreements promoted by some developed powers such as the US and the EU have not been immediately and fully translated into the North-South FTAs or South-South FTAs, in particular those concluded by large emerging countries. For instance, India's opposition to link labour and trade is crucial for the outcome of its FTAs. India's FTAs with Chile and Korea did not include labour provisions even though both Chile and Korea had concluded FTAs with the US before where labour provisions were included. Moreover, as China and India have been negotiating bilateral and regional FTAs, their positions will also impact on the setting and diffusion of labour norms at the regional and global level, where the EU and US have been making efforts to play leading roles.

Some emerging countries could also initiate policy advices to other countries. Some authors have noted that some emerging countries such as China and Brazil act as norm agents or shapers in development areas (Erthal Abdenur, 2014; Urban et al., 2013). Recently, with

the establishment of international organizations such as the AIIB and the New Bank (BRICS Bank) as well as the BRICS Emergency Reserve Fund, China and other emerging powers have much potential to influence the setting and diffusion of international norms and rules including those related to social issues.

2.4. Methods : content analysis

This dissertation indicates the potential to employ content analysis methods in bilateral relations and international diffusion. Regarding the EU-China relations, the previous studies have used content analysis to examine the policies of the EU towards China and that relations in general. One interesting study presented the analysis of the communications of the European Commission during 1995-2003 (Griese, 2006). The author examined “the time references within those policy papers, the overall structure of those papers and the official reasons for their publication” and found that the exercise of drafting policy papers is helpful for the European Commission to develop evolving comprehension of China (Griese, 2006). Another content analysis also included China’s policy paper towards Europe (El-Agraa, 2007). Another study took a step forward from investigating the EU’s documents to examining the joint statements of the EU-China Summits (2001-2007) (Holslag, 2011). That survey helped answer how EU-China strategic partnership had been formulated in general.

This dissertation demonstrates the usefulness of the content analysis in bilateral relations by focusing on one specific aspect of relations : the social dimension of the EU-China relationship. In particular, in addition to substantial analysis of structure and sentences of the documents, the article 1 in this dissertation employs coding techniques in qualitative content analysis to generate word frequency table which illustrate the evolving social dimension in that bilateral relations. More importantly, that article uses word frequency table with special design to visualize the coded message. In that table, those key words representing broader social issues such as social development and social policy are on the upper side; the key words representing specific issues such as decent work and core labour standards are on the bottom (see details in the table 1 in article 1). In this way, the word frequency table can visually illustrate how “deep” attention the EU-China summits have paid to social issues.

The content analysis method is also useful in coding and visualizing provisions in FTAs. The existing literature on labour provisions in FTAs has employed qualitative content analysis to compare labour clauses (e.g. Agustí-Panareda et al., 2014; Van den Putte et al., 2013) . The qualitative analysis of labour provisions in a few FTAs helps keep sufficient details of terms and wording which reflect subtle differences in legal binding degrees and contents of regulations. The article 4 in this dissertation keeps this advantage of qualitative analysis in containing important details. It also tries to set up a framework of indicators with scale from 0 to 3. In doing so, that article makes it feasible to code labour provisions in dozens of FTAs. Through translating terms and wording into numbers, that article is able to present concise tables with rich message (see table 4, 5, 6, 7 in article 4). More importantly, the coding in this way enables visualizing temporal variations of labour provisions in FTAs concluded by one country in terms of location, references to instruments and mechanism (see figure 2 and 3 in article 4). These figures can visually unveil how labour provisions appear in varying extent in different FTAs concluded by one country along time. In this way, they facilitate the comparison of labour provisions in dozens FTAs while still keeping sufficient information.

2.5. Summary

This dissertation engages with the above research themes at varying levels, including presenting empirical findings, introducing innovations in conceptual frameworks, and identifying causal factors to refine theoretical accounts. The table 4 summarizes the key contribution to the above literature. By examining China's involvement in international social policy diffusion, this dissertation also helps facilitate the future dialogues among these themes which have been previously isolated or mutually ignored research islands scattered in different sub-disciplines of political science (such as domestic politics, comparative politics and IR) and inter-disciplinary research traditions (such as the EU Studies and social policy studies).

Table 4: Engagement with research themes

Research themes	Key contribution of this dissertation
The EU-China relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presented an original empirical analysis on the social dimension of the EU-China relations: historical development, features, key issue areas, impact on the general bilateral relations • Deepened our understanding of the multi-faceted nature and complexity of the EU-China relationship • Unveiled each party's complex approaches towards the other • Indicated that no single causal factor may provide a satisfactory explanation for the complexity of this relationship, but that the complexity of this relationship requires complex accounts by combining factors • Indicated the great potential of content analysis in the EU-China relations
The NPE literature in EU Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found the EU's mixed approaches: pragmatic power and normative power • Found that neither norms similarity nor power leverage are necessary conditions for the success of NPE • Found that others' positive perception of the expertise of the EU (and its member states) in certain policy areas could be a sufficient condition for the success of NPE • Found that the lack of consensus between the EU and others on certain issues, along with other factors, may increase the possibility of NPE failure • Pointed out the mutual or relational nature of the NPE: the norms "offer" and "receiver" being constructed by each other • Called future attention to the possibility of the EU as a norms "receiver" (the VOR framework may also apply)
The NLC framework in IR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated China's varying response to different issues in the social dimension of globalization • Submitted that the VOR framework may complement the linear-

	logic in the NLC framework in understanding the recipient side of norms diffusion
Policy diffusion/transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enriched the literature of empirical studies of China in international diffusion • Introduced the concept of VOR as a umbrella term to connect and organize the existing specific concepts of response of the recipient country • Developed the typology of the VOR as heuristic device for seeking causal factors of the response of recipient side • Highlighted the usefulness of combination of causal factors in addressing causal complexity in policy learning • Refined the recent typological framework in policy learning (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013)
Global social governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighted the impact of the response of developing and emerging countries in international social policy diffusion • Revealed that these countries are more than passive “receivers” of international diffusion

3. Implications for policy, reflections and future research

3.1. Implications for policy

Although this research project is largely an outcome of research in an ivory tower, it could offer some message to the “real” world. By saying “real” world, I mean the “reality” which this dissertation tries to portray, explore and explain. This dissertation does not claim that it provides “absolute laws” or “undisputable knowledge”. Instead, the message of this dissertation is quite modest. Based on findings in this dissertation, two nuances are offered.

Firstly, it would be better to consider the complexity of EU-China relations than to follow a black-and-white way logic. In everyday life, it is easier for individuals to simplify the

situation to quickly understand it. Similarly, modern knowledge production often leads people to focus on one very narrow field to “know more and more about less and less”. Understandably, people often find it more attractive to follow lazy man’s logic to oversimplify what happened in the world than to spend time and energy to inspect the details. However, to simplify the world is not always helpful to understand it. The EU-China relations is an example where many may easily jump to drawing conclusions before time-consuming search and research on details and evidence. As this dissertation demonstrates, both the EU and China have mixed approaches on social issues. In turn, these mixed approaches together reflect the complexity of the social dimension of the EU-China relations. In broader sense, this bilateral relationship is complex, characterized by the coexistence of dialogue, cooperation and competition. Although sometimes metaphors are useful to portray it, such as honeymoon or marriage (Mirabile, 2013; Shambaugh et al., 2008) or “problem” and “battle” (Kaya, 2014), it is easy to proceed further toward dilemmas of “cannot see the forest through the trees” or “blind men and elephant”. After all, one leg of the elephant is not the whole elephant. Bearing in mind the complexity of this relationship may help avoid any extremes in imagining it.

Secondly, living as a good example is crucial for one actor to achieve success of norms diffusion. As discussed in previous sections, living as an example in the eyes of others could alone be a sufficient condition for the success of the NPE. More than 2000 years ago, Lao Zi (老子), one of the great philosophers in ancient China, pointed out in the Chapter 43 of Dao De Jing, one of the famous classics in Chinese philosophy, that “Few in the world can understand the teaching without words and the advantage of taking no action (不言之教，无为之益，天下希及之)”¹⁹¹. That is, teaching others with words is not the highest level of teaching. Instead, teaching by setting good examples for others is better than verbally persuading others to accept what to be diffused. Unfortunately, this mode of teaching (or norms diffusion) is rarely understood and practiced. Because few have had deep understanding of the value of this mode : teaching others by setting good examples. Put

¹⁹¹ One translation of the whole Chapter 43 or Verse 43 is “The softest things in the world overcome the hardest things in the world. Non-being penetrates that in which there is no space. Through this I know the advantage of taking no action. Few in the world can understand teaching without words and the advantage of taking no action.” See (W.-t. Chan, 1963, p. 161). Another version of translation is “The softest thing in the world dashes against and overcomes the hardest; that which has no (substantial) existence enters where there is no crevice. I know hereby what advantage belongs to doing nothing (with a purpose). There are few in the world who attain to the teaching without words, and the advantage arising from non-action.” See (Legge, 1997, p. 44).

simply, as long as some live as a good example for others, it is not very necessary to worry about the ability of others to discover and follow. Indeed, living as an example would be much better than imposing what one prefers on others.

3.2.Limitations of the study and future research

Although the author has tried to make progress in this research project, this dissertation has limits in a variety of ways, given limited time and resources. Firstly, there is room for improvement in data collection and analysis. Due to time and practical constraints, this research relies heavily on the secondary material such as governmental documents, news coverage and historical records. The limited data sources inevitably prevent full triangulation of the data, an important step of reliability of research. More importantly, limited access to sufficient details of causal processes constrains the deeper tracing causal mechanisms, such as learning mechanisms in article 3. If authors of future studies are able to access to more sources such as archives in the EU-China interactions in social policy during 1975-2015 (in English and/or Chinese languages), or if they are able to arrange interviews with key officials who know the inside story of bilateral relations, in particular the social field, they would probably find more details on the interactions between the EU and China. If possible, researchers may also try other methods such as observation and participatory observation in the current cooperation projects. Meanwhile, research methods such as qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and quantitative methods could be tried to complement the case studies used in this dissertation. For instance, QCA and network analysis methods could ideally be useful to systematically analyse all available documents of the existing FTAs, to trace the routines of labour provisions travelling over time.

Secondly, although this dissertation draws on some literature on social policy development in China, it did not fully engage with the China Studies literature. To my knowledge, the works of China Studies did not closely engage with the social dimension of the EU-China relations or international diffusion. The China Studies literature seemly focus more on China's domestic situation than on China's involvement in international relations and global governance. It is the authors of international relations and foreign policy of China who pay much attention to China's external relations. It would be helpful for future research to survey more the literature of China Studies to be inspired by the discussions in that research area, in particular the development and implementation of specific social policy area in China.

Thirdly, this dissertation focuses on the involvement of the EU and China in international social policy diffusion and global social governance. It did not elaborate domestic actors on each side. In addition, it did not fully take other international actors into consideration such as other developed countries like the US and Japan and other developing countries such as India, Brazil and South Africa. One research point that is worth for future research is to conduct more comparative studies among them. It is also interesting to go beyond bilateral interactions to investigate interactions among several actors in global social governance including the EU, the US, China and India.

Fourth, this dissertation highlights the complexity of bilateral relations. To thoroughly elaborate the complexity of bilateral relations is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In fact, how to conceptualize the complexity of bilateral relations remains a question for scholars of international relations. Although authors in IR often use the term “complexity” to refer to complex bilateral relations (e.g. W. C. Lee, 2010; Lewy, 2010; Suedfeld, 1992; Sulistiyanto, 2010), few have systematically conceptualized or operationalized the complexity of bilateral relations. To conceptualize, operationalize and theorize this concept/phenomenon would deepen our understanding the “relations” in international politics. One possible way for future research is to draw on ideas from other disciplines such as business management and marketing, where scholars have had fruitful discussions on how to conceptualize of relations (Donaldson & O'Toole, 2000; Golicic & Mentzer, 2006) .

Finally, this dissertation presents the ideas of problematizing and conceptualizing the response of recipient countries. While this research offers the VOR framework, it has not further develop it into fully fledged typological theory or explanatory typology (see discussion in David Collier et al., 2012; Elman, 2005). In order to make progress in theorizing the response of the recipient side to international diffusion, future research might consider developing the VOR framework to an explanatory typology to better guide identifying causal factors of the response. It is recommended to use more empirical evidence to test and refine the VOR framework and its future version : an explanatory typology.

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