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NORMATIVE DIVERGENCE AS A LIMITATION: THE CASE OF EU-CHINA
COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION

MA thesis

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Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have been long-standing partners across various sectors; however, as their global presence evolves, their relations have experienced challenges stemming from their divergent normative stances, particularly in more politically sensitive fields, such as counterterrorism (CT). While the actors manage to cooperate on diverse non-traditional security issues, CT continues to face limitations, prompting reflection on what hinders collaboration. Accordingly, by utilizing a single case study and applying constructivism as a theoretical framework, the thesis aims to uncover how the degree of normative gap affects their level of engagement from 2013 to the present. Given the objective of the thesis, qualitative document analysis is employed to identify the level of CT cooperation, alongside qualitative content analysis combined with qualitative document analysis to measure the extent of normative gap between the actors. Focusing on the normative divide, instead of the economy-security nexus or differing conceptualizations of "terrorism", enables the demonstration of how the ideational factors impact the level of CT cooperation between the EU and China, thereby filling the gap in literature, which overlooks the latter. The findings revealed that the substantial normative gap causes limited CT cooperation. In particular, the different normative perspectives derived from the principles they invoke in their policies and discourse do not align, resulting in divergent normative perspectives on the legitimate CT activity. Nevertheless, as normative foundations shift in response to globalization, as observed in this case study, this domain demands further scrutiny.

Keywords: Cooperation, EU, China, security, counterterrorism, normative gap, limitations, qualitative content analysis, qualitative document analysis, constructivist approach

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1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have become global actors in the broader international community and have been engaging on various issues bilaterally and multilaterally since the last century. Their relations have been developing and changing as time passes, yet their engagement remains complex. Snyder (2009), for instance, outlines three main periods representing the evolution of their bilateral partnership. Namely, the establishment of bilateral ties (1995-2003), deepened their bond (2003-2006), and the period from 2006, when their relations witnessed significant obstacles, resulting in competition.

Both parties put diplomatic efforts and showcased a willingness to create frameworks for Sino-European ties since the 1990s, which culminated in the launch of the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2003; however, this partnership soon witnessed significant challenges. This drastic shift of the Sino-European paradigm stemmed from a complex interplay of reasons. The central factor for this change is China's evolving nature and the EU's policy approach to the latter. The alignment of their overall policies in various domains and closer relations paved the way for diplomatic rapprochement and even the consideration of lifting the embargo, which has been imposed since the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident.

Nevertheless, China's economic rise, which was followed by a more assertive political image on the international stage, constrained the normalization of relations between the actors (Geeraerts, 2019, p. 283). The EU's normative agenda, a pivotal part of its foreign policy, clashed with China's approach to human rights and other principles that the European partners champion. As a result, the EU policymakers began to question the effectiveness of their engagement with China, which should have led the latter to political liberalization of its approach domestically and globally. Hence, the EU started to view China as a revisionist power opposing the prospect of the international liberal order. This laid the foundation for the shift in their agendas, depicting them as competitors rather than cooperative partners.

Despite the transformation of the frequency and depth of their relations, the EU and China are interdependent because their close economic ties, which have been developing rapidly, have spilled over into other domains. Their economic interdependency is evident from the fact that

China remains the EU's top partner in export and import of goods, while for China, the EU is a crucial partner in the domains involving trade, business, and investments (Eurostat, 2025). Since both actors need to enhance sustainable development and protect the environment while advancing the economy, stable and predictable international environments are essential for them both (Geeraerts, 2019, p. 289). This creates mutual interests, leading them to become mutually reliant. Moreover, apart from trade, they are at the center of the multilateral global governance, which predominantly evolves around the EU, China, and the United States (US). For this reason, it is necessary for them to interact in various fields to strengthen a secure political and social environment, while strengthening their normative agenda.

It is widely acknowledged that their political relations are more complex compared to, for example, the US and the EU, because the PRC and the EU have relatively divergent identities with deep-rooted conceptual differences (Politi, 2023). The difficulty in their policy alignments can also be attributed to their different governance models. The EU is a post-sovereign entity that endorses sovereignty transfers and mutual interference and advocates for strong international institutions and supranational governance. In contrast, China represents a sovereign state model, which views sovereignty as a core component of the state, favoring intergovernmental cooperation over supranational frameworks (Geeraerts, 2019, p. 289). This, in turn, affects their ability to cooperate on specific political issues, including counterterrorism (CT). Given the outcome and the reasons for these obstacles, the normative foundations, which are partially created by the distinct governance models, require a closer look to uncover the process of the limitation of cooperation on certain security issues.

Despite the differences in governance models described above and the transformation of relations between China and the EU outlined by Snyder (2009) and many more authors, such as De Matteis (2010), Freeman (2022) and Gurol (2022), which are salient to this day, the actors indeed still manage to augment their cooperation in various fields, including domains beyond trade, business and investments to share responsibility of addressing global governance issues. The non-traditional security fields, which exceed military concerns, serve as excellent examples of where the actors, despite their differences in overall regime and governance model, managed to create collaboration frameworks, thereby strengthening political connections. These global governance issues that fall within non-traditional security domains, such as threats posed by

climate change, transnational crime, cyber-attacks, and terrorism, create a common ground for the major actors to act jointly.

After the 2003 agreement on a comprehensive partnership, and amid growing divergence between the actors, the security field has become a significant area of cooperation. More specifically, since the 2010s, as the Common Security and Defence Policy has expanded to include a wide range of topics of non-traditional security, such as migration, terrorism, and climate change, the EU began to consider cooperating on these issues with China. On the other hand, Chinese President Xi Jinping also highlighted the readiness to include security issues in cooperation with the EU, thereby creating a new pillar in their joint agenda. Later, according to policy papers and discourse, security emerged as the second most central cooperation area in Sino-European relations (Gurol, 2022). Nevertheless, the actors tend to avoid some specific topics in the context of security, such as issues regarding the South China Sea, Taiwan, and the Korean Peninsula. The EU aims to navigate cooperation without contradicting the “One China” policy it pursues, and on the other hand, China keeps its regional issues away from the EU.

Additionally, they managed to establish institutionalized dialogues under the CSP framework, addressing various topics. These dialogues, such as the High-Level Strategic Dialogue (2013) and the EU–China Peace and Security Forum (2017), include topics on maritime security and anti-piracy, climate and energy security, anti-terrorism, and beyond. Later, the creation of the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for cooperation has enlarged the list of issues and broadened the range of cooperation areas in their bilateral engagement. However, the level of cooperation has been varying in different sub-fields of non-traditional security.

In particular, cooperation on maritime and anti-piracy has been robust and highly institutionalized over time. Climate and energy security have been leading examples of effective and long-lasting cooperation. In contrast, the CT domain, which is included in their dialogues on security, has experienced significant obstacles, and cooperation on this matter remains limited, meaning that the practical component of collaboration is significantly missing. Thus, while, for instance, maritime security and anti-piracy, as well as climate and energy security, demonstrate successful cases of their cooperation, CT cooperation undermines the idea that the actors can cooperate effectively on non-traditional security matters. This raises the question of what exactly hinders partnership on CT matters.

Terrorism has become a more transnational security concern that undermines economic and social stability, which are central factors for the EU and China. Therefore, anti-terrorism has become a relevant security domain for them. Both actors have witnessed increased domestic terrorism activity closely linked to international terrorist organizations since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, their threat perception aligns with each other and the rest of the international community, who aim to combat terrorism. Terrorism is referred to as the pivotal threat in China's 2015 white paper on defense (The State Council, 2015), and it has always been an active issue on the EU's agenda, leading to a mutual and highly prioritized threat perception. Given this, the EU and China have included this issue in their dialogues, thereby making it a prioritized topic for their partnership at the rhetorical level. Yet, their practical cooperation on CT has been significantly limited. There are no mutual exercises, a shared database, and other elements, which are part of a comprehensive partnership.

The actors opt for deeper cooperation with like-minded partners, such as Russia for China and the US for the EU (Gurol, 2022, p. 92). This brings up the question of why these actors cannot further their cooperation for the common good while they engage with other actors to combat terrorism. For instance, China aims to gain knowledge in combating terrorism as it is a relatively new actor, while there are aspects that could benefit the EU, too, including access to critical transport infrastructure, especially aviation (Duchâtel, 2016). Thus, the empirical research puzzle revolves around the issue of why cooperation remains relatively low, even though the actors who portray themselves as crucial players in global governance acknowledge the common threat that should be addressed in a multilateral manner.

Since the security domain has become a relevant area of cooperation, the significance of the security domain in EU-China relations has gained prominence among scholars in the last two decades. Nevertheless, because of the actors' economic interdependence, the focus of inquiry prominently remains on the economy-security nexus, overlooking the ideational factors affecting partnership. The normative divergence and convergence are mainly treated separately from security and other dimensions in academia or are not adequately applied to the specific CT domain. Simply put, CT cooperation between China and the EU undoubtedly has not gained enough attention for a deep examination of the phenomenon of limited cooperation amid existing

collaboration frameworks to counter terrorism. Hence, this subfield of the broader security dimension is relatively underexplored and requires a closer look at the limitations.

For instance, Gurol (2022), who has dedicated a chapter to this controversial area of cooperation between the EU-China claims that the main reasons of limited cooperation between the EU and China on CT are their normative difference, conceptualization of the term “terrorism” and the low degree of interdependence stemmed from the lack of economy-security nexus. The author’s focus is primarily on rationalist logic, which is also supported by the results derived from the interviews she conducted for the inquiry. On the other hand, broader security relations and their convergence as global actors, which are examined by other authors, such as Dorussen, Kirchner, and Christiansen (2018), who primarily focus on the level of mutual threat perceptions, overlook the importance of normative elements for CT cooperation.

All of the above-mentioned reasons undoubtedly create the foundation for the actors to a low level of cooperation; however, this particular study focuses on the ideational factors, more precisely, a normative gap between the EU and China, which limits the cooperation. The focus on the normative gap is relevant for several reasons. First of all, the economy-security nexus is a part of the rationalist assumptions, but given the shared threat perception and benefits that the parties could obtain from this cooperation, the latter should assume the opposite of what is the case. Simply put, according to the presence of mutual threat perception and the utility maximization principle, their cooperation should be more comprehensive, which is not applicable in this context. Especially given the fact that the prioritization of this threat posed by terrorists is similarly high for both of them (Dorussen et al., 2018, p. 298).

Secondly, the definition of this concept is a common issue globally, as there is no consensus on the universal conceptualization of terrorism; however, security actors still cooperate on this matter. Finally, it is not merely the definition of “terrorism” that affects the CT measures, but also the norms that actors incorporate in their policies, which shape what is considered legitimate CT activity. Hence, the ideational factors that shape individual approaches to CT enable revealing how the actors enforce CT measures, thereby indicating the extent of their willingness to cooperate, considering their normative alignment. Accordingly, this provides an opportunity to focus on norms integrated by the EU and China into their respective policies, thereby looking

into their individual normative stances on legitimate CT activity instead of merely examining their conceptualization of the term “terrorism.”

On the other hand, Gurol, in her conclusion, refers to this particular partnership as “non-cooperation”; however, this study suggests that the actors engage on this matter, and there have been significant practical developments since 2013, demonstrating that the cooperation is limited, yet existing. Additionally, the mutual interest and shared threat perception posed by international terrorism to the broader international community, as well as domestically, creates a perspective of furthering CT cooperation in the future (Duchâtel & Ekman, 2015). Nevertheless, the level of cooperation remains limited, which requires a more in-depth approach to this issue.

Given the content of the research puzzle discussed above, the principal objective of this research is to uncover how the ideational factors, namely the normative gap, affect the level of CT cooperation between the EU and China. By doing so, it aims to fill the gap that exists in the literature on CT cooperation between the EU and China. While the other factor stressed by Gurol, such as the different conceptualization of terrorism, is considered, the study primarily focuses on the normative gap between the actors. The normative gap, in turn, is established by the diverging normative stances of the EU and China; while normative stances are created by the norms that actors incorporate into their policies, which, on the other hand, craft their perspective on the legitimate CT activity. The shared understanding of the legitimate CT activity is pivotal for effective joint activity, i.e., cooperation. Hence, the case study delves into the actors' normative stances on a legitimate CT activity, which creates diverging or converging trends in understanding of the latter, thereby affecting the degree of normative gap between them.

In this study, the shared understanding is defined as a common normative ground between the actors regarding the legitimate CT activity. In particular, the shared understanding of the specific principles, such as human rights, the rule of law, or multilateralism, is incorporated into the policies, which in turn generate norms. The same principles can generate similar or different norms, which establish “rules” for the legitimate CT activity. For example, the principle of multilateralism translates into the norm of reciprocal engagement, which sets the rule of combating terrorism together in a mutual way. These norms should align in order to establish effective cooperation. When such a shared understanding is lacking or the extent of the latter is

relatively low, which creates a certain degree of normative gap, the level of cooperation is lower, or no partnership occurs.

According to the research objectives, the research question is:

“How does the degree of normative gap between the EU and China affect the level of CT cooperation?”

To answer this research question, the study relies on the constructivist logic. Hence, the theoretical expectations are derived from the latter. More precisely, norms, an indivisible part of constructivism, are significant indicators of what the actors deem to be “appropriate.” The norms that the EU and China are implementing in their respective policies on CT activity are expected to be respected by their prospective partners. While the CT policies are crafted based on the frameworks provided by the global governance platforms, such as the UN, it is expected that both actors touch upon approximately the same principles. However, how they understand each principle that generates a norm is more central to them and defines the legitimate CT activity. The EU and China opt for cooperation with the actors that align with their understanding of the appropriate CT activity. Since they cover approximately the same principles, but their engagement experiences obstacles, there must be principles differently comprehended, which create divergent normative stances. As a result of creating a substantial normative gap stemming from the distinct normative positions on the appropriate CT activity, the level of cooperation remains limited.

2. Theoretical framework: A Constructivist Approach to Cooperation Amid Normative Divergence

This chapter introduces the theoretical approach on which this thesis is grounded. Firstly, it provides a detailed justification for the choice of theory, specifying the specific type of approach utilized in this case study; it also discusses why other approaches, which are usually used for explaining cooperation, fall short of explaining this research puzzle. Secondly, it presents a summary of the approach, including the reasons for the emergence of this approach and the core and authentic perspectives and arguments it provides. Finally, it applies the constructivist lens to explain the level of CT cooperation amid a certain degree of normative gap between the EU and China.

2.1 Constructivism and Its Relevance

Given the focus of this research on the normative gap between the EU and China regarding the legitimate CT activity and the level of cooperation, the social constructivism approach (commonly referred to as “constructivism”) was selected as it offers the most suitable perspective to explain this phenomenon. Considering the research puzzle described above, this approach provides excellent theoretical ground for examining how the normative gap that the actors showcase in their policies on CT affects the level of cooperation.

The mainstream theories that are commonly employed to explain (non)cooperation, such as realism, liberalism, and rational choice theory, share the assumption that cooperation is facilitated by material rather than ideational factors. Therefore, these approaches offer different perspectives on state behavior and argue that agents tend to act strategically, opting for decisions based on cost-benefit calculations. According to this particular logic, CT cooperation between China and the EU should flourish as it benefits both sides; however, the parties experience limitations. According to the given outcome, these alternative theoretical frameworks fall short of explaining the limited cooperation and primarily overlook the fundamental contestation of norms between the actors, which is the possible reason behind the limitation of CT cooperation that this thesis aims to prove and explain. In contrast, constructivism provides the necessary tools and emphasizes the significance of ideational factors in analyzing Sino-European security relations, more precisely, in CT cooperation. It captures the non-material factors, allowing for

the exploration of the impact of the ideational factors, such as the normative gap between actors, which, on the other hand, according to the constructivist logic introduced below, provides an explanation for the limited level of cooperation.

Realism focuses on power dynamics, self-interest, and survival, and as argued by the classical realists, “states are continuously engaged in a struggle to increase their capabilities” (Elman & Jensen, 2014, p.3). According to this logic, the advancement of engagement of these two actors in combating international terrorism would be beneficial for both as they share the same perception of threat regarding terrorism and show willingness to engage with other actors for the common good. Additionally, realists treat normative alignment, which is the core element of this thesis, as a secondary component (Waltz, 1979, p. 114).

Rational choice theory is also a weak match to this research puzzle, as it supposes that actors have fixed preferences and want to maximize their gains to fulfill their self-interest. This research does not fit the utility-maximization model, as these actors limit their cooperation because of the normative gap, which creates different conceptualizations of legitimate CT activity. Although Snidal (2013) argues that rational choice theory is a flexible approach, it still has limits for this research. He adds that rational choice theory is “not restricted to self-regarding or material interests but could include other-regarding and normative or ideational ‘goals’” (Snidal, 2013, p. 87). However, the key factor remains that this approach is still centered on the “goal” and cannot sufficiently address the existing and emerging normative and ideational gaps between actors.

Similarly, liberalism cannot adequately explain the limited cooperation between these actors, as it assumes that “cooperation is needed to maximize the possible benefits and minimize the possible damages of interactions and interdependencies and to capture opportunities for realizing greater peace, welfare, and justice” (Matthew & Zacher, 1995, p. 110). For both actors, international terrorism is a key priority in the non-traditional security domain, which should be addressed multilaterally. They have also formed frameworks for furthering cooperation. Moreover, the EU and China are highly economically interdependent, as they remain each other’s top partners in trade and investments. According to the liberalist logic, the cooperation in combating terrorism should also be deepened, as it is in various security and non-security domains. Yet, the current nature of cooperation experiences challenges. Additionally, according

to liberalism, shared interests should naturally lead to cooperation. As stated above, the willingness to approach this issue multilaterally is highlighted in various documents and statements released by each actor, as well as joint documents, including the mutual strategic partnership documents on security cooperation; however, the shared interest of combating international terrorism is challenged by normative aspects within the existent cooperation on anti-terrorism, which neither realism nor liberalism cannot address sufficiently. In contrast to realism, liberalism places emphasis on international norms, focusing more on the role of ideas, but as Chul (2009) puts it, both liberalism and realism consider norms as “epiphenomenal” (p.78).

This empirical puzzle of the EU-China CT cooperation showcases that merely mutual interests or their identities cannot define the nature and presence of cooperation. Moreover, the significant academic discussion on EU-China's political rapprochement on global security issues offers additional perspectives on the practical outcomes of cooperation between these two powers. While these theories tend to portray their identities as generally contested, there are some security domains where these identities, on the contrary, experience a certain level of convergence. Yet, other factors, such as norms and culture, are obstacles to deepening cooperation, and actors' identities, which are also reflected by those elements, remain resistant to further harmonization. Dossi (2015), in his work on the EU-China cooperation in non-traditional security issues where the author reviews ideational factors, states that “for two actors to cooperate in the field of security, a convergence of interests is not enough; there is also a need for a convergence of ideas about security and the ways to provide it” (p. 78). Indeed, the ideas about security, including employment and respecting norms, such as the rule of law, human rights, sovereignty, and other norms, are pivotal and affect the policies. Since the policies are affected by the norms, the core element that constructivism deals with, this approach is most relevant to explain the limited cooperation in this case, thereby explaining how the degree of normative gap alters the level of cooperation.

Relations between the EU and China are often defined by material elements, including in the security domain; however, CT cooperation presents an interesting empirical puzzle that cannot be explained solely from a materialistic perspective, as discussed in the relevant chapter above. Security cooperation between these actors is mainly treated through a security-economy nexus.

This is also evident from the inquiry into the non-traditional security fields, such as energy and climate, or maritime security (Gurol, 2022). The cooperation remains limited amid the potential material benefits that both actors could get, including the enhanced international image as a security actor and technological mechanism advancements, which drive other cooperation in security politics. As a result of examining the controversy over CT policies between the EU and China, the degree of normative gap becomes particularly significant. Norms contested in the cooperation in this security field can change the whole image. For this exact reason, the norms are the central concept of this research. As in this case, neither mutual threat perception nor interest is sufficient for effective and long-lasting cooperation, examining the normative aspects that hinder the cooperation is pivotal.

Besides the discussions of what hinders their CT cooperation, which involve more of a rationalist logic, some scholars invoke the argument of the diverging definition of the concept “terrorism”. Although the original definitions of terrorism by China and the EU differ, as already mentioned, it is insufficient to claim that mere definitions hinder cooperation. The opinion about the Chinese definition of terrorism being broad and giving the Chinese government concrete leverage over its CT policies is pretty popular within academia and among Western politicians (Zhang, 2021); however, the aim of this research is delving into the logic of how the degree of normative gap affects the level of cooperation between the EU and China and not merely measuring the conceptual gap between these actors.

The normative gap that is created in this domain is more significant as it showcases how norms, the core element of the constructivist approach, can be obstacles to further cooperation. Moreover, the focus on norms is crucial as solely the definition of terrorism is not sufficient to address and explain the reasons for limitation, as there is no strict definition of terrorism itself, and it lacks a universal consensus. Even if a definition were agreed upon, how CT is implemented in practice is pivotal. Moreover, the definition of terrorism and developed anti-terrorism policies moderately follow the frameworks established through the international guidelines, adding the local (national) laws and considering regional agreements. Such an international framework is the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, commonly adopted by consensus in 2006, which affects the policy outline of the actors contributing to combating terrorism (The UN Office of Counter Terrorism).

Policies reflect underlying normative and political considerations, such as human rights, sovereignty, and security priorities, which shape the intensity of cooperation or non-cooperation between the EU and China. Despite the issue of differing definitions, states cooperate to combat terrorism all over the world. For instance, China cooperated with the US in this matter, where the normative contestation arose, and again, the problem of human rights as a norm that hinders their cooperation was emphasized rather than merely the issue of different conceptualizations of terrorism (Park, 2017). This study, on the other hand, offers a more valuable inquiry of how their differing normative positioning limits cooperation, instead of looking merely at the definitions.

Accordingly, since this is the inquiry about how norms affect the nature and frequency of cooperation and not about how they exclusively define terrorism or CT and how power asymmetries shape these norms, conventional constructivism is utilized as a theoretical framework for this thesis. Unlike critical constructivism, a post-positivist approach focusing on power hierarchies and hidden ideological structures in discourse, conventional constructivism enables examining how the normative gap created by norm contestation affects the level of cooperation and, in this case, leads to its (limited) nature. This type of constructivism allows the maintenance of an empirical focus and aligns with the methodology employed for the analysis part.

Although these two types of constructivism share many mutual assumptions about cooperation and state behavior, in security studies, they differ on the premise “that identities are often treated as explanatory variables for certain security phenomena in conventional constructivism, but in critical constructivism, the identities themselves are to be explained to make sense of the cultural productions of insecurities” (Chul, 2009, p. 97). This claim is also supported by Agius (2013), who claims that critical constructivism treats identity as a subject of a deeper inquiry (p. 88). Therefore, since this thesis focuses on why cooperation is limited and how specifically norms (altering state identities) affect the latter, the conventional version of constructivism is a better fit. Moreover, this idea highlights the need for individual employment of the constructivist theory in certain empirical cases, focusing on one of the variables (norms, culture, and identity) as a core element and observing their interrelation.

Social constructivism emerged as a prevalent and impactful theoretical perspective in the late 1980s in International Relations, emphasizing the role of ideas, identity, norms, and interactions

of the states based on those aspects in the global system (Agius, 2013). The emergence and the rise of the social constructivist perspective in IR in the 1990s occurred after the “Third Great Debate” between rationalists and early international critical theorists that took place in the 1980s (Jung, 2019). It turned out to be a great addition to the theories that explain many phenomena happening in the field of IR, including theories on integration, cooperation, and other key areas of political studies.

It has remained controversial whether social constructivism is a full-fledged theory or a theoretical approach (Fierke & Jorgensen, 2015). For instance, Finnemore and Sikkink (2001) believe that constructivism is “not a substantive theory of politics,” unlike other theories (p. 393), while for Ruggie (1998), it is “a theoretically informed approach to the study of IR” (pp. 879-880). Moreover, some scholars, such as Kratochwil (2008), argue that “constructivism is neither a theory nor even an approach to politics, any more than empiricism is” (p. 80). Considering this debate and the fact that this theory or theoretical approach is frequently employed for the study of IR, it provides the researchers with valuable insights into how ideas, norms, beliefs, and social structures influence global interactions and state behaviors and how other factors, such as predefined identities and self-interest, are not sufficient to explain the nature and frequency of actors’ interactions. Moreover, this approach and its criticism paved the way for the different perspectives within constructivism, which vary from author to author and are mainly grouped into critical constructivism and conventional constructivism, as well as other theories and approaches.

During a big reorientation within IR, a new mainstream constructivist approach was dominating over other more minor theories, emphasizing that “the human world is not simply given and/or natural but that, on the contrary, the human world is one of the artifices; that it is “constructed” through the actions of the actors themselves” (Kratochwil, 2001, p.17). This claim challenged the dominant rationalist theories significantly, which drew the attention of many because this perspective focused on ideational factors that were ignored or underexplored earlier. The idea of non-given but rather constructed identities for the actors of international politics challenged the rationalist view on the states behaving in the manner of their very own (national) interests and whose identities were fixed. On the contrary, the constructivist approach introduced a new view on the identity of the actor states, which would construct their own identity while crafting the

“other” to their “self.” This process is the outcome of the interaction and leads to cooperation or non-cooperation, depending on the identity divergence or convergence.

The reason behind the popularity of the new approach in the field of IR was the innovative perspective of how the ideas, norms, identities, and other concepts, as suggested by Agius (2013), drawing from sociological theories, affect state behavior and shape world politics. It was different from “materialistic theories, which see political behavior as determined by the physical world alone” and “individual theories, which treat collective understandings as simply epiphenomena of individual action and deny that they have causal power or ontological status” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 393).

On the contrary, social constructivism prioritizes social aspects, including identities, collective ideas, culture, and norms, as drivers of the state’s decision to interact with other actors. These central concepts are socially constructed and lead to the process of defining their foreign policy orientations. It is an approach arguing that human interactions are predominantly shaped by ideas rather than material determinants; the most significant ideas are shared, non-individual beliefs, and these collective beliefs, therefore, shape the interests of the international actors (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 391). Thus, that is how the states' interests and behavior change according to constructivism and how historical and cultural aspects define collective ideas.

According to Adler (1997), the theoretical approach holds the view that “the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world” (p. 322). This precisely highlights the constructivist perspective on the relation of human agency and the material world. Following the logic of this quote, the material world lacks intrinsic meaning, and it is somewhat shaped by human actions and interactions while influencing them in return. Yet, the way and intensity of the material world influence humans and their actions is a subject of epistemic and normative perceptions. Wendt (1992), one of the most influential and respected constructivist authors, in his famous work, where he put, “anarchy is what states make of it” (p.391), emphasizes the role of states in constructing meanings and ideas. He also highlights the significance of intersubjective ideas, meanings, and social context in his works, which was also frequently pointed out by other respected constructivists, such as Hopf (1998).

Constructivism is referred to as “the middle-ground” approach in IR theories because of its nature and perception of human agency and material world dynamism. Adler (1997) himself argues that the “middle-ground” approach bridges a gap between the rationalist (realist and neoliberal) and relativist (postmodernist, poststructuralist, feminist, and critical) theories (p. 322). Additionally, realists and neorealists, such as Morgenthau, Waltz, and Gilpin, rely merely on positivist and material aspects of the world and explain international politics and relations as a behavioral response to external material forces, focusing on power without a deeper epistemological angle, while the other camp of aforementioned theorists, such as postmodernists, poststructuralists, and other approaches put stress on a relativist philosophy and believes that only the ideas are essential because the social reality is constructed through discourse (Adler, 1997, p. 324).

Neoliberal institutionalists tried to incorporate the ideas into the rationalist perspective, but their focus remains on the advantage of the material perspective on the world and adhering to the rational choice theoretical framework. On the other hand, constructivism acknowledges the existence of the material world and does not entirely deny it. Nevertheless, it highly emphasizes that the significance of the material world also depends on human interpretation of the latter. The proponents of social constructivism acknowledge that the material world is also sometimes resistant to society's attempts to engage with it, making them the “ontological realists” (Knorr Cetina, 1993, p.184; Adler, 1997, p. 323). Accordingly, constructivism is an approach that tries to connect the divide between positivist/materialist and idealist/interpretive ideologies in social and political sciences (Adler, 1997, p. 323).

2.2 The Role of Norms and Beyond

The constructivist approach successfully entered the study of security politics and has been an indivisible part of it since the 1990s. The reason behind it is the nature of this approach, which, as Adler (1997) stresses, is based on “war, cooperation, and the international community” (p. 323) and supports the study of security politics as those mentioned above are implied in its inquiry objectives. Unsurprisingly, there are many concepts that are connected to this approach; however, this sub-chapter on theoretical framework primarily emphasizes (1) identity, (2) culture (security culture), and (3) norms and their interplay as all of them significantly affect each other and usually are analyzed together in security studies (Agius, 2013).

Nevertheless, as the main objective of this thesis is to explore the connection between the degree of normative gap and the level of cooperation, the norm is a central concept. A norm is “a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 891); therefore, identities are somewhat “fixed” in this thesis in order to be able to study the effect of the norms on cooperation, while security culture is explicitly altered by norms.

Firstly, identity in international politics is a pivotal concept for constructivism. It assumes that identities show who the actors are, what their interests are, and how their preferences, which are defined by their interests, determine their actions. Identity is socially constructed alongside shared interests, and it is based on shared ideas (Agius, 2013). Accordingly, the research on, for instance, why there is no NATO in Asia and why the US opted for the alliance with like-minded allies also relies on the constructivist approach, as it answers the research puzzle in a normative manner, uncovering interesting aspects of security cooperation and the role of shared identities in cooperation and alliance building (Hemmer & Katzenstein, 2002). The common interest they constructed was based on the shared idea of defending themselves from the Soviet Union, and other aspects in common, such as the political principles and culture, contributed to the formation of the defense union, and the lack of the above-mentioned factors amid different aspects affected the disinterest of the US on establishing the multilateral alliance. Political actions can be understood by intersubjective meanings, which are the shared ideas and principles (Hopf, 1998, p.173), and the behavior of the actors who are willing to become allies should undoubtedly align with each other. In the case of EU-China CT cooperation, despite the shared interest of countering terrorism globally, their invoked principles are less aligned, which causes obstacles.

Identity for constructivism is a more profound concept than it is for other theories, such as neoliberalism, which mainly assumes that identity is a product of the exogenous origin (Agius, 2013, p. 77). It treats identity as something crafted by interaction and “formed by social processes” (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 194). Since the identity defines the actor’s “images of distinctiveness,” based on constructivism, it represents the mutually crafted perception of the “self” and “other” (Jepperson et al., 1996, p. 59). Some historical adversary states can have good relations after centuries and vice versa, because they interact in different settings and times. For example, Germany and France established a great bond during European integration, and Russia

and Ukraine became adversaries after years of partnership. These cases are illustrative examples of how identities change based on interactions and not merely on external (exogenous) factors, and they are not predefined. Additionally, identity formation results from the states' interactions and how they engage on a normative level, which also indicates the significance of the interplay of the central concepts -norms, culture, and identity (Agius, 2013). Although identities are relatively fixed for this case study, they still somewhat shape actors' worldviews, which in turn alter the norms they invoke. For this reason, identities must be considered, yet should not be in the center of inquiry, which is described in more detail in the next subchapter.

Secondly, culture is the core concept, as it affects other elements of what constructivism defines as crucial for cooperation. It is also closely tied to other terms, such as norms and identity. Constructivism sees culture as “a set of practices that give some sort of meaning to shared experiences and actions” (Agius, 2013, p. 79). Culture is not just a simple set of social practices but is connected to security, reflecting the actors' view on national security and threat perception, which affects the security policies. Therefore, in this case, culture, or more precisely, security culture, is a significant determinant of the state's identity. Because of this assumption, some constructivists, such as Wendt (1996), applied this concept with a more robust meaning and even depicted the Cold War as a “cultural rather than material structure” (p.49).

Katzenstein (1996) highlights close ties of security culture to norms, altogether altering the identity and puts,

culture refers to both a set of evaluative standards (such as norms and values) and a set of cognitive standards (such as rules and models) that define what social actors exist in a system, how they operate, and how they relate to one another. (p. 3)

In turn, as norms define what is considered a legitimate security activity, the security culture is crafted by these norms embedded by the actors in their respective policies. As observed, the security culture is directly linked to principles, norms, and values, which can be used somewhat interchangeably due to the interrelation. The effect of normative stances is direct to the latter; therefore, as constructivism assumes that the actors with distinct security cultures are less likely

to cooperate, this supports the main claim of this thesis, that ideational factors are the crucial limitations of the CT cooperation between the EU and China.

Finally, norms, the core element of constructivism, are closely linked to culture, collective beliefs, and identity, and are typically analyzed alongside them. As Hoffmann (2010) puts it, “social norms were conceptualized as aspects of social structure that emerged from the actions and beliefs of actors in specific communities; norms shaped those actions and beliefs by constituting actors’ identities and interests” (p.1). Thus, norms are socially constructed, which emerge from the actions and beliefs that this or that phenomenon is rightful, appropriate and legitimate. For instance, the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) emerged as an international norm as a response to the international community’s failure to effectively address the atrocities in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect). Those norms then affect the actors' identity, creating the “collective expectation about proper behavior for a given identity” (Katzenstein, 1996, p.5). For example, the EU’s identity is closely linked to the advocacy for human rights and the rule of law, and a set of member states, therefore, have shared norms stemming from these principles that create their identity accordingly.

The concept of “norm” has been a highly controversial concept among constructivists, and first of all, this applies to the nature of norms. As Hoffmann (2017) notes, the debate about norms started in the 1990s and continued in the 21st century, and scholars such as Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) began exploring the nature of norms and their dynamics. The early empirical constructivists tended to perceive norms as something static and fixed; however, later, this mainstream assumption was replaced by the adjective “relatively stable” (Hoffmann, 2017, pp. 4-5). This trend has evolved over time, and Shannon (2000) once argued that “oftentimes norms are what states make of them” (p. 293), emphasizing that norms are not fixed, and state leaders interpret norms to justify their actions according to their interpretation. Therefore, academics started to study norms as a subject that can change as a result of norm contestation, focusing on how and in what conditions they are usually altered.

Norms not only alter the identity and interests of the states but also facilitate or impede the states’ positive interaction (cooperation or noncooperation). They are significant for the interaction process because they dictate the rules for cooperation, setting the norms as a

guideline for the latter. Each action that actors agree to cooperate on needs a set of rules, which they should respect; these rules are usually grounded in norms that stem from principles, such as, for example, multilateralism and sovereignty. Based on this particular logic, the principles that the EU and China invoke in their policies and discourse are closely analyzed to uncover what political norms the actors follow. Thus, the principles such as “human rights,” “rule of law,” “sovereignty,” “multilateralism,” “non-interference,” “non-proliferation,” are closely tied to norms and craft the normative stances that actors rely on while opting for (non)cooperation.

For example, the principle of multilateralism is generally translated into reciprocal engagement; however, the different interpretations of this same principle lead to normative divergence. A similar logic can be applied to other norms, depending on how the actors view these principles. Accordingly, it is justified to argue that the principles that emerged and were adopted by all the states vary in definition and applicability, resulting in the generation of different norms. Moreover, this supports the assumption that norms are not fixed and are the subject of interpretation and change. If the normative stances derived from the aforementioned principles do align, the cooperation is more likely to happen. On the contrary, the normative divergence between the security actors hinders the cooperation process. Furthermore, principles, thus, norms, define actors’ aspirations and foreign policies, crafting their identities, which are grouped in relevant, socially constructed “political camps” based on regimes, mainstream ideologies, and so on.

The norms also affect the definition of legitimate or illegitimate actions; and as Shannon (2017) argues, by providing and exploring the example of the principles of human rights and sovereignty and humanitarian intervention in relation to the derived norms in the Balkans, states by interpreting those norms define those actions in the region as legitimate or illegitimate (p.8). The issue of legitimization is central to this study, as well as cooperation in general. Security actors, based on the interpretations of the principles embedded in their policies and discourse, set a normative stance that they follow while conducting security activities. This is pivotal for the decision-making on cooperation, because actors tend to cooperate with those who apply a similar approach to the security activity. In conclusion, the constructivist approach to the norms offers valuable insights into how they evolve and influence global politics by defining the state’s

foreign policy. Moreover, this approach delves into the dynamics of social expectations and state interests in shaping the international order.

2.3 Constructivist Explanation of (Non)Cooperation in the Context of a Normative Gap

The level of cooperation is a dependent variable, as this thesis aims to explain the limited level of cooperation between the EU and China based on the degree of normative gap they have developed through their CT policies. As one Finnish philosopher, Tuomela (1993), puts it, “cooperation is a joint action” (p. 87); however, sometimes this term does not imply the joint action and is something beyond it. For example, this could be following the same rules or cooperating intermittently, which does not mean a comprehensive joint action. Hence, cooperation may or may not occur, but when it does, it can vary in intensity, meaning that the level of joint action differs under different circumstances. For this exact reason, this thesis outlines three levels (types) of cooperation: (1) no cooperation, (2) limited cooperation, and (3) comprehensive cooperation.

In particular, no cooperation refers to situations where political actors do not engage in tackling the issue together. In this case, there is no practical or communicative interaction on the specific issue, more precisely, anti-terrorism. However, the rhetorical willingness to cooperate can occur, which lacks practical implementations, including formal dialogues on the specific topic of anti-terrorism. Limited cooperation is a scenario where the political actors interact to a certain extent, which can be partially practical, too. This level of cooperation is more open-ended and can include dialogues and formal frameworks for CT, as well as practical means of collaboration. Yet, it refers to the case when the CT cooperation faces some obstacles that lack one or more of the components, such as high-level dialogues, intelligence exchanges, mutual practical pieces of training, and formal agreements. In contrast to both, the comprehensive level of cooperation refers to broad and deep collaboration, which does not lack any of the aforementioned elements, and is highly institutionalized.

The independent variable, the degree of normative gap, is crucial because it affects the level of cooperation. A normative gap refers to an absence, inconsistency, or deficiency of shared norms between the actors within a specific policy area. It can occur when international actors have differing normative stances, and they fail to align their principles or conceptualization of

principles, creating a normative gap between them. The extent of the normative gap between China and the EU within CT policy is analyzed in this thesis to uncover the reasons for the limited cooperation between them. The degree of the normative gap can vary, and for this reason, it is crucial to categorize the degrees of the normative gap. The normative gap can be categorized in many ways; however, the categories outlined in this thesis are: (1) minimal, (2) substantial, and (3) complete.

The categories are based on the notion of shared understanding of the principles incorporated in their policies and discourse, which craft their normative positions. In turn, shared understanding means a common interpretation and grasp of the principles they apply to the CT activity.

Minimal normative gap refers to the scenario when political actors hold significantly different understandings of the principles, thereby creating largely divergent normative stances. A substantial normative gap occurs when the actors have noticeably divergent interpretations of the principles or their prioritization; however, they also have mutual understanding. The actors with this particular degree of the normative gap have substantially distinct normative stances. The complete normative gap refers to the case when the actors have no shared understanding of the principles, therefore not embedding the same norms, or they invoke entirely different principles, thus creating different norms.

The correspondence of normative convergence and divergence (how the actors conceptualize and apply principles) between the actors and the level of cooperation is exceedingly significant for understanding the success or failure of cooperation initiatives (Kramer, 2021). Finamore (2017) also points out the correlation between cooperation and normative convergence and divergence and believes that, according to the constructivist approach, normative differences can explain limited partnerships. By delving into the normative stances of the security actors and the logic provided by constructivism on how this normative gap affects the level of cooperation, it is possible to unpack the research puzzle and explain it.

The norms, the central concept of constructivism in this case study, allow for the close examination of a normative gap and its correlation with the level of cooperation. In this case study, the normative gap caused by norm contestation leads to different perspectives on legitimate CT activity, which hinders actual cooperation on CT. Yet, this is a complex process that involves different principles and, therefore, norms tied to them, the actor's perspectives, and

how it all plays out with the identity and security culture. Namely, on the one hand, normative differences can be observed with concrete principles that are interpreted differently, such as human rights in the case of Sino-European CT cooperation. On the other hand, some principles, such as sovereignty and non-interference, are incorporated into China's policies, while they are not directly included in the EU's policies, challenging other principles and norms emphasized by the latter, such as human rights and the rule of law. All of this, together and independently, creates a normative gap that challenges the process of cooperation.

The principles and norms, the foundation of rules that are implied within policies, are expected to be respected and followed by the involved parties. However, when these fundamental grounds of the policy are not "appropriate" for another party, it causes norm contestation, which hinders cooperation. Norm contestation is the central cause of the limitation of cooperation. Wiener's (2014) understanding of norm contestation is a "political practice that both indicates and generates legitimacy" (p. 6). Accordingly, the EU and China aim to indicate and generate the appropriate CT activity. To do so, they embed the principles that they respect and follow in their individual policies, which is a handbook of how they combat terrorism. Moreover, they emphasize these principles in their discourse to create a normative foundation for their prospective cooperation. In turn, the normative positioning of the security actors who are willing to collaborate should align with others' in order to deepen and broaden their cooperation on certain issues, including CT.

Identity, which is another core concept of constructivism, is also tied to the phenomenon of cooperation, as identity constitutes actors' preferences, interests, goals, and, therefore, shapes their behavior (Agius, 2013, p.53). When states share similar political values based on norms and are committed to them, they see each other as legitimate partners, which facilitates cooperation. The identities, therefore, can be converging or diverging, creating different kinds of relations and defining the level of cooperation. This general assumption fits the topic of cooperation as the security actors search for partners with compatible identities. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that neither identities nor culture alone can determine whether the actors are willing to cooperate, because, as mentioned above, the norms are the core lens through which to approach this case study. Furthermore, according to this perspective, the norms alter identity and shape security culture.

Although the general identities of the EU and China are contested, the principles they invoke in their respective legal frameworks to confront the issue vary in specific non-traditional security domains. In the CT sector, because the EU and the PRC read the same principles differently, resulting in distinct norms, or prioritize one principle over the others, thereby creating different normative stances, the level of cooperation cannot be comprehensive and remains within the frameworks they have managed to create. Nevertheless, it does not occur in other non-traditional domains, which once again supports the argument that focusing on norms over merely identities is more valuable in this new and evolving area of engagement.

As outlined earlier, social constructivism argues that national and transnational interests are not fixed and are a product of intersubjective understanding (Hopf, 1998; Fierke & Jorgensen, 2001; Agius, 2013). Based on the logic, states opt for a certain level of cooperation or non-cooperation based on ideational factors, which affect national interest accordingly. The states assess how those factors and constructed national interests can co-exist within the cooperation framework (Cho, 2010). Indeed, cooperation is based on the logic of appropriateness. Constructivism expects actors to cooperate when it is deemed “appropriate” under given circumstances. These circumstances, in this case, are the norms incorporated within policies, which affect the security culture and identity of the actor. If the normative stances do align, cooperation is more likely and vice versa.

It is also crucial to treat concrete cooperations separately because, although norms play a role in the overall relations between the actors, some norms are more contested in specific domains and, therefore, are inhibitors of cooperation. Such norms stem from the principle of human rights, which plays a central role in CT cooperation, while it is less significant in trade cooperation. Some norms are defined and incorporated differently, while some differ hierarchically within actors’ policies. For instance, China puts emphasis on sovereignty while it interprets human rights differently from the EU or even mentions it less frequently, while the Union highlights the rule of law and grasps it in another way and gives considerably less attention to sovereignty compared to China. Therefore, the international norms implemented in policies require close individual examination to address the question of what matters. This can be different principles, and the norms connected to them, or the misinterpretation of the same principles. For this case study, both aspects matter as they conjointly create a normative gap within the CT cooperation.

According to conventional constructivist logic, actors tend to interact more when they internalize shared norms, identify with each other based on converging culture, and redefine their interests in alignment with these norms (O'Neill et al., 2004, p. 162). The norm internalization is an optional final stage of the “norm cycle,” which happens when the actor accepts the new norms through interaction with other agents or through international organizations that promote them (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Park, 2006). It is essential to some agents, such as the EU and China, because the EU portrays itself as a normative power, while China has also become a norm promoter. On the other hand, their roles as “norm makers” challenge the process of norm internalization (Kramer, 2021, p. 59).

There are cases when states are not willing to accept and internalize norms through any channels. The PRC has been resistant to internalizing the version of human rights that the EU promotes through interaction with the latter, and this issue has been discussed within academia for a long time (Balducci, 2010; Yun-Chen, 2019). Nevertheless, there are some international norms that have experienced convergence, such as those stemming from multilateralism and non-proliferation. This process causes the redefinition of interests, which are the outcome of normative, therefore, cultural and ideational convergence. As a result of aligning their identities through normative rapprochement caused by norm internalization, the actors are expected to cooperate further. This happened in the EU-China CT cooperation. Since some norms have experienced convergence, the cooperation proceeded to the point where the actors witnessed a clash of understanding on the rest of the norms they embedded based on the principles.

As O'Neill et al. (2004) put it, “the emergence of shared, transnational norms and ideas is important in generating lasting cooperation” (p. 150). Norms can facilitate cooperation by establishing shared values and expectations, or hinder the latter because of the norm contestation, which refers to competing and conflicting norms or conceptualizations of them. When states internalize standard norms, they develop a sense of mutual obligation, making cooperation more predictable and stable.

Constructivists argue that the emergence of norms is not accidental, and as already mentioned, norms are constructed through social interactions. Based on this assumption, the socialization process, where states adopt and internalize norms through diplomatic interaction, can gradually transform state preferences. When there is a normative contestation because of the interpretation

of the same principles differently or the implementation of different norms within policies, the normative gap occurs, leading to the limitation of cooperation. For example, when normative contestation occurs, and the diffusion and alignment of the norms struggle, the attempt to cooperate on security issues is limited, as seen in EU-China disagreements over human rights and other principles in CT efforts.

The policies that are affected by norms can be incompatible for each actor, creating the ground for disagreement. The differing stances on how to deal with insecurity caused by the normative gap between the actors can result in diverging identities, portraying each other as “others” while crafting the “self” as an actor with “legitimate” policy who cannot cooperate with the other actors having “illegitimate” policy. Yet, the main driver of this disagreement is the norms that affect the identity and, therefore, interests and goals.

Many authors, such as Finamore (2017), Montesano (2019), and Sicurelli (2010), argue that norms between China and the EU are diverging. The perception of threats and the overall interest in dealing with those threats are converging over time; however, according to Stubmaum (2007), the core norms that affect policies in specific domains are still highly contested. The aim of this thesis is to examine the latter and detect how it influences the nature of cooperation.

In conclusion, constructivism argues that cooperation is not exclusively driven by material aspects but is deeply rooted in the shared understanding of norms. The EU-China CT cooperation demonstrates an interesting case where interests align to some extent because of the mutual threat perception, but the normative contestation over human rights, the rule of law and other norms, and their deployment in the policies pose an obstacle to the cooperation.

Constructivism argues that norms are not “given” and necessarily shared; they can be contested, affecting the level of cooperation. When the norm contestation creates a normative gap between the actors, cooperation is expected to be hindered. Norms affect how the actors shape legitimate policies and how they read the security issue, and when norms that stem from the principles are less contested, cooperation becomes more possible. In the EU-China case, the normative gap indeed restricts deepening cooperation, reinforces identity differences, and limits policy alignment. However, in this thesis, the degree of normative gap is significant because the level of cooperation changes accordingly. As theoretical expectations dictate, the substantial normative

gap, which is created by the different normative stances that are moderate but not complete, leads to limited CT cooperation between the EU and China. Nevertheless, this claim needs to be proven by the analysis, which takes place in one of the following chapters.

3. Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodology used in the research. First and foremost, it outlines the research design, including the case selection and particular contextual information on the chosen case. Secondly, the specific data collection and analysis methods are introduced, and the justification for their relevance and the ways of utilizing the analysis methods are explained. Finally, since this research analysis involves original texts in two languages and contains vulnerable topics such as human rights, the limitations relevant to this inquiry will be discussed, as well as the ways to address the challenges to improve the validity and reliability.

3.1 Research Design and Case Selection

This research utilizes a single case study of the EU-China CT cooperation from 2013 to present to delve into the conditions limiting the latter, amid potential benefits that actors get via cooperation on the issue commonly considered a threat. In particular, this thesis focuses on norms that actors emphasize while crafting their own policies and proving the legitimacy of their CT activity, as well as how the latter is essential for deepening and widening their cooperation in this non-traditional security domain. This is significant as the emergence of shared norms and normative convergence between the states facilitates international cooperation and develops a stable security architecture.

A single case study has numerous advantages that must be considered when deciding on a research design. The strength of the single case study lies in its ability to examine real-life phenomena closely and allows it to delve into more details regarding the case, possibly uncovering the flaws in the hypothesis and theories previously proposed by the researcher (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 309). Regarding the complexity, the single-case study enables researchers to deal with the context without challenging themselves with various factors hindering the correct assessment of the phenomenon itself. It also enables the use of much more detailed data, giving the researcher a comprehensive perspective on the subject of study and addressing the issue of possibly missing significant factors for the precise inquiry. The topic of this thesis is narrow and needs the approach mentioned above because the single-case study enables the close examination of the issue of cooperation precisely in this domain, avoiding the complexities that other research designs could pose, and an in-depth examination of the cooperation case amid the normative gap

between the concrete actors. This is significant because CT is affected by security concerns, which include different aspects that should be considered while analyzing the data, and this approach itself allows for a deeper examination of the data.

Scholars tend to criticize the single case study for various reasons (Gerring, 2007, p.232).

However, because a significant portion of our empirical understanding of the world originates from case studies, it remains a widely acceptable research design in social sciences (Gerring, 2004, p. 341, p.93; Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 302). The most common criticism is that the single case study lacks the opportunity to generalize the findings. Nevertheless, it mainly depends on the single-case study, which mostly deals with unique events and uncovers the reasoning behind many intriguing cases. Examining norms embedded in policies and their connection to international cooperation requires a close examination of the case; therefore, the small-N or large-N are not suitable for this research, and the single case study is more well-suited.

Conducting comparative studies to compare the selected cases or using a large-N research design to detect that the normative gap matters for cooperation does not allow for in-depth analysis and overlooks the process of how this normative gap emerges.

The issue raised in this thesis- the extent of the normative gap and the latter's effect on the level of CT cooperation - is quite unique and narrow, requiring a detailed approach provided by the single case study. The normative gap observed in this case requires such a close-up approach because the latter allows for identifying the concrete factors (norms) at play. It enables the detection of concrete norms that affect cooperation by establishing the normative gap. Moreover, the single case study is well-suited to delve into each identified norm and determine how and in what way certain norms limit or facilitate cooperation. Hence, the single case study is well-suited because it grants the identification of norms that create the normative gap between actors and analyzes the causal link between the latter and the level of cooperation.

The cases of bilateral and multilateral anti-terrorism cooperation around the world reveal great perspectives that support social and political studies with significant nuances that help develop the discipline. The case of the EU-China cooperation on CT, which is selected for this research, enables the uncovering of the vital role of normative alignment in deepening collaboration. The selected case is insightful for research because material factors cannot explain the limited cooperation in this domain. As mentioned in the chapter above, the security-economy nexus

approach cannot fully address the puzzle that evolved around this case. A thorough examination of this particular cooperation helps to address and even criticize certain rationalist assumptions on cooperation facilitators, such as the presence of shared interests, common goals, certain levels of interdependence, or material gains, as they cannot explain the given research puzzle.

Based on the nature of the research puzzle described above, this case belongs to the group of „outlier“ cases in the context of CT cooperation in the sense that it defies rationalist expectations. According to Gerring and Cojocaru (2016), this particular type of single case study is the case that deviates from the expected pattern (p. 404). Hence, as an „outlier“ case, this study helps us find factors other than those proposed by rationalists to determine the level of cooperation on CT and uncover previously overlooked causal mechanisms, thereby illuminating gaps in the literature.

EU-China CT cooperation fits within the broader universe of the latter because both sides formally engaged in dialogue on CT, recognizing anti-terrorism as a shared security concern. Moreover, they have included this issue in their strategic dialogues, particularly within the EU-China High-Level Strategic Dialogue and EU-China Security and Defense Consultations. Unlike the cases of deep CT cooperation, such as EU-US or China-Russia, this case illustrates a limited but existing form of engagement, making it a valid case for inquiry. On the other hand, this case is significant to examine because, unlike Russia and other countries, which differ in various ways from the EU, China is formally a strategic partner that collaborates with European partners in other non-traditional security fields. Despite the individually crafted CT policies and established frameworks to engage, both actors have different normative stances within this particular security domain. The EU's emphasis on human rights and China's prioritization of non-interference and other norms constitute the normative gap, which affects CT cooperation and the process of normative clash and significantly affects the level of cooperation. By analyzing this case, it is possible to uncover the limits of norm-based engagement and the broader implications for the EU and China in CT cooperation.

Moreover, as this research angle is relatively narrow and is underexplored by scholars who have ever researched EU-China security relations and touched upon their normative convergence/divergence, the utilization of a single case study of this cooperation is justified for several reasons discussed above. Firstly, the single case study of EU-China CT cooperation

delves into their normative gap that requires deep inspection and analysis of policies on anti-terrorism and the actors' statements and responses in the framework of the contemplated cooperation project. Focusing on this bilateral cooperation allows for a rigorous examination of the primary policy papers as well as the statements made by each actor as a remark or response to the other. Secondly, given the complex nature of the EU-China relations context, including the Strategic Partnership signed in 2003, the current trend of securitization of China by the EU, and their evolving roles as security actors, the single case study facilitates an in-depth analysis by considering these factors.

The timeframe for this thesis is selected based on the relevance of the CT activity and international cooperation for these actors. Although China has started paying more attention to international terrorism since 9/11, the content from 2013 to the present will be examined, as this period is significant for several reasons. Firstly, in 2013, the EU and China adopted the 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, which included anti-terrorism joint efforts. Secondly, the first legal framework for combating terrorism, amended later and still relevant to this day, was also drafted in 2014 by China, setting the agenda for international cooperation, which led both actors to start considering cooperation on this matter. Additionally, by that time, ISIS had gained international attention after spreading its influence in Iraq and Syria, which made countries change their CT strategies and push China to outline its perspective on terrorism more clearly (Duchâtel, 2016). China increased its efforts to gain international support for its domestic CT policies, which the West highly criticized. Additionally, around the same period, the 2015 Paris terrorist attack was the first time when terrorists (ISIS) executed the first Chinese citizen, which made China a victim of international terrorism (Lei, 2015).

3.2 Data Collection Method

The study of CT cooperation between the EU and China and how the normative factors affect their engagement requires a close examination of the policies that these actors implement to prevent terrorism. In particular, their shared understanding of the norms embedded in their respective policies and discourse, such as human rights, the rule of law, multilateralism, sovereignty, non-interference, and non-proliferation. As anti-terrorism policies are what make the CT activity legitimate for each actor, it is significant to scrutinize the stances of each actor through the leaders' and high-ranking officials' statements, namely, how these political leaders

portray the legitimate CT activity based on policies created by authorities, which on the other hand include and incorporate norms in the latter. Analyzing their normative stances and comparing them allows for measuring the normative gap between the actors. On the other hand, measuring the level of CT cooperation, which is affected by the normative gap between them, requires looking into the documents within the EU-China security cooperation framework.

To measure the degree of normative gap and the level of cooperation, this thesis analysis is derived from the data gathered from policy documents on CT and the leaders' statements, and remarks from the EU and PRC within the 2013-2025 timeframe. The analysis consists of several sections discussed below based on pre-chosen textual data, specifically primary sources. The policy papers, official documents, statements, and remarks by officials on the CT issue are utilized as primary sources. Additional sources that are considered secondary sources are the existing research and policy brief papers analyzing the EU's and China's evolving policies on anti-terrorism, supporting the findings derived from the analysis of the primary sources.

First and foremost, to measure the level of cooperation, the documents signed by the EU and China and the joint statements issued by the actors are used to gather and analyze data. In particular, the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation and the available summit joint statements made in 2015, 2018, and 2019, where the prospects of the CT domain are included. Furthermore, for the same objective, a concrete cooperation agreement, such as the Agreement on Strategic Co-operation between the European Police Office and the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China (2017), is closely examined. These documents give a comprehensive perspective on what frameworks are established for the prospect of CT cooperation between the EU and China. Accordingly, the existence or non-existence of the indicators, such as dialogues, intelligence sharing, agreements, and mutual pieces of training, within their shared agenda is detected, thereby measuring the level of cooperation.

The three categories for the level of cooperation are predefined: no cooperation, limited cooperation, and comprehensive cooperation. A certain level of cooperation is identified based on the assessment provided above. The levels of cooperation, on the other hand, are defined as follows:

No Cooperation: There is no formal engagement between the actors on CT matters. No agreements, valuable dialogues on specifically anti-terrorism, legal assistance frameworks, intelligence sharing, mutual training frameworks, or practical implementations are present.

Limited Cooperation: Cooperation exists, but it is limited in scope. The parties have established frameworks for some indicators but lack practical implementation in certain areas. The collaboration is more symbolic or focused on broader aspects of CT, yet valuable dialogues or a certain level of practical engagement occur.

Comprehensive Cooperation: The parties engage in formal, continuous, all-encompassing cooperation. The frameworks for the predefined indicators are established and institutionalized, and their implementation is carried out in practice.

To measure the degree of the normative gap, the examination of each set of data is required to identify the central norms incorporated by them for the construction of the legitimate CT activity, and a comparison of these findings is required. To proceed with this goal, an analysis of the legal frameworks and policies on CT developed by each actor is needed. The primary policy texts on CT provided by China are “Counter-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China” (2015), including amendments implemented in 2018 of this policy, and “China’s Legal Framework and Measures for Counterterrorism,” published in 2024. On the other hand, the EU has more documents addressing CT; however, three relatively significant texts are chosen for the comprehensive analysis.

These texts are: “EU Strategy for Combating Radicalization and Recruitment to Terrorism,” the revised version of the 2005 agenda, which was updated in 2014 in response to the evolving landscape of the threat posed by terrorism, the directive on the fight against terrorism and its definition, the amendment of Council 2002 and 2005 decisions in 2017, and a new “Counter-terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent. Protect, Respond”, adopted in 2020 by the EC. These documents allow for a comprehensive inspection of the norms implemented in the actors' policies to confront domestic and international terrorism and extremism.

Secondly, the analysis of statements delivered by high-ranking officials is conducted. This is essential as it uncovers the stances of both actors in the evolving landscape. The review of exclusive documents is not sufficient in this case, as the statements of officials give a more

enhanced perspective on the actors' understanding of what constitutes legitimate CT activity and, therefore, the norms they invoke in their portrayal of the latter. The logic of legitimation of the actions for international politics, which Finnemore (2015) emphasizes in his work, is crucial as it contributes to understanding and measuring the normative gap and, therefore, its link to the level of cooperation between them.

Political discourse carries many aspects that are helpful for measuring the normative gap between actors, as officials contextualize their normative stances more straightforwardly compared to formal document texts. The UN has been the main framework for the Sino-European cooperation on security matters, and therefore, the speeches delivered, and statements made at the UN meetings merely on anti-terrorism uncover their fundamental stances on CT activity and cooperation. For this purpose, joint statements issued by the EU member states and delivered by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borell and the EU special representatives to the UN on CT matters are examined, in parallel with Chinese diplomats speeches, who were appointed as a Permanent Representative of China to the UN, such as Ambassadors Fu Cong, Li Baodong, Chang Jun, Geng Shuang, Dai Bing, Liu Jieyi, Wang Min. Additionally, the remarks by the Vice Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, Mao Zhaoxu and Cui Tiankai, and Deputy Head of the Chinese Delegation on Regional Issues, Wu Haitao, and the EU's briefing statements are examined to delve into their normative stances. Although the timeframe is from 2013 to present, the statement and remarks about the CT activity are available mostly after 2019, which proves the point that this domain has gained more relevance recently.

By comparing the normative stances drawn from the norms that actors embed in their policies and discourse to determine legitimate CT activity, the normative gap can be identified. The general results derived from the individual analysis and their comparison allow for the measurement of the degree of normative gap, which should fit into one of the categories. The predefined categories for this thesis are:

Minimal Normative Gap: Actors share a mutual conceptualization of the norms and apply them similarly in practice. Disagreements are minimal, but the approach to what norms are and how to incorporate them is minimal.

Substantial Normative Gap: Actors agree on the norms that should be incorporated but differ in conceptualizing some of them or in their practical implementations. Some of the norms are conceptualized differently; however, there are no significant differences between the norms incorporated.

Complete Normative Gap: Actors fundamentally disagree on the incorporated norms and their conceptualization. Norms are highly contested, without consensus over their definition.

With the same objective, China's white papers on the EU and the EU's policy papers on China are examined to support the finding on the degree of normative gap. In particular, EU-China Strategic Outlook (2019) is examined, in parallel to China's two main white papers on the EU, such as China's Policy Paper on the EU: Deepen the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit and Win-win Cooperation Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2014) and China's Policy Paper on the European Union (2018), are analyzed. These documents include many aspects of their relations; however, the parts on CT are examined closely. This process enables a deep investigation of their positions towards each other regarding the CT issue, dictating the level of motivation for a more profound cooperation framework.

All these texts are available on the official websites of the authorities and the specific web pages dedicated to the UN mandate. The filtration of the statements is strictly by the topic- CT from 2013 to the present. The speeches, remarks, policies and legal documents are available in their original languages (Chinese or English) and translated accordingly into English and Chinese versions, making the translation results more accurate, relying on the original source translation instead of self-translation.

3.3 Data Analysis Method

Qualitative document analysis is utilized to measure the level of CT cooperation, which is a “systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents” (Bowen, 2009, p.27). The indicators that are predefined to operationalize this variable are independent formal agreements on CT, frameworks of discussion (structural dialogues) on CT, mutual legal assistance frameworks, intelligence sharing, and mutual pieces of training within the domain. In the table of indicators, the existing indicators that represent a complete framework and practical

implementation are marked with “+1,” and the absent indicators are marked with “-1,” while the elements which are partially present, having an established framework, but are not practically implemented are marked as “0.” For example, there are valuable dialogues in various formats, which will be marked with “+1.” However, there is no mutual training, which is indicated as “-1.” The existing indicators are also assessed and discussed in the analysis part to showcase the comprehensive image of the level of cooperation, its prospects, and limitations. This is required because some indicators, such as structural dialogues, while existing within CT cooperation, are more symbolically incorporated rather than substantively, lacking enforcement in their agendas. Accordingly, the level of cooperation is defined. If the average score range is from 0,66 to 1, the level of cooperation is comprehensive. However, if the average score is from -0,65 to 0.65, the level of cooperation is limited, and in case it is from -0,66 to -1, the latter indicates no cooperation.

Qualitative content analysis is utilized to analyze the degree of normative gap. Content analysis is originally a quantitative data analysis method that counts the frequency of occurrences of the categories defined earlier within a given dataset (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015). Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), on the other hand, is a widely used qualitative approach for examining the (communication) content, which helps identify themes and emphasizes describing and interpreting the selected themes (Williamson et al., 2018, p. 464). Although it originates from its quantitative counterpart, the QCA is more interpretive than the latter and is not limited to numerical measurement (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015). This quality is a key factor in opting for it. Moreover, this method focuses not merely on the explicit meanings of the words and phrases but also on their underlying and latent definition (Mayring, 2000), which makes it more valuable for this study.

As the analysis is divided into several parts, namely the examination of norms stemming from the principles incorporated by each actor, which, on the other hand, construct legitimate and illegitimate CT activity through the various textual data, this method is especially fitting. It establishes categories within each chosen textual content, making the analysis process more comprehensive and consistent. It allows for a systematic yet flexible examination of the content. Unlike discourse analysis (DA), which emphasizes language structures and rhetorical strategies, QCA deals with an exclusively normative gap between the chosen actors in this case.

Furthermore, this process ensures a structured approach while maintaining the interpretative depth, which also enables identifying the relation between the recognized norms. Additionally, as this case study is more interested in the cause and effect of the normative gap on cooperation and not about the constitutive effect or relation of power and is based on more positivist epistemology amid a more moderate constructivist approach, QCA is a better fit than DA. QCA is a better fit. By breaking down complex Chinese and English texts into analytical categories, QCA enhances consistency and comparability, making it well-suited for studying the normative gap between China and the EU. Its methodological rigor ensures transparency in identifying how legitimacy is constructed and contested, which makes QCA an excellent fit.

The deductive qualitative content analysis is processed in several stages. The first two stages are (1) gathering the data to delve into, which is followed by (2) the identification of a specific “picture frame” dictated by the research puzzle, question, and objective (Williamson et al., 2018; Altheide, 1996). In this thesis, the central theme for analysis is the normative gap, which leads to limited cooperation; therefore, the categories that are established and stated below are concerned with norms, normative contestation, and, possibly, rapprochement.

The third stage is coding, thereby establishing the categories within the texts. The coding is done with the software tool Taguette, which allows for tagging the specific open codes, while also counting the occurrences. The open codes are then manually put into the code tables, where the categories are placed according to the themes alongside the predefined codes. These textual corpora are then analyzed based on the developed content categories, some of them being common to various texts, while some of them can identify new categories. The categorization process is time-consuming, and the number of categories grows as more texts are examined. However, it is crucial to set a narrow frame and filter out the extra categories that are not closely related to the research objective.

As this thesis deals with norms, the focus on normative aspects helps address this potential shortcoming. Mayring (2000) refers to the categorization process as a “feedback loop,” which is the top-down process stemming from the theoretical background. According to the top-down principle, it is relevant to start identifying the main themes of the texts, some of them being “(national) security,” “threat,” “foreign policy,” “cooperation,” “the European Union,” and “China.” Since the norms are central to this research, they are put in smaller categories, i.e., more

concrete principles which establish norms, such as “human rights,” “multilateralism,” “rule of law,” “sovereignty,” and “non-interference.” Those principles are attributed to the bigger category identified earlier. For example, in the coding set for China’s policy, the “national security” category has a subcategory “sovereignty”, because it is attributed to the “national security” for their authority, while “rule of law” falls under the “EU’s foreign policy” category. Connecting principles that this thesis investigates to uncover normative stances, more precisely, “human rights,” rule of law,” “multilateralism,” “sovereignty,” “non-proliferation,” and “non-interference” to the bigger categories stated above allows for better interpretation. This connection enables us to follow the logic of how these actors view the principles and what themes they use to justify using and generating these principles into norms.

Each actor widely uses those norms while defining appropriate CT activity and referring to potential cooperation with other actors. Nevertheless, sometimes, the norms are not stated directly. For example, despite the frequent occurrence of the concept of “human rights” in the EU policies, some documents consist of textual units that do not mention “human rights” explicitly but refer to this norm as people’s “fundamental freedoms” and “universal rights.” Therefore, these words and phrases connected to concrete norms create “open codes” which are attributed to the concrete codes and are supported by remarks. The remarks are added to the table's last graph to improve the analysis's efficiency. To illustrate this, the aforementioned case from the coding of the EU’s normative stance is used:

Category	Codes	Open Codes
EU’S SELF-PERCEPTION	Human rights	“Fundamental freedoms, “universal rights,” An advocate for human rights internally and externally

Table 1. A sample set of codes is provided to illustrate the example of coding conducted for this thesis

This case serves as a good example for coding. The predefined code, human rights, represents a norm that the EU employs when engaging with other actors, including for CT cooperation. In essence, when the EU expresses its perspective on potential cooperation in the CT domain, it highlights the importance of respecting human rights, indicating its normative stance. In other words, for the EU, adherence to human rights is a fundamental precondition for legitimate CT. This norm is reflected in various formulations, as illustrated in the open codes section of the table.

All these codes are used for comprehensive analysis. The relations between these categories and codes are explained in great detail, such as the way actors use these “open codes,” i.e., phrases and words, to illustrate their perspective on legitimate CT activity. Furthermore, the hierarchy of the norms is underlined since the perception of some of the norms, such as multilateralism, experiences convergence, but some of the norms are relatively contested. The human rights norm is relatively controversial and needs a greater focus in this study. Despite the frequent occurrence in the policies and statements, the EU and China frame human rights differently, significantly hindering cooperation. The latter argument is justified by analyzing their official statements on each other, where the human rights issue becomes a focal point. This analysis process enables the examination of the differences between their viewpoints based on norms, which, on the other hand, illustrates the normative gap between them, explaining the limited cooperation.

Identifying all these codes in the chosen sources provides an image of the norms that an actor invokes when portraying legitimate CT activity. Hence, by revealing their individual normative stances, the comparison of the latter becomes possible. By comparing their respective normative stances, the size of the normative gap can be identified. As mentioned, the document analysis of the white papers that the EU and China have issued on each other is conducted to support the comparison. This allows for a more thorough scrutiny of the findings derived from the comparison of their normative stances.

Finally, the results of the comparison of individual normative stances stem from QCA, supported by qualitative documents analysis of white papers on each other, should fit into one of the aforementioned categories of the degree of the normative gap. To fit them into categories, it is significant to indicate the degree of shared understanding of the principle, which creates norms and, therefore, a normative position. To do so, the table with the principles showcases the results

given from the comparison. The divergent grasp of the same principle is marked as “-1,” while a partially shared understanding is indicated as “0,” and a high level of shared understanding as “+1.” Accordingly, the degree of normative gap is revealed. If the average score range is from 0,66 to 1, the degree of normative gap is minimal, while from -0,65 to 0.65 is substantial, and -0,66 to -1 indicates the complete normative gap.

3.4 Potential Limitations

It is crucial to consider the potential limitations and obstacles to any research, including this thesis. The first limitation is language, as the textual data analyzed in this thesis is in English and Chinese, which is translated into English for coding. The Chinese officials’ speeches are often delivered in Chinese, and for the validity and reliability of the analysis, it is vital to examine the original texts. Although my Chinese language proficiency and experience working with political textual data, including official statements and documents, are sufficient for content analysis, and the error in translating is minimized by the provided English translation by Chinese authorities, the risk of misinterpretation still exists, yet is minimized.

While analyzing non-Western texts, especially regarding norms, it is crucial to consider cultural sensitivity in analysis. Human rights, for example, are a highly sensitive topic as well, and as non-Chinese researchers tend to interpret norms through the Western lens, it could potentially lead to misinterpretation or overgeneralization of China’s normative stance. Establishing a well-defined, context-aware coding framework and considering the cultural context is essential to address this potential shortcoming.

The content analysis poses challenges to the reliability and validity of findings, which should be considered. While it allows for the systematic examination of the content, it still involves the researcher’s interpretations, which can cause bias in findings. Unlike other methods, such as discourse analysis, it does not focus on language structures, which limits uncovering the hidden message behind the words; however, the strict emphasis on norms still allows addressing this issue, as direct discourse is also valuable, and it does not require strictly reading between the lines. Iterative coding of the categories is time-consuming and complex, which can affect the quality of the analysis. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that most of the analysis methods are labor-intensive and slow-paced and require the patience and consistency of the researcher.

4. Analysis: Explaining (Limited) EU-China Counterterrorism Cooperation from 2013 to the Present through Normative Gap

This chapter aims to present the findings derived from the analysis conducted on the collection of data described in the previous chapter, as well as the discussion of findings. Firstly, a detailed examination of the level of cooperation between the EU and China takes place to reveal the level of engagement between the EU and China on CT matters. Secondly, the individual normative stances derived from the principles the actors invoke in their policy documents and discourse at the UN stage are indicated. Thirdly, these respective normative positions are compared to determine the degree of normative gap. Finally, a discussion of the findings on the level of cooperation and degree of normative gap and their interrelation is unpacked.

4.1 The Level of Counterterrorism Cooperation between the EU and China

The level of cooperation varies significantly across fields and is influenced by different factors. The EU and China have been strategic partners since 2003, and as time passes, they have been engaging in more issues that have expanded beyond economic ties. They started engaging on global political and security issues, which has been beneficial for both and the international realm. However, as they started to collaborate in various fields, which spilled over to more political issues, the contestation became more salient. This shift can be attributed to China's rise as a significant international player, which began to assert its own rules rather than adopting the offered framework for cooperation (Maher, 2016, p. 959). The level of cooperation varies in non-traditional security domains, which underlines the need for measuring concrete fields within broader Sino-European security cooperation.

CT cooperation is a distinct case within the broader partnership on security issues between these actors. According to Casarini (2006), actors have shown a willingness to deepen their cooperation on many global issues, including countering terrorism since the beginning of the 21st century, and considering the latest updates, they continue to support this idea. Moreover, they were referred to as "natural partners" by the former EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana in 2005, while Chinese authorities called for a more comprehensive security engagement with the EU in 2004. Some scholars have questioned the level of cooperation in this area, as it remains controversial because of the nature of the number of joint agreements, formal engagements on

this issue, and actual joint CT measures. However, with the predefined categories outlined in the methodology section of this thesis and using document analysis as a data analysis method, it is possible to put this cooperation model into one of the predefined categories for the level of cooperation. The joint CT measures, such as mutual anti-terrorism trainings, judicial collaboration and bilateral consultations, and intelligence sharing, are proper indicators for the level of cooperation, as well as the formal agreements signed by the parties.

Firstly, since 2013 to the present, there has been no active or conducted mutual training between the EU and China, meaning that their forces do not engage in joint exercises to combat terrorism. At the same time, China has been engaging with certain countries in Europe, such as Serbia, in 2019 antiterrorism drills (Vasovic, 2019). However, it has not collaborated with any of the Union's member states or participated in the anti-terrorism trainings led or attended by the EU yet. The EU tends to conduct joint exercises with other states, such as the US and other NATO member states, while only engaging with China on maritime security matters in the anti-piracy operations in Africa, which has been part of their successful cooperation, emphasized by both sides. China, on the other hand, in CT matters works mainly with ASEAN countries, such as Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, and some countries in Eurasia such as Russia, Belarus, Pakistan, and some Balkan states (Gurol, 2022; Noy, 2023). Accordingly, this element is absent while assessing the level of cooperation on CT.

Secondly, during the same timeframe, there has been a certain degree of judicial collaboration and bilateral consultations between the EU and China on CT measures. Since the "EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation" was released in 2013, this domain has been included in the bilateral relations and discussions (European External Action Service, 2013). First of all, the EU delegation engages with Security Council members, including China, through the UN Counterterrorism Coordination, which is a part of the multilateral framework on anti-terrorism discussions. The UN is an international stage where most of the countries that portray themselves as security actors engage in a wide range of topics, which is considered a certain degree of collaboration; however, bilateral ties are what matter more for the EU-China CT cooperation. They hold bilateral annual consultations on the security and defense matters; but on the other hand, based on the reports on the latter between 2013 to present, their discussions are mostly on

regional issues and topics, such as their relations during the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, and a little about the terrorism issue in the Middle East, Africa and Balkans.

Reviewing the annual consultations reports from 2014 to the present showcased that CT is not the priority for the latter, and the consultations are conducted within a strictly formal, regional situation-assessment framework. On the other hand, greater focus on CT measures are dedicated to on the EU–China Dialogue on Human Rights, as both of the actors incorporate human rights in their CT policies and this norm has been relatively contested because of their different perspectives on human rights and the Uyghur issue as well as the situation in Tibet. The minority living in Xinjiang province has been a target of China’s CT measures, such as mass surveillance and re-education camps, which the EU has somewhat viewed as an example of using excessive force by Chinese authorities, resulting in suppressing Uyghur identity. The EU actively works with the Chinese side and calls for reviewing the CT measures against the criteria provided by international law on protecting human rights (European External Action Service, 2024). In line with the objectives of organized bilateral dialogues, this issue is also tackled through the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN department that works on improving and promoting fundamental rights.

Chinese authorities are more resistant to changing their policies; however, these meetings have a certain level of impact on improving the framework of CT activity. More precisely, the EU has been helping to spread awareness on the issue and demand a more transparent, non-discriminatory approach to the CT measures, while China is informing the world of its domestic issue of extremism. As the EU has been designated the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) synonymously used as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) by the Chinese authorities, which recruit Uyghur-affiliated personnel to their ranks, as a terrorist organization, the EU’s involvement in distinguishing the minority’s identity and civil rights from the violent extremism, which it condemns too, is highly important. However, its ties with Al-Qaida are concerning for both actors, making this issue a common threat to the international community. According to the review of the previous formal attempts for the consultations and active frameworks for dialogue described above, this element of the cooperation is still in place despite the low effectiveness of the latter.

Thirdly, the intelligence sharing has been relatively problematic in the case of Sino-European bilateral relations because of the lack of trust (Gurol, 2022, p. 95). This process includes exchanging sensitive personal data, which, given the increased securitization of digital policies, has been challenging to overcome in many other domains, including CT. Nevertheless, the information sharing is a part of the active agreement between the EU and China, namely “Agreement on Strategic Co-operation between the European Police Office and the Ministry of Public Security of the People’s Republic of China” (EUROPOL-MPS Agreement) (2017), which is described and discussed below. This process remains complex and is considered in dialogues to further their partnership by including the latter in the cooperation framework. Yet, despite the efforts, intelligence sharing has not been thoroughly institutionalized, resulting in a limited nature of the latter.

Finally, there are formal agreements on CT cooperation between the EU and China, which touch upon the previous elements as well, emphasizing the need for information sharing and coordination, including the meetings. The EUROPOL-MPS Agreement was signed by the actors in 2017. This has been a pivotal accord in their joint CT activity, as it lays the ground for capacity building and operational coordination. The frameworks have been particularly significant in fostering channels for dialogue on terrorism-related threats; however, given the normative constraints, their practical implementation has been relatively limited.

This agreement includes the articles on “consultations and closer cooperation” and “information exchange”; therefore, the scope of the document is limited to deepening the dialogue on CT and intelligence exchange regarding this issue. This means that the agreement does not include the practical mutual exercises, and it serves to further “exchange of operational, strategic and technical information between Europol and the Ministry of Public Security of the People’s Republic of China” (EUROPOL-MPS Agreement, 2016, p.3). Article 2 of this document also points out that no personal data is exchanged through this agreement, which is defined as:

Any data relating to an identified or identifiable natural person: an identifiable person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identification number or to one or more factors specific to his physical, physiological, mental, economic, cultural or social identity. (p.3)

This remark justifies the claim that the exchange of personal information is a highly sensitive topic in Sino-European security relations, which is avoided given the securitization of digital policies. Additionally, the mentioned cultural and social identity is significant because it prevents parties from including minority issues in their exchange channel. Despite this limitation, the accord gives a broad opportunity for deepening cooperation. Operational, strategic, and technical information is a crucial element for trust-building and paves the way to more comprehensive collaboration on terrorism-related issues.

Furthermore, this agreement is strictly bilateral, including only the PRC and the EU, or any individual EU member state. Article 10 on the transmission of the information received states that “any other onward transmission, including to third States and international organizations, must be consented to by Europol” (p. 5), and vice versa, outlining the involvement of only these parties. Additionally, based on Article 15, the dispute regarding the interpretation of the articles can be solved only through dialogue, without the involvement of other parties, which also validates this idea.

Based on the findings that were derived from the document analysis of the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation, EU-China annual summit joint statements and the EUROPOL-MPS Agreement, the table was created (Table.2). It reflects the results that help to determine the level of cooperation, considering all the elements which construct CT cooperation architecture, such as formal consultations and dialogues, intelligence sharing framework and formal agreements. Despite the fact that there is no joint anti-terrorism training between China and the EU, they have showcased significant progress by establishing and conducting formal consultations and dialogues through various platforms, including multilateral channels, such as the UN. They have been engaging on CT issues through dialogues on human rights and have incorporated this issue into their annual consultation on security and defense. Although, according to the analyzed documents, intelligence sharing takes a solid part of their active agenda on CT cooperation, as mentioned, it has limitations posing challenges to the consideration of this element as comprehensive.

Finally, the number of formal agreements, which includes the prospects of CT cooperation, that the actors have signed is not sufficient to deem them reliable partners in this area. The concrete agreement on CT cooperation, which is solely a EUROPOL-MPS Agreement, touches upon

information sharing with limitations, and the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation addresses the CT cooperation relatively broadly, without stating a concrete agenda for further cooperation.

Elements of cooperation	Joint CT Exercises	Formal Consultations and Dialogues	Intelligence Sharing	Formal Agreements
	-1	+1	0	0

Table 2. The elements of engagement that serve as indicators for measuring the level of CT cooperation between the EU and China

Based on the analysis of the elements provided in this thesis, namely, joint CT exercises, consultations and dialogues, intelligence sharing, and formal agreements, the level of cooperation is limited. This means that there are some components that create the framework for the cooperation to combat terrorism with a certain degree of engagement with each other through bilateral and multilateral channels; however, there are problems of institutionalizing this cooperation, and the practical means of the latter are lacking. Despite the fact that the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation calls for “advancing towards more practical cooperation” (European Council, 2013, p.4), it merely created the ground for bilateral dialogues and information exchange, putting more emphasis on the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime framework for multilateral engagement.

The elements that exist and create the current framework for the joint CT activity invalidate the idea that there is no cooperation between China and the EU. No cooperation means no engagement on this issue, which is far from the truth in this domain. However, their efforts, despite the willingness to deepen their cooperation for the common good, making it more practical, are challenged. The comprehensive cooperation includes active and frequent engagement on the issue, which is not the case for these actors in this domain. They opt for more comprehensive cooperation with other actors, making this case appear less thorough and

extensive. For instance, China closely engages with Russia, while the EU's cooperation with the US has flourished in this regard. Comparing these models of cooperation to the Sino-European CT cooperation just proves the idea that the level of CT cooperation is limited.

4.2 Normative Gap Between the EU and China in Counterterrorism Cooperation

Since the EU-China CT cooperation is limited, as showcased in the section on the level of cooperation, it is significant to delve into the actors' normative stances and compare them to uncover the degree of the normative gap. The degree of a normative gap regarding legitimate CT activity, on the other hand, supports the idea offered by constructivism that ideational factors, such as norms, affect the level of cooperation between the actors. A closer examination of their normative stances within CT policies and discourse, which create a certain degree of normative gap, is conducted to prove this theoretical expectation.

4.2.1 The EU's Normative Stance on Legitimate Counterterrorism Activity

Legal Documents and Policy Papers

The EU is an actor that aims to increase its visibility on the international security stage. Despite the debate regarding the EU's security actorness, it elevates its agency by engaging in more non-traditional security domains, such as climate, energy, maritime security, and CT. The EU tries to enhance its capability through furthering and deepening its cooperation with third countries on CT matters. This is the EU's significant goal, as the Union highlights that this particular domain requires multilateral engagement inside and outside Europe. Since the EU is considered a normative power, it interacts with other non-EU states by employing normative frameworks, which means promoting and diffusing norms to partners.

Its serious approach to security, more precisely CT, is also evident in the policies that are analyzed for this thesis because, as time passes, the EU comes up with more complete and all-encompassing initiatives and courses of action, which help it craft more comprehensive anti-terrorism policies. The Union already plays a pivotal role within multilateral frameworks such as the UN and also endeavors to strengthen its approach to combat terrorism within its borders. For this objective, Europol became a tool to enhance the EU's strategy on CT and its agency.

Furthermore, Europol became a tool for developing CT activity and engaging with third countries by establishing formal cooperation through agreements (Kaunert, 2010).

As already mentioned, the norms are central to the EU's international cooperation and collaboration among its member states. In turn, as already mentioned, the norms are derived from the principles that actors invoke, and in certain cases, when they are heavily internalized, these principles are regarded as norms; therefore, they can be used somewhat interchangeably. All the policy initiatives and legally binding acts include the norms that serve as a foundation for the local security activity and external cooperation. The policies and directives concerning the CT activity analyzed for this chapter are not exceptions. Moreover, based on the nature of the CT domain, more precisely, the threat posed by terrorism to human beings, the content of legal frameworks established by the Union states norms that must be respected more frequently compared to the domains that do not address human security issues, which it cooperates on with non-EU countries.

The most consistently used principle in the set of data turned out to be "human rights." The EU puts a great emphasis on respecting human rights while conducting anti-terrorism operations as well as protecting the rights of victims affected by terrorism, which is the norm that stems from this principle. Although it primarily uses the term "human rights" in every document, other concepts and content of sentences that can be attributed to human rights exist in the dataset. Such concepts, for example, are "fundamental rights and freedoms" and "physical integrity of the person," while the phrases imply human rights are "security of individuals and communities and their rights" and "victims' rights" (European Parliament and the Council, 2017).

Additionally, there are concepts that are core principles for human rights and are stressed with notable frequency. For instance, "human dignity, freedom, equality, and solidarity" highlighted in the 2017 directive are attributed to human rights because the content of the text section correlates with the norm of respecting these particular principles, which are part of human rights (European Parliament and the Council, p. 6). Moreover, there are whole sentences that are dedicated to human rights. Such a sentence occurs in the directive from the European Parliament and the Council (2017):

The right to liberty and security, freedom of expression and information, freedom of association and freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the general prohibition of discrimination, in particular on grounds of race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, the right to respect for private and family life and the right to protection of personal data.

(p.11)

Since this sentence particularly touches upon human rights and how the EU defines it with all the core elements incorporated, it offers a clearer image of where the EU stands on this matter. Human rights are not only a subject for the victims of terrorism and their family members, as stated in the documents, but also for the detained persons. The EU's normative approach is equal, and it implies protecting human rights for suspected individuals, while it is concerned with the human rights of the victims and their families. According to the texts, the EU tries to advocate for an equal approach to human beings, portraying itself as a human rights defender within its borders and outside. In turn, the EU's all-encompassing approach to human rights in this domain indicates that respecting human rights without any exceptions is a core normative foundation of the legitimate CT activity.

The second most frequently incorporated norm is the rule of law. Usually, it is used alongside human rights; however, there are cases where the EU puts it independently from the latter. For the EU, the rule of law emphasizes that no one is above the law, especially the authorities who conduct CT activity on potential terrorist individuals and organizations. This norm is stated directly in the combination of "in respect to the rule of law" or "based on the rule of law." Nevertheless, in some cases, the sentences in the documents highlight the content of the latter. For instance, "all activities must be done in accordance with ... and in full respect of international human rights law" (The Council, 2014, p. 9). This sentence emphasizes the fact that all activities must follow the pre-established and respected laws, which is a core norm that the rule of law as a principle demands while combating terrorism.

Multilateralism is also greatly emphasized by the EU when the subject is cooperation. Yet, it varies based on the document. For instance, in the analyzed directive, "a legislative act that sets

out a goal that EU countries must achieve” (European Union), where the EU allows member states to modify the directive according to their national laws, multilateralism is sometimes referred to member states’ multilateral efforts to tackle the issue of terrorism. However, multilateralism is primarily used to emphasize the urgency of combating terrorism with global partners. The European Parliament and the Council, in their 2017 directive, emphasize “the need for Union-wide harmonized rules” (p.11), pointing out multilateralism as the internalized norm among the member states. Furthermore, the Union also highlights the need for international engagement in all the analyzed documents.

Multilateralism is frequently mentioned in the legal frameworks and documents, and the EU’s emphasis on this internalized principle, which became a norm, stems from the genuine idea of shared responsibility and burden-sharing, as well as the diplomatic and normative leverage it gains as a result of engaging with other actors on this issue. Multilateralism provides the EU with a new area to spread its normative power, balancing out the influence of other powers. Moreover, cooperating with other actors on countering terrorism and providing policy frameworks where the EU incorporates the norms it considers crucial allows for norm diffusion and internalization. This approach is evident in the analyzed data, more precisely in this quote from the 2014 Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalization and Recruitment to Terrorism:

The challenge is to ensure coherence between our counter-radicalization work in third countries with our domestic experiences, based on the rule of law and full respect of international human rights, lessons learned and good practices, but also unsuccessful practices. (p.13)

This particular sentence extensively showcases the tight connection among multilateralism, human rights, and the rule of law for the EU. Moreover, proves the claim that for the EU, it is central to cooperate on the basis of respect for these norms, as the message is directly outlined in this policy paper on CT.

For the EU, non-proliferation is tied to multilateralism and human rights. The 2023-2027 Strategy for CT calls for multi-agency cooperation and coordination to deter the use and spread of nuclear and chemical weapons, potentially used for terrorist aims. Multilateralism in this sense

is practical and diplomatic, as well as internal and external. Moreover, since the nuclear and chemical weapons cause harm to human beings, it emphasizes addressing this issue due to human rights concerns relatively often. The EU has been advocating for non-proliferation for a long time, becoming one of the leaders in providing its technical and financial support for other countries and multilateral frameworks where this issue is raised (Cottey, 2014, p. 89). Hence, it is natural for this actor to emphasize and incorporate this principle into the CT policy and make it a norm, representing itself as a responsible global security actor that respects the non-proliferation standard.

There is no direct mention of sovereignty or non-interference in the analyzed dataset. Since the EU is a union of sovereign European countries that decided to join the bloc initially created by six nations on an economic basis, which later transformed into a more political entity, the issue of sovereignty remains a topic of discussion. Nevertheless, the absence of this principle and non-internationalization of it as a norm in the CT framework, in order to consider it while engaging with other actors, occurs. This can have an effect on the relations with other actors, especially sovereign states, like China.

Statements and remarks

The speeches delivered on the UN stage by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell and the statements made by the special representatives of the EU for the UN between the period from 2013 to the present uncovered trends that are slightly different from the results derived from analysis of the EU documents. This subtle shift is caused by the audience and the nature of the platform; however, it still showcases specific nuances that support analyzing the EU's normative stance regarding CT and its idea of legitimate CT activity. For instance, while the EU's legal frameworks on CT highlight the norms such as human rights, the rule of law, multilateralism, and non-proliferation, the speeches and statements alongside universal rights and global solidarity, which are pointed out in the documents, emphasized sovereignty. Additionally, while the EU refrains from explicitly addressing the non-interference principle in its statements, this theme is still part of the discourse, which is analyzed below.

For the EU, the UN is one of the most significant places where it interacts with other states on the issue of terrorism. It is a place where the EU states its normative stance on various issues, including CT, calling for stronger and more comprehensive global collaboration. Hence, it is not surprising that the frequency of the pointed-out norms that the states should respect and follow to cooperate is very high. Although the EU representatives stress that multilateralism is an inevitable part and a core normative foundation of the Union, it, in the majority of cases, puts more emphasis on multilateralism at an international level through the UN.

It represents the Union as one body, willing to cooperate with third countries for the common good, i.e, combating terrorist individuals and organizations. For the EU, multilateralism is a tool to “work together” and for “the mobilization of state security services” in order to develop a “common understanding” (Borell, 2020); and additionally, a “more comprehensive approach” (Lutz, 2024). This repeated call for multilateralism indicates not merely the EU’s preference for collective action, but its normative identity as an actor encouraging inclusive global governance and equal partnership.

Human rights are the most mentioned norm/principle in its policies, indicating the promotion of the EU’s core values inside and outside its borders. It encourages the UN member states to respect this principle in any case, stressing the universality of the latter. The representative of the EU to the UN, Markus Lutz, in 2024 also states, “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is the cornerstone of sustainable counter-terrorism strategies, enhancing their legitimacy and effectiveness.” This one more time highlights the EU’s normative stance and understanding of the legitimate CT activity, which is founded on human rights.

Moreover, the EU calls for establishing a common understanding of CT measures, which is first and foremost generated from the definition of terrorism. It also stresses that the Union is an excellent example of establishing a unified conceptualization of terrorism, as provided by the 2017 EU Directive on Combating Terrorism, which helps to develop more comprehensive CT policies for multilateral engagement. However, Counselor Lutz (2024) also states that although the “pan-European” definition of terrorism serves as a great example of the latter, on an international level, other texts such as the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism provide a good foundation for creating the mutual definition. Nevertheless, in the same statement, he adds that “any definition should contain a safeguards

clause to ensure the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms”, which emphasizes the importance of this particular norm, putting it above every other norm incorporated in speeches. The examined speeches and statements have once again indicated that multilateralism and human rights are tied together as inevitable parts of the EU’s approach regarding legitimate CT activity.

Similarly to human rights, the rule of law is mentioned as a central norm included in the basis of the EU’s CT approach. It is primarily brought up alongside human rights and is also linked to multilateralism in every statement delivered at the UN stage. The EU encourages international partners who seek to combat terrorism to achieve the mutual goal of establishing sustainable and long-lasting peace in the world, to adhere to the rule of law and respect human rights. For instance, Borell (2020) stresses “we stand together, and uphold the rule-based international order.” “Rule-based international order” is the message of the EU to the international community, which reflects its commitment to the rule of law which rejects arbitrary power. The EU depicts itself as an actor combating terrorism in accordance with international law, strictly following principles established by the international community, without subjective interpretations of the laws. Moreover, it requires a similar approach from potential partners, and if the principles are respected and aligned with the values and normative position of the EU, the cooperation is guaranteed, since it matches the European image of the legitimate CT activity.

While discussing the terrorism issue in the Middle East, the EU representative skooScoog (2020) touches upon the non-proliferation. He emphasizes that this issue is a significant topic for the EU and requires full implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA). This also implies a multilateral approach, which should stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology that could potentially be used for terrorist aims. Sovereignty is a norm that the EU stressed directly in the examined statements. However, it was not linked directly to CT efforts. The EU stresses that it is a supporter of sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of some states, such as the Syrian state, and the aspiration for sovereignty of Palestine (Gonzato, 2020; Camelli, 2022; Skoog, 2023). In fact, the EU’s positioning in combating terrorism allows for a more flexible interpretation of sovereignty.

Despite the EU’s direct attention to sovereignty in this case, it seeks to manage the balance between the adherence to the principle of sovereignty and its broader normative agenda, which

aims to spread its normative power over countries by being present and engaging with them. This presence and engagement are often justified by multilateralism, namely capacity-building, assistance, and promotion of reforms that include more pan-European models. As this leads to influencing the domestic security landscape through soft power, the EU is sometimes accused of intervention in sovereign states' affairs, which it actively rejects. This raises the question of where the line of multilateralism ends and where the boundary of cooperation and interference is. Hence, multilateralism, sovereignty, and non-interference are tied naturally; however, the EU's approach is different, putting all of them separately. By respecting sovereignty, working through multilateralism, and emphasizing normative engagement to assist the shift to more liberal and democratic values, the EU seeks to reject accusations of direct interference in the domestic affairs of partner states.

Ultimately, the EU primarily invokes principles of human rights, the rule of law, multilateralism, and non-proliferation in its respective policies and discourse on CT. It translates human rights as a non-derogable principle, which has become a norm within its CT policies. This norm implies absolute rights that are given to humans all over the world, especially the right to live, which sets the rules combating CT, where human rights should be respected and protected for people's own security. Moreover, human rights are hierarchically placed above security. Similarly, the rule of law is also internalized in their policies and therefore constitutes a norm itself, i.e, abides by the rule of law. For the EU, the legitimate CT activity in the context of this norm should avoid arbitrary treatment of any aspect of the CT measures, ensuring the fair applicability of the legal frameworks, especially those that are dictated by international law. Multilateralism has been a norm that the Union respected due to its supranational nature. Therefore, for the EU, tackling the common goal, which is combating terrorism worldwide, is an inevitable part of the legitimate and effective CT activity. It also invokes the principle of non-proliferation, which is also included in its perspective on the legitimate CT measures. This principle upholds the norm of respecting arms controls and preventing the proliferation of WMDs.

On the other hand, sovereignty and non-interference are relatively ignored in this sense. Despite the overall respect for sovereignty from the EU's side, it does not stress it in its policies and barely incorporates it in its discourse on CT. Yet, it views this principle in a way that the norm of respecting states' sovereignty is crucial. Non-interference is viewed slightly differently by this

actor. It adheres to the principle established by the international community. However, it has a conditionality to the latter. Simply put, the EU respects other actors' sovereignty, but not at the expense of human rights. As a normative power advocating for respecting human rights, it shares a willingness to assist third countries in order to prevent human rights violations.

4.2.2 China's Normative Stance on Legitimate Counterterrorism Activity

Legal Documents and Policy Papers

For China, principles and norms that stem from them are also crucial elements of what constitutes legitimate CT activity. Normative alignment is a significant factor in its willingness to cooperate internationally on this matter. The analyzed collection of legal frameworks, which consists of CT laws and policies on combating terrorism, outlined an interesting trend, which defines China's normative stance regarding anti-terrorism measures and its ideational preferences amid establishing cooperation. The Anti-terrorism Law, which was first drafted and adopted in 2015 and amended later in 2018, showcases a more nationally focused approach to CT; however, it also includes the legal framework for international cooperation, where the ideational elements are mentioned. Although China encompassed normative stances within its first law on anti-terrorism, it has developed its legal framework significantly, enhancing its scope and incorporating the UN principles in the 2024 China's Legal Framework and Measures for Counterterrorism. This shift expanded the norms incorporated into policies, making the PRC's normative stance more all-encompassing for the international community.

As already mentioned, although the 2015 Anti-terrorism Law of the PRC, which was amended in 2018, consists of detailed measures to combat terrorism, it is concerned more with national security rather than international security. This is also evident when China, in this particular document, puts emphasis on human rights; however, it limits its scope to Chinese citizens, thereby overlooking the broader applicability of the norm itself. For instance, Article 6 states that "counterterrorism work shall be conducted in accordance with the law, respect and protect human rights, and safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of citizens" (p. 3). This sentence is relatively broad and focuses on citizens, indicating its prioritization of national over international security. The domestic focus of this document is also apparent in the nuanced approach to respecting human rights, such as "citizens' freedom of religious belief and ethnic customs and

habits” (p. 3). The word citizens that is used interchangeably with other words such as “victims of terrorism”, considering the domestic-focused context, further strengthens this claim.

On the contrary, the 2024 Legal Framework and Measures for Counterterrorism includes direct mentions of human rights, showcasing a drastic change in terminology within the legal document. Nevertheless, despite the broader generalizability of human rights, enhancing its scope from “citizens” to “humans” in general, the norm itself still has more of a domestic focus in terms of applicability. The terminology does not significantly alter the law’s practical application because China significantly prioritizes the human rights of its citizens and emphasizes that the general applicability of the norm to CT activity is relatively shallow.

Based on the documents, protecting human rights is pivotal for “social stability,” which China considers a part of “national security.” Therefore, China views this norm more narrowly, overlooking its fundamental nature and broad relevance established by more Western institutions and the UN, of which China is a part. For the PRC, this principle is translated slightly differently compared to Western-centric conceptualization. In turn, a norm that constructs the legitimate CT activity is protecting citizens’ rights to ensure social stability and national security, rather than putting emphasis on absolute rights and their universal applicability.

China’s domestic focus on norms is not an exception in the case of the rule of law. The norm of the rule of law in the Chinese context is complex. The rule of law is usually linked to democracy; however, it is not the case in China, and this norm is more “instrumental” rather than “political and normative” (Orts, 2001, p. 106). The Chinese authorities implement the rule of law in order to cooperate with other actors on security and beyond, as this norm is the foundation of most partnerships around the world. On the other hand, China mentions the elements that create the norm of the rule of law itself. For instance, in both legal frameworks for CT activity, especially in the 2015 Anti-terrorism Law, it highlights the “accountability” and “just law” created by them, without mentioning the rule of law directly. This selective approach enables China to engage with the international community’s expectations while maintaining the concept within its normative scale amid its political system. More precisely, by focusing on elements such as accountability and just law without fully embracing the rule of law, China creates its own version that empowers the state’s authority rather than limiting it. This process undermines the holistic

approach to the rule of law because it hinders other principles of the norm, such as “open government” and “impartial justice”.

Some authors draw attention to the distinction between the rule of law and “rule by law”, which inhibits the implementation of the rule of law in modern China (Tamanaha, 2004, p.3). In essence, it is not the rule of law with the traditional meaning, which became an international norm; however, some might confuse it with the latter, as China emphasizes certain core elements, thereby challenging the conventional definition. Furthermore, China’s focus on the practical benefits of implementing this principle, such as stability and predictability, resulting from international cooperation, reflects its broader pattern of normative localization.

Multilateralism is a norm that China uses frequently in its documents, more precisely, when it emphasizes the mutual threat perception and the common interest in combating terrorism. For China, the definition of multilateralism aligns with the universal meaning of the concept; however, other norms that China links to the latter do not align with the general model. For instance, while the PRC is actively advocating for a multilateral approach to combat terrorism, which also supports the domestic anti-terrorism efforts, it draws a strict line between external and internal CT activity. This is evident from the 2024 Legal Framework and Measures for Counterterrorism, where China stresses:

Some countries often disregard others’ right to choose their own path of counterterrorism under the rule of law. These countries impose their own will upon others and pass judgment on them. They even interfere in others’ internal affairs and infringe on their national sovereignty under the pretext of defending the rule of law and human rights.

(p. 18)

As showcased by this quote, it is evident that non-interference and sovereignty are core elements of China’s foreign policy, a part of which is the CT domain as well. By emphasizing sovereignty and non-interference in their legal frameworks on CT, China creates an artificial obstacle to the traditional meaning of multilateralism.

Although multilateralism itself does not imply that countries should not respect sovereignty and should interfere in domestic affairs, China poses a challenge to its advocated multilateral efforts by not compromising national sovereignty, framing any involvement in domestic affairs as a violation of its established principles. Given this context, China, amid advocating for multilateralism, also emphasizes that multilateral initiatives regarding CT must be in line with states' jurisdiction. In turn, this poses a significant limitation to the multilateral CT activity. Hence, the legitimate CT activity for China implies relatively selective multilateralism, which is hindered by the norms protecting states' national security. This creates a dual and controversial approach to multilateralism, which challenges its efforts of engagement with other security actors.

Non-proliferation is a norm highlighted by China frequently in its legal frameworks on CT. It is also linked to multilateralism, where the PRC calls for strict control over nuclear and chemical weapons that could be used for terrorist activities. China views the prevention of WMD proliferation as a general goal, but as a core part of CT efforts. Therefore, for China, this issue is a pivotal element of CT activity, requiring a close look and incorporation into policies established by security actors. By doing so, China promotes non-proliferation as an international norm, expecting potential partners to align on this matter.

Statements and Remarks

The close examination of statements and speeches delivered by China in the UN frameworks revealed a compelling perspective on China's normative stance amid the prospect of international cooperation to jointly combat terrorism. It showcases a more protectionist stance while actively advocating for multilateralism in this domain. Considering the audience and the nature of the framework, it is not surprising that multilateralism emerges as the most frequently employed norm in China's discourse. As already noted, China portrays itself as a promoter of a multilateral approach to tackling the issue of terrorism worldwide. Despite China's divided approach to its domestic and international terrorism, it acknowledges that these two are interconnected and the internal threat posed by ETIM is significantly tied to external terrorist groups, which explains China's emphasis on multilateralism. Nevertheless, the statements uncovered a greater interconnection of sovereignty and non-interference and their link to

multilateralism, which was also discussed in the previous sub-chapter on analysis results derived from the legal documents on CT.

Chinese ambassador Zhang Jun (2020) states that “adhering to multilateralism, and strengthening international cooperation is the only option for responding to the challenges” and that this multilateral approach should apply “in all fronts of counterterrorism.” The same idea was developed by other Chinese representatives of the UN. By emphasizing the all-encompassing outlook on this issue, China sets the expectation that it is ready to be involved in combating terrorism side by side with the international community and develop the mechanisms to prevent it all around the world. Nevertheless, in practice, this does not seem to be exactly what China does. The internal-external CT activity for China is evident, as the domestic terrorism, which is tied to extremism within its borders, is affected by international terrorist groups.

China emphasizes how international security affects its national security; however, despite its readiness to engage with other actors on CT measures, the Chinese government refrains from allowing external actors to assist them with domestic terrorism, which also strengthens the terrorism network worldwide. To do so, the PRC actively incorporates sovereignty and non-interference into its normative foundation in its legitimate CT activity. Namely, Chinese ambassadors, such as Wu Haitao (2017), Ma Zhaoxu (2018), Zhang Jun (2022), Dai Bing (2024) frequently call on every actor contributing to CT to respect others’ sovereignty and territorial integrity and to abstain from interfering in domestic affairs, thereby crafting legitimate ways to combat terrorism multilaterally. Although China adopts a complex multilateral approach and maintains a strong focus on protecting its national security, it supports the international community’s joint efforts to combat terrorism in Africa and demonstrates a willingness to assist states in need.

Despite overlooking the general elements of the rule of law and emphasizing the need to combat terrorism “in accordance with law”, China stressed that “international counterterrorism cooperation should follow the purposes and principles of the UN Charter” (Shuang, 2020). While advocating for furthering international CT cooperation, the trend of altering the norm derived from the rule of law prevails, and this particular principle, with its conventional definition, is neglected.

Nevertheless, human rights in a broader sense are incorporated in several ways, which also crafts a complex stance. More specifically, Ambassador Ma Zhaoxu (2019) stresses that China's CT measures, which he portrays as a legitimate CT activity, are "fully consistent with the purposes and principles that guide the UN in fighting terrorism and maintaining basic human rights." However, from the statements and speeches analyzed to uncover China's normative stances on legitimate CT activity, it is evident that representatives of the PRC contrast their understanding of human rights in CT activity to the perception of Western countries on implementing this norm in the CT policies. This is especially evident from two points made by the Chinese ambassadors addressing the UN.

Firstly, they touch upon the Xinjiang situation, which has been controversial for a long time because of the security actors' critique regarding human rights violations while conducting anti-terrorism operations by Chinese authorities in the province of Xinjiang. Ambassador Geng Shuang (2020), for instance, states that "it is not a religious issue or a human rights issue. Rather, it is about counterterrorism and anti-extremism." China denies these allegations and portrays the incidents, which are considered to repress Uyghur identity by the broader international community, as a crucial measure to prevent extremism and terrorism within its borders. In this respect, it also ties the latter to non-interference, as the representative Geng Shuang (2020) urged the US not to interfere in China's domestic affairs and to "protect the human rights of the American people" instead. This is the issue where China also develops the outlined category, "double standards," in the table of codes. China frames itself as a victim of double standards, where other security actors, in order to achieve their goal, i.e., preventing terrorism, violate the rules set by the international community, but only criticize China when it does the same.

Secondly, Dai Bing (2023) praises African countries, which, "with regard to human rights issues," have made great efforts in countering terrorism, thereby supporting the idea that human rights cannot be sufficiently addressed while achieving the bigger goal of countering the threat posed to humanity. This paves the way for the reassessment of priorities amid CT measures, enhancing China's image in global security as an actor conducting legitimate CT activity. Respectively, for China, the legitimate CT activity means putting the CT measures over protecting human rights.

In conclusion, for the PRC, the essential principles that it invokes in its legal frameworks and discourse are human rights, the rule of law, which it grasps slightly differently from other global governance actors, such as the EU, sovereignty, non-interference, multilateralism, and non-proliferation. The norms of respecting others' sovereignty and not interfering in others' domestic affairs are a part of China's foreign policy. In turn, it also demands similar treatment from its partners, thereby drawing the line when it comes to international cooperation, including the CT collaboration. Thus, for China, the legitimate CT activity in the international context refers to selective multilateralism. This selective multilateralism implies the reciprocal engagement, which aligns with the EU's approach to the latter; however, it poses an obstacle when it comes to China's domestic CT activity, which is a part of broader international terrorism.

On the other hand, despite highlighting human rights and the rule of law, the norms stemming from these principles are divergent. For China, human rights are not placed over security, as is the case for the EU. The social stability and security are highly prioritized over the absolute rights of human beings, which is evident from its policies and discourse. Similarly, the norm of adhering to the rule of law is interpreted differently and implies obeying the laws established within its jurisdiction. The emphasis on power that the authorities hold as a part of legitimate CT activity further reinforces this claim. Finally, the principle of non-proliferation is aligned with the international standard and non-proliferation of WMD is an inevitable norm to its legitimate CT activity.

4.2.3 The Degree of Normative Gap Between the EU and China regarding Legitimate Counterterrorism Activity

The analysis of the EU's and China's normative stances and their understanding of legitimate CT activity based on the norms used by each actor in their legal frameworks and discourse on the UN showcased an excellent foundation for comparison of which norms, incorporated by those actors, experience convergence and where the ideational clash occurs. The predefined codes establish categories that can be grouped into bigger categories: domestic and international affairs. Since terrorism is acknowledged as an international threat for both actors and they stress that domestic and international terrorism are interconnected, these categories are relevant for both actors.

China demonstrates a more state-centric approach to CT activity, while upholding engagement with other parties. Indeed, the strong emphasis on “sovereignty” and “non-interference” allows China to maintain a protectionist approach to its foreign policy while advocating for deeper cooperation on anti-terrorism. On the contrary, the EU is focused more on human rights and the rule of law internationally, also putting a certain level of prominence on domestic affairs, balancing its domestic and international focus within the CT domain. This showcases the trend of the EU addressing domestic issues and seeking international actorness through CT. On the other hand, China aims to increase visibility of its actorness in the security domain, maintaining a safeguarding foreign-policy orientation. This observation enables the outlining of their normative orientation within the CT framework, namely China’s sovereignty-centered pragmatism, which differs from the EU’s international rule-based multilateralism (Grimmel & Gurol, 2021; Yu, 2024).

Although the actors incorporate similar norms in their policies, sometimes the norms are understood differently, thereby crafting divergent understandings of the legitimate CT activity, hindering CT cooperation. The analysis reveals that the EU adopts a predominantly Western-centric conceptualization of norms, challenged by other countries, such as China. This raises a distinct issue regarding the universality of this Western-centric approach, which is usually questioned by China itself. Additionally, the EU and China prioritize different norms, which makes the overall normative gap more salient. Nevertheless, based on analysis of their individual stances, in parallel with significant divergence, the prominent convergence is uncovered. The most converged understanding and incorporation of the norm is in the case of “non-proliferation”. Both actors actively included this particular international principle, which became a norm, in their legal frameworks and discourse. This convergence stems from their mutual normative perspective on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. This is proved by their mutual institutional participation in JCPoA and the EU’s support of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), of which China is also a party, through its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

As Wiseman (2018) stresses, “multilateralism is a primary, interrelated norm of diplomatic culture” (p.5); however, it is understood inconsistently by global actors. In case of the Sino-European partnership, it has experienced a convergence; yet, it is normative for the EU, while it remains instrumental for the PRC, despite the shift to more value-based usage of the latter, which

as Scott (2013) argues if a result of engagement with the EU and norm internalization. According to constructivists' claim, multilateralism became a taken-for-granted norm (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998); nevertheless, its interplay with other norms, with the latter still uncovers a different image. For instance, the EU's usage of multilateralism with the emphasis on liberal principles, such as human rights and the rule of law, and China's intense stress on sovereignty and non-interference while advocating for multilateralism provide divergent normative perspectives on the latter, resulting in widening the normative gap between the actors.

More specifically, China challenges the process of multilateralism by stressing its sovereignty and the states' obligation not to interfere in its domestic affairs, which might fall under international counter-terrorism activity, as China's domestic anti-terrorism measures are a part of broader multilateral CT activity. This leads to selective multilateralism, which undermines the universal understanding of this particular principle. What the selective multilateralism is viewed by the EU is safeguarding state's sovereignty and principle of non-interference from China's perspective, as for China sovereignty and non-interference are non-negotiable and accepted norms, while for the EU, as the union consisted of multiple member states, they are as already mentioned above relatively flexible notions because of its supranational nature. Hence, the normative gap, established by these norms, for the political union and the state is natural, yet undeniable when discussing the security cooperation, in particular the CT domain.

In parallel to multilateralism, other norms such as human rights, the rule of law, sovereignty, and interference create a set of normative obstacles, i.e, a normative gap for the CT cooperation between China and the EU for several reasons. Firstly, although China and the EU formally endorsed the general definition of human rights provided by international frameworks such as the UN, for the EU human rights are civil and political rights, while China focuses on economic and social rights and argues that right to essential needs is more significant and other fundamental rights comes with the long-term development (Freeman & Geeraerts, 2011, p. 181). Fundamental rights and freedoms, which the EU emphasizes in its legal frameworks and discourse, certainly differ from what China implies by the latter. This is evident from the comparison of their incorporation of this particular norm. China's approach to human rights demonstrates a narrower scope on the latter, highlighting citizens' rights, thereby justifying CT

activity as necessary to protect them. In contrast, human rights, as a part of the EU’s normative agency, are grasped as universal and all-encompassing rights of every human being.

Secondly, the rule of law is another norm that widens the normative gap between the actors, as the EU embodies this norm into its policies with substantive meaning. At the same time, China opts for more instrumental utilization. In Europe, the rule of law implies equality before the law, judicial independence, and procedural fairness. On the other hand, China adopts an instrumental version of the rule of law, relying on the “just law” principle, lacking ideas of impartial justice and open governance (Tamanaha, 2004). In conclusion, the EU views the law as a limiting and legitimating force, while China sees it as a reinforcing mechanism. This also explains the controversy over de-radicalization methods by China and the EU’s critique regarding the latter in the EU’s policies on China, examined through document analysis, which supports the findings on the degree of normative gap.

According to the comparison of respective normative stances, the degree of normative gap is substantial. The comparison findings, which are illustrated below (Table 3), revealed that China and the EU have a high degree of shared understanding of the principle of non-proliferation, which has become a norm for both actors within legitimate CT activity. A grasp of the principles, such as human rights and the rule of law within the CT policies and discourse, showcased a wide gap between the actors. However, as the sovereignty and non-interference are relatively ignored by the EU and the clear contestation over the norms derived from this principle is not revealed, the extent of shared understanding is average, yet not high or low. Finally, multilateralism is the norm that they partially agree on; however, the shared understanding is not complete.

Degree of Shared Understanding /Principles (Generating norms)	Human Rights	Rule of Law	Sovereignty	Non-interference	Multilateralism	Non-proliferation
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	-1	-1	0	0	0	+1
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Table 3. Analysis of shared understanding of the principles generating norms within the CT framework

The document analysis, which aims to support the finding on the degree of normative gap derived from a comparison of the EU’s and China’s normative stances regarding the legitimate CT activity, showcases that the normative gap was created by diverging norms stem from examined principles above- human rights, sovereignty, non-interference, and multilateralism. The greater emphasis was put on human rights, which has been an issue for CT cooperation between the EU and China for a long time. This is evident from this particular quote from the Policy Paper on the EU (2018):

The European side should view China's human rights conditions in an objective and fair manner and refrain from interfering in China's internal affairs and judicial sovereignty in the name of human rights. (p.7)

The EU’s documents on China, more precisely EU-China- A Strategic Outlook (2019), reveal the issue of human rights as central, since the situation in Xinjiang is concerning for the EU and demonstrates an example of breaching human rights from its perspective (p.2). On the contrary, for China, the situation in Xinjiang is concerning because of the extremist and terrorist activity that is happening in the province. The PRC in its policy paper on the EU asks its European partners in various domains to abstain from intervening in China’s domestic affairs and respect its sovereignty, repudiating allegations of human rights infringements by their authorities in the province (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2018, p.3). Additionally, China accused the EU of having “double standards” on human rights, which bolsters the claim that this norm is particularly significant within the frameworks of their CT cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2018, p. 3). However, as some of the norms experience convergence, namely, approximately similar understanding of non-interference and partially homogeneous comprehension of multilateralism, the degree of normative gap cannot be attributed to the category of complete normative gap. Considering all the above and relatively conflicting grasp of

the rule of law and human rights, in parallel to greater emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference by China, the actors created a substantial normative gap.

4.3 Discussion: The EU-China CT Cooperation from 2013 to the present Amid Normative Gap

The result of the measurement of the level of cooperation indicates that the EU and China experience a limited level of cooperation on CT. The primary reason for this limitation, as claimed in this thesis, is the normative gap that the actors created by incorporating divergent norms in their respective policies and discourse. These norms are either significantly distinct, relatively similar, or grasped slightly differently in the context of what constitutes the legitimate CT activity. Each actor crafts the legitimate CT activity based on the norms embedded in their legal frameworks and general discourse, thereby creating their unique security culture and identity. In turn, the constructivist approach, adopted in this case study, suggests that a similar understanding of norms, which also alter security culture and identity, dictates whether the actors pursue joint activity with another or not. Nevertheless, the extent of shared understanding matters for the level of cooperation. Since the degree of the normative gap between the EU and China turned out to be substantial within the CT domain, they opted for furthering their cooperation to the scale at which they can cooperate.

The EU and China have established their policies based on the UN frameworks on combating terrorism and the development of their legal frameworks, i.e., documents and policies on anti-terrorism, where they also formed the desirable international cooperation strategy alongside the legitimate measures to counter terrorism, demonstrates their alignment to the international standard, where the principles accepted internationally are integrated, such as human rights, the rule of law, multilateralism, non-interference, non-interference and respect for sovereignty. For this reason, the actors have managed to create a framework for CT cooperation and engage on this issue on bilateral and multilateral levels to a certain degree. They have created the platforms for dialogues and discussions where they interact on CT measures alongside various non-traditional security topics.

Nevertheless, merely the implementation of similar principles is not enough to build a comprehensive framework. This is evident from the established framework, which misses

practical implementations. In fact, a similar grasp of the incorporated principles is what fosters cooperation. This is significant because the principles that are incorporated in the policies and discourse are understood and interpreted differently, which causes distinct norms and, therefore, divergent normative foundations. Accordingly, as the constructivist approach suggests, cooperation faces certain obstacles due to the deficiency of a shared understanding of norms.

To answer the research question, which is “How does the degree of normative gap between the EU and China affect the level of CT cooperation?”, it is not sufficient to state solely the principles on which they agree or disagree. The thorough discussion of findings derived from a comprehensive analysis, which was conducted on their individual normative stances, which, on the other hand, created a substantial normative gap between the EU and China within the frameworks of the CT cooperation, can address this question. Furthermore, the analysis has not only revealed how differently they interpret the principles that generate norms, but also allows for proving the logic backed by the constructivist approach on how the degree of normative gap alters the level of cooperation. In particular, when the normative gap is substantial, the security actors' perspective on the norms, which can be translated into the rules of combating terrorism, differ considerably, and the level of cooperation is limited.

As Hoffmann (2010) argues, “norms are generic rules that allow agents to behave and get along in a wide range of situations” (p.13). The principles that translate into norms and thus, create expectations on the set of rules the CT activity should be based on must be met in order for the security actors to choose comprehensive cooperation. In the case of the EU-China, despite advocating for advancing their collaboration on CT, this set of rules derived from norms does not align. Therefore, these generated rules that the EU and China have established have experienced contestation, resulting in the limitations of their efforts to interact further. However, why it is limited yet still exists has its own explanations. These reasons are hidden in individual principles which create norms, therefore the rules.

The human rights issue demonstrated the most significant obstacle for their comprehensive cooperation, as this norm is interpreted differently, thereby posing a great challenge to the practical implications. This was evident from the content analysis; however, document analysis also revealed that the issue of human rights dilemma has an illustrative example. More precisely, the Uyghur issue in Xinjiang, one of the most pivotal concerns for their joint CT activity, stems

from different interpretations of human rights alongside other norms such as sovereignty and non-interference, which makes their engagement problematic for two primary reasons.

Firstly, their understanding of human rights is different; China prioritizes security and social order over individual freedoms, while for the EU, the latter is a cornerstone of its general policy. This divergent approach to human rights hinders consensus-building between the actors. Secondly, the EU's human-based approach to CT, emphasizing individual freedoms and criticizing China's measures in Xinjiang, in contrast to China's commitment to non-interference and protecting its sovereignty, not allowing other actors to dictate how to counter terrorism, significantly raises diplomatic tensions, obstructing the development of CT cooperation. This, alongside other norms they interpret differently, such as the rule of law and partially multilateralism, which were explained in the previous sub-chapter, impedes the capacity of the actors to cooperate on the CT issue.

More specifically, according to this general overview, the EU establishes rules that constitute respecting and adhering to human rights universally, prioritizing human rights over security. In contrast, China's approach to combating terrorism sets security over human rights and views it through a state-centric scope. This demonstrates a great normative mismatch, which affects their respective policies significantly.

In the case of the rule of law, they craft fundamentally different norms and thus rules. For the EU, the law is above everyone, and the CT measures are implemented in accordance with the international law; however, China views this principle more flexibly, crafting the norm, which merely emphasizes the importance to obey to the law, in this case the domestic legal frameworks that the PRC adopted to counter terrorism.

Sovereignty and non-interference are the principles that established the normative foundation for China's foreign policy in general. The CT domain is not an expectation, and it draws the line for multilateralism, which, for both independently from other norms, means reciprocal engagement. In contrast, the norms that are generated from the principle of non-proliferation, thereby creating the rule to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction and not to possess them, align perfectly. Altogether, this translates into the substantial normative gap between the EU and

China, thus the substantial difference in rules and approaches, which constitute legitimate CT activity for each of them.

As evident from this case study, a certain level of convergence on the specific norms supports the established framework of cooperation. As the normative gap is not complete, they still have space for trust building, focusing on the norms on which their understanding is converging. The EUROPOL-MPS Agreement remains a central bilateral legal framework, with limited focus on information exchange and consultations. Trust building, which can be the outcome of actively engaging through this agreement, enables transformation from a symbolic to a practical cooperation.

Nevertheless, the norm internalization is necessary for this process to occur. This becomes evidently difficult, as both actors are growing international actors, shaping the global order and therefore altering the norms and their definitions of global diplomacy (Scott, 2013, p. 31). For instance, the EU advocates for the rule of law, while China challenges this norm with its version, which constitutes “rule by law”. Moreover, China champions sovereignty and non-interference, while the EU, as a Union, has a more flexible approach to them, affecting the broader international community. China has become more resistant to change normatively, and the EU’s engagement through a normative foundation has been challenged by China’s authorities. This became an obstacle to furthering security cooperation, especially regarding CT.

The core element to address the open question of why the EU and China managed to find the ways to cooperate on other non-traditional security issues, but faced limitations in the CT field, are the principles that the actors invoke in their respective policies to combat terrorism, as well as their discourse which further supports portraying what is legitimate way to do so. These principles create the normative foundation for “how to counter terrorism” and, therefore, determine the legitimate approach to CT measures. The constructivist approach offers a valuable perspective on understanding these dynamics by highlighting how actors embed different normative foundations by interpreting the same principles differently or prioritizing one over another.

While in other non-traditional security domains, such as climate and energy security, they have found common normative ground via converging their norms, this domain remained resistant to

normative rapprochement. The normative gap revealed in the established CT cooperation between the EU and China showcases not only incompatible practical implementations, but also the different ideas of “appropriate” CT activity, thereby obstructing furthering and deepening cooperation despite the common threat and potential benefits. Moreover, “policies diffuse because of their normative and socially constructed properties instead of their objective characteristics” (Gilardi, 2012, p.22); therefore, successful normative convergence paves the way to policy alignment and effective and long-lasting joint CT activity.

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to reveal how the degree of normative gap affects the level of CT cooperation between the EU and China from 2013 to the present. For this reason, the level of cooperation was uncovered, which turned out to be limited, and the extent of the normative gap, which is claimed to alter the level of cooperation, was closely examined. By delving into the actors' individual normative foundation within the CT frameworks, which in turn crafted their perspective on the legitimate CT activity, and comparing the findings that were derived from the individual legal frameworks and discourse, the degree of normative gap was determined. The extent of the normative gap that the actors showcased in CT cooperation is substantial. Finally, the logic between the substantial gap and the limited level of cooperation was revealed, which was grounded in the constructivist theoretical approach.

Accordingly, this research dives deeper into the superficial assumptions of the scholars regarding the normative factors obstructing this particular cooperation. Analysis showcased that the human rights dilemma between the actors, which is highlighted by the authors who touch upon Sino-European relations on anti-terrorism, is not the only principle and, therefore, normative foundation that poses an obstacle. Instead, it is a synergy of multiple norms embedded in their respective policies, with often conflicting conceptualizations, that form a fundamental barrier to a more all-embracing joint CT activity. This "outlier" case has been somewhat intriguing, as it demonstrates a grey area in the developing non-traditional security cooperation between the EU and China. By focusing on an in-depth and broader analysis of the normative elements instead of focusing on merely human rights through the lens of their discourse on anti-terrorism, this study uncovers the core norms integrated and delves into their profound definitions articulated by actors, which they construct to argue what constitutes the legitimate CT activity.

In order to answer the research question, the analysis was processed through several stages. Firstly, the document analysis utilized to operationalize the level of cooperation allowed for the comprehensive and consistent examination of the dependent variable. The measurement of the level of CT cooperation between these actors proved that their engagement is limited. However, the existing bilateral and multilateral frameworks for engagement demonstrated that the area of cooperation still exists, and both actors' political discourses demonstrate the willingness to overcome obstacles and continue working on enhancing joint CT activity bilaterally and

multilaterally. Moreover, the close look into the CT cooperation demonstrated somewhat practical implementations beyond merely rhetorical commitment for prospective cooperation, thereby proving that claims of no CT cooperation between the EU and China are incorrect.

Secondly, since this thesis argued that the main obstacles to their cooperation are rooted in ideational factors, such as norms, it delved into their individual normative stances on legitimate CT activity. This was followed by comparing the findings on their discrete normative stances, which were indicated by the norms the actors and their representatives embed in their official policies and standpoint demonstrated through discourse at the UN. This comparison enabled the measurement of the degree of normative gap between the EU and China. The content analysis, which was utilized to examine their individual normative stances, comparison of which demonstrated the sustainable normative gap, allowed for examination of a large set of data, which consisted of policy papers and legal frameworks, and speeches and statements made by representatives of the actors at the UN. The deductive qualitative content analysis with codes specified in advance provided greater consistency in the analysis. Furthermore, document analysis of the parties' white papers on each other greatly complemented the findings on the degree of normative gap.

As expected, since the anti-terrorism policies are affected by the predetermined frameworks established by the central platform for global governance, the UN, they experience a particular extent of normative convergence. In simple terms, the actors who engage in countering terrorism domestically and internationally adopt the approach determined by the UN. Indeed, the EU and China both incorporate similar principles in their respective policies and advocate for them through political discourse. However, these principles are not always interpreted into similar norms or prioritized correspondingly. More precisely, China places emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference, while these are not prioritized for the EU. Furthermore, the EU has a more comprehensive understanding of multilateralism, while China, despite the converging grasp of this principle that is translated into the norm of reciprocal engagement for both, still sets limits to it.

Furthermore, some norms are perceived completely differently, such as the rule of law, while there are norms that are comprehended similarly, such as non-proliferation and, partially correspondingly, multilateralism. The reasons for their different understanding of principles,

leading to a different perspective on the legitimate CT measures, require an additional inquiry. However, the divergent grasp of the rule of law could be attributed to their distinct regimes, while different prioritization of the norms might be explained by divergent governance models. Additionally, a similar perspective on non-proliferation and a partially shared understanding of multilateralism could also be linked to their evolving actorness in global governance.

It is noteworthy that human rights turned out to be one of the most essential obstacles to the CT cooperation. Although both actors actively mention this norm as an inevitable part of their policies on countering terrorism, understanding and the prioritization of this norm vary substantially. For example, China emphasizes the citizens' human rights, overlooking the fundamental nature of this norm, which the EU advocates for. Furthermore, China prioritizes security over human rights, which was also supported by the findings derived from document analysis of white papers on the EU, where the Chinese authorities accuse the EU of double standards. In parallel, the EU also highlights the issue of China's human rights infringement in its white papers on China. Accordingly, for China, these double standards imply the EU's alleged ignorance of human rights violations by itself and its historic allies, such as the US, while criticizing China's human rights records, specifically in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong. Based on these findings, the normative clash, which was created by the different understanding of human rights alongside other norms discussed above, paves the way to limited cooperation.

Constructivism, which is applied as a theoretical framework for this study, addresses the issue of cooperation limitation amid normative clash between the actors, while capturing how this normative clash constructs what counts as legitimate CT activity. Constructivist logic suggests that the normative gap between the EU and China limits CT cooperation because different interpretations of the principles that generate norms lead to conflicting views regarding legitimate CT activity. Indeed, despite the existence of mutual threat perception posed by international terrorism to their domestic, regional, and international security and economic development, and the prospect of relations on CT guided by cost-beneficial considerations, the EU and China opt to maintain a limited partnership on anti-terrorism. In turn, this proves the constructivist claim that the normative gap between the actors, which leads to different understandings of what constitutes the appropriate security activity, limits their cooperation.

It is also noteworthy to mention that constructivism often looks into cooperation through the lens of identities; however, this study primarily focuses on the norms. This is the case because limited cooperation by the overall assessment of the EU's and China's identities, which are considered quite different (Geeraerts, 2011; Pan, 2012), is not sufficient. Alternatively, cooperation is still very much possible when the actors agree on the general norms and principles that craft their strategies on certain activities, thereby navigating differences (Terhalle, 2011). This is evident from the developing cooperation on other non-traditional security issues, where the EU and China established a more shared understanding of principles that construct the legitimate security activity. On the other hand, identity is still considered because normative stances still define their respective identities and security cultures, affecting their political behavior, particularly their willingness to cooperate. Thus, this thesis treats identities from the normative prism and does not place the latter in the center of inquiry. Findings on their shared understanding of embedded norms in their policies and political discourse have demonstrated that despite the recent trend of convergence, their normative stances, altering identities, and security cultures within the CT framework largely differ, culminating in limited cooperation.

Throughout the process of working on this thesis, more precisely during analysis and discussing findings, several limitations occurred that should be considered for further studies. Firstly, the single case study, which allowed for a comprehensive examination of this cooperation and the role of the normative gap in it, could be expanded. Despite the overarching findings that this case delivered to prove the constructivist logic that the specific extent of the normative gap alters the level of cooperation, comparison of this case to other non-traditional security domains where the EU and China experience more effective engagement would complement the findings and improve generalizability. Secondly, the statements and remarks that were chosen for examination of their individual normative stances on the legitimate CT activity could consist of their general statements outside the UN, which is a given multilateral framework of cooperation.

Nevertheless, the UN added a great perspective, as for the EU and China, it remains the most significant multilateral stage for engaging on CT matters; therefore, it is the place where they showcase their normative stances the most. Finally, interviews could be complementary to the findings and the overall direction of this case study, uncovering the aspects that were possibly overlooked. On the other hand, qualitative content analysis and document analysis addressed the

objectives set at the beginning of this thesis, thereby arriving at the findings aligned with the theoretical expectations.

Ultimately, the thesis has filled the gap in existing literature on the EU-China CT cooperation, thereby contributing to the broader dimension of Sino-European security cooperation. By providing a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the normative aspects influencing EU-China CT cooperation, this study allows for moving beyond the dominant narratives spread by the authors, such as problematization of merely conceptualization of the term “terrorism” or the focus on the security-economy nexus while observing their CT cooperation.

Furthermore, this thesis uncovers a wider constellation of norms affecting the cooperation and proves that focusing on human rights overlooks pivotal insights. The wider approach to norms utilized in this thesis demonstrates that the normative gap between the EU and China is multilayered, requiring a closer look. Additionally, by applying constructivism as a theoretical framework with the focus on norms, instead of solely identities, it provides a wider perspective that can be applied to other domains of non-traditional security. Adopting constructivist logic instead of rationalist approaches, by examining the degree of normative gap in other fields, instead of focusing solely on their economic interdependence, will provide a more overarching perspective for security studies in the context of Sino-European relations. Yet, given that norms and identities, which are also affected by the ideational elements, consistently change and are not static, the normative dimension in the Sino-European security cooperation, more precisely, CT cooperation, should remain under close scrutiny as global power dynamics evolve. Furthermore, the normative lens should be applied to broader EU-China non-traditional security cooperation and beyond.

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Appendix 2: The Tables of Codes

The EU's Normative Stance

Categories	Codes	Open Codes/Remarks
EU'S SELF-PERCEPTION	Human Rights	“Fundamental freedoms,” “universal rights”. An advocate for human rights internally and externally
	Rule of Law	“Principle of the rule of law” Basis of the Union
	Multilateralism	Relies on multilateral actions within and outside the Union
DOMESTIC TERRORISM	Multilateralism	Strengthening each other
	Human Rights	Protecting human rights
	Rule of Law	In accordance with what?
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM	Multilateralism	Global cooperation on CT
	Human Rights	To protect what?
	Rule of Law	
INTERNATIONAL CT COOPERATION	Multilateralism	
	Human Rights	UN Charter
	Rule of Law	In accordance with what?
	Non-proliferation	Supporting a common goal

		while cooperating
GLOBAL GOVERNANCE	Rule of Law	UN
	Human Rights	UN Charter
	Multilateralism	UN and other frameworks
TERRORISM THREAT	Human rights	“Threat to international peace and security of citizens”
PRIORITY IN CT ACTIVITY	Rule of Law	In accordance to what?
	Human Rights	Respecting what?
FOREIGN POLICY PRINCIPLES	Human Rights	Top priority internally and externally
	Rule of Law	Top priority internally and externally
INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THIRD COUNTRIES	Sovereignty	Respecting what?
	Multilateralism	Presence and assistance multilaterally
	Human rights	Engage to protect what?
	Rule of Law	Engage to promote what?

China’s Normative Stance

Categories	Codes	Open Codes/ Remarks
CHINA’S SELF-	Sovereignty	

PERCEPTION	Rule of Law	“Rule by law”, “in accordance to...”
	Non-interference	The West
DOMESTIC TERRORISM/ EXTREMISM	Human rights	Human rights of nationals
	Rule of Law (Rule by Law)	“...in accordance with the law” national laws established by authorities
	Non-interference	“respect... independence” Not intervening in domestic CT activity
	Multilateralism	To combat international terrorism, which affects domestic extremism, which leads to domestic terrorism
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM	Human Rights	Chinese citizens, human security
	Multilateralism	
INTERNATIONAL CT COOPERATION	Multilateralism	
	Non-interference	
	Sovereignty	
GLOBAL GOVERNANCE	Sovereignty	UN Charted
	Non-interference	UN Charter
TERRORISM THREAT	Human Rights	Chinese nationals

	Human rights	“Legitimate rights of...” UN and other multilateral frameworks
PRIORITY IN CT ACTIVITY	Non-interference	“Not intervene”
	Sovereignty	Foreign policy activity to whom?
	Multilateralism	
FOREIGN POLICY PRINCIPLES	Non-interference	“Domestic affairs”
	Sovereignty	Protect what?
INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT	Non-interference	Respecting what?
	Sovereignty	Respecting what?
	Multilateralism	For common goals
	Rule of Law	
DOUBLE STANDARDS	Human Rights	On what?
NATIONAL SECURITY	Non-interference	
	Human Rights	Prioritized security
	Rule of Law	“Rule by law”
	Sovereignty	Core principle

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