

# **Normative Power and the Role of China in the Western Balkans: The case of Serbia**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis adopts a normative power approach to analyze China's role in the Western Balkans. It attempts to redress the long-standing debate about whether China is a threat or not in engaging the Western Balkans. I will argue that China's purpose in constructing its normative power is to struggle for other countries' recognition of its key practices in external relations and ensure the domestic legitimacy of the Communist Party of China. History factors shape China's current foreign policy thinking, and these factors have been transformed into current forms. Therefore, China has to struggle for other countries' recognition of its political and economic models, human rights narratives, and the One-China and non-interference principles. All in all, China concerns its domestic sustainable economic growth, sovereignty issues related to national reunification, and nationalism, instead of rebuilding the international order or even seeking hegemony. The extent to which the Western Balkan countries accept these three norms determines whether China could be considered a normative power in the Western Balkans.

Wendt's approach contributes to understanding China's participation in the Western Balkans in terms of sovereign practice, cooperation, and (internal and external) legitimacy. After China successfully internalized its sovereignty, China became more respectful of other's territorial rights. At the same time, China recognizes that its sovereignty depends on the recognition of others. Moreover, both internal and external legitimacy has to struggle for recognition. The Communist Party of China needs to maintain sustained economic growth and territorial sovereignty and oppose external interference in Chinese affairs in order to legitimize its one-party rule. Externally, China has put forward the slogans like 'peace and development' and 'The community with a shared future for all mankind' to build China's external legitimacy.

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# 1 Introduction

The Western Balkans is one of its last regions in Europe which have not been integrated into the 'ever-closer union' of European countries. In the geopolitical sense, the Western Balkan countries have always played the role of 'Front yard' in Europe, and the EU has been actively strengthening ties with the Western Balkans since the post-Cold War era.<sup>1</sup> However, the Western Balkans have been deviating from the track of European integration after Croatia joined the European Union in 2013 due to a number of reasons, such as the EU's insufficient commitment to the enlargement, the rising economic and political influence of external actors in the region, the political unwillingness of the politicians in the Western Balkans to implement the anti-corruption measures. Besides, the decline of the popularity of joining the European Union in the Western Balkans is also one reason.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, external players such as China, Russia, and Turkey are stepping in and strengthening their presence in the region. The influence of Turkey and Russia, which share the territorial borders with the EU, has been widely discussed.<sup>3</sup> However, as an emerging player geographically farther from the Western Balkans than Turkey and Russia, China did not

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<sup>1</sup> Valbona Zeneli and Zoran Nechev, Western Balkans: Europe's Front Yard, The Globalist, October 2019: <https://www.theglobalist.com/western-balkans-european-union-enlargement-albania-north-macedonia/>

<sup>2</sup> Beáta Huszka, The power of perspective: Why EU membership still matters in the Western Balkans. Policy Brief. European Council on Foreign Relations. Jan 2020. [https://www.ecfr.eu/page//the\\_power\\_of\\_perspective\\_why\\_eu\\_membership\\_still\\_matters\\_in\\_western\\_balkans.pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page//the_power_of_perspective_why_eu_membership_still_matters_in_western_balkans.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>**Russia and the Western Balkans:** Stanislav Secrieru, Russia in the Western Balkans, European Institute for Security Studies, July 2019. <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/russia-western-balkans>; Matthias Bieri, The Western Balkans between Europe and Russia, CSS Analyses in Security Policy, March 2015; Benjamin Rhode, Russia and the Western Balkans, Strategic Comments, 25:5, 2019. Dimitar Bechev, Russia's strategic interests and tools of influence in the Western Balkans, Atlantic Council, 2019. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russia-strategic-interests-and-tools-of-influence-in-the-western-balkans/> **Turkey and the Western Balkans:** Asli Aydintasbas, From Myth to reality: How to understand Turkey's role in the Western Balkans, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2019; Bedrudin Brljavac, TURKISH-BALKANS RELATIONS Turkey in the Balkans: Capitalizing on a Soft Power, Preconditions for a Modern Civil Defense, 2013; Zarko Petrovic and Dusan Reljic Turkish Interests and Involvement in the Western Balkans: A Score-Card Turkish Interests and Involvement in the Western Balkans: A Score-Card, Insight Turkey 13(3), 2011

initially receive much attention. Since the Chinese government proposed the 'going out strategy' in 1999 to encourage Chinese companies to invest abroad, China's foreign direct investment (FDI) has increased significantly. After the Chinese government launched 'the Belt and Road Initiative' in 2012 and the 'China-Central and Eastern European Countries 17 + 1 Cooperation Mechanism' in 2013, China has expanded beyond the 'going out strategy' to create a China-centered network of infrastructure, covering roads, railways, and ports. All five non-EU countries of the Western Balkans, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, and Northern Macedonia, have signed MOUs with China under 17 + 1 Mechanism.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, China's influence in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Western Balkans as a subregion, has received increasing attention.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars and policymakers in China and Western countries have different opinions on whether China has strategic intentions in strengthening their presence in the Western Balkans. However, previous research by Chinese and the Western scholars on this topic has some limitations. China's discourse emphasizes cooperation and win-win but ignores the difference in values between China and the EU. In the public discourse of Western countries, they have overemphasized that China is an undemocratic country instead of fully understanding the motives behind China's external strategies.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Since Kosovo's independence from Serbia in 2008, China has not recognized Kosovo as an independent sovereign state. Therefore, Kosovo has never been included in China's official discourse on Western Balkans. This footnote was originally submitted as part of the Term paper for the course of EU Security Policy (Professor Michael Merlingen) at Central European Policy, 2020

<sup>5</sup> Shaohua Yan, The 16+1 Framework and China-EU Cooperation in the Western Balkans: A Region Building Perspective. Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies. Vol11(1), 2019; Michal Vít, Alexandr Lagazzi Chinese Influence in the Western Balkans: An Annual Review, EUROPEUM, March 2019; Dragan Pavlicevic, Structural power and the China-EU-Western Balkans triangular relations, Asia Europe Journal, September 2019

<sup>6</sup> Some sentences in the first three paragraphs were originally submitted as part of the Term paper for the course of EU Security Policy (Professor Michael Merlingen) at Central European Policy, 2020

This thesis attempts to redress such long-standing debate about whether China will threaten the current international order. In other words, whether China is a threat or not. This kind of debate has focused too much on imaginations and speculations about China, such as doubt about the expansion of communism, China's huge population base, China's rapid economic growth, the rise of China's military strength and conflicts with neighboring countries. However, it lacks an understanding of China's diplomatic traditions, ideational factors behind China's foreign policy thinking, the extent to which China has shaped specific diplomatic norms and values, and the motivation behind it. The concept of normative power is the ability of actors to shape the conceptions of normal through ideas and opinions.<sup>7</sup> On this basis, China's motivations can be better interpreted.

In this thesis, I'm going to focus on China's normative influence in the western Balkans with an emphasis on the case of Serbia. The questions this study sets to answer are: How can normative power approach help understand China's motivation to engage in the Western Balkans? Why may China be considered as a normative power in the Western Balkans? What does Serbia, in particular, tell us about the motivation behind China's shaping its norms in this region?

This thesis is going to argue that the purpose of China constructing its normative power is to strive for other countries' recognition of its key practices in external relations and ensure the domestic legitimacy of the Communist Party of China. Therefore, China has to struggle for other countries' recognition of its political and economic models, human rights narratives, and non-intervention principles that differ from Western values. All in all, China concerns about

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Diez, Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33 (3), 2005, 615; Ian Manners, Normative Power Europe: a Contradiction in Terms? 2002, 239-240

its domestic sustainable economic growth, sovereignty issues related to national reunification and nationalism, instead of rebuilding the international order or even seeking hegemony.

The reasons that I take Serbia as a case are as follows: (1) Serbia is the only state in the Western Balkans which have established a comprehensive strategic partnership with China. (2) So far, Serbia is China's largest trading partner in the region. Meanwhile, Serbia is the largest receiver of Chinese investment in the Western Balkans.

My research is a qualitative study rather than quantitative one. The thesis is structured as follows.

In the first chapter, I will look at the literature related to the topic, with an emphasis on the debates on whether or not China is a threat to the Western Balkans and China's normative power. In the second chapter, I will discuss the theoretical framework and research design, in which I argue that traditionalism and constructivism can help understand the norms China is promoting in its external strategies. The research design is about the source of data and how I'm going to make the argument. In the third chapter, I will analyze the norms that China is framing in the Western Balkans, focusing on the infrastructure, human rights, and national sovereignty. Chapter four takes Serbia as a case, because only Serbia and China have established a comprehensive strategic partnership among the Western Balkan countries, and Serbia fully recognizes China's norms. The last part will conclude the analysis and provide insights into future research.



## 2 Literature Review

This chapter seeks to review the existing literature on three sub-topics: the strengths and weaknesses of the argument that China is a threat to the Western Balkans, scholars who argue that China is not a threat to the Western Balkans, and normative power approaches to China's foreign policy.

### 2.1 Debate on whether China is a threat or not to the Western Balkans

Scholars and policymakers have different views on China's motivations to strengthen its presence in the Western Balkans. Some European and American policymakers and scholars have expressed concerns about China's presence in the Western Balkans from the perspective of global order and European integration.<sup>8</sup> These commentators tend to use concepts such as 'Debt Trap Diplomacy'<sup>9</sup>, 'Divide and Rule'<sup>10</sup> and 'Trojan Horses'<sup>11</sup> to explain the nature of China's 17+1 Mechanism in the Western Balkans. These critics have noted the threat posed by Beijing's growing influence in the Western Balkans.<sup>12</sup> Proponents of this view believe that debt trap diplomacy is a tool used by China, making small developing economies unable to repay loans for large-scale infrastructure projects. Ultimately, these countries have become financially dependent on China, which also makes them vulnerable to China's political

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<sup>8</sup> Valerie Hopkins, Brussels says EU has 'underestimated' China's reach in Balkans, *Financial Times*, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/4ba18efa-377b-11e9-b72b-2c7f526ca5d0>; Peel, M. (2018). Bulgaria to host contentious China summit. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/e0dd5d3a-5aa1-11e8-bdb7-f6677d2e1ce8>.

<sup>9</sup> Austin Doehler, How China challenges the EU in the Western Balkans, 2019, *The Diplomat* <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/how-china-challenges-the-eu-in-the-western-balkans/>

<sup>10</sup> A Stanzel, A Kratz, J Szczudlik, D Pavličević. China's investment in influence: the future of 16+ 1 cooperation. European Council on Foreign Relations, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Ryan Heath, Andrew Gray, Beware Chinese Trojan horses in the Balkans, EU warns, *POLITICO*, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/johannes-hahn-beware-chinese-trojan-horses-in-the-balkans-eu-warns-enlargement-politico-podcast/>

<sup>12</sup> These four sentences were originally submitted as part of the Term paper for the course of EU Security Policy (Professor Michael Merlingen) at Central European Policy, 2020

influence.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, China's success in maintaining the core role of the state and national interests in setting the economic and political agendas while developing the economy is seen as promoting anti-liberal and undemocratic practices and norms in Central and Eastern Europe. In general, these include a reassessment of communism's past, dependence on state-level means for formulating and implementing economic policies, and disregard for clean and transparent governance.<sup>14</sup>

However, few of them can clarify China's strategic intentions and what kind of political influence China is constructing in the Western Balkans. Indeed, China's government-led system and external investment model do have some drawbacks. However, there is no clear evidence that China is extending these norms and practices to the Western Balkans. For example, is China forcing the Western Balkan states to implement reform plans in accordance with China's blueprint? Therefore, scholars and politicians who hold this view rarely give concrete examples of how China promotes these norms and practices to the Western Balkan states. They can only illustrate that Chinese norms and practices are different from European norms, so China is a potential threat and competitor.

On the contrary, most Chinese scholars interpret relations between China and the EU in the Western Balkans from the perspective of cross national and cross-regional economic cooperation, mutual benefit, and opportunities for development. They argue that there is no conflict between China and Europe's core interests in the Western Balkans, and as such, Beijing and Brussels are not competitors in the region. At the same time, Chinese commentators tend to emphasize that the 17+1 mechanism can assist the development of the Western Balkan

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<sup>13</sup> Austin Doehler, How China challenges the EU in the Western Balkans, 2019, The Diplomat <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/how-china-challenges-the-eu-in-the-western-balkans/>

<sup>14</sup> Dragan Pavlicevic, A Power Shift Underway in Europe? China's Relationship with Central and Eastern Europe Under the Belt and Road Initiative, Chapter 10, Mapping China's One Belt One Road Initiative, 249-278

countries.<sup>15</sup> From the perspective of region-building, Shaohua compares the 17+1 framework with the European approach towards the region-building of the Western Balkans, and argues that China's and Europe's approach towards the Western Balkans are largely complementary rather than competitive because of China's engagement works to promote the EU's agenda in the region.<sup>16</sup> When the Chinese government first time proposed the concept of 17+1 framework in 2012, the specific meaning of this framework was not very clear. As an attempt to eliminate this ambiguity, Professor Kong Tianping of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences summarized the characteristics of the 17+1 framework into the following five points: 'equal partnership; loose institutionalization; comprehensiveness of cooperation; multifunctional arrangement; and a well-planned framework.'<sup>17</sup> Despite varying levels of participation and perception, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe generally actively participate in 17+1 cooperation, as it brings trade and investment opportunities and the development potential for the Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>18</sup>

This argument could partly explain why countries in the Western Balkans want to develop their economy and improve economic cooperation with China, but this view is not sufficient to show if China has other strategic motivations. It seems to ignore the fact that the EU and China have had fundamentally different visions of international order and political values. Meanwhile, this view stays in step with China's dominant foreign strategies of Keeping Low Profile (KLP) and

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<sup>15</sup> Tang Xiaodong, Economic and Commercial Affairs Embassy of China in Belgrade – Enhanced Cooperation Which is Growing, *Diplomacy&Commerce*, August 7, 2019, <http://www.diplomacyandcommerce.rs/tang-xiaodong-economic-and-commercial-affairs-embassy>; Jiang Yu, Lian Gang, The Association Visiting Albania, September, 2017, <http://www.mcacepa.org/enhdShow.asp?id=24>; Shaohua Yan, The 16+1 Framework and China-EU Cooperation in the Western Balkans: A Region Building Perspective. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*. Vol11(1), 2019, 83

<sup>16</sup> Shaohua Yan, The 16+1 Framework and China-EU Cooperation in the Western Balkans: A Region Building Perspective. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies*. Vol11(1), 2019, 76

<sup>17</sup> Kong T., 16+1 Cooperation Framework: Genesis, Characteristic and Prospects, January 2015 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283709012\\_161\\_cooperation\\_framework\\_Genesis\\_characteristics\\_and\\_prospect](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283709012_161_cooperation_framework_Genesis_characteristics_and_prospect)

<sup>18</sup> Long J. Opportunities and Challenges of the Belt and Road Initiative in Central and Eastern Europe, *Guojiguancha*, 3, 118-130

giving priority to economic development since the 1980s. In Chinese former President Jiang Zemin's (1989-2002) most down-to-earth words, 'Keep Quiet and Make Big Fortune'. (Men Sheng Fa Da Cai)<sup>19</sup> However, such assertions is hard to convince scholars, policymakers, and even the public who have doubts about China's rise, particularly the supporters of offensive realism. The theory assumes that every big power's final objective is to maximize its share of the world power and ultimately control the system. The representative of the theory, Mearsheimer, warned the US government of the danger of China's rise, declaring that the rise of China, or the rise of any major power, would trigger conflict.<sup>20</sup> In particular, as China surpasses Japan to become the second largest economy and participate more actively in international affairs, and meanwhile, China sometimes had armed conflicts with neighboring countries and became increasingly tough on issues related to China's state sovereignty and territorial integrity, which caused the fact that some policymakers are increasingly worried about China's rise.

There are only few researches on China-Western Balkan relations and what China's strategic motivations are. However, some scholars' research on China's foreign policy and whether China can rise peacefully can help solve this problem.

David C. Kang believes that the reason for China has been able to rise peacefully is that its domestic stability and sustained economic growth are based on deep integration and openness with the region and the international economy. China recognizes that it needs sustained economic growth and relies on continued open international economic relations. In fact, the

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<sup>19</sup> Jiang Zemin lectured Hong Kong Journalists on 27 October 2000, China Uncensored, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GIj2BVJS2A>; Tun-jen Cheng, Yun-han Chu, Routledge Handbook of Democratization in East Asia, 2018, Chapter 7, China: Dynamics of Developmental Authoritarianism, Dali Yang

<sup>20</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise," Current History, Vol. 105, No. 690, April 2006, pp. 160-162.

main claim of the Chinese Communist Party on legitimacy is its economic record.<sup>21</sup> M. Weissmann answers the questions as to what is guiding Chinese foreign policy and what kind of power China is and will be in the future from the perspective of Chinese foreign policy. He argues that China's foreign policy is rooted in domestic issues, and domestic political stability is the primary objective of China's foreign policy, which in turn is a necessary condition for the survival of a one-party rule. Both are dependent on a combination of two key elements: sustained domestic economic growth and nationalism.<sup>22</sup> In short, both scholars emphasized the issues of the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party and China's sustainable economic growth to answer whether China could rise peacefully in the future. As for the connection between China and the future international order, a basic understanding is that China will not be a country that accept the status quo of the present world, nor can we expect China to be a revisionist power aim at reshaping the global order. China will be a responsible reformer 'Striving for Achievements'.<sup>23</sup>

The above two scholars' arguments illustrate the relationship between China and the future international order from the perspective of China's foreign policy objective. The common conclusion is that China gives priority to its economic development because it relates to the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party.

This view also has the weakness, that is, it does not clearly explain the origin of China's contemporary diplomatic thought. In other words, why does China have such a foreign policy

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<sup>21</sup> David C. Kang, *Why China's Rise Will Be Peaceful: Hierarchy and Stability in the East Asian Region*, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Sep, 2005), 554

<sup>22</sup> Mikael Weissmann, *Chinese Foreign Policy in a Global Perspective: A Responsible Reformer "Striving For Achievement"*, 2015, 154;

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 154

objective? In addition, what exactly does the achievement means in the 'striving for achievements'? How does it differ from China's former foreign policy objectives?

## **2.2 China struggles for recognition: Framing China's normative power**

From what have been discussed above, two opposite views on whether China's presence in the Western Balkans is a threat or not lacks comprehensive understanding of China's diplomatic thinking. In this part, I argue that normative power approaches to China's foreign policy could further illustrate China's strategic motivation in strengthening relations with the Western Balkan countries.

There have been many discussions on how to characterize the nature of China's power: rising power, global power, great power, regional power, or as having soft power.<sup>24</sup> However, the normative power of China is an emerging concept. Pu Xiaoyu argues that while scholars and policy makers have widely recognized the concept of "European Normative Power (NPE)" that sets standards for the international community, there are few discussions about emerging powers as normative powers. Particularly, the concept of a "normative power China" may cause controversy and provocation because China has become a main target of international criticism for its human rights record, energy-driven activities in the developing countries and pragmatic foreign policy.<sup>25</sup> However, China has shaped its norms in some aspects, such as human rights discourse with "Chinese characteristics" to counter the criticism of human rights in China by

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<sup>24</sup> Hongyi Lai, Yiyi Lu, *China's Soft Power and International Relations*, 2015; Phillip C. Saunders, China's Rising Power, the U.S. Rebalance to Asia, and Implications for U.S.-China Relations, *Issues & Studies* 50, no. 3: 19-55. 2014; Shaun Breslin, China's Emerging Global Role: Dissatisfied Responsible Great Power, *POLITICS: 2010 VOL 30(S1)*, 52; MAGNO KLEIN, Silva. China, a regional power: an analysis of Chinese actions in East Asia. *colomb.int.* [online]. 2017, n.92, 157.

<sup>25</sup> Xiaoyu Pu, Can China be a normative power? *Opendemocracy*, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/openglobalrights-openpage/can-china-be-normative-power/>

the western countries. Moreover, China maintains its political and economic model under the one-party vertical leadership, the so-called "Beijing Consensus", which takes China's development model as an alternative option, especially for developing countries—to the Washington Consensus with an emphasizes on market-friendly and the opening of goods.<sup>26</sup> Although some observers believe that China has always been a normative power, there are not many explanations for the specific 'norms' that China is shaping. The approach of normative power avoids the direct answer to the question whether China poses a threat to the Western Balkans, but judges China's specific motives by observing how China shapes specific 'norms' in global affairs.

The "normative power" discourse or strategy is a theory proposed by the Danish political scientist Ian Manner in the early 2000s. Manning defined normative power as 'the ability of actors to shape what is considered normal in international politics.'<sup>27</sup> Kavalski emphasized that 'normative powers are those actors that are recognized as such by others.' Moreover, he argued that as a normative power, China strives to be recognized by others as capable actors who have the legitimacy to set what should be considered normal in global life.<sup>28</sup> For China to be recognized as a normative power, China should win the recognition of China's government-led model of development by recognizing and respecting the actors they interact with.<sup>29</sup>

To further observe China's motives behind the presence in the Western Balkans through the normative power approach, the foremost element that should be clarified is how China

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<sup>26</sup> Dustin R. Turin, The Beijing Consensus: China's Alternative Development Model, 2010, VOL. 2 NO. 01 <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/134/the-beijing-consensus-chinas-alternative-development-model>

<sup>27</sup> Ian Manners, Normative Power Europe: a Contradiction in Terms? Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2002, 253

<sup>28</sup> Emilian Kavalski, The Struggle for Recognition of Normative Powers: Normative Power Europe and Normative Power China in Context, Cooperation and Conflict, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2013, 258.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 259

demonstrates its normative power. Kavalski argues that 'China's normative power can be elicited from the interaction between its key practices in external relations.'<sup>30</sup> In other words, China's normative power is related to China's foreign policy objectives and external regionalization strategies.

Therefore, in this thesis, I'll use the normative power approaches to analyze China's motivation to engage in the Western Balkans and take Serbia as a case study, which is the only Western Balkans countries that already have comprehensive strategic partnership with China. The questions I'm going to answer are: How can the normative power approach help to understand China's motivation in engaging in the Western Balkans? Why may China be considered as a normative power in the Western Balkans? What can we know, from the case of Serbia in particular, about the motivation behind China's shaping its norms in this region?

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 255



### 3 Theoretic Framework and Research Design

This chapter will be about the theoretical framework and research design. In this thesis, I will use the traditionalism, economic pragmatism and constructivism to explain China's normative power and its intentions in the Western Balkans.

#### 3.1 Chinese traditional values and economic pragmatism

After I adopted a normative approach to frame China's foreign policy in the last chapter, the question that emerged as to which Chinese political values are guiding China's policies to shape the future international normative order.

Yan Xuetong holds the view that economic pragmatism and traditionalism decide China's foreign policy making. Economic pragmatism refers to the continuing domestic economic growth mentioned in the previous chapter in M. Weissmann's argument.<sup>31</sup> The achievements of China's economic reform in the past 40 years have laid a solid social foundation for the values of economic pragmatism. Regarding the formulation of foreign policy, it not only defines strategic interests from an economic perspective, but also emphasizes the importance of foreign trade.<sup>32</sup>

Traditionalism refers not merely to Confucianism, but a series of traditional Chinese ancient school of thoughts represented by Confucianism. Traditionalism is also guiding China's

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<sup>31</sup> Mikael Weissmann, *Chinese Foreign Policy in a Global Perspective: A Responsible Reformer "Striving For Achievement"*, 2015, 151;

<sup>32</sup> Yan Xuetong, *Chinese Values vs. Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order?* *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2018, 8

political values to shape the future international order. For instance, Partiel and Kavalski argues that the 'harmonious world' (he xie shi jie) and 'harmony with difference' (he er bu tong) claimed by China's peaceful rise has developed an understanding of normative power through the Confucian practice of 'model behavior'.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Yan Xuotong believes that the ancient concept of 'humane authority' (Wang Dao) promotes the value of benevolence (ren) and justice (yi) in guiding China's foreign policy decisions-making.<sup>34</sup>

In this thesis, I will use such a theory to explain China's motivation as a new player in the Western Balkans. The normative power presented by China combines its traditions, such as focusing on its own domestic affairs, and does not require the Balkan West countries to implement China's political and economic system or adopt the same values. China only hopes to recognize each other's values based on the principle of 'harmony with difference'.

### 3.2 Constructivism

Another International Relations' theory I will use to guide my thesis is the Constructivist approach of IR, focusing on the work of Alexander Wendt. In the last sub-section, I adopt the traditionalism theory in Chinese foreign policy thinking. One puzzle that needs to be clarified here is that since the Chinese have had a traditional view of 'harmony with difference' and 'harmonious world' in international politics, why should China frame its normative power?

The characteristics of constructivism are to emphasize 'the importance of normative and material structure, the role of identity in shaping political action, and the relationship between

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<sup>33</sup> Jeremy T. Partiel, Constructing Global Order with Chinese Characteristics: Yan Xuotong and the Pre-Qin Response to International Anarchy, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 4, Issue 4, Winter 2011, 394; Emilian Kavalski, The Struggle for Recognition of Normative Powers: Normative Power Europe and Normative Power China in Context, *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2013, 254-256

<sup>34</sup> Yan Xuotong, Chinese Values vs. Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order? *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2018, 8

the agents and structures.<sup>35</sup> Although constructivist approach in modern international relations has complex theoretical origins, the most direct driving reality is the disintegration of the Soviet Union before 1991 and European integration and the development of the EU after the World War II.

Wendt assumes a Hobbesian state of nature in which anarchy is socially constructed regarding the institutional transformation of power politics. It is determined by the beliefs and attitudes of the states. Meanwhile, it is not a constant structure that imposes certain constraints on the states and forces everyone to participate in the endless struggle for power and security. Wendt illustrated three institutions for transforming identity and interests: sovereignty, the evolution of cooperation, and the intentional transformation of egoistic identities into collective identities.<sup>36</sup>

This thesis highlights the norms that China is building concentrates on three elements. The first element is the norm of sovereignty. Wendt argues that the practice of sovereignty will transform the understanding of security and sovereignty politics in three ways: First, states will define their (and our) security under the conditions of maintaining their "property rights" over certain territories. Second, to the extent that states successfully internalize their sovereignty norms, they will more respect others' territorial rights. Third, ongoing socialization make state accept the reality that their sovereignty depends on the recognition of other countries. They can rely more on the system of the international community than on the military power of individual countries to ensure their security.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Scott Burchill et al. (2005): *Theories of International Relations*, 188

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 26

<sup>37</sup> Alexander Wendt, 1992: Anarchy is what states make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics, *International Organization* 46(2): 391-425:414-415

The second element is the evolution of cooperation. Wendt believes that the sovereign system transformed the Hobbesian world into the Lockean World.<sup>38</sup> In this world, countries are 'self-interested, and they mutually recognize their property ownership'<sup>39</sup>, the country's fear of being occupied by potential collaborators reduced, and the possibility of cooperation between countries increase. Constructivists' interpretation of cooperation focuses on how behavior expectations affect identity and interests. They believe that forming the institutions is the 'process of internalizing a new understanding of themselves and others, and it is the process of acquiring new role identities.'<sup>40</sup> The process of cooperation among egoists is also the process of rebuilding their interests under the conditions of fulfilling their obligations to social norms. It will transform the interdependence on outcomes into the interdependence on utility or collective interests.<sup>41</sup>

The third key element is the concept of legitimacy. In terms of the possibility that an actor may change the structure of identity and interests through intentional efforts, those who are subject to a common power must consider the existence and operation of that actor to be correct. Legitimacy is made up of a political authority structure that empowers some people to enforce rules, while others are obliged to comply with these rules. Moreover, Wendt emphasizes that legitimacy (as well as sovereignty, internal and external) requires a struggle for recognition.

In this thesis, I argue that sovereignty, legitimacy, and cooperation based on mutual recognition of property rights constitute the three key elements of China's diplomatic strategy. My hypothesis is that China builds its norms in the Western Balkans and cooperating with Western Balkan countries is for the recognition of China's sovereignty and state-led development model,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 415

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 416-417

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

as well as the legitimacy of Chinese communist party. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China has been fighting for recognition of its sovereignty, legitimacy, and China's development path differ from western countries. Before the People's Republic of China regained the legal seat of the United Nations and became the sole representative of 'China' on October 25, 1971, China had been fighting for the recognition of China's sovereignty and legitimacy. After China made the reform and opening-up policy in 1978, China began to develop equal economic cooperation with all countries, but the ultimate goal is still to strengthen its domestic legitimacy. In addition, China has also made significant progress on the issue of sovereignty after 1978, such as the restoration of sovereignty over Hong Kong and Macau through bilateral negotiations with Britain and Portugal respectively in the 1980s. About the Taiwan issue, China has successfully incorporated the Taiwan issue into the scope of China's domestic issues after 1980s and avoided the internationalization of Taiwan's status. Most countries have also accepted the diplomatic principle that Taiwan is part of the territory of China.

Although there have not yet been many political, economic, and trade links between the Western Balkan countries and China, these countries are not yet Western countries in the traditional sense, nor have they all joined organizations such as the EU and NATO. Therefore, these countries have not been fully affected by the values of democracy, human rights, civil society, and capitalist market economy. Compared to the 11 former communist countries that have joined the EU and NATO, China has a greater possibility of building its norms in the Western Balkans, making these countries recognize China's values and norms.

### 3.3 Research design

In this sub-section, I'm going to discuss the data I will use and the rules I will apply to evaluate them, with reflections on the limitations of the used data.

The purpose of analyzing the influence of historical tradition and the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party on the normative power approach to China's foreign policy is to illustrate the logic of thinking in this thesis. That is, historical traditions with selected liberal values and the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China determines China's foreign policy thinking and its interests.

Specifically, the logic of China's promotion of its norms in the Western Balkans is determined by China's historical tradition and the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China. In this thesis, the research methods are mostly historical, analytical, and descriptive. Descriptive and historical methods are used to describe historical, internal and external factors affecting the relations between China and the Western Balkans. Some parts of the subject use analytical methods to understand the issues better. Inductive methods are used for research, but deductive methods are used to best understand the problem. Due to the particularity of the subject being treated, it is not a quantitative study but a qualitative study. However, some specific issues need to be supported by some data.<sup>42</sup>

The qualitative data is primarily based on the detailed analysis of normative power approach to China's foreign policy, China-Western Balkan relations, scholars' analysis, official statistics regarding trade and Chinese investment in the Western Balkan, official discourse,

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<sup>42</sup> This paragraph was originally submitted as part of the Term paper for the course of EU Security Policy (Professor Michael Merlingen) at Central European Policy, 2020

announcements, reports at the political level published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China and other Chinese agencies, as well as medial news and official documents from European institutions. Additionally, in more general terms, I will briefly review the historical events related to China-Western Balkan relations since the 1990s. The important part will include a review of the most relevant literature in this area to have a comprehensive view of China's participation in the Western Balkans. This research will provide some guidance for further strategic development based on the case study's path and reasoning to provide a modest contribution.<sup>43</sup>

My research also has certain limitations. In He Yao's view, in applying the constructivist IR theory, the researchers' views and assumptions determine the different analysis methods they adopt. At the same time, their different values make them have a different understanding of causality. Therefore, the IR theory has the characteristic of 'openness', and the relevance of each school has its limitations.<sup>44</sup> In my research, I focus on the impact of China's historical traditions and the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party on China's foreign policy thinking, which determines how China demonstrates its normative influence in the Western Balkans. However, the factors that affect China's foreign policy thinking may not be limited to these two aspects. Since China has just joined the 'game' in the Western Balkans, there are not many first-hand data, so my research is mainly based on second-hand data. I do not speak any official languages of the Western Balkan countries, so the data I have collected is mostly in English, and only a little is in Chinese.

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<sup>43</sup> The first and last sentences of this paragraph was originally submitted as part of the Term paper for the course of EU Security Policy (Professor Michael Merlingen) at Central European Policy, 2020

<sup>44</sup> He Yao, Rationality and Limitations of International Relations Theory, "America Studies", No. 01, 2001, pp. 89-100

## 4 Normative power approach towards China's foreign policy thinking

In the following section, first, I trace what I argue to be relevant historical factors that had shaped foreign policy thinking. Then in the second section I review how they were translated into current norms. In the third subsection I consider how interests are constructed out of structural and normative elements in line with Wendt's approach, etc.

### 4.1 Historical factors in China's foreign policy thinking

In this section, I will analyze the relevant historical factors that had shaped China's foreign policy thinking. Historical factors cover the following three historical stages of the impact on current Chinese diplomatic thought: the pre-Qin period (770BC-221BC), the century of humiliation in modern time (1840-1949), and contemporary Chinese diplomatic thought (1949-present).

As mentioned before, China's foreign policy thinking came from ancient Chinese philosophical thoughts. G. Davis and Yan Xuetong mentioned the influence of traditionalism on China's foreign policy. Davis believes that "return to tradition" dominates China's foreign policy thinking. Meanwhile, Yan argues that 'scholars of traditionalism and the Chinese government agree that China's foreign policy should be guided by traditional Chinese political wisdom, not any ideology rooted in the Western culture.'<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.1.1 Norms of China's diplomatic thinking in ancient China

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<sup>45</sup> David G, Hommo dissensus significants, *Social Text* 29(4): 30; Xuetong Yan, Chinese Values vs. Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order? *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 11, Issue 1, Spring 2018, 8



The most significant function of Chinese traditional philosophical thoughts (especially Confucian and some legalists) is to stabilize society and build an orderly (you xu) and harmonious (he xie) society. The Chinese Empire shaped China's foreign policy thinking from the following aspects.

The starting point of all these Chinese traditional philosophical schools is to increase the security and peace of the country. Besides, all of these are trying to help maintain the ruler's dominance (through different measures, for instance, Law, hierarchy, absolute military superiority.), and 'all attach great importance to agricultural production, which shows the status of economics.'<sup>46</sup> The roots of this political philosophy should be traced back to the beginning of ancient Chinese history in the pre-Qin period. In the 3rd century BC, the Qin State carried out a series of swift conquests and eventually wiped out six other feudal states and founded the first imperial dynasty in China, Qin Dynasty. After more than 500 years of war among feudal states, Chinese civilization aspired to stability and peace. Since then, the territory of the Chinese civilization has been basically fixed and the following dynasties rarely engaged in large-scale wars to expand their territories. They devoted themselves to the governance of existing territories and stabilized relations with neighboring nations/countries through peace-through-marriage policy and tributary system.

The influence of the first unification of China to foreign policy thinking is that China (Zhong tu<sup>47</sup>) should be highly united (da yi tong).<sup>48</sup> Since the Qin Dynasty united China for the first time in 211 AD, China's standardized currency, weights, measures, and writing system have

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<sup>46</sup> Gustaaf Geeraerts, Men Jing, *International Relations Theory in China*, Global Society, 15:3, 260, 2001

<sup>47</sup> Zhongtu (literally means the Middle Kingdom) is how the various dynasties of ancient China called themselves. Broadly speaking, the term Zhongtu refers to areas where the Chinese civilization and the Chinese nation are directly ruled by the Chinese central government and dynasties. In a narrow geographical sense, its general geographical scope is the territory of contemporary China (including Taiwan).

<sup>48</sup> Gustaaf Geeraerts, Men Jing, *International Relations Theory in China*, Global Society, 15:3, 260, 2001

been highly united, aimed at unifying the state and prompting commerce. After that, this thought dominated the mainstream ideology of every Chinese dynasty, that is, China should always be profoundly united.

As for relations with other neighboring countries or dynasties, in the imperial era before 1912, the Chinese Empire handled relations with them through the so-called tributary system. Chinese hegemony in early modern East Asia was based on symbolic domination, which was constructed by interacting with other actors to pursue domestic legitimacy.<sup>49</sup> Specifically, these countries only had to recognize the Chinese Empire's suzerain status nominally, then China would regularly provide generous gifts (economic benefits) to these countries (dynasties). The tributary system's essence is that the Chinese dynasty "showed off" its hard power in East Asia in exchange for other countries (dynasties) to recognize the Chinese Empire's status as a major power in the region and its legitimacy of the Chinese emperor. Neighboring countries, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of the Chinese Empire's domestic rule in China.<sup>50</sup> Borrowing the Confucianism notion of 'harmony with difference' (he er bu tong) and 'harmonious world' (he xie shi jie)<sup>51</sup>, the Chinese Empire did not have substantive hegemony over other countries. Scholars have conducted studies on the history of Chinese-centered order in the region and one view is that China couldn't restore such a historic order in the globalized world of the twenty-first century.<sup>52</sup> The impact of this model on contemporary Chinese foreign policy thinking is that China does not need to seek substantive hegemony in the East Asia and other continents

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<sup>49</sup> JI-YOUNG LEE, *Hegemonic Authority and Domestic Legitimation: Japan and Korea under Chinese Hegemonic Order in Early Modern East Asia*, *Security Studies*, 25:320–352, 2016

<sup>50</sup> Chinese Tributary System, NAKASENDOWAY, <https://www.nakasendoway.com/glossary/chinese-tributary-system/>

<sup>51</sup> Emilian Kavalski, *The Struggle for recognition of normative powers: Normative power Europe and normative power China in context*, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48(2) 254-256

<sup>52</sup> JI-YOUNG LEE, *Hegemonic Authority and Domestic Legitimation: Japan and Korea under Chinese Hegemonic Order in Early Modern East Asia*, *Security Studies*, 350

beyond. On the contrary, China hopes to be recognized by more countries of its strength after becoming an economic power.

#### **4.1.2 Century of humiliation in modern time**

From the outbreak of the First Opium War in 1839 to the CCP's victory in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, China's actual territorial control shrank by one-third and its thousands-year-old imperial system collapsed. Meanwhile, China has been turbulent due to internal uprisings, civil wars, and foreign aggression. All the countries ended the tributary relationship with the Chinese Empire and no longer recognized China's suzerainty. States that recognized China's suzerainty in the past have declared independence or become colonies of the Western countries. Moreover, during the 110 years, Japan, Russia, and almost all the Western countries participated in the war of aggression against China. China had been forced to sign several unequal treaties with these countries between 1842 and 1901, including the clauses of vast amounts of compensation and the cession of territory or the opening of coastal city ports.

In this aspect, China's normative power has been preconditioned on the reflective construction of the nation's humiliating past in modern time from 1839 to 1949.<sup>53</sup> This period of history has shaped China's foreign policy thinking from the following aspects.

First, after the republican system came into China in 1912, China aimed to restore its past territorial sovereignty in the new era, re-complete the high degree of unity, and establish stable relations with other countries based on the principles of traditional Chinese philosophy.

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<sup>53</sup> Emilian Kavalski, *The Struggle for recognition of normative powers: Normative power Europe and normative power China in context*, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48(2) 257

Second, as a weak country in modern time, China needed to re-establish its internal capabilities to prevent future indignities from the "powerful nations". China has been skeptical of the Western-dominated international order/system that has repeatedly conquered China in the century of humiliation.<sup>54</sup>

Third, after 1912, the formulation of China's foreign policy has transformed a technical issue to the perspectives of national identity, nationalism, and legitimacy status. Scholars have pointed out that this experience of subjugation and humiliation has become a core element of today's Chinese identity.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, China's humiliation experience provides China with a clearer understanding of the value of peace and the cost of inequity.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, China has a moral sympathy for weak countries that have suffered aggression by powerful countries, regardless of the specific reasons of the countries launching the war.

#### **4.1.3 Contemporary Chinese diplomatic thinking**

China's foreign policy thinking since 1949 has been based on the comprehensive understanding of traditionalism and the national identity and legitimacy formed by the humiliation of a century in modern times.

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<sup>54</sup> Alison Adcock Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus*, Vol. XXV, No. 1 (April 2010), 27

<sup>55</sup> Emilian Kavalski, "The Struggle for recognition of normative powers: Normative power Europe and normative power China in context," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48(2) 257; Alison Adcock Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus*, Vol. XXV, No. 1 (April 2010), 3

<sup>56</sup> Alison Adcock Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus*, Vol. XXV, No. 1 (April 2010), 28

As mentioned before, the function of Chinese traditional philosophical thoughts is to stabilize society and build an orderly (you xu) and harmonious (he xie) society. The starting point of all these traditional Chinese philosophical schools is to increase the security and peace of the country, all of which are trying to help maintain the ruler's dominance and emphasize the importance of economic status.

In contemporary China, the ruler's dominance refers specifically to domestic political stability and the survival of the one-party political system, which is the primary goal of China's foreign policy objectives.<sup>57</sup>

Sovereign security, national unity, and territorial integrity constitute another element of contemporary Chinese diplomatic thinking.<sup>58</sup> This thinking is not only derived from the "notion of the great unity (da yi tong)" in Chinese traditionalism, but also due to the extreme insecurity of China's sovereignty in the humiliation of modern history. Meanwhile, from a practical perspective, the issue of national revival has not yet been resolved. Although Hong Kong and Macao have returned, they have not achieved a high degree of reunification, and Taiwan is missing.<sup>59</sup>

Another foreign policy objective is sustainable economic growth, which is based on the focus on economic status in all traditional Chinese theories. However, unlike the Chinese Empire's closed agricultural economy, contemporary China's economic construction has the nature of international cooperation. From the economic cooperation with socialist countries during the

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<sup>57</sup> Mikael Weissmann, *Chinese Foreign Policy in a Global Perspective: A Responsible Reformer "striving for achievement"*, 2015, 151

<sup>58</sup> Jakobson Linda, *China's foreign Policy dilemma*, Lowy Institute, February 2013, 4, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/chinas-foreign-policy-dilemma>

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 155

Cold War era to economic cooperation with all countries since the 1980s, the ultimate objective is to achieve sustainable economic growth.

One-party political rule, sustainable economic growth, and national sovereignty and territorial integrity, these objectives of China's foreign policy have following common characteristics: First, the objectives of China's foreign policy all focus on China's domestic issues; second, the ultimate goals are to strengthen the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party's rule in China; third, these objectives come from traditional Chinese philosophical thinking and China's humiliating experience in modern history.

What's more important, the core interests behind the foreign policy objectives are driven by, in Heath's words, "externally derived by China's development and threats to China's access to overseas resources and goods upon which its economy is increasingly dependent."<sup>60</sup>

In this section, I illustrated how historical factors, especially traditional Chinese schools and reflections on humiliating modern history shaped contemporary China's foreign policy thinking. Meanwhile, China's normative power has been preconditioned on the traditional Chinese schools and reflexive construction of the past of "Century of humiliation". This part traced to the beginning of Chinese history and illustrated how historical factors shaped the current Chinese foreign policy thinking stages by stages. However, what needs to explain further is how China's foreign policy thinking has been transformed into what China currently considers to be "normal," and what its core elements are?

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<sup>60</sup> Heath Timothy R, What does China want? Discerning the PRC's National Strategy, *Asian Security*. 8(1): 64

## 4.2 The transformation of Chinese foreign policy thinking to current norms

In the previous section, I quoted the argument that the core interests of China's foreign policy are driven by 'external threats to China's development and threats to China's increasing dependence on China's economic access to overseas resources and commodities.'<sup>61</sup> On this basis, combined with China's humiliating history of being invaded by powerful countries in modern history, Chinese leaders and scholars have focused on the following IR theoretical themes: Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, theory of the division of the Three Worlds, the epochal themes of peace and development all over the world, and new international political order.<sup>62</sup>

In practice, China was a weak country throughout the 20th century and had only mastered limited international discourse. In addition, Chinese culture lacks a tradition of imposing 'norms' on other countries, that is, the notion of 'harmony with difference'(he er bu tong).<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the core element of China's shaping of 'norms' is not only what tools China could use to shape these norms, such as political, military or economic, cultural tools, but how to make more countries recognize the 'norms' that China wants to shape. To cite Kavalski's argument, 'the issue is not merely about being and becoming a normative power, but also about being recognized as one by others.'<sup>64</sup> In other words, political, military, economic, and cultural tools should be used to obtain the recognition of Chinese norms by other countries, rather than how to impose what China considered to be 'normal' on other countries. However, the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Gustaaf Geeraerts & Men Jing, *International Relations Theory in China*, 256

<sup>63</sup> Emilian Kavalski, *The Struggle for recognition of normative powers: Normative power Europe and normative power China in context*, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48(2) 254

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 259

prerequisite for being recognized by others is to recognize others. Therefore, China has formulated the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as the basis of all foreign policies.<sup>65</sup>

In the previous section of 4.1, I mentioned that China's three core foreign policy objectives are all related to the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party's rule in China. Therefore, the 'norms' that China struggles to be recognized by others is all going to the legitimacy of the CCP's one-party rule. The external factors threatening the rule of the Chinese Communist Party have transformed into specific “norms” that China hopes to be recognized. In this thesis, I argue this includes the following three aspects of the norms: (1) China's state-led political-economic model (2) Human rights discourse based on social-economic rights (3) The Principles of Non-interference and One-China. The key to judging whether China is a normative power in the Western Balkans lies in the extent to which the three norms that China adheres to be recognized by the Western Balkans.

In this section, I will briefly explain the specific meaning of these three norms, why these norms are important for China to be recognized by others and the extent to which the Western Balkans countries recognize these norms. In the next section, I will use Wendt's methods to illustrate how interests are constructed and take Western Balkans' case with emphasis on Serbia.

#### **4.2.1 China's state-led political-economic model**

Before the 1980s, China was economically isolated and faced several threats from the two major powers, the Soviet Union and the United States. Over the past four decades, China's reforms have undoubtedly brought about rapid and sustained growth and have lifted hundreds

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<sup>65</sup> These are: Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.



of millions of people out of poverty. The US has been using its hegemony and influence for many years in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to guide developing countries towards capitalism market economy and liberal democracy.<sup>66</sup> However, as mentioned in the first section, the humiliating experience of modern times has made China suspicious of the Western-dominated international order/system. China shapes its political and economic model under the one-party vertical leadership, the so-called 'Beijing Consensus', to frame China's development model as an alternative option, especially for development in the Third World—to the Washington Consensus of market-friendly and the opening of goods promoted by the IMF and World Bank.<sup>67</sup>

China's development model is based on the state's continuous and selective intervention in the market and enterprises, aimed at shaping the process of economic development.<sup>68</sup> However, China's approach, which differs from the Western free market-based approach, has to be recognized by others to allow China to access overseas resources and goods upon which China's sustainable development is increasingly dependent. Specifically, the recognition of China's market economy status by other countries constitutes China's core interests. In this respect, China's normative power depends on whether the Western Balkans recognize China's full market economy status.

China believed that 'it should automatically obtained Full Market Economy Status after the 15th anniversary of its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December

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<sup>66</sup> Simran Walia, China's Development Model and its Political and Economic Implications, IMPAKTER, April 2020. <https://impakter.com/china-development-model-political-economic-implications/>

<sup>67</sup> Dustin R. Turin, The Beijing Consensus: China's Alternative Development Model, 2010, VOL. 2 NO. 01 <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/134/the-beijing-consensus-chinas-alternative-development-model>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

2016’.<sup>69</sup> However, the US, EU and some other Western countries disagree with this view, and they denied China's market economy status in 2016. They extended several anti-dumping measures on Chinese products in the past five years. Securing full market economy status will benefit China by ‘requiring global trade regulators to compare of Chinese export prices to its domestic markets (rather than higher-priced third countries) in anti-dumping cases, thus limiting their ability to impose tariffs on Chinese products’.<sup>70</sup> In other words, China will be benefiting from more countries recognizing China's full market economy status, thus improving the export of Chinese product and China's sustainable economic growth.

Till now, except for Serbia, the other four Balkan countries have not clearly stated whether they support China's market economy status. The main reason is that China's trade with these countries is relatively small compared to the other 11 Central and Eastern European countries, so it has not yet been put on the agenda. Secondly, many of China's infrastructure investment projects in the Western Balkans have only contracted but have not been implemented due to the unclear future of Western Balkans’ EU integration. Moreover, The EU also wants to create the railway network in the Western Balkans.

Table 1 Capital Projects in the Western Balkans supported by Chinese investment

Country	Project	Value and Fund	Contractor	Year <sup>71</sup>
Serbia	Pupin Bridge	€260 million	China Road and Bridge Corporation, SOE <sup>72</sup>	2011
	Kostolac Phase I	€130.5 million	China Energy Construction Group Co., Ltd. SOE	2012

<sup>69</sup> Andrea Durkin, IS CHINA A “MARKET ECONOMY”? Tradevistas, December 15, 2016. <https://tradevistas.org/is-china-a-market-economy/>

<sup>70</sup> Lucy Hornby, Shawn Donnan, China fights for market economy status, September 2016, Financial Times, <https://www.ft.com/content/572f435e-0784-11e6-9b51-0fb5e65703ce>

<sup>71</sup> Year refers to the year the contract was signed or the year the project started

<sup>72</sup> State-Owned Enterprises

	Kostolac Phase II, 350 MW unit	€ 700 million	China National Machinery Industry Corporation	2013
Serbia	Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway link	€800 million in Serbia	China Enterprise Consortium, regulated by China's State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council	2013
	Zelezara Smederevo Steel Mill	€150 million	China's Hebei Iron & Steel Group, SOE	2016
	Zrenjanin Tire Factory	€900million	China's Shandong Linglong Tire Co. Ltd. Private	2019
B&H	Banja Luka-Split motorway	€600million	China Shandong International Economic and Technical Cooperation Group (CSI), SOE	2018
B&H	450MW unit, Tuzla thermal power plant	€722 million	Gezhouba Group Co, a member company of the China Energy Engineering Corporation, SOE	2017
	300 MW unit, Stanari thermal power plant	€550 million	China's Dongfang Electric Corp, SOE	2016
	350 MW unit, Banovici thermal power plant	€584 million	China's Dongfang Electric Corp, SOE	2016
Montenegro	Section of the European motorway XI	€809.6 million	China Road and Bridge Corporation, SOE	2014
	Renewal of the Montenegrin ship fleet	€100 million	(Shanghai) Shipyard Co., Ltd, SOE	2012
North Macedonia	Kicevo-Ohrid Highway	€375 million	The Chinese Sinohydro Corporation, SOE	2014 Abandoned in 2019
	Miladinovci-Stip highways	€206 million		2014 in process
Albania	European Motorway VIII: Arber motorway to FYROM	€200 million	China State Construction Engineering Corporation, SOE	2014 Suspended

Source: EBRD(2016), based on Intellinews, with additional information mainly from Reconnecting Asia:  
<https://reconnectingasia.csis.org/>

Move back to the debate I mentioned in the literature review about whether China is a threat to the Western Balkans. The two arguments only present a partial view of the complicated picture. The argument of 'Money for influence'<sup>73</sup> referred to by some Western scholars seem plausible. However, what needs to be clarified is that such influence aimed explicitly at improving China's development and the CCP's domestic legitimacy, not an issue of external expansion or seeking hegemony. Chinese scholars say that the 17+1 project is an equal partnership and economic cooperation project. This argument is also reasonable, because there is no evidence to prove that China's infrastructure investment projects in the Western Balkans are completely exclusive, and other participants such as the European Union are not allowed to participate. However, the view of those Chinese scholars that China has no political motives outside the economy is a fallacious argument. For example, China hopes to use economic cooperation projects in exchange for the recognition of China's full market economy status by the Western Balkans.

Besides, one controversy about Chinese investment was the concern about transparency. Since China formulated its economic reform policy in the 1980s, the Chinese government hopes to narrow the gap between China and developed countries as soon as possible. Therefore, China has long been concerned about the efficiency and speed of infrastructure construction projects rather than being slowed down by disagreements among economic actors. For example, infrastructure projects hosted by China usually have the practice of 'the company that designs the project is also responsible for quotation and construction', including those construction

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<sup>73</sup> Visar Xhambazi, China Buying Balkans Influence, Competing with West, BIRN, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/28/china-buying-balkans-influence-competing-with-west/>; Austin Doehler, How China Challenges the EU in the Western Balkans, The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/how-china-challenges-the-eu-in-the-western-balkans/>

projects in China. Therefore, China needs to reconsider whether this model applies to construction projects undertaken by China abroad. Countries that accept Chinese investment need to be cautious about the details of the quotation.

#### **4.2.2 Human rights discourse based on social-economic rights**

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe around 1989, one of the main political risks to the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party was that China quietened the incident held in Tiananmen Square on June 4th, 1989 to maintain the order of the country. Therefore, in the post-Tiananmen era, the Western countries have always been skeptical of China's rise in human rights violations. To support its domestic legitimacy and China's political stability, China put forward the different human rights narratives.<sup>74</sup>

China's human rights narrative in its diplomatic strategy revolves around the two norms of 'legitimacy' and 'recognition'. The specific meaning of legitimacy covers the following two aspects: First, the Chinese Communist Party made tremendous achievements in solving the Chinese people's fundamental right of survival and development in the past forty years and thus has the legitimacy foundation of the party in power. Second, the legitimacy of China's "peaceful rise". China's external investment and global regionalization strategies are all for pursuing Chinese people and peoples of the world's right to survival and development instead of seeking China's hegemony.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> David Scott, *From Brussels to Beijing: Comparing the EU's and China's regionalism*, in Kavalski, *China and the Global Politics of Regionalization*, Ashgate Press, 2009, 112

<sup>75</sup> Which is the concept of 'Community with a Shared Future for Mankind' in the speech delivered by Xi Jinping at the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 2017  
<http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201711/06/WS5d034782a3103dbf1432840b.html>

As for recognition, it refers to the following two elements: First, 'China recognizes and respects the principles of the Charter of the United Nations related to the protection and promotion of human rights.'<sup>76</sup> However, all countries are expected to recognize that human rights are essentially matters within a countries' domestic operation, instead of an international issue.<sup>77</sup> Second, China's purpose in constructing its human rights discourse is not to replace the human rights discourse in the West, or as a diplomatic strategy to force any countries to accept it. As a Chinese saying goes, the well water does not intrude into [interfere with] the river water. China has always recognized that people's political participation and religious freedom are important aspects of human rights. However, China hopes that more countries could recognize or understand that China's priority is to solve people's right to survive and develop. In addition, China cannot tolerate foreign politicians who publicly criticize China's human rights situations or meet with activists related to the Chinese separatist movement in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Tibet. In this situation, many cases proved that China defends its position through diplomatic or economic leverage, such as the termination of Chinese-funded investment projects or other bilateral cooperation projects.

So far, the human rights issue has not become a factor affecting bilateral relations between China and the five Western Balkan countries. In these five countries, politicians have never publicly criticized China's human rights issues or met with separatism supporters in China. In this aspect, China has successfully shaped its norms in the Western Balkans. Among them, Serbia firmly supports China's human rights position. In the 41st session of the UN Human Rights Council, Serbia and other 36 countries officially signed the letter to the council, which praised "China's remarkable achievements" in "protecting and promoting human rights through development." The letter further "call [ed] on relevant countries to refrain from employing

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<sup>76</sup> X. Active Participation in International Human Rights Activities, [http://en.people.cn/whitepaper/4\(10\).html](http://en.people.cn/whitepaper/4(10).html)

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

unfounded charges against China," and urged the UNHRC to approach the Xinjiang situation "in an objective and impartial manner... with true and genuinely credible information".<sup>78</sup>

#### **4.2.3 The principles of non-interference and One-China**

The positions on national sovereignty come from China's history of humiliation in modern history. For the first time in 1953, the Chinese government put forward the principle of 'non-interference in each other's internal affairs' in its 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.' The principle serves as China's core position for solving the sovereignty issue of Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, which is the so-called 'One-China Principles.'<sup>79</sup>

China adheres to these two principles due to the following reasons: First, in addition to sustainable economic growth, nationalism is another factor that determines the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. In the preamble of the Chinese Constitution, the Communist Party of China shapes its rule's domestic legitimacy in the name of 'leading Chinese people to overthrow imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic-capitalism'.<sup>80</sup> However, from the perspective of traditional Chinese notion of 'highly unification'(da yi tong), Hong Kong and Macau have not yet achieved the same systems as mainland China, and Taiwan is still missing. Therefore, the task of ending the influence of imperialism on China in modern times has not completed. Second, China's experience of foreign powers intervening in its domestic affairs remains the source of resentment towards the west and national humiliation. In the 19th century,

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<sup>78</sup> Roie Yellinek, Elizabeth Chen, 'The "22 vs. 50" Diplomatic Split Between the West and China Over Xinjiang and Human Rights', China Brief Volume: 19 Issue: 22. December 2019. <https://jamestown.org/program/the-22-vs-50-diplomatic-split-between-the-west-and-china-over-xinjiang-and-human-rights/>;

<sup>79</sup> White Paper--The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue, The Taiwan Affairs Office and The Information Office of the State Council (February 21, 2000 ) <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceno/eng/ztxw/twwt/t110655.htm>

<sup>80</sup> CONSTITUTION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, <http://m.for68.com/new/201007/he60492159127010212383.shtml>

Western powers imposed unilateral commercial and political agreements on China.<sup>81</sup> Third, the Western countries adhere to the principle of humanitarian intervention, or even direct military intervention, which contradicts China's position in the sovereignty over Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. Therefore, China needs to shape the norms of the non-interference principle and struggle for others' recognition of China's 'One-China' principle.

All five Balkan countries have accepted China's non-interference diplomatic principles and the One-China policy in the form of diplomatic bulletins or official statements. In the 1990s, pro-Western governments in Northern Macedonia and Albania tried to develop official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, but they subsequently turned to Beijing and dropped Taiwan in the early 2000s. These two countries reiterated its support for the "One-China" policy and stated that they "will not establish official ties or conduct official contacts with Taiwan in any form".<sup>82</sup> In the past 15 years, politicians in five Balkan countries have not contacted any political dissidents from China or intervened in China's domestic affairs. In the case of the two countries of Muslim ethnicities, North Macedonia, and Albania, their media reports are by no means human rights issues and other political issues that Beijing considers disturbing.<sup>83</sup>

Such recognition by others also depends on the recognition of others. China's One-China policy and non-interference principle have enabled it to divert foreign criticism of its domestic actions, avoid entanglement in other countries' internal affairs, and maintain neutrality on some

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<sup>81</sup> Kaufman, Alison, *The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Changing Chinese Perceptions Of the International Order* (2009). APSA 2009 Toronto Meeting Paper, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1449346>

<sup>82</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, Hiromichi Higashi, *Are we real friends? Albania-China relations in the Xi Era*, September 2019, SINOPSIS, <https://sinopsis.cz/en/are-we-real-friends-albania-china-relations-in-the-xi-era/>; Deseret News, *Taiwan is loser as Macedonia aligns with China*, July 2001, <https://www.deseret.com/2001/6/18/19592019/taiwan-is-loser-as-macedonia-aligns-with-china>

<sup>83</sup> Robert Rajczyk, *CHINA'S INFLUENCE IN BALKANS AND CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE*, Warsaw Institute, July 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Chinas-influence-in-Balkans-and-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-Special-Report-Warsaw-Institute.pdf>



internationally controversial issues. In the case of the Western Balkans, China initially maintained its neutrality against NATO's bombing of Belgrade, the capital of the Yugoslav Union. Later, after NATO bombed the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia, China turned to the opposite position. In addition, as for the Kosovo issue, China's firm support of Serbia's position in protecting its sovereignty over Kosovo is mirrored by Serbia's firmly support to China's claim on the issues related to Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.

In this part, my argument is that China's method of shaping normative power is how to make more countries recognize the 'norms' that China wants to shape. Specifically, the norms refer to those externally derived threats to China's development, includes China's market economy status, the human rights narrative's construction, and the One-China principle. Meanwhile, China's goal in shaping these norms is towards the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party in China. This finding answers the question of China's motivation for shaping its norms in external strategies, that is, struggles for the recognition of CCP's one-party rule in China.

In the third subsection, I will consider how interests are constructed from structural and normative elements in line with Wendt's approach and how it works in the case of Western Balkans.

#### **4.3 Wendt's approach: China's normative power in the Western Balkans**

In this section, I will use Wendt's method to analyze China's normative power in the Western Balkans from three aspects: sovereignty, cooperation, and legitimacy.

Wendt argues that the practice of sovereignty will transform the understanding of security and sovereignty politics in three ways: First, states will define their (and our) security under the conditions maintaining their "property rights" over particular territories. Second, to the extent that countries successfully internalize sovereignty norms, they will more respect others' territorial rights. Third, ongoing socialization makes the state accept that their sovereignty depends on the recognition of other countries. They can rely more on the international community's system than on the military power of individual countries to ensure security.<sup>84</sup>

The territorial sovereignty defined by the People's Republic of China refers to the Chinese territory before the British army invaded China (the Qing Dynasty) in 1839. This norm shaped by the nationalist factor in contemporary Chinese identity. China should overcome the specters of the past<sup>85</sup> and restore territorial sovereignty before China was invaded by Western powers in modern times. Therefore, China has a firm position to take back Taiwan and oppose external forces' interference in Taiwan affairs.

After China successfully internalized sovereignty, China begins to pay more attention to respecting others' territorial rights. Therefore, China has put forward the principles of 'mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity' and 'non-interference in each other's internal affairs' in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.<sup>86</sup> In the case of the Western Balkans, China opposes external forces interfering in the Yugoslav Union's domestic affairs. After 2008, China supported Serbia's sovereignty declaration over Kosovo and vetoed against the proposal of Kosovo's UN membership.

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<sup>84</sup> Alexander Wendt, 1992: Anarchy is what states make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics, *International Organization* 46(2): 391-425:414-415

<sup>85</sup> Emilian Kavalski, The Struggle for recognition of normative powers: Normative power Europe and normative power China in context, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 48(2) 254

<sup>86</sup> Mikael Weissmann, Chinese Foreign Policy in a Global Perspective: A Responsible Reformer "Striving For Achievement", *JCIR: VOL.3, No.1* (2015)

Meanwhile, China recognizes that its sovereignty depends on the recognition by other countries. China can rely on the international community's system to safeguard its territorial sovereignty and not just China's military power. Although the Taiwan issue has not yet been fully resolved, China has successfully used the international system to include the Taiwan issue within its domestic affairs. As of 2019, fewer than 20 countries maintain official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and all the remaining countries, including the five Western Balkans, have recognized the One-China principle.

As for cooperation, Wendt argues that countries are 'self-interested, and they mutually recognize their ownership of property'. The country's fear of being occupied by potential collaborators reduced, and the possibility of cooperation between countries increases.<sup>87</sup> Cooperation can maximize the benefits of the two parties in the game under certain circumstances and affect the judgment of the two parties involved in the cooperation on their own identities and interests, thereby restricting state behavior.

The motivation of China's economic cooperation with the Western Balkans is to expand its product exports and obtain the overseas resources and goods it needs to maintain sustainable domestic economic growth, and ultimately support the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party's rule in China. For the Western Balkan countries, there is a need to develop their infrastructure, increase bilateral trade with China, attracting foreign investment to boost the economy and enjoy the benefit of employment.<sup>88</sup> However, the constructivist's explanation of cooperation focuses on how the expectations generated by behavior affect identity and

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<sup>87</sup> Alexander Wendt, 1992: Anarchy is what states make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics, *International Organization* 46(2): 416

<sup>88</sup> Shaohua Yan, *The 16+1 Framework and China-EU Cooperation in the Western Balkans: A Region Building Approach*, 2019, 80

interests.<sup>89</sup> How the development funds provided by China to the Western Balkans affect their perceptions of their identity and interests. For example, is the agenda for the Western Balkan states to join the European Union to obtain a new identity still the priority for the Western Balkan countries, or is China's entry into the region may delay this process? The cooperation between China and the Western Balkans has allowed both actors to obtain what they need on an equal basis. However, its ultimate effect, especially how it affects the Western Balkans' understanding of their identity, remains to be tested.

The third aspect is the concept of legitimacy. Legitimacy is constituted by a political authority structure that empowers some people to enforce rules, while others are obliged to comply with those rules. Moreover, Wendt emphasizes that legitimacy (as well as sovereignty, internal and external) requires a struggle for recognition. The legitimacy that China has shaped is to win domestic recognition of Chinese Communist Party's one-party rule. Specific norms include other countries' recognition of China's full market economy status, non-criticism of China's human rights issues, and recognition of China's territorial sovereignty as China's internal affairs. In addition, China has proposed the two themes of "peace and development all over the world" to shape its external image without being involved in international disputes, thereby gaining external legitimacy.

Basically, as Wendt said, anarchy is what states make of it.<sup>90</sup> However, it does not mean that states can make whatever they want out of anarchy. China's intention is to struggle for the Western Balkan countries to recognize the norms that China considers to be 'normal.' China may adopt soft and not-so-soft methods to make the Western Balkans recognize these norms.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 417

<sup>90</sup> Alexander Wendt, 1992: Anarchy is what states make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics, International Organization 46(2):391

Although this is only a relative power and presence, and China does not seem to seek hegemony, China does challenge the existing international system to a certain extent.

There is no evidence to prove that China intends to establish an alliance to promote China's "norms", and this behavior does not conform to the principle of "non-alignment" in China's fundamental foreign policy. However, on some international issues that China has always concerned, China has indeed found that some countries recognize what China considers to be 'normal' more than others. For example, those countries that openly support China's human rights narrative also recognize "one China principle" and "full market economy status."

As China's overall strength continues to increase, is it possible for China to continue expanding the scope of this seemingly non-existent alliance in this flexible way? Indeed, the influence of the Western Balkans on the international stage is limited. However, when Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and other developed capitalist countries successively announced the signing of the "Belt and Road" cooperation memorandum of understanding in 2019, will these norms shaped by China enter the Western European countries? What does this mean for the world order? These issues are worthy of further observation.

In this chapter, I analyzed how ancient, modern and contemporary Chinese history has influenced China's current foreign policy thinking, and how it has been transformed into current norms. Moreover, I discussed how to understand China's normative power in the Western Balkans in terms of sovereignty, cooperation, and legitimacy according to Wendt's approach.

My argument is that the three specific norms that China has shaped in the Western Balkans, China's state-led political-economic model, human rights narratives, and non-interference and

the One-China principle have all been recognized by the Western Balkan states. Therefore, China can be regarded as a normative power in the Western Balkans. As I mentioned in the first section of this chapter, the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party's rule in China is the main motivation for China to shape these norms.

## **5 China's normative influence in the Western Balkans: The case of Serbia**

In this chapter, I'm going to take Serbia as a case study to analyze China's motivation in shaping its norms in this region.

Among the bilateral relations between China and the five Western Balkan countries, Serbia and China have established the closest political, economic, and cultural relations. As shown in the table of 4.2.1, Serbia has signed the most infrastructure project cooperation agreements with China among the five countries. In the case where the two groups submitted letters condemning and supporting China's Xinjiang policy respectively to the 41st session of the UN Human Rights Council, the other four countries neglected to pick a side, but Serbia was the only Western Balkan country that firmly supports China's position. Therefore, China's normative role in Serbia is a case worthy of study.

### **5.1 Sovereignty practice: China's position on the independence of Kosovo**

China's position on Kosovo's independence shows apparent complexity. Although China vetoed Kosovo's membership in the United Nations, China neither wants to interfere in this affair nor cares about Kosovo's independent status. However, the Taiwan authority was involved in the Kosovo issue, which touched China's red line on its sovereignty. Therefore, the Chinese government firmly opposed Kosovo's independence and instead supported the Serbian government in safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity.

After Kosovo unilaterally declared independence on the 17th of February 2008, The Chinese government has not initially opposed Kosovo's independence. Wu Haitao, China's deputy

permanent representative to the United Nations, made a statement stressing that 'We believe that the best way to resolve the Kosovo issue is that parties concerned could reach a shared consensus through dialogue within the framework of relevant Security Council resolutions. The international community should create favorable conditions for that'.<sup>91</sup>

However, on the day of Kosovo's independence, Taiwan's Foreign Ministry said that 'the Republic of China (Taiwan) has formally recognized Kosovo with immediate effect,' and using the island's official name.<sup>92</sup> Taiwan's recognition of Kosovo's independence threatened China's bottom-line of the "one China principle, Taiwan is part of China". After that, when a foreign journalist asked Liu Jianchao, spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, China's reaction to 'the Taiwan authorities might recognize Kosovo as an independent state and Whether Kosovo's independence will become a precedent for resolving the Taiwan issue?'<sup>93</sup> Liu Jianchao replied, 'It is well known that as a part of China, Taiwan has no right or eligibility to give the so-called "recognition". There is only one China in the world. The Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legitimate government representing the whole of China, and Taiwan is an inseparable part of the Chinese territory. The international community universally recognizes this. We are resolutely opposed to the attempt of anyone or any group to separate Taiwan from China by any means whatsoever. Any attempt of this kind is going to get nowhere.'<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Mu Xuequan, China supports settlement of Kosovo issue through dialogue: envoy, Xinhua, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-06/11/c\\_138132033.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-06/11/c_138132033.htm)

<sup>92</sup> Reuters, Taiwan recognizes Kosovo in move likely to anger China, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-kosovo/taiwan-recognizes-kosovo-in-move-likely-to-anger-china-idUSTP33781020080220>

<sup>93</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Jianchao's Remarks on Taiwan's Possible "Recognition" of Kosovo Independence, Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America [2008/02/18, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/fyrth/t408073.htm>

<sup>94</sup> Ibid



As a matter of fact, Kosovo does not intend to challenge the 'one-China principle' because Kosovo wants China to support Kosovo's joining the United Nations. Kosovo ultimately refused to accept Taiwan's recognition of Kosovo's independence and reject the proposal to establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan.<sup>95</sup> However, China has not recognized Kosovo's independence because China gives priority to its sovereignty over Taiwan. This case further demonstrates that China's main concern is the adverse impact of Kosovo's independence on China's domestic political affairs, rather than Kosovo's independence itself.

Since Taiwan publicly supported Kosovo's independence in 2008, China turned to support Serbia's position instead of the neutral position typically adopted by China. China and Serbia signed a strategic partnership in 2009. Beijing is supporting Belgrade on the Kosovo issue, and Belgrade reiterated 'its commitment to the One-China principle, recognizing that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China. Serbia will therefore not establish official relations or engage in official exchanges with Taiwan authorities.'<sup>96</sup>

From the perspective of sovereignty practice, China defines its security under the conditions of maintaining its "property rights" over certain territories. In the Kosovo case, the specific territory here refers to Taiwan. In other words, China holds the positions of 'non-interference' and does not publicly support any parties' stances when it comes to those controversies with nothing to do with China's domestic affairs. However, once the issue is related to China's sovereignty, China takes the priority of the inviolability of its sovereignty, especially when it comes to issues related to the 'One China principle.'

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<sup>95</sup> Li Xiuwei, Kosovo will reject Taiwan's recognition, Feb 2008, CCTV.COM, <http://news.cctv.com/world/20080219/101110.shtml>

<sup>96</sup> China, Serbia stress sovereignty and territorial integrity, People's Daily, 2016 <http://www.scio.gov.cn/m/32618/Document/1480882/1480882.htm>

## 5.2 China-Serbia economic cooperation and Chinese Communist Party's domestic legitimacy

Chinese investment in this region is not without any purpose. Take the case of Serbia as an example. China's economic investment in Serbia is indeed a mutually beneficial and win-win project. As mentioned before, China's motivation is to expand its product exports and obtain the overseas resources and goods it needs to maintain sustainable domestic economic growth, and ultimately support the foundation of the Chinese Communist Party's rule in China. Chinese investment projects in Serbia are centered on the following sectors: infrastructure, energy, mining, and other areas. For Serbia, in addition to jobs, access to infrastructure construction funds is the main economic benefit.

As for infrastructure investment, the China-Europe freight train service, a significant part of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, was launched in 2011 and has been growing rapidly since then. China has already opened several new freight train services to Budapest, which only takes 18 days from the Southeastern part of China to Budapest. Since Serbia has not fully integrated into Europe's high-speed rail network so far, China cannot transport goods swiftly to Belgrade and other Western Balkan cities. For this purpose, The Export-Import Bank of China financed about 1.5 billion Euros to build the Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway link, thereby reducing the time from Budapest to Belgrade from 8 hours to 3 hours. The Budapest-Belgrade railway will be mainly used for cargo transportation.<sup>97</sup> This project's destination is not limited to connecting Budapest and Belgrade but later extended to the port of Piraeus in Greece to build the land-sea express line of trade between China and Europe.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Andreea Brînză, China and the Budapest-Belgrade Railway Saga, April 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/china-and-the-budapest-belgrade-railway-saga/>

<sup>98</sup> Ibid

Besides, Serbia and China plan to start constructing a 300 million euro (\$332 million) industrial park in Belgrade at the end of March 2020, which is the first industrial park invested by China in Southeast Europe. A Chinese company has pledged to invest at least million euro to Zelezara Smederevo Steel Mill, which was on the verge of bankruptcy, and retained the workforce of some 5,050 employees.<sup>99</sup> Similar propaganda usually appears in how China to defend that it is an active participant rather than a dangerous competitor, more specifically, the legitimacy of its foreign investment.

As the bilateral economic ties between China and Serbia heat up, the two countries have established the comprehensive strategic partnership and reached agreement on some of China's core interests. From the perspective of normative power, China has received Serbia's recognition of all China's core interests and what China considers to be 'normal', such as capacity cooperation and China's full market economy status, China's position on human rights, China's sovereignty over Hong Kong and Taiwan, Serbia's position is to support China's position and interests.<sup>100</sup>

Serbian First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić visited China in 2016 and shared his views on bilateral relations and China's latest issues with the Global Times. When answering the question of how to see the status of China's market economy that has not been recognized by the World Trade Organization (WTO), he said, "China has its own development model that proves to be very successful. Serbia, on the other hand, has a number of issues related to the WTO, but I think we should work together to overcome these

<sup>99</sup> Ivana Nikolic, All Eyes on China in Serbian Steel Mill Town, Balkan Insight, June 20, 2016, <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/06/20/all-eyes-on-china-in-serbian-steel-mill-town-06-20-2016/>

<sup>100</sup> Dragan Pavlicevic, The geoeconomics of Sino-Serbian relations: The view from China, 14th December, 2016, [https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/chinas\\_investment\\_in\\_influence\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_161\\_cooperation7204](https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/chinas_investment_in_influence_the_future_of_161_cooperation7204)

obstacles."<sup>101</sup> In addition, President Aleksandar Vucic sent a letter to the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, in January 2020 and reiterated that 'as far as the Republic of Serbia is concerned, Taiwan is and will remain an integral part of the People's Republic of China.'<sup>102</sup>

All these norms recognized by Serbia point to China's sustainable economic growth and the CCP's legitimacy. Most importantly, China has successfully shaped everything that it thinks should be 'normal' in Serbia. From the concept of normative power, there is no further evidence that China has further motivation to establish a strategic partnership with Serbia.

According to Wendt's view of cooperation, the cooperation between China and Serbia has enabled both parties to obtain what they need and maximize their interests. Proceeding from China's consistent core diplomatic principle of non-interference', China does not care about the future of Serbia's EU negotiation. However, Wendt also mentioned that cooperation affects the judgment of the two parties involved in the cooperation on their identities and interests, thereby restricting state behavior. For Serbia, what does it mean for Serbia to recognize China's core interests and norms? In particular, the norms China wants to shape are not recognized by most EU member states, such as China's human rights issues, sovereignty over Taiwan, and China's full market economy status. The question that needs further attention is to what extent has the cooperation with China affected Serbia's understanding of its European identity and the goal of joining the EU?

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<sup>101</sup> Serbian First Deputy Prime Minister Ivica Dačić talks China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of China, <http://www.mfa.gov.rs/en/about-the-ministry/minister/minister-interviews/16077-serbian-first-deputy-prime-minister-ivica-dai-talks-china>

<sup>102</sup> "For Serbia, Taiwan is part of China": Vucic sends letter to Xi Jinping, Telegraf, <https://www.telegraf.rs/english/3142029-for-serbia-taiwan-is-part-of-china-vucic-sends-letter-to-xi-jinping>

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis has sought to answer the questions of China's motivation to engage the Western Balkans, emphasizing the case of Serbia in line with normative power and Wendt's approach.

The two views on whether China poses a threat or not to the Western Balkans have their drawbacks and both views can only outline part of the picture. On the one hand, what Chinese scholars argued "beyond the zero-sum game" is too idealistic. States do not consider their interests purely in terms of economic gains as China envisions. Moreover, China's motives for engaging with other countries are not entirely based on economic interests either. For example, China's non-interference principle and human rights discourse are based on China's political and national security motives. On the other hand, although some scholars and political makers are concerned about China's low investment transparency and China's implementation of anti-liberal norms in the Western Balkans, the Western Balkans are still willing to accept China's infrastructure investment. The main reason is that economic development and access to infrastructure development funds are the Western Balkans' realistic needs. When the European Union cannot provide sufficient development funds to the Western Balkan countries, these countries will automatically look for alternative sources.

The concept of normative power can help observe China's specific motives from the perspective of how China promotes its norms in the Western Balkans. In addition, Wendt's approach contributes to understanding how nations interact under anarchy, to screen out which aspects may be hidden risks, and which are not.

In this thesis, the data primarily comes from the detailed analysis of normative power approach towards China's foreign policy, China-Western Balkan relations, scholars' analysis, official

statistics on trade and Chinese investment in the Western Balkan, official discourse, announcements, reports at the political level published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China and Republic of Serbia, as well as medial news and official documents from European institutions. These data are used to illustrate China's motivation for shaping the 'norm' and the amount of China's investment in the Western Balkans.

The findings are as follows in this thesis:

First, China's motivation to build its normative power is to win other countries' recognition of its key practices in foreign relations and ensure the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party domestically. Therefore, China has to struggle for other countries' recognition of what China considers to be 'normal' in international life. In short, China concerns about its domestic sustainable economic growth, sovereignty issues related to national reunification, and nationalism, instead of rebuilding the international order or even seeking hegemony. In the case of the Western Balkans, China's motive was to strive for the Western Balkans to recognize the norms China is shaping.

Second, this thesis argues that historical factors have shaped the current Chinese foreign policy thinking. Ancient China's philosophical thoughts have determined the thinking of "highly national unity" and "harmonious world". These two principles form the basis of China's contemporary foreign policy thinking. After that, China's normative power had been preconditioned on the reflective construction of the nation's humiliating past in modern times from 1839 to 1949. The Chinese government is committed to re-establish its internal capabilities to prevent future indignities from the "powerful nations," and China, therefore, adheres to the principle of non-interference and One-China. Based on traditional philosophical

thinking and reflection on the humiliating history of modern times, the Chinese government has formulated the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" as the basis for all its diplomatic activities. The above historical factors have been transformed into the norms shaped by China: the state-led political and economic development model, the human rights narrative of social and economic rights, and the principle of one China and non-interference.

Third, Wendt's approach contributes to China's participation in the Western Balkans from the perspectives of sovereign practice, cooperation, and (internal and external) legitimacy. After China successfully internalized its sovereignty, China has become more respectful of the territorial rights of others. At the same time, China recognizes that its sovereignty depends on the recognition of others. Therefore, China and Serbia recognize each other's territorial sovereignty. The cooperation between China and the Western Balkan countries is equal, and each takes what it needs. However, combined with Wendt's point of view, the crux of the issue is how China's investment in the Western Balkans will affect the Western Balkans' understanding of their identity? This issue needs further research. Moreover, both internal and external legitimacy has to struggle for recognition. For the legitimacy of its one-party rule, the Communist Party of China needs to maintain sustained economic growth and territorial sovereignty and oppose external interference in Chinese affairs. Externally, China has put forward the slogans like 'peace and development', and 'The community with a shared future for all mankind' to build China's external legitimacy, that is, China hopes that all countries could obtain what they need through cooperation, instead of seeking hegemony.

An unresolved question is that although China's motive is to serve China's domestic legitimacy, not to seek hegemony. However, some of the norms that China has promoted in the Western

Balkans are in conflict with the norms that the EU hopes to create. Therefore, how will this affect the identity and interests of the Western Balkans? This question deserves further study.



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