Multipolarity and Multilateralism

A comparative study of the European & Chinese perspectives

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the European and Chinese perspectives on multilateralism in the emerging multipolar world. Starting from a qualitative, critical literature review, it presents an assessment of the impact of the rising multipolarity on multilateralism. Since EU research is often introverted and insulated, this paper tries to offer a different view on the multipolar world order by using a comparative rather than a Eurocentric approach. Considering that multipolarity and multilateralism are possibly the two defining characteristics of the emerging new world order, a proper conceptualization of the two terms is in order. The growing importance of China, as a new emerging power, and its understanding of the international system is a focal point. In this context this paper has three research objectives. First, this study aims to examine whether different perspectives on the concept of multilateralism exist, with a special focus on the Chinese perspective in a multipolar world context. Second, the research aims to explain the EU and Chinese perspectives on multilateralism through a theoretical lens. Third, the paper aims to verify the differences between the EU and Chinese perspectives. The EU’s discourse is dominated by the concept of effective multilateralism, while China seems to believe in balance of power theory. However, a subsequent case study of the 2010 IMF reforms shows that the European and Chinese perspectives on multipolarity and multilateralism are more alike than the conceptual part of this paper would have guessed. This study argues that a combination of (neo)realism and constructivism offers the most accurate explanation of the behavior of the EU and China in the 2010 IMF reform.

KEYWORDS: Multipolarity, Multilateralism, European Union, China, IMF reform.

1. Introduction

Today’s world is shaped by the decline of the West on the one hand, and an increased share of global problems on the other hand (Wade, 2011, p. 349). The new emerging world order, and the feeling of uncertainty it brings with it, raises a lot of unanswered questions. In this context the impact of “the rise of China” on the existing international system is manifold debated (Renard, 2009; Mingjiang, 2011; Télo, 2011).

This paper focuses on China, in its ever-growing role as an economic and political power. The research wishes to make an original contribution to the scientific debate on multilateralism. The literature on the topic almost always presents the term as a Western concept; scholars rarely take notice of other interpretations. This paper has three research objectives. First, this study aims to examine whether different perspectives on the concept of multilateralism exist, with a special focus on the Chinese perspective in a multipolar world context. Second, the research aims to explain the EU and Chinese perspectives on multilateralism through a theoretical lens. Third, the paper aims to verify the differences between the EU and Chinese perspectives.
It is important to understand why this study focuses on *multipolarity* and *multilateralism*. Both terms look at the international system in a different way (Scott, 2013, p. 30). *Multipolarity* measures power divided between several poles or great powers. *Multilateralism* is a way for these great powers to cooperate with each other and other powers. This will further be explained in the conceptual part of this paper. The focus of this research is *multilateralism*, while *multipolarity* is the contextual factor that makes it relevant to look at the different perspectives thereof. *Multipolarity* is currently changing international politics, which explains why comparing the European and Chinese perspectives on *multilateralism* makes sense.

Special attention goes to the EU’s and China’s relationship with the IMF. This is relevant because the IMF is an important multilateral fora. On the one hand the IMF played a big role in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis; on the other hand the organization has been criticized by the emerging powers and developing countries for being too western oriented. The behavior of the EU and China in the IMF sheds an interesting light on the European versus Chinese views on *multilateralism*. The ongoing reform of the IMF will be used as a starting point to better achieve this.

The objectives of this research paper will be reached in three consecutive steps: in the first section of the paper, the terms *multipolarity* and *multilateralism* will be thoroughly analyzed. In particular, European and Chinese literature will be examined in light of the ongoing IMF reform, some similarities and differences will be listed and a number of hypotheses advanced. Section two of this paper aspires to explain the European and Chinese discourse on the basis of theories of constructivism and (neo)realism respectively. In the third section of this paper the hypotheses from section one will be tested by means of a single case study.

This research will provide a concise summary of the lacunae in the literature as well as in-depth knowledge on the concepts *multipolarity* and *multilateralism* in the 21st century. Therefore the subsequently presented conclusions will not only rest on western or European publications, but also on Chinese literature and official reports. As a result this study has great potential for informing future policy debates, which signifies the relevance of this research paper.

### 2. Approach and method

The research of the present study rests on two main approaches in particular; on the one hand it is a multidisciplinary research, consciously combining international relations (IR) theory and European Union (EU) Studies. On the other hand this study uses a comparative approach.

Similar to the work of Jorgensen and Laatikainen (2013), this paper aims to have a more international than European objective. The decision to focus on the international context in this study has been made very deliberately, given the lack of attention to the external variables in previous EU integration studies. Traditionally EU research is introverted and insulated. This paper will therefore try to offer a different view on international relations by using a comparative rather than a Eurocentric approach. This means this study will step away from the frequently used sui generis approach (Bretherton & Niemann, 2012) and frame the EU as an actor comparable to other major states in international society.
Comparative EU studies are often contested. Mostly, because scholars feel the EU has such a unique character and comparisons are difficult. Other researchers have expressed their hope for future studies of a comparative kind (Bretherton & Niemann, 2012; Jorgensen et al., 2013, p. 15; Lucarelli, 2013, p. 20).

Consequently this paper compares the EU with the most important emerging power, China. According to Scott (2013, p. 1) this is complex, since both actors have a different political nature: the EU is a regional organization with supranational powers, while China is a sovereign state. Accordingly, a lot of diversity exists within the EU. Nevertheless previous researchers have used this contested form of comparative analysis of international relations (IR) theory in their studies. Zielonka (2011, pp. 282-283) legitimizes comparisons between the EU and an individual state, like China, given that the EU shares important characteristics with other international actors.

In this light it should be made clear that the IR context surrounding the EU-China relations will not be discussed in this paper. This does not imply they exist in a vacuum. Clearly, the influence of other great powers, like the US for instance, on the EU-China relations can not be denied. Still no apparent mentioning will be made of any of those third parties in order to keep this comparative study focused. Therefore it is important to underline there’s more to this subject in reality than this research shows. However, it is interesting to single out the EU and China in this study because of their increasing importance in the international system (Scott, 2013, p. 31).

In terms of research method this contribution wishes to present a qualitative, in-depth literature review with a critical assessment of the conceptualization of the terms multipolarity and multilateralism, both from the EU and Chinese perspective. This particularly since the existing literature shows the field is under-theorized in terms of theoretical background. Next, a single case study method will be employed.

The advantages of this kind of qualitative research are multiple (Greetham, 2009, pp. 180-182). First it can be used in an explorative way, which is the goal in this study (Baarda, De Goede & Theunisseesn, 2009, pp. 130-135). Qualitative research also creates a lot of room to analyze and interpret the data, in this case the collected perspectives on multipolarity and multilateralism. Secondly, this method will generate hypotheses (Baarda et al., 2009, pp. 96-100). This means that the formulation of hypotheses will only take place after the data collection. This approach was chosen because there hasn’t been done much research yet on the comparison between European and Chinese perspectives on multipolarity and multilateralism.

To analyze the data the case study method is used (Baarda et al., 2009, pp. 112-114). Although the results generated by a case study often only apply for the studied case and for this reason are difficult to generalize, this research has opted for the case study method because of the following grounds. First of all, the case study method studies things more specifically then a quantitative method would. Moreover it doesn’t reduce reality, because it can incorporate more indicators and therefore will lead to more conclusions on the perspectives on multipolarity and multilateralism. This approach will make the present study more profound.

Secondly, more detailed information will be collected because of the fact that this research only looks at the IMF and not all existing multilateral organizations, such as
the World Bank (WB) or the United Nations (UN). Hence more attention will be given to variables that would normally have little chance to be researched. A single case study not only has the goal to describe situations, but can be used in an explorative way as well. For instance to generate hypotheses, therefore it is useful to apply the single case study method for this study (Baarda et al., 2009, pp. 121-123).

To sum up, the case study method sets an accurate research design, which exposes factors that would be ignored by a quantitative method (Baarda et al., 2009, p. 114). And because it is exploratory, it leads to welcome new thoughts because relevant theoretical literature on non-western thoughts on multipolarity and multilateralism is scarce.

3. Literature study and hypotheses

Taking into consideration that multipolarity and multilateralism are possibly the two defining characteristics of the emerging 21st century world order and that both terms are used in the EU’s and China’s public diplomacy language, Laatikainen and Scott state that a proper conceptualization is in order (Laatikainen, 2013, p. 6; Scott, 2013, p. 1).

Laatikainen and Scott are not the only scholars attaching great importance to a better conceptualization of the two terms. Umbach (2006) is of the opinion that multipolarity and multilateralism are used misleadingly and at times even mixed up deliberately. According to him both concepts are insufficiently defined, which leads to confusion. Scott (2013, p. 26) adds that maybe the terms are too narrow and unable to grasp the complex world we’re living in today. Accordingly, there’s the issue of other and overlapping terms like interpolarity, multilateralising multipolarity, multi-multilateralism … presented in contemporary literature.

Due to the above stated reasons the following paragraphs will zoom in on the EU’s and Chinese perspectives on both terms. Additionally some hypotheses will be formulated, in the second part of this paper these will be tested by means of a single case study of the 2010 IMF reform.

a. Multipolarity

In May 2011 the World Bank published a report called ‘Multipolarity: the new global economy’. According to the World Bank emerging countries like Brazil, Russia, India, China and South-Africa (the so called BRICS) will induce clear signs of change in the socio-economic power relations (World Bank, 2011). In line with Scott’s (2013, p. 1) definition of multipolarity as “a measurement of the distribution of power as concentrated in several poles of power, those poles being Great Powers” the World Bank hereby suggests the BRICS are becoming great powers alongside the US and the EU.

Although Biscop and Odegaard (2006, p. 5) declare that the emergence of a multipolar world order as a fact, this is not overall as well established in the literature. Higgot (2010, p. 7) states that the question still remains how, if and when multipolarity is emerging. Accordingly, Télo (2011, n. p.) is of the opinion that the concept of multipolarity is no more than an empirical description and that it is still
unclear what kind of multipolar structure will govern the emerging world system. In his view the currently observed multipolarity is an unprecedented one. In short, Narramore (2011, p. 96) summarizes that there is no consensus on what kind of international politics will shape the future.

Clearly, not all scholars are convinced of the ongoing emergence of multipolarity. Geeraerts (2007, p. 17) feels that the EU overestimates the speed of the establishment of a new world order. “Many EU members take for granted that multipolarity is a reality, not an objective in a distant future.”

Barroso (2010, p. 2), the president of the European Commission, on the other hand expressed his beliefs in a multipolar world quite obviously by stating: “It has become a common assertion that the first decade of the 21st century has witnessed the gradual emergence of a multipolar world. A system composed of multiple global and regional powers, by a number of relevant institutions and organizations, and by powerful non-state actors.”

Whether the EU will be one of the major poles in this multipolar world is a question that is rarely debated (Laatikainen, 2013, p. 9). Renard (2009, cited in: Higgott, 2010, p. 13) shares Barroso’s hypothesis, but adds that it is of the utmost importance for the EU to help shape this multipolar world in order not to lose its international status: “Either the EU participates in the shaping of the coming order and becomes one of its major poles, or it will be relegated to the position of a mere spectator in global affairs.” Higgott (2010, p. 2) agrees with this last argument and states that the only way the EU can help define this multipolar world is by advancing the cause of multilateralism.

Geeraerts (2007, p. 6) underlines the relevance of a more comprehensive understanding of China’s perception of multipolarity, since this has a direct impact on its foreign relations. He believes Chinese leaders are in favor of multipolarity (Geeraerts, 2007, p. 7).

When testing this hypothesis by looking at the official Chinese point of view, Geeraerts seems to be right: “Our efforts to promote the development of the world towards multipolarization are not targeted at any particular country, nor are they aimed at re-staging the old play of contention for hegemony in history. Rather, these efforts are made to boost the democratization of international relations, help the various forces in the world, on the basis of equality and mutual benefit, enhance coordination and dialogue, refrain from confrontation and preserve jointly world peace, stability and development.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2003d).

According to Wang and Zhang (cited in: Geeraerts, 2007, p. 8) Chinese leaders believe that a multipolar world might protect China’s national interests better, as a result they are striving to make China one of the major poles so they can help shape the world. They also realize that cooperation with other powers, like the EU, will help facilitate this multipolar structure. This is one of the reasons why the EU is of so much interest for China; the EU is a promising pole in the coming multipolar world order and it equals peace and good relations with the US (Narramore, 2008, p. 94). In this light, Chinese scholars are increasingly paying attention to the study of the EU
and especially to the supranational institutions; to what extent they work well and how far they are able to go (Geeraerts, 2007, p. 9-12).

In the introduction of this section it is stated that multipolarity presumably comes in different forms. Biscop and Renard (2010, p. 5) believe that the EU’s preference goes to a cooperative form of multipolarity, based on rules-based multilateralism (later referred to as effective multilateralism). Geeraerts (2007, p. 14) acknowledges that the EU favors an international order based on rules and norms.

Acharya (cited in: Scott, 2013, p. 24-25) makes the distinction between strategic multipolarity and normative multipolarity. According to Scott (2013, p. 25) this distinction can help us to understand the difference between the EU and Chinese form of multipolarity. Strategic multipolarity can be pursued in a balance of power framework, where military and economic hard power is dominant. The normative multipolarity form, which is linked to the use of soft power, is compatible with multilateralism and advocates shared rules, international law and international institutions.

Traditionally, the EU leans more towards normative multipolarity. China on the other hand has a history of strategic multipolarity, especially in its relations with Russia. Strategic multipolarity is causing China some serious image problems and in the light of the Chinese “peaceful rise” their rhetoric has recently more turned into normative multipolarity.

Higott (2010, p. 17) comments that distinction needs to be made between “multipolarity as a reality” and “multipolarity as a normative goal”.

Table 1: Comparison of the European and Chinese perspective on multipolarity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese perspective</th>
<th>European perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>PRO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China = Great pole/power</td>
<td>EU = Great pole/power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National interests</td>
<td>International status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic ◯ normative</td>
<td>Normative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Multilateralism

Unsurprisingly, many distinct understandings exist on how the world should be governed. One possibility is global governance through the means of multilateral cooperation. Scott (2013, p. 1) defines multilateralism as “a process; a way of acting that involves several states (big, medium or small) working together as a matter of practice”. But, just like the term multipolarity, multilateralism can be understood in
very different ways. This research paper will follow Caporaso (cited in: Basu, Schunz & Wouters 2008, p. 5) and define multilateralism as: “a normative concept in the sense of a “belief” about how international cooperation should function”.

The aim of the following paragraphs is to research how the normative concept of multilateralism can be observed and examined in an international context that is shaped by globalization and global governance. The work of Basu et al. (2008) serves hereby as an example. Vasconcelos (cited in: Laatikainen, 2013, pp. 20-21) predicts that most of the emerging powers have a different conception of multilateralism as opposed to the EU. The sections below test this hypothesis.

The dominance of institutionalism in the scholarship of the EU and multilateralism spreads the belief that multilateral institutions matter (Laatikainen, 2013, p. 8). Taking the EU’s history into account, the European stress on multilateralism is no surprise. Groom (cited in: Scott, 2013, p. 6) puts it strikingly: “Multilateralism is a way of life in Europe”.

Scott (2013, pp. 5-6) explains the EU’s focus on multilateralism as a response to the American unilateralism under the Bush presidency (2001-2009). He also follows Renard’s (2009, pp. 35-36) argument that EU multilateralism is more a necessity than a choice. It is a way to make up for Europe’s lack of military power (cited in Scott: 2013, p. 5).

As stated above multilateralism takes many different forms. The global objective of the EU is effective multilateralism. This concept was introduced in 2003 in the European Security Strategy (ESS) Paper and officially means the following: “the development of a stronger international society, well functioning international institutions, and a rules-based international order” (European Union, 2003; Biscop & Odegaard, 2006, p. 2).

In the literature there is a lack of consensus on what is the definition of effective multilateralism (Lucarelli, 2013, p. 19; Narramore, 2008, p. 103). The question remains: what parameters make multilateralism more effective?

According to Van Langenhove (2010, pp. 15-20; also cited in: Scott, 2013, p. 26) the EU has taken the position to support the reform of multilateralism by stressing the concept effective multilateralism. However, the EU member states (and China for that matter) might not be ready to deliver. Multilateralism 1.0 is evolving to multilateralism 2.0. The first type of multilateralism has the state as the central figure in the international system and has been around since the end of the Second World War. Multilateralism 2.0 refers to the emergence of non-state actors in the multilateral framework. China means to safeguard its sovereignty in the international system and therefore does not applaud the development to multilateralism 2.0. Moreover Scott (2013, p. 26) wonders whether the EU will be able to function better in this new international setting than China.

The previous sections implied that “China’s rise” means a change in the distribution of power. The following paragraphs raise the question how China will find its balance between power politics and multilateralism. Geeraerts is of the opinion that China is already integrated in international politics and its institutions, and therefore expects
multilateralism to be a standard ingredient of the Chinese foreign policy going forward (Geeraerts, 2011, p. 60).

Zielonka (2011, p. 291) makes the same hypothesis by characterizing China as “an economic giant, but a political dwarf”. He suggests that economic powers are expected to avoid conflict and to rely more on multilateral organizations, which safeguards the legal and diplomatic agreements with their partners. Zielonka finds this is the case for the EU and probably also for China.

However, several other scholars find it necessary to expand on this point of view. Wei (2008, p. 3) and Mingjiang (2011) for example, observe on the one hand that China’s attitude towards global affairs has developed from an introspective and conservative to an active and pragmatic approach. On the other hand - and opposed to the EU’s standard practice - China’s choice for multilateral diplomacy is in many cases rather selectively tailor made and not overall consistently guided by a grand and overarching vision. This selective approach towards multilateralism can easily be explained as follows: for China it is important to be self-relying when it comes to the protection of national interests, on the other side they want to be seen as a responsible power (Wei, 2008, p. 9). By participating in multilateral organizations, China can kill two birds with one stone.

Geeraerts (2007, p. 6; 2011, pp. 61-62) explains the adaptation of China’s diplomacy to the evolving circumstances by the fact China as a nation is struggling with an identity problem: is it a developing country or a great power? When it comes down to China’s dual identity he states for China domestic economic development is the main priority and being a responsible strong power a long term ambition. This while the EU expects exactly the opposite: China as a global power in a multipolar world taking up its responsibility and contributing to effective multilateralism (Biscop & Odegaard, 2006, p. 6).

The EU regrets this conditional Chinese attitude towards multilateralism: “Europeans are worried that China might support multilateral organizations but subject its support for tactical reasons to global order-policy concepts of strategic multipolarity, the result being more political and economic rivalry and less multilateral cooperation.” (Umbach, 2006, n. p.).

In this light China, like other major and emerging powers, is often called an instrumental multilateralist (Barysch, 2011, p. 1-2; Télo, 2011, n. p.) or an experimental multilateralist (Biscop & Odegaard, 2006, p. 8). When it serves the Chinese interests the international rules and organizations are accepted, otherwise China prefers to act unilaterally. Consequently, Barysch (2011, pp. 1-2) and Biscop and Odegaard (2006, p. 16) believe that the world is becoming increasingly power-based.

Biscop and Odegaard (2006, p. 10) go even further by stating that multilateralism is not a dominant feature of the Chinese foreign policy, although the official rhetoric may present it that way. When looking at official documents this seems to be the case; the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (2003a; 2003b; 2003c) does not list a direct reference to multilateralism as such.
Instead, China strongly and repeatedly uses the word cooperation and stresses over and over the need for long-lasting peace.

Table 2: Comparison of the European and Chinese perspective on MULTILATERALISM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese perspective</th>
<th>EU perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>PRO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Politics</td>
<td>Multilateral Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Effective multilateralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(intergovernmental institutions)</td>
<td>(supranational institutions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilateralism 1.0</td>
<td>Multilateralism 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(state)</td>
<td>(non-state actors)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c. Hypotheses

Based on the extensive literature study, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HYPOTHESIS 1: Whereas China believes in selective multilateral diplomacy, EU multilateralism is guided by a &quot;grand vision&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HYPOTHESIS 2: Both China and the EU Member States are not ready to deliver the concept of effective multilateralism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HYPOTHESIS 3: China and the EU both prefer a multipolar and multilateral world, but they mean different things by it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next sections will examine which theoretical approaches can further explain these hypotheses.

4. Theoretical approaches

The next paragraphs study the European and Chinese attitude towards multipolarity and multilateralism, first from a (neo)realist and then from a constructivist approach to make a comprehensive understanding of the ongoing developments possible. The paper argues that just one theory is insufficient to fully grasp the EU’s and the Chinese stand towards the concepts. In this sense the two approaches shouldn’t be seen as opposing views on the matter, but rather understood to be supporting each other. Consequently the EU’s and Chinese strategy towards multipolarity and multilateralism is explained by a combination of material interests and ideational factors. This will be made clear by means of a case study of the 2010 IMF reform.
i. (neo)realist approach

The ongoing IMF reform can be explained by means of realism. However, considering the fact that the EU and China are members of the IMF because it serves their self-interest, rational choice theory may come to mind when thinking about the IMF case as well. From this point of view this study stresses the fact that realist studies can be rationalist at the same time. The difference being that realism is an IR theory and rationalism a meta-theoretical perspective (Dunne, Kurki & Smith, 2007, pp. 4-7; Jorgensen, 2010, pp. 262-263). In other words: although both approaches overlap, they don’t treat things the same way.

Being one of the major branches of IR theory, realism has a pessimist world view and does not believe in progress by means of international institutions. Therefore; it proclaims states to be the major actors in the international system (Jorgensen, 2010, p. 2). However, there are many different types of realist theory; classical realism, structural realism or neorealism and post-realism. In general realist theories often focus on security issues (Jorgensen, 2010, p. 97). For this reason realists are not likely to analyze the IMF case, although power relations and multipolarity are indeed realist themes. The present study chooses to do otherwise. From the start, this paper has emphasized the importance of the concept multipolarity. Therefore, the next paragraphs attempt to examine the IMF case by means of Waltz’ neorealism.

Waltz (1979) introduces neorealism in Theory of International Politics. His understanding of world politics is as follows: based on the structure of the international system there is a key group of actors that rule the world, the great power(s). Great Powers are countries with the most prominent military and economic capabilities. Hierarchically, they play the biggest role in world politics (Evans & Newnham, 1998, pp. 209-210). The structural setting in which great powers (inter)act can undergo changes, which he calls varying polarities. Hence, a world can be uni-, bi- or multipolar. According to Waltz these are the systemic structural factors that can help to explain state behavior. When the distribution of power changes capabilities alter similarly. Hence nations will decide which strategy it will follow in seeking relative and absolute gains; balancing, bandwagoning or making alliances (Jorgensen, 2010, pp. 84-85).

It’s particularly interesting to look at the IMF reform trough the eyes of power transition theory because the behavior of great powers, like the EU and China, is the focal point. Organski (1958) introduced the theory, Organski and Kugler (1980) edited later.

Dissimilar to realism’s focus on anarchy, power transition theory defines world politics as a hierarchy of states with varying degrees of cooperation and competition (Abdollahian et al., 2000, pp. 6-7). The theory presents a pyramid of power with “a dominant power on top and other great powers, among them a potentially future challenger, lower in the pyramid” (Jorgensen, 2010, pp. 93-94). In the same logic, world politics will be stable as long as the great powers are satisfied and they align themselves with the dominant power. In other words: in the case of an unequal power distribution there will be peace and international conflict will come about when the key players acquire an equal share of power (Kugler & Organski, 1989, p. 193).
Recently, the rise of China is an illustration of power transition theory (Tammen and Kugler, 2007, cited in: Jorgensen, 2010, p. 94).

In the IMF case, the US and the EU are the dominant powers. However, the emerging countries are starting to question their hegemony in the Fund. Among them, China’s the only great power that could really challenge the US or the EU (Abdollahian et al., 2000, p. 7). Even so military conflict seems unlikely; according to the Chinese “peaceful rise” discourse China merely aspires a gradual power transition (Yang, n. d.).

ii. Constructivist approach

The previous considerations suggest that the EU’s and Chinese perspectives are dominated by (neo)realism, which has granted valuable insights on this matter. Nevertheless there is also the ideational side of the story, such as the values and identities that form the decision making process of the involved actors. This limitation of the above described (neo)realist approach is solved when you apply a constructivist perspective on the IMF reform.

Constructivists believe the world is constructed by means of interaction, and therefore can only be perceived in a subjective and dynamic way (Orbie, 2009, p. 129). This way not only the material dimension of the IMF reform’s political process will be reviewed in this paper, but also the values and ideas that co-determine states’ behavior.

This study attempts to apply discourse theory and identity theory to the IMF case. The reason is twofold. To begin with, the first part of this paper stressed the importance of discourse while putting together the European and Chinese view on multipolarity and multilateralism. Secondly, Nau (2002, cited in: Jorgensen, 2010, p. 174) claims that in order to show the whole picture identity-based explanations should be paired with power-based explanations.

Firstly, discourse theory will be applied on the IMF case. In international relations discourses are always present. Before specifying which discourse theory this paper will focus on, the meaning of the term discourse has to be made clear. Jorgensen (2010, p. 172) defines it like this: "Discourses simply concern the meaning of things and words. Put differently, discourse is made by means of ‘social representation’, that is, systems of values, ideas and practices.” The present study limits itself to structural discourse theory (SDT). According to SDT, “political actors are expected to stay within the constraining limits of what can be said (without political costs)” (Jorgensen, 2010, p. 173).

Secondly, identity theory can generate further explanations. Opposed to the rational choice and neorealist perspective that national interests are exogenously given, identity theory argues that the origin of interests lies with the politics of identity. Jepperson et al. (1996, cited in: Jorgensen, 2010, p. 174) formulate it as follows: “The question is how a certain identity causes a set of interests and subsequently, how these interests are translated into policy.”
According to Orbie (2009, p. 132), a state’s interests depend on its institutional environment and the shared values and ideas. The latter determines a so called ‘logic of appropriateness’: “Actors seek to fulfill the obligations encapsulated in a role, an identity, a membership in a political community or group, and the ethos, practices and expectations of its institutions. Embedded in a social collectivity, they do what they see as appropriate for themselves in a specific type of situation.” (March and Olsen, 1989; cited in: Orbie, 2009, p. 132). This logic should be understood as some sort of normative rationality; what can and can’t be done is based on the institutional environment.

The above described ‘logic of appropriateness’ also features in role theory. This is especially interesting in the IMF case because it means that actors feel obliged to act according to their role concept even though this doesn’t meet their particular interests.

5. Case study: the 2010 IMF reform

The first part of this paper has generated some hypotheses about the differences between the European and Chinese approach to multipolarity and multilateralism. In the second part these hypotheses will be tested by means of a single case study. More precisely, the next sections analyze which role the EU and China are playing in the ongoing IMF reform.

In order to understand the analysis of this paper the following has to be made clear. First, it is essential to emphasize that scientific literature on the most recent IMF reform is scarce. Therefore this research is based on the official statements on the IMF reform and newspaper articles. Moreover, this study uses IR theory and aspires to explain the European and Chinese discourse and their actual attitude towards the IMF reform on the basis of constructivism and (neo)realism respectively.

Lastly, on the matter at hand it is unclear what views the EU perspective holds since only states can be members of the IMF. Consequently, the IMF remains mostly a national theme. The European Commission is only represented by the Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs at the annual and spring meetings (European Commission, n. d.). Even though generalizations are often made about the European point of view a single EU perspective therefore is absent (Debaere, personal statement, 2012, 28 November). As a result this study will try to shed light on the perspectives of the different EU member states and the diversity that exists within the EU on the matter.

a. The 2010 IMF reform

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is a specialized UN agency with its own charter, governing structure and finances. The IMF has 187 member states that are represented through a quota system (Van Laethem, 2011, p. 55). Its main tasks are to “promote international monetary cooperation and exchange rate stability, facilitate the balanced growth of international trade, and provide resources to help members in balance of payments difficulties or to assist with poverty reduction” (IMF, n.d.).

The IMF has a somewhat ambiguous reputation. The organization has aroused much dismay by the emerging powers and developing countries for under representing the
Global South. They feel the IMF is dominated by the US and the EU to the detriment of today’s economic power distribution (Rood, Ros, van Ham & van Schaik, 2012, p. 2).

This became very obvious in the build up of the election of the new IMF chief in 2011. “Emerging markets challenged Europe’s grip on the leadership of the IMF as pressure mounted for Strauss-Kahn to quit. In a significant move China, which last year became the IMF’s third most powerful member country, called for “fairness, transparency and merit” in the selection of the next IMF boss.”(Indian Express, 2011). Eventually it was the French minister of finance, Christine Lagarde, who got the post. In other words, the newly elected IMF chief is a European politician again.

In spite of this the G20 put forward the IMF to deal with the economic crisis (Lipsky, 2010). Several scholars state the financial crisis has safeguarded the future of the IMF (Pisani-Ferry, 2008; Malkin & Momani, 2011, p. 8, Debaere, P., Dierckx, S., Lesage, D. & Vermeiren, M., 2013). Still they recognize the international sphere has changed and the Fund should adapt to this new situation. To quote Zoellick (cited in: Wade, 2011, pp. 348-349), the former president of the World Bank: “A multipolar world requires changes in the governance [of international institutions] to make them more multilateral, and less dominated by the Western states.” According to Laatikainen (2013, p. 22) the innovation of existing multilateral organization will ensure the survival of multilateralism despite the emergence of new powers.

In the mean time the IMF is experiencing great difficulty to adapt to the shifting global power relations and has to deal with a lack of legitimacy and effectiveness (Debaere, 2010, p. 31; Wade, 2011, p. 348; Rood et al., 2012, p. 2; Qianming, 2013). In this light, Holslag (2010) points out the growing normative disconnection between the EU and emerging powers, like China, within multilateral organizations. According to Holslag the involved actors fail to reach consensus on how to address major global challenges. Messner (2007, p. 17) goes even further and fears that “the transition from a quasi-unilateral, US-dominated power constellation to a multipolar one will lead to competition for power and will turn into a conflict in the global governance architecture”. Therefore, Rood et al. (2012, p. 2) and Woods (2010, pp. 59-60) state that national interests are becoming increasingly prominent in international governance. New compromises with emerging countries are thus urgently needed.

The IMF governance and quota reforms of 2010, dealing with the over-representation of the EU in the advantage of the emerging powers, were meant to be such a compromise. Former IMF Chief, Dominique Strauss-Kahn put it like this: “Taken together, it’s a big shift in quotas and accordingly in voting power. It’s a very important increase in the voice and representation of the emerging market and developing countries... it is a historical reform of the IMF.” (IMF, 2010b).

In this sense the 2010 reform corresponds partially with the ever-increasing global multipolarity (Malkin et al., 2011, p. 21). Currently the IMF is dominated by the US and the EU and shows a power distribution that doesn’t reflect today’s economic reality anymore. It is the objective of the emerging powers to become more engaged in reformed international institutions, like the IMF, because it is a way to obtain global power (Renard, 2009, p. 20).
According to the timeline, which was agreed upon in 2010, the quota increase and realignments were supposed to take effect by the IMF-World Bank annual Meetings in October 2012. The Executive Board reforms were to be applied before the following Board election, which was planned in late 2012 (IMF, 2010b). However, the IMF was unsuccessful to meet the deadline for agreeing on a new quota formula that would diminish EU voting power and increase the emerging economies’ representation (Euractiv, 2013). The EU’s resistance towards the change is said to have caused this failure. Consequently, the new deadline to settle on an improved formula is January 2014, when the Fifteenth General Review of Quotas takes place (Rehn, 2013).

Consequently, the BRICS stated the following in their fifth declaration: “We call for the reform of International Financial Institutions to make them more representative and to reflect the growing weight of BRICS and other developing countries. We remain concerned with the slow pace of the reform of the IMF. We see an urgent need to implement, as agreed, the 2010 International Monetary Fund (IMF) Governance and Quota Reform. We urge all members to take all necessary steps to achieve an agreement on the quota formula and complete the next general quota review by January 2014. The reform of the IMF should strengthen the voice and representation of the poorest members of the IMF, including Sub-Saharan Africa.” (BRICS, 2013).

This paper has the objective to study this still ongoing reform and to examine which roles the EU and China play in the process. Similar to the work of Debaere (2010) it focuses on the IMF’s governance and quota reform. It is important to stress that the IMF case represents dissimilar things for China and the EU. In this sense this study deems it relevant to look at these two sub cases in this single case study. Therefore a comparison between the European and Chinese perspective on multipolarity and multilateralism will be made on the basis of two different aspects of the IMF reform. For China the quota reform is the most important issue; the EU attaches more value to the reform of the Executive Board. Nevertheless it is the objective to compare the European and Chinese point of view in a systematic way.

i. Quota reform

In the IMF, the distribution of quotas has caused quite some debate. The actual distribution of quota shares, the financial contributions to the Fund, does not correspond with today’s economic reality (People’s Daily, 2010; Rood et al., 2012, p. 2). The distribution of quotas is of the utmost importance since it determines the Funds financial fire power and the maximum amount of money an individual country can loan when needed (Batista, 2012).

At the moment China’s quota share does not mirror its economic power. Consequently, it is voiced the country should have a greater say in the IMF (People’s Daily, 2007; Springford, 2009; Bpovia, 2009). Still China and the BRICS in general believe the IMF should remain a quota-based institution (Guriev, 2012; Lesage, personal statement, 2012, 12 December). Once the 2010 reform package gets implemented China will have the third highest quota share with 6, 39 %.

One of China’s big frustrations in this part of the IMF reform story is the fact that the US will still hold the highest quota share with 17, 398 %. In the IMF a decision is made when 85% of the voting shares are gathered, which means the US has and holds
veto power (Debaere, 2010, p. 32). The US is the one and only country with veto power at its disposal. In 2009 Lijian declared: "A meaningful reform should not only increase the voting power of developing nations, but also remove America's de facto veto power in the IMF." (People’s Daily, 2009). Germany (this was not a common European position) requested the US as well to give up its veto power, the US declined (Beattie, 2010).

In 2010 it was agreed that the IMF members should be allocated a number of quotas based on their current contribution to sustainable growth of the world economy once the reform gets implemented. This means that “dynamic emerging markets” will get more voting power. In general the reforms will lead to a shift of 6 percent of quota shares to emerging economies and developing countries (IMF, 2010b). Strauss-Kahn stated: “The bottom line is that 110 countries out of 187 will see their quota share increased or maintained. When you look at who those 110 are, you have 102 which are emerging or developing countries.” (IMF, 2010b).

Lagarde (2012), the new IMF chief, emphasizes the fact that Brazil, India, China and Russia will be among the top shareholders for the first time once the 2010 reform package gets completed. Although the theoretical package has been approved, in practice still 85 percent of the voting power is needed to make this happen (Haibing, 2011, p. 2).

All in all the 2010 quota reform is rather limited, or like Woods (2010, p. 59) puts is: “not enough”. Even so the BRICS seem pleased that the reform is about to take place. It’s probable that promises for a deeper reform in the future, with a new quota formula in 2013 and a quota review in 2014, keep the emerging powers hoping that more significant changes will occur (Batista, 2012; Lesage, personal statement, 2012, 12 December). Even so, the IMF quota review seems still far away (Destais, 2013). Even tough, the quota formula review is all about IMF credibility (Virmani, 2012).

ii. Executive Board reform

Once the quota reform is implemented, the IMF Executive Board will undergo some changes as well (IMF, 2013). Today the Board consists of 24 executive directors, roughly one third of whom are European (Gros et al., 2012, n. p.). Consequently the EU is overrepresented and has been pressured to turn in “two advanced” seats (Falk, 2006; Wade & Vestergaard, n. d.). On the 27th IMFC Meeting in April 2013 the EU stated: “Advanced European countries reaffirm their commitment to reduce their Executive Board representation by two chairs as part of the 2010 quota and governance reform agreement by the time of the first regular election of the Executive Board after implementation of the 2010 quota and governance reform.” (Noonan, 2013).

This would benefit the emerging powers and developing countries and make the Board “more legitimate and democratic”. Also, it has been agreed that the members of the Board will be all-elected and its composition will be reviewed every eight years (starting when the quota reform has been implemented) (IMF, 2010b).

China, being an important economic power, has its own Executive Director. This explains why the Executive Board reform is of no great importance to the country.
Currently, Germany, France and the UK have a seat of their own as well (Lesage, personal statement, 2012, 12 December; IMF, 2013).

b. Research results

The second section of this paper studied the EU’s and Chinese perspectives on the 2010 IMF reform. Now the hypotheses formulated earlier in this study will be tested.

**HYPOTHESIS 1: Whereas China believes in selective multilateral diplomacy, EU multilateralism is guided by a "grand vision".**

China’s involvement in the IMF reform is expected to be rather guided by pragmatism than “grand visions” (Mingjiang, 2011), more precisely it practices selective multilateral diplomacy. This can be explained as follows. The IMF reform is important to China because it will consolidate its domestic sustainable development in a secure external economic setting. Secondly, China wants to contribute to global economic governance for the sake of the world economy (Haibing, 2011, p. 2). In this light, China urges “to accelerate the establishment of a new international financial system that is fair, just, inclusive, and orderly, it is important to continue with the reform efforts at the IMF” (Gang, 2012).

Still Lesage (2012) states that the dominant powers shouldn’t fear a Chinese challenge too much because China doesn’t need the IMF to safeguard its future. This explains why China doesn’t even mention the 2010 governance reform in most of its official statements and stresses the quota reform instead. This became obvious in the speech of the Chinese governor of the People’s Bank of China at the 27th IMFC Meeting (Xiaochuan, 2013). Other emerging powers, like Brazil and India, feel the pressing need to represent the Global South and therefore use a more critical discourse towards the US and the EU.

For the present dominant powers, the IMF reform is a different story. Being the only country with veto power and desperately wanting it to remain this way, the US has tried to meet the emerging powers half way with regard to the IMF reform. The reason is simple: the US has a unique position in the Fund and realizes the only way to keep the IMF a prominent multilateral player is to reform the organization. Consequently the US has chosen to support the BRICS by pressuring Western-Europe to turn in some seats in the Executive Board (Lesage, personal statement, 2012, 12 December; IMF, 2013; Steil & Walker, 2013).

According to neorealism a country must be powerful enough to be considered a significant pole (Geeraerts, 2011, p. 59). In order to survive in this (neo)realist world, the EU made convincing efforts to protect its interests and opted for multilateralism and its old institutions to guarantee its global role; this now proves to be puzzling (Wissenbach, 2007, p. 3). To keep the IMF relevant it must be reformed, this would be in the interest of the US and the EU (Biscop & Renard, 2010, p. 4).

The EU was expected to make great efforts to contribute to the reform (Messner, 2007, p. 20). However, Barysch (2011, p. 2) points out that the EU’s unwillingness to give up a share of its seats in the IMF initially was a stumbling block to the reform. The EU’s role in the process of the IMF reform has been characterized more by
conflict then by cooperation. Defraigne summarizes it as follows: “The EU pleads for multilateralism, but so far it is in no hurry to play as a major actor in all multilateral forums.” (Defraigne, 2009, pp. 6-7).

Internal European conflicts made a united stand for the IMF case difficult for two reasons especially (Debaere, 2010, p. 36). Initially the right to deliver a permanent Executive Director to the Fund has been questioned, which would mean that Germany, France and the UK would no longer have this privilege. Additionally, the smaller European member states are opposed to the idea of being represented by the bigger member states (Debaere, 2010, p. 36). The question remains whether the European solution is stable enough.

The aim of the IMF reform was to increase the power of emerging powers and developing countries. During the ongoing process it has become clear that the EU won’t give up its powerful position in the IMF that easily. The EU could have turned in even more seats in the Board towards Africa but didn’t (Bretton Woods Project, 2010).

In reality the Union is being criticized externally as well internally. First, the EU is being condemned for making certain that EU (candidate) member states are benefiting the latest IMF reform (Bretton Woods Project, 2010; Biron, 2012; Lesage, personal statement, 2012, 12 December; IMF, 2013). This is how the Union turned in two “advanced seats”: The Belgian and Dutch constituencies are merging; Belgium and the Netherlands will be rotating from now on (which makes half of the imposed deal). Austria and Turkey, which used to be a part of the Belgian constituency, are having their own constituency and are joined by Hungary and the Czech Republic. Switzerland is rotating with Poland (which adds another fourth of the deal). The Scandinavian and Baltic constituency is allowing Baltic States to be more represented. And Spain’s rotating a little more with Colombia, which makes the deal complete.

Secondly, the IMF governance reform strained the intra-European relations (Lesage, personal statement, 2012, 12 December; IMF, 2013). As mentioned before, the US and the BRICS pressured the EU in the G20 context to agree to lose power in the institution. Eventually, the EU succumbed to the G20’s will (IMF, 2010a). The smaller European member states pay the price. The four biggest member states (Germany, France, the UK and Italy) chose not to voice the interests of the smaller member states in the G20, thus the so called G4 (Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland) are the biggest losers of the ongoing reform (Debaere, 2010, p. 34).

To solve this problem Malkin et al. (2011, p. 13) suggests the EU should only have one seat in the Board, given the fact that the IMF is a monetary organization and the EU share the euro currency. If this were to happen, the EU would have one of the largest and most powerful single chairs. Combining the EU’s IMF representation would mean that big member states like France and Germany have to give up their seat, while the UK can hold on to it because it is not a member of the Eurozone. In this context the European countries, which prefer to represent their own nation, are reluctant to consolidate their seats. The above seems to prove Philips right: “The current legal, political and institutional climate in Europe is not conducive to moving immediately towards a single European representation.” (Philips, 2006, p. 24).
Two things can be concluded. For starters the IMF case proved that the EU puts its own interests before the IMF’s interest (by making sure that mostly (candidate) member states benefit from the reform). In the meantime, in the context of the decision-making process of the G20 national interests still weigh more heavily than the overall EU interests.

It was assumed that the Chinese stand would be rather guided by pragmatism than grand visions and in practice this does seem the case. China’s position is indeed characterized by leadership of major powers and national sovereignty. In China’s view the IMF should remain intergovernmental and benefit the countries’ national interests. In the light of the “peaceful rise” discourse, China tried to be a constructive player in the reform process.

To sum up: in practice China holds on to its selective multilateral diplomacy and the EU fails its own "grand vision". In other words, the (neo)realist perspective on the IMF reform has prevailed.

**HYPOTHESIS 2: Both China and the EU Member States are not ready to deliver the concept of effective multilateralism.**

Constructivism suggests that the Chinese and the EU’s actions within the IMF reform were not only led by their particular interests, but also by a legitimizing narrative as well as the proclaimed identity.

According to European discourse, the EU believes strongly in effective multilateralism. This means the EU supports a system which is based on multilateral cooperation embedded in international rules and norms and supranational institutions. The concept effective multilateralism fits the European identity as a civilian power remarkably well (Orbie, 2009, p. 133). The term implies multilateral organizations, like the IMF, need to reflect the emerging new international order (Geeraerts, 2011, p. 66). But, when considering the particular interests the EU has at stake in the IMF reform, multilateral cooperation seems rather a necessity than a conscious choice. This explains why the EU was reluctant at first to go along with the 2010 IMF reform. But, the EU soon realized it would lose its legitimacy and credibility as a “multilateral actor” if it would not agree. Nevertheless the EU made sure the final deal still protects the EU interests.

China has to deal with a similar dilemma: although it could take a more prominent stand in the reform, the country decides against it because of its “peaceful rise” discourse. Nonetheless, Haibing (2011, p. 1) finds that China has been a significant actor in the reform of global economic governance, especially since it balances the powers and influences of developed and emerging and developing countries. In this respect the Chinese influence on the IMF reform can not be underestimated, or overestimated. On the one hand China’s interests mostly overlap with those of the developing countries; on the other hand it is an important member for the developed countries as well since they rely on China’s influence (Haibing, 2011, p. 2). In this light, China faces high expectations from international society: it has to ensure the interests of the developing world, while demonstrating it is a big power (Haibing, 2011, p. 2). This is also in line with its official discourse; China wants to be perceived as a responsible power and therefore needs to play a constructive role in the IMF
reform. However, it will always be important for China to be self-relying and able to protect its national interests. Therefore, it will never be a true fan of effective multilateralism.

Consequently, the EU’s and China’s actions can be explained by the fact that it becomes nearly impossible not to act according to their role concept, because it is exactly how other states expect them to act. Should China or the EU decide to go against its role it will lose its legitimacy and credibility (Orbie, 2009, pp. 134-135; Debaere et al., 2013). As a result, effective multilateralism should rather be seen as a necessity than a conscious choice. To summarize: the EU Member States and China are not truly ready to deliver the concept of effective multilateralism.

HYPOTHESIS 3: China and the EU both prefer a multipolar and multilateral world, but they mean different things by it.

Theoretically, the EU stands for a multiopolar world, “Multilateralism as a way of life” and the concept effective multilateralism. However, the IMF case proved that on the one hand the EU puts its own interests before the IMF’s interests, and on the other hand that all in all national interests still weigh more heavily than the global EU interests.

In the first part of this paper, it was assumed that the Chinese stand would be rather guided by pragmatism than grand visions and in practice this does seem the case. China’s position is indeed characterized by leadership of major powers and national sovereignty. In China’s view the IMF should remain intergovernmental and benefit the countries’ national interests. In the light of the “peaceful rise” discourse, China tried to be a constructive player in the reform process.

These observations suggest that the EU’s and Chinese position on the IMF reform are more alike than the conceptual part of this paper would have guessed.

c. The 2010 IMF reform anno 2013

Anno 2013 the 2010 quota and governance reform package still hasn’t been completed. To achieve this, the US needs to ratify the reform, lately they’re being pressured to do so. “The US took the initiative on these reforms in order to sustain US leadership in the IMF – US leadership will weaken if it does not pass these reforms.” (Inter Press Service, 2013).

Even though the IMF’s future remains uncertain, IMF Chief Lagarde (2012) is optimistic: “While multilateral institutions were important in the past, they are even more important for our future.”

China and the BRICS in general seem to agree with this. Last year the BRICS announced they’re planning to construct their own Development Bank “for mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, to supplement the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.” (BRICS, 2012). This was reaffirmed at the fifth BRICS Summit in Durban this year.
According to the official statements “The goal of the proposed bank is not meant as a sign of abandonment of any existing global financial institutions, but a response to current economic necessities” (The BRICS Post, 2013). However, experts say the BRICS bank should be considered as a significant signal to the world. “While emerging powers seek a larger role within the existing framework, they do not feel established powers are willing to provide them with the adequate power and responsibility – reforms at the World Bank and the IMF have been too slow, and not far-reaching enough.” (Stuenkel, 2013). As a result, it is very likely that the new BRICS Development Bank will cooperate and compete with the already existing IMF and World Bank at the same time.

6. Conclusion

Over the last decades, China has evolved from a poor developing country to an economic and political superpower. Consequently, China’s self-esteem has been revived and it is encouraged, by the West and other developing countries, to play a bigger role on the international stage. What impact does this trend have on the international system? In order to answer this question it is necessary to get to know China better. To quote the Chinese ambassador to the UK: “The world has waited for China to join it, now China has to have the patience for the world to understand China.” (cited in: Wei, 2008, p. 10).

Therefore, the starting point of this paper was to make a comparative study of the EU and China. By means of an extensive literature study it has examined which perspectives on multipolarity and multilateralism exist. A critical analysis of both the EU’s as the Chinese point of view has established several findings. In what comes next an overview is given of the similarities and differences between the EU’s and Chinese view on the two concepts.

Starting with the similarities between the European and Chinese views, it is obvious they share a lot of common objectives and interests in international politics. China and the EU are both regional powers with broad global interests (Geeraerts, 2011, p. 65). Therefore they both prefer a system of global governance to avoid conflicts and maintain international stability and peace.

However, some restraint is in order: although the two of them prefer a multipolar and multilateral world, they mean different things by it. First of all, the EU supports effective multilateralism, which is based on strong systems of regional and global governance and international rules and norms and supranational institutions. China, as a developing country, fears the prospect of western intervention and wants to keep the multilateral scene intergovernmental (Geeraerts, 2007, pp. 19-20). Second of all, the EU prefers a multipolar world over a unipolar one, since the latter means an international system based on balance of power instead of multilateral cooperation. China on the other hand strives for a multipolar world characterized by leadership of major powers and national sovereignty (Lucarelli, 2013, p. 19).

The second part of this paper examined how the above stated theoretical conclusions are translated into practice, more specifically in the 2010 reform of the IMF. This
study argues that a combination of (neo)realism and constructivism offers the most accurate explanation of the behavior of the EU and China in the IMF reform.

The IMF case has proved that on the one hand the EU puts its own interests before the IMF’s interests, and on the other hand that for member states national interests still weigh more heavily than the overall EU interests. This is completely in line with the (neo)realist approach to the IMF reform. Similarly, China is more guided by pragmatism than grand visions. The Chinese perspective on the IMF reform is characterized by leadership of major powers and national sovereignty. In China’s view the IMF should remain intergovernmental and benefit the member countries’ national interests.

In short: the IMF case shows that the European and Chinese perspectives on multipolarity and multilateralism are more alike than the conceptual part of this paper would have guessed.

With only a limited time frame and resources this research proved to be worthwhile; it offered a concise overview of the existing literature and the ongoing debates on the topic. In this sense it can be a solid starting point for further research. Forthcoming studies should focus more on the implications of the emerging multipolarity for multilateralism. It would also be interesting to check whether the same conclusions can be drawn in the reform of other international organizations, like the World Bank or the UN Security Council, and the research results of the presented single case study can be generalized.
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De afgelopen decennia, heeft China zich ontwikkeld van een arm ontwikkelingsland naar een economische en politieke grootmacht. Bijgevolg is China's zelfvertrouwen nieuw leven ingeblazen en wordt het door het Westen en andere ontwikkelingslanden aangemoedigd om een grotere rol te spelen op het internationale toneel. Welke impact heeft deze trend op het internationale systeem? Om deze vraag te beantwoorden is het nodig om China beter te leren kennen. De Chinese ambassadeur in het Verenigd Koninkrijk zei het zo: “The world has waited for China to join it, now China has to have the patience for the world to understand China.” (geciteerd in: Wei, 2008, p. 10).

Omwille van deze reden is het uitgangspunt van deze masterproef om een vergelijkende studie van de EU en China te maken. Door middel van een uitgebreide literatuurstudie is onderzocht welke perspectieven op multipolariteit en multilateralisme er bestaan. Een kritische analyse van zowel het EU als het Chinese standpunt heeft verschillende bevindingen blootgelegd. In wat volgt wordt een overzicht gegeven van de overeenkomsten en verschillen tussen de Europese en Chinese visie op de twee concepten.

Eerst en vooral komen de overeenkomsten tussen de Europese en Chinese visie aan bod, aangezien het duidelijk is dat beiden veel gemeenschappelijke doelstellingen en belangen in de internationale politiek hebben. China en de EU zijn allebei regionale machten met uitgestrekte mondiale belangen. Daarom hebben ze zowel een voorkeur voor een systeem van global governance om conflicten te vermijden en de internationale stabiliteit en vrede te onderhouden.

Toch is enige terughoudendheid aan de orde: hoewel ze allebei een voorkeur geven aan een multipolaire en multilaterale wereld, bedoelen ze hier verschillende dingen mee. Ten eerste is de EU een voorstander van effective multilateralism, dit is gebaseerd op sterke systemen van regionale en mondiaal bestuur en internationale regels en normen en supranationale instellingen. Als ontwikkelingsland vreest China westerse interventies en wil het de multilaterale scène intergouvernementeeel houden. Ten tweede, geeft de EU voorkeur aan een multipolaire wereld, aangezien een unipolaire wereld gelijk staat aan een internationaal systeem op basis van de balance of power theory in plaats van multilaterale samenwerking. China echter streft naar een multipolaire wereld gekenmerkt wordt door leiders van de grote mogendheden en de nationale soevereiniteit.

Het tweede deel van deze studie onderzocht hoe de bovengenoemde theoretische conclusies worden vertaald in de praktijk, meer bepaald in de hervorming van het IMF in 2010. Deze studie stelt dat een combinatie van het (neo)realisme en het constructivisme de meest nauwkeurige uitleg biedt over het gedrag van de EU en China in de hervorming van het IMF.

De IMF case heeft bewezen dat de EU aan de ene kant de eigen belangen voor de belangen van het IMF stelt, en anderzijds dat nationale belangen voor de lidstaten nog steeds wegen zwaarder dan de algemene EU-belangen. Dit is in lijn met de (neo)realistische visie op de hervorming van het IMF. Ook China laat zich meer leiden door pragmatisme dan “grand visions”. Het Chinese perspectief op de
hervorming van het IMF wordt gekenmerkt door de leiding van de grote mogendheden en de nationale soevereiniteit. Volgens China moet het IMF intergouvernementeel blijven en de nationale belangen van de lidstaten vooruitschuiven.


Met slechts een beperkt tijdsbestek en gelimiteerde middelen is dit onderzoek de moeite waard gebleken, het gaf een beknopt overzicht van de bestaande literatuur en de lopende discussies over het onderwerp. In dit opzicht kan het als een goede basis dienen voor verder onderzoek. Verdere studies moeten zich meer richten op de gevolgen van de opkomende multipolariteit voor multilateralisme. Het zou ook interessant zijn om na te gaan of dezelfde conclusies kunnen worden getrokken uit de hervorming van andere internationale organisaties, zoals de Wereldbank of de VN Veiligheidsraad, en of de onderzoeksergebnissen van de besproken single case study kunnen worden veralgemeend.