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Theorizing the variability of response to international diffusion:

China's reactions to the social dimension of globalization in EU-China relationship

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Abstract:

The relations between international diffusion and state behavior have been puzzling political scientists for decades. Whereas prevailing academic literature has examined the impact of international diffusion on state behavior, states' feedback to international diffusion remains under-researched. In order to address this, this paper introduces the concept of the variability of response (VOR), develops a typology and sets up a common analytical framework on it. These theoretical apparatus would help further capture and theorize complex interactions among actors in international diffusion. It suggests that states, especially those ones with adequate capabilities, have more autonomy to influence and reshape international diffusion back than conventional linear models would expect. This paper argues that it is domestic factors rather than external pressure that finally determine those states' choices. It applies the framework advanced here to investigate China's response to the social dimension of globalization in EU-China relations. The findings show the complexity of this relationship, avoiding any simple assertions on China's integration to international system dominated by developed countries. A tentative conclusion emerges: whereas China has much potential to develop alternative version of international norms, it prefers to actively participate and improve rather than fundamentally challenge the existing international system dominated by the West. Although mixed signal show it has its own traditions and preferences on these issues, China is seemly satisfied with being a "good student" in the audience lectured by the West.

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

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Introduction

International diffusion is a common and interesting phenomenon in international relations. Information, ideas, values, norms and policies as well as many other things transfer across borders every day. Knowing the significant consequences of international diffusion, states and non-state international actors always try to influence these processes: to promote or hinder them. It would be important to understand the varying responses of different actors to international diffusion : what they care and why? The relations between international diffusion and state behavior have been puzzling political scientists for decades. Prevailing academic literature in different research traditions such as international relations (IR), European Studies and policy transfer analysis in comparative politics has examined the impact of international diffusion on state behavior. Yet states' feedback to international diffusion remains under-researched. The better capture of the dynamics and complexity of international diffusion seemly requires more attention to varying responses of states.

This paper aims to problematize the variability of responses of states to international diffusion. It firstly discusses research traditions on international diffusion, in response to recent scholarly calls on more dialogues among them (Andrews, 2012; Benson & Jordan, 2011; D.P. Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Dussauge-Laguna, 2012; Jensen & Kristensen, 2013; McCann & Ward, 2012). Secondly, in order to build common conceptual and theoretical frameworks on international diffusion (Solingen, 2012), in particular to fully analyze target actors of international diffusion, this paper introduces the concept of the variability of response (VOR), develops a typology and sets up a common analytical framework on it. These theoretical apparatus would help further capture and theorize dynamic interactions among actors in international diffusion. It suggests that states, especially those ones with adequate capabilities, have much more autonomy to choose positions to influence and reshape international diffusion than conventional linear models would expect. It is domestic factors rather than external pressure that finally determine those states' choices.

The empirical study into which this study applies the concept and framework advanced here investigates China's response to international diffusion on the issue of the social dimension of globalization, which concerns the impact of globalization on the life and work of people, on their families, and the societies (Globalization, 2004; Gunter & van der Hoeven, 2004). In the past decade, this became an important issue of EU external policy(Orbie, 2009; Orbie et al., 2009). When engaging with China, the EU promotes key

initiatives including core labor standards (CLS), decent work agenda, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). China's response is mixed: it tends to maintain its traditional positions on labor rights but also seeks to learn EU expertise in employment and social affairs. The research on diffusions in social field remains little, except for some research in social and welfare policy transfer (D. P. Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). This article identifies principal factors and mechanisms shaping China's positions on this issue. In doing so, it would complement case studies of the existing literature in which the investigation of the Western world is abundant, while the study of normative behavior of other regions remains little (Acharya, 2004, 2011; J. T. Checkel, 1999). This 'empirical omission' inevitably constrains further understanding of deeper structural factors shaping the policy transfer (Benson & Jordan, 2011, p. 374). In addition, this research would also deepen our understanding of the complexity of the EU-China relationship through the investigations of interactions in social field.

I. International perspective on international diffusion

The existing literature on international diffusion are from two perspectives: structural/international system and agent/state. Scholars of structuralism in IR tend to stress the structural constraints on state behavior such as structural realists (Waltz, 1979). Likewise, structural idealists like Alexander Alexander Wendt (1999) underscored the roles of the inter-subjective structure in shaping agents' behavior and the stability of this structure (Widmaier & Park, 2012). As norms are viewed as standards of behavior which are more endogenous rather than exogenous factor defining states' identity and their interests (Barnett, 1995; Coplin, 1965; Dessler, 1989; Katzenstein, 1996; A. Wendt, 1995; Alexander Wendt, 1999), states are expected to follow the "logic of appropriateness" (Finnemore, 1993, 2009; Lutz & Sikkink, 2000; March & Olsen, 1998). These theories tend to anticipate the stability of international system, failing to explain the political changes in international diffusion.

Some scholars have tried to highlight the autonomy of some agents in international diffusion. While realists have noticed the role of great power or hegemons in socializing others through material power (De Nevers, 2007; Drezner, 2005; Gilpin, 1981; G. J. Ikenberry & Kupchan, 1990; Schweller, 1994; Thies, 2010), liberal institutionalists (Simmons, 2001) stressed institutions' role. Constructivists have noticed political change caused by international norms diffusion driven by "teachers of norms", who are some states, international

organizations (IOs) or transnational advocacy networks(TANs) (Finnemore, 1993; Keck & Sikkink, 1999; Park, 2006). In particular, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink made pioneering attempts by inducting patterns from empirical research on international norms evolution (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). They examined three aspects of norms evolution, namely, the origins of norms, the mechanisms of norms influence and the conditions of norms diffusion. They proposed a three-stage norm “life cycle” (NLC) pattern of norms evolution: norms emergence, norm cascade and internationalization. In the first stage, norm entrepreneurs initiate norms through persuasion with organizational platforms like international (non-) governmental organizations. In the second stage, after states and international organizations have been persuaded to adopt the norms which help to enhance their legitimacy, reputation and esteem, they will in turn take leading role to promote these norms through socialization and institutionalization as well as demonstration. That is, critical state as norm leaders promote transnational and international socialization in which other states face much peer pressure and tend to follow. Finally, the established norms will be “taken-for-granted” almost automatically by actors.

Similarly, scholars of European Studies have introduced a number of concepts to describe the identities and roles of the European Union (EU) (and its predecessor European Community)¹. For instance, in theorizing EU external normative efforts, scholars developed the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE) and the normative power approach (NPA) (I. Manners, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; 2013). Its central view is that the EU “exists as being different to pre-existing political forms” and “act[s] in a normative way” thus it can be viewed as a normative power in addition to civilian or military power (I. Manners, 2002, p. p 242). The NPE would act through “living by example” in principles, “being reasonable” in actions and “doing least harm” in consequence(I. Manners, 2008). Others have noticed the role of the EU in socializing states including accession and neighboring countries through Europeanization or external governance (Diez, Stetter, & Albert, 2006; S. Lavenex, 2004; Sandra Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009; Schimmelfennig, 2009a). These studies are impressive on the EU but the research around “one specific case” really needs generalization.

Through partly moving from structural level to agent level, these frameworks have problematized the behavior of some norms entrepreneurs and released the explanatory power

¹ For example, the civilian power (Duchene, 1972; Bull,1982), magnetic force (Rosecrance, 1998), gentle power (Padoa-Schioppa, 2001), quiet superpower (Moravcsik, 2003), post-modern state (Cooper, 2003), Kantian paradise (Venus) (Kagan, 2004), Pragmatic power Europe (Wood, 2011), Realist-normative power(Ruffa, 2011), Transnational Power Over (Bossuyt, 2011).

in changes driven by these actors. However, They did not exhaust the efforts towards problematize all of the agents. Firstly, they would risk of overestimating international pressure but underplaying the autonomy of the target actors. Secondly, they tend to assume international diffusion as a linear process from active norms entrepreneurs in the some developed countries down to others, or one-way global-to-national cause-effect logic (Zwingel, 2012). The empirical evidences show, however, that policy diffusion could also come “from below”, from developing countries (Towns, 2012). Thirdly, they failed to realize dynamic interactive processes among actors, leading to a static view of norm content (Krook & True, 2012; Sandholtz, 2008; Van Kersbergen & Verbeek, 2007; Zwingel, 2012). In reality, target actors in a mutual constructed world could in turn influence norms (Bell, 2012).

Fully capture of the complexity of international diffusion needs problematizing all of agents, especially the “others”. The second wave of IR norms scholarship have indicated importance of theorizing from agent/domestic perspective (Cortell & Davis, 2000). In fact, the policy transfer analysis literature has discussed not only the coercive diffusion of policy but also voluntary lesson-drawing of policy, ideas and practices (Benson & Jordan, 2011, p. 357; 2000; D.P. Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Evans, 2004; Rose, 1993a, 1993b, 2004; Westney & Westney, 1987; K. G. Weyland, 2005; Wolman, 1992). Therefore, it would be healthy to combine the two perspectives to fully conceptualize actors’ response to international diffusion.

II. The variability of response to international diffusion

Definition

The exist literature has discussed specific responses of states. Yet there is little general term stressing the autonomy of states facing international diffusion. In order to problematize this autonomy, this paper introduces a concept : *the variability of response*, which could have a working definition as *the quality and ability of actors to respond to international diffusion of norms and policies in order to shape preferred possible outcomes*.

The concept of variability of response (VOR) could have two dimensions: direction and willingness. Direction here refers to the implications of outcomes, which could be inward-looking or outward-looking, as inspired by Acharya (2011, p. 97). The inward-looking means the actor’s intentions of favoring the diffusion and achieving domestic objectives such as

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

The concept of the VOR has potential to help conceptualize and theorize international diffusion in several ways. Firstly, it would serve as an umbrella term under which a typology could be set up to categorize varying types of reactions in a systematic way. Although scholars of policy transfer/diffusion analysis have tried to arrange types of responses, such as D. P. Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) who established a continuum of policy transfer from lesson-drawing to coercive imposition and Richard Rose (2004, pp. pp.80-83) who developed more detailed subtypes of learning process, their categories are lack of types identified by IR scholars. Based on the two dimensions of the VOR, this paper deductively establish a typology of VOR in the below matrix (Table 1).

Table 1. Variability of response (VOR) to international diffusion of norms and policies

	Passive	Active
Inward-looking	1) Internalization , emulation	2) Translation, localization, lesson-drawing
Outward-looking	3) Resistance, non-transfer	4) Subsidiarity, rivalry (competition)

This matrix has four sets of types in four sections into which the identified responses could be grouped from the existing literature including the IR norms diffusion and policy transfer analysis literature. It is important to note that this is also an open typology which allows more types of the VOR to be identified and added in. The first set which is passive inward-looking in section 1), contains internalization and emulation, which refer to the process of imitating normative models, means habitual conformity to the diffused norms and ideas, which is “taken-for-granted” almost automatically by actors who seek international legitimacy (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The second set which is active inward-looking in section 2), includes translation, localization and lesson-drawing. Translation involves translations of norms among local, national and global levels through “different avenues of cross-cultural encounters and transmissions of meaning” (Zwingel, 2012, p. 124). That is, norms translation could be a process of “vernacularization” of international norms in which

actors transform external norms through contextualization and/or domestication (Levitt & Merry, 2009; M. Liu, Hu, & Liao, 2009; Rosen & Yoon, 2009; Zwingel, 2012, p. 124). Localization of international norms refers to the “active construction (through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors”, who actively borrow foreign ideas to strengthen their traditions and authority (Acharya, 2004). Through policy learning, as policy transfer analysis scholars indicate, actors draw lessons from abroad to solve their domestic problems (D. P. Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000; Rose, 2004, pp. pp.80-83). The third set, being passive outward-looking in section 3), contains resistance and non-transfer. Actors could hinder, resist or reject the international diffusion, by setting up firewalls to against dominoes, leading to non-diffusion (Solingen, 2012). The fourth set, which is active outward-looking in section 4), includes subsidiarity and rivalry (competition). Actors may also take more active steps to export their local norms to support or challenge internationally established norms through norms subsidiarity (Acharya, 2011). Rivalry occurs when states favor and export different norms or policies (Kavalski, 2007).

Secondly, the concept of the VOR and typology developed here would facilitate our anticipation on responses to international diffusion. In spite of a heuristic device, this typology would enable us to distinguish different types of VOR in a more systematical manner. It indicates that the internalization of the diffused is not the only option for states, and that states have much more options to respond to international diffusion than conventional approaches (such as the NPA and IR constructivism or realism) would expect. The introduction of the VOR and its typology helps to “activate” or awaken the roles of target actors in those conventional models. The second and fourth set of VOR types deserve more academic attention, as they remain relatively less researched.

Thirdly and more importantly, it enable us to better understanding of the complexity of international diffusion. Through highlighting the autonomy of actors, the VOR anticipates that previous target actors could in turn reshape international diffusion in which previous entrepreneurs would become target actors, while the conventional static and linear models failed to fully capture this. The models inspired by the VOR could allow dynamic mutual construction among actors in international diffusion.

Two caveats of this typology deserves attention. Firstly, distinctions between the types listed here are only theoretical for the purpose of analysis as it is not easy to clearly identify or measure them in practice. For instance, it is difficult to draw a clear line between

internalization and translation or lesson-drawing because they can probably be overlapping to with each other. In other words, they are connecting positions in the spectrum of inward-looking dimension of VOR. Secondly, it is possible for actors to pragmatically choose different but related positions at the same time. For instance, states perhaps internalize some the diffused norms or practices but at the same time resist others, or learning some facets of one policy but reject or modify others.

Towards a common analytical framework on analyzing VOR

The concept of VOR would also help to rethink and reorganize the current accounts on international diffusion and set up a shared analytical framework on responses of states to international diffusion. Scholars of policy transfer analysis have attempted group existing approaches to international diffusion. Kurt Weyland, for instance, put the four prevailing theoretical frameworks into two sets (K. G. Weyland, 2005). The first set refers to the external pressure framework, which stressed coercive “vertical imposition” from powerful external actors. The second set focuses on domestic mechanisms: the normative imitation framework underscore the quest for international legitimacy; rational learning and cognitive heuristics theories concerns the pursuit of interests. Others discussed classic IR phenomena such as coercive imposition and normative diffusion in terms of diffusion mechanisms which include coercion, competition, learning and emulation (Dobbin, Simmons, & Garrett, 2007; Gilardi, 2012). Scholars of European Studies also tried to theorize EU impact beyond Europe (Sandra Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009; Schimmelfennig, 2009b) but their work is far from complete and needs generalization. In short, the above efforts are inspiring but lack some important types of the VOR such as resistance, localization, subsidiarity.

Drawing on the existing literature, this paper sets up a common analytical framework for analyzing the VOR. This framework contains two perspectives towards the VOR: international systematic/ structural level and state/domestic/agent level. Approaches from international perspective, as discussed in previous section, tend to stress the actors’ internalization and emulation of the diffused norms or policies, also the first set of VOR. The first wave IR norms scholarship and the NPE tend to emphasize the external pressure such as international legitimacy on target actors and their internalization of norms. Approaches from state/agent perspective could explain nearly all of the types of VOR. They include the second

wave IR norms scholarship and policy transfer analysis literature on learning, which allows autonomy of target actors based on their domestic situations.

This framework highlights the important roles of domestic factors in offering explanations for a variety of responses. Although the external pressure truly plays important roles for some countries, especially small and weak countries, it may not for big countries in this anarchic world. Policy transfer analysis traditions in political science have tried to develop theoretical accounts for international transfer processes such as coercion, competition, learning and emulation (Dobbin et al., 2007; Gilardi, 2010, 2012; Linos, 2011; Meseguer, 2005; K. Weyland, 2009; 2005). Competition and learning deserve more attention. Competition here involves states' attempt to survive in international market through maintain or create advantages via policy in tax rates and social standards (e.g. social protection and labor rights). That is, competition stresses economic dimension, while rivalry has more meaning including norms rivalry.

Learning process can be rational, bounded and conditional. Rational learning theory assumes policy making based on perfect rational examinations of sufficient information on abroad policies. Yet, cognitive psychologists have indicated that lesson-drawing processes can be influenced by heuristics or bounded due to “cognitive shortcuts” like “availability” and “representativeness” (K. G. Weyland, 2005), or channeled by a number of factors including the salience of policy apparent success, the cognitive shortcuts, individual networks and international organizations (Dobbin et al., 2007). In addition, scholars have noticed the “conditional nature of leaning process” and found the important influence of ideological positions, prior beliefs and information about consequences of policy reform (Gilardi, 2010; Volden, Ting, & Carpenter, 2008). Others suggested that more constraints related to transfer process should be considered such as demand side, programmatic characteristics of policy, contextual factors of import, and application of policy (Benson & Jordan, 2011; Marsh & Sharman, 2009).

In fact, response to international diffusion would be influenced by a variety of factors from information access, cognitive-psychological conditions to policy preference like ideological inclinations and other domestic contextual elements. Scholars of the second wave IR norms scholarship have already noted two types of domestic factors in conditioning international norms diffusion: domestic political structure and domestic salience (Cortell & Davis, 2000; Gourevitch, 1978). Further, Cortell and Davis (2000) identified five key factors

influencing the domestic salience: one condition which is cultural match, and four mechanisms which include national political rhetoric, domestic interests, institutions as well as socializing forces. Recent research identified more domestic factors like social movements in civil society (Grugel & Peruzzotti, 2012; Htun & Weldon, 2012).

It is also possible that states take more ambitious steps with outward-looking intention. They would rely on subsidiarity of the norms and practices they cherish to defend their international positions when facing “great power *hypocrisy*” (Acharya, 2011, p. 100). Further, states may also try to participate in international competition or rivalry through stressing, safeguarding and exporting the norms or policies they cherish (Kavalski, 2007).

III. China’s variability of response : case studies

The past three decades witnessed the rise of China and the West’s efforts to integrate rising China to the existing international system (G. John Ikenberry, 2008), in spite of Transatlantic differences in strategies (Gill & Wacker, 2005; Shambaugh, 1996, 2002, 2005). There have been debates on China’s positions on this process and the extent of this integration. Whereas some stressed China’s reluctance to external pressure, for instance insisting on sovereignty and non-intervention (Johnston, 2008), others noticed the gradual changing understandings and positions of China on sovereignty and its relationship with the world (Carlson, 2005). Some recently asserted that China will not threaten the West as it is playing the economic games defined by Western countries (Steinfeld, 2010). Yet it remains an open question: what China cares and why? This section investigates China’s response to the social dimension of globalization in the EU-China relations. Next section will apply the concept of the VOR and the framework advanced above to illustrate China’s autonomy in responds to this diffusion.

Since 1990s, along with other international actors, the EU has decided to provide development cooperation for stable reform, sustainable development and good governance in China². One relevant area is the social dimension of globalization, which has been discussed in a series of global meetings, including the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen and the 2000 World Summit in New York identifying the UN Millennium Goals. In 2004, the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (WCS DG)’s Report called for global leadership to “build a fair and

² EU-China Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006, pp. 4-5.

inclusive process of globalization”³. In the past decade, the EU has been promoted the CLS, decent work, and CSR towards China through using soft and financial instruments on bilateral and multilateral occasions such as the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM). Of the current three pillars in the EU-China ties, the bilateral political dialogue is a basic channel in addition to the development cooperation programmes and trade policy⁴. In addition, the EU highlights the role of the ASEM which viewed by the EU as providing “a new dimension to the EU-China relationship”⁵. Since 2006 the ASEM Summits have been paying an increasing amount of attention to this issue. The ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers’ Conference (LEMC) has already gathered four times to discuss it in more detail⁶. Both of them made a clear reference to the ILO initiatives such as the CLS, the recommendations for decent work and CSR⁷.

China’s responses are mixed: it tends to take a cautious look at them and defends its traditional positions on labour rights but also seeks to learn EU expertise in urbanization, employment and social affairs such as social security and cohesion. Notably, while European representatives stressed the significance of these ILO initiatives, Chinese officials emphasised technical cooperation in order to create job opportunities⁸.

The CLS

The CLS refers to four fundamental labour rights coded in eight ILO Conventions: N°s 87 and 98 on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; N°s 29 and 105 on the elimination of forced or compulsory labour; N°s 138 and 182 on the effective abolition of child labour; and N°s 100 and 111 on the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation⁹. In EU-China bilateral Summits, both sides pledged to respect these international

³ See World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, *A Fair Globalization: Creating opportunities for all*, Geneva, International Labour Office, 2004; B. Gunter & R. Hoeven, “The Social Dimension of Globalization: A Review of the Literature”, *International Labour Review*, vol. 143, No. 1-2, 2004, pp. 7-43.

⁴ *EU-China Country Strategy Paper 2002-2006*, P 19.

⁵ COM(98)181 final.

⁶ In Germany (2006), Indonesia (2008), the Netherlands (2010) and Vietnam (2012).

⁷ See the in the Chairman's Statement of the 4th -8th ASEM Summits and the Chairman’s Conclusions of 1st -4th ASEM LEMC.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See International Labour Organization, International Labour Conference, *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, Geneva, June 1998; International Labour Office, *The International Labour Organization’s Fundamental Conventions*, Geneva, 2002.

recognized norms under the title of human rights including the CLS¹⁰. EU officials generally raise these issues in various contacts with the Chinese authorities. For instance, the issue of forced labour in China, such as the system of 're-education through labour' (RTL), also called "laodong jiaoyang" in China was raised by EU representatives at the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue¹¹. It once considered imposing import control of goods to force China to take positive actions. For example, in 2002 the Parliament clearly signalled that products from forced labour camps in China should be rejected by the EU¹². Interestingly, up to date the EU has not taken legal actions to support its rhetorical objections to those products, in spite of years of internal discussions on this topic¹³.

In past decades, China participated in international progresses for social justice (Table 3). It took steps in the abolition of child labour and the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation. China ratified the ILO Conventions on child labour (N°s 138 in 1999 and N°s 182 in 2002) and elimination of discrimination at work (N°s 100 in 1990 and N°s 111 in 2005). The discussion of reforming its RTL system has been going on¹⁴. In addition, by issuing its two human rights action plans and its first decent work country programme, China recently sought to improve its international image on human rights¹⁵. On the other hand, China's positions on the freedom of association remain unchanged. China has not ratified those conventions on the rights to association and collective bargaining as well as on the prohibition of forced labor. Interestingly, its DWCP shown commitment to facilitating collective bargaining and ratifying conventions on forced labour, in spite of not official ratifying those standards.

With regard to the implementation of ILO conventions in China, there are serious problems and challenges in terms of understandings and practices of members in intellectual, business, trade union and government circles (张, 2006, p. 109). That is, in spite of Chinese

¹⁰ *The Joint Statement of the 4th EU-China Summit*, Brussels, 5 September 2001; *The Joint Statement of the 9th EU-China Summit*, Helsinki, 9 September 2006, p 9.

¹¹ See EU and China Hold Human Rights Dialogue (01/06/2012), Delegation of the European Union to China, retrieved 10 September 2012, from http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/press_corner/all_news/news/2012/20120601_en.htm.

¹² European Parliament, EU strategy towards China, P5_TA (2002) 0719, Brussels, 2002, human rights. 37.

¹³ A. Willis(2010, September 23), EU considers ban on Chinese labour-camp goods, retrieved 10 December 2012, <http://euobserver.com/china/30878>.

¹⁴ J. FlorCruz (2012 , October 19), Reforming China's Controversial Labor Camps, *CNN*, retrieved 17 December 2012, from <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/10/18/world/asia/china-forced-labor-camps/index.html> .

¹⁵ China, The Information Office of the State Council, *National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2009-2010)*, Beijing, 2009; *National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2012-2015)*, Beijing, 2012 ; International Labour Office, *Contributing to realizing decent work: ILO Decent Work Country Programme in the People's Republic of China 2006 – 2010*, 2007.

government's efforts to improve the situation of workers' legal rights, some practitioners have not taken the implementation of these standards seriously. The All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is the only eligible trade union in China, which plays important roles in organizing and managing workers. To what extent it plays efficient roles in collective bargaining for labor forces remains a question (Confederation (ITUC), 2012). There are also practical problems in elimination of discrimination and child labor (Confederation (ITUC), 2010).

Decent work agenda

Decent work was initiated by the ILO in 1999 and the decent work agenda is a policy instrument to achieve the CLS¹⁶. The decent work agenda has four strategic objectives including the CLS and social protection and social security. To realize these objectives, the ILO offered assistance to China after the MOU in May 2001¹⁷. China has created a system of tripartite consultation in August 2001 and concluded its decent work country programme (DWCP) based on negotiations among tripartite partners and endorsed by the ILO in August 2007¹⁸. This DWCP is closely linked to China's the 11th Five Year Development Plan (2006-2011) and its ministerial level Programme (2006-2010). It identified four priority areas including employment, labour relations, social security and labour rights, and also stress the significance of cooperation with the ILO, the UN system and others.

In practice, China shows much interest in the EU's experience and technical assistance in decent work and other social issues. In China's only EU policy paper, China expressed its cooperative attitude to the protection of the rights and interests of migrant workers and the coordination in international labor affairs¹⁹. The joint statements of the EU-China Summits represent the bilateral consensus on constructive roles of the engagement on the issues such as employment and social affairs as well as decent work²⁰. Both sides also highlight the significance of the political dialogue in promoting "their compliance with international

¹⁶ International Labour Organization, *Fundamental Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*, Geneva, 2008.

¹⁷ The MOU was signed between the Ministry of Labour and Social Security on behalf of the Government of China, and the ILO in May 2001. The MOU defines the mutually agreed objectives and priorities for cooperation within each of the four strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda.

¹⁸ International Labour Office, *Contributing to realizing decent work: ILO decent work country programme in the People's Republic of China 2006-2010*.

¹⁹ See China, *China's EU Policy Paper*, 13 October 2003.

²⁰ See for example, joint statements of the 4th, 7th, 9th, 10th and 15th EU-China summit.

human rights standards and co-operation with UN bodies and mechanisms in this field”²¹. The concrete results of the EU-China political dialogue in this field include the Memorandums of Understandings (MoUS) signed in 2005 and 2009 respectively²². The two MoUs led to a series of seminars, round table talks and cooperation projects covering employment, labour and social protection issues²³. One comment indicated that the EU was trying to 'export' the European social model, or at least elements thereof, to China to help form China's own social security system²⁴.

During the 7th EU-China Summit in 2004, they signed the financing agreement for the EU-China Social Security Reform Cooperation Project (EUCSS)²⁵. This five-year project was launched in 2006²⁶, aiming to improve China's policy development and capacity building in social security through EU's expertise assistance. This cooperation covered four areas: pension benefiting both urban and rural residents, and health, unemployment and work injury insurance schemes. The EUCSS project was welcomed and attached importance by Chinese authorities at various levels²⁷. Yin Weimin, Minister of Human Resources and Social Security, recognized that the project " played a positive role in the cultivation of talent with a global vision, in the understanding and learning of EU experience and in the promotion of

²¹ See Joint statement of the 4th EU-China summit.

²² The first is the Memorandum of Understanding on Labour, Employment and Social Affairs, signed by Commissioner Vladimír Špidla signed with the Chinese Minister of Labour and Social Security, Tian Chengping on 5 September 2005, at the EU-China Summit in Beijing. The MoU, signed in 2009 by The Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission and the State Administration of Work Safety of the People's Republic of China, was to set up a policy dialogue and cooperation in the field of health and safety at work.

²³ For example, EU-China High Level Round Table on Social Security. A five-year EU-China Social Security Reform Cooperation Project(2006-2011), a joint EU-China euro 40 million technical assistance project.

²⁴ EU/CHINA: EU 'exports' European social model, *Europolitics* (Thursday 01 September 2005), retrieved June 22, 2013, from <http://www.europolitics.info/eu-china-eu-exports-european-social-model-artr175075-25.html>.

²⁵ The European Commission and the Chinese government jointly provided financing of 40 million euros (\$57.2 million). China and the EC respectively contribute € 20 million.

²⁶ The project was launched in April 2006 and ended with the closing ceremony and information dissemination workshop in July 5 2011.

²⁷ Gao Fengtao, Vice-director of the rule of Law, State Council, noted that the sound experiences of most developed countries in legislation of social insurance law could be viewed as reference for making China's social insurance law(author's translations; the original reads as :国际上社会保险立法已经有120多年的历史，大多数发达国家都有许多成功的经验，可以作为中国制定《社会保险法》的借鉴。). see 人民网(2007, September 22), 《社会保险法》:确立我国社保制度基本法律框架[Social Insurance Law: establishing our basic legal framework for social security institution], retrieved 10 December 2012, <http://finance.people.com.cn/GB/1037/6301144.html>.

China's security system construction"²⁸. Chinese media viewed it as "one of the flagship cooperation projects between the two sides"²⁹.

The project plays important roles in policy advice, capacity building as well as dialogue between Chinese and the EU officials and scholars. Firstly, the policy advices concerned China's legislation and practice on social policies including social insurance. The EUCSS organized a series of Social Insurance Legislation Consultation seminars to advice Chinese legislators, regulators and administrators on Social Insurance Law, the development of health insurance manual, analysis of training needs, best social insurance practice package, standard procedures of social insurance service³⁰. In 2010, China's top legislature adopted the Social Insurance Law "after reading it four times and receiving feedback on the draft from the general public"³¹. The EU's experience and practice were considered as "important inspirations and references" by Chinese high level officials in China's relevant legislation including health insurance, the building of unemployment alarm system as well as new rural pension system³². In addition, workshops were also held to support the Chinese Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security in its preparedness for the implementation of the new Social Insurance Law.

Secondly, the cooperation also focused on capacity building through transferring available international expertise to improve quality and performance of the founded projects at national and provincial levels³³. This included the development of social insurance administrative procedures, the strengthening of social care, the introduction of social insurance administration standards and procedures. 20,000 Chinese participants taking part in a series of social insurance capacity building activities, ranging from urban employees pension insurance to rural residents pension insurance, from health insurance to work injury insurance, from social insurance service standardization to social careering of the

²⁸ See Liu Yutong (2011), Five-year joint project approaching the finish with an air of success, *China Daily*, Updated: 2011-07-05 07:54, retrieved 10 September 2012, from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2011-07/05/content_12837028.htm.

²⁹ Tan Yingzi (2009), China, EU focus on social security schemes, *China Daily*, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2009-10/19/content_8812676.htm Updated: 2009-10-19 11:05.

³⁰ During the legislative process of Chinese Social Insurance Law, Chinese legislative body organized three times special consultations with Project experts.

³¹ A social insurance law was firstly proposed and planned by the National People's Congress(NPC) in 1994. See China's top legislature adopts social insurance law to safeguard social security funds, *English.news.cn* 2010-10-28 16:35:36, retrieved March 21, 2013, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-10/28/c_13580127.htm.

³² The evaluation of Wang Xiaochu, Vice Minister of Human Resource and Social Security (MOHRSS). For more details see <http://www.jnhrss.gov.cn/Contents/ArticleShow.asp?ArticleID=12913>.

³³ Provincial level includes Beijing and 5 provinces such as Jilin, Hunan, Shandong, Gansu, Sichuan.

pensioners³⁴. The Chinese side recognized that the implementation of the project trained many Chinese experts and professionals in social field³⁵.

This cooperation also played important roles in promoting broader dialogue among policy makers, administrators, experts, professionals, interns and students in social fields. From 2006 till 2011, as a part of the project, the annual EU-China High Level Round Table on Social Security have already been successfully held alternating between China and Europe and conference proceedings were published³⁶. At the same time, in order to promote wider discussion among Chinese and foreign scholars on social issues, China organized the China Social Security Forum since 2006 and made effort to link it to broader audience³⁷. In addition, many officials from both sides attach great significance to the project by visiting the Project Office, including the President of the European Parliament and high level officials of Member States³⁸. The dialogue on human resources and social security has become institutionalized on annual basis³⁹.

CSR

The CSR involves the initiatives encouraging companies' voluntary efforts to improve labour rights and benefits of their employees in the work. The EU committed to international initiatives on CSR by the UN and OECD and stressed them in its external relations, including EU-China contacts⁴⁰. In the 10th EU-China Summit (2007), both parties pledged to "support corporate social responsibility and sustainable development, including through sustainable production and consumption patterns and a more efficient use of natural

³⁴ See note 28.

³⁵ See note 32.

³⁶ The annual meetings have been held for six times, including those in Beijing(2006, 2008, 2010), Berlin(2007), Stockholm(2009) and Prague(2011). These meetings were addressed by high level officials from China and the EU as well as EU Member States.

³⁷ This forum was organized by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China and endorsed by 32 other national authorities. Up to date, this forum has organized four major symposiums and built up its own website (www.cnss.cn). The first symposium of this forum comprised the first EU-China High Level Round Table on Social Security. The 2006 meeting of the forum was addressed by Huang Ju, Vice-Premier of China, in 23 September 2006, Beijing. See 黄菊在首届中国社会保障论坛上的致辞[Addressing the first China social security forum by Vice-Premier Huang Ju], retrieved 22 October 2012, from <http://www.gov.cn/zhibo17/>.

³⁸ See 戴广义：中国社会保障论坛和城市论坛应该信息共享 实现强强联手 [Dai Guangyi: China social security forum and city forum should share information and cooperation], retrieved 22 October 2012, from http://www.cnss.cn/twzb/trs_2/200711/t20071122_166810.htm.

³⁹ See note 36.

⁴⁰ European Commission, 2011, a renewed EU strategy 2010-2014 for corporate social responsibility ;European Parliament, Report on EU and China : unbalanced trade? 20.4.2012, A7-0141/2012; European Parliament, Report on EU-China relations(2012/2137), 20/12/2012, A7-0434/2012.

resources.” EU-China Trade Project has been carried out since 2004 with EUR 20.6 million in joint-funding, to “transfer know-how from the EU on trade-related issues”⁴¹. China also has realized CSR initiatives as useful tools to promoting “harmonious labour-management relations”, which was identified as one of four priorities in its DWCP⁴². Chinese government mentioned issues of CSR firstly in the new Company Law(2005) and later in Labour Contract Law (2008) and other laws. It also stressed the capacity building of the China Enterprise Confederation (CEC) in this field and established some institutions like Global Compact Network China (GCNC) within the CEC in 2011.

Some observers found that in China public sectors are playing leading roles in promoting the CSR initiatives and identified a state-centric model of CSR in China, which is different from those models in the US (market-based model) and Europe (relational model)(Ho, 2013). Chinese government has issued guidelines for state-owned enterprises(SOEs) on CSR and developed Chinese version of reporting standards (Shin, 2012). Studies have indicated that the CSR in China is influenced by social and cultural background and remains at a “preliminary stage”(Yin & Zhang, 2012). While Chinese recognized some features of CSR like economic, legal and environmental responsibilities, they also identified unique dimensions of CSR such as good faith (business ethics), jobs creation, social stability and progress but didn’t stress other features “shareholder interests” and “equality” in western countries(Xu & Yang, 2010).

In the international dimension, Chinese version of CSR has impact outside its borders through the activities of Chinese companies including the SOEs. For example, Chinese state-owned enterprises with Chinese CSR initiatives have already had some environmental and social impacts in Africa (Tan-Mullins & Mohan, 2013). Some viewed China as a new shaper of international development, in particular on environmental issues and this has caused worries of traditional donors including the OECD countries (Urban, Mohan, & Cook, 2013).

IV. Discussion

China’s mixed response to the CLS, decent work and CSR covers nearly all of the types of VOR. As for the CLS, China basically took selective but passive positions between

⁴¹ See ChinaCSRMap, retrieved 10 August 2013, from http://www.chinacsrmap.org/Org_Show_EN.asp?ID=1141.

⁴² International Labour Office, *Contributing to Realizing Decent Work: ILO Decent Work Country Programme in the People’s Republic of China 2006 – 2010*, 2007, P8.

internalization and resistance. China signed and ratified four conventions which concerns child labour and discrimination, illustrating its favor of these standards. While freedom of association remains outside of priority, China has shown determinations to reform the system of forced labour and to promotion of collective bargaining. Regarding to the decent work, China showed more flexibility among acceptance, emulation, learning and localization on issues like social security, social inclusion as well as sustainable economic and social development. Through signing and implementing its DWCP, China officially accepted the principles of decent work. In particular, China proactively cooperated with the EU on social security to learn EU expertise. Meanwhile, basing its DWCP on its national development plans, it aimed to localize those principles and practice. Thirdly, on the CSR, China has developed its own version of CSR, and been developing alternative approach to human rights. In this sense, it has potential to pursuit subsidiarity or rivalry (competition) in this field.

How to explain these results? The structural/international approach would not be able to explain the varying response of China. Realistic accounts which would stress external coercive imposition in diffusion can anticipate the internalization of some CLSs but fail to explain other China's positions, in particular resistance of other CLSs. That is, external coercive imposition seemly doesn't work for today's China, in spite that some would expect it could be as effective as decades ago when China was weak. The NPA and the NLC model which emphasize normative diffusion and international legitimacy would be useful to accounting for China's internalization and emulation of international initiatives and to less extent lesson-drawing of EU expertise in social security and some features of CSR, but fail to explain China's response on other issues. International legitimacy matters to some extent but is not as important for China as these models would anticipate. The above case study helps fully show the limitations in explanatory power of international perspective.

The above results would be better understood from agent/state perspective. China's approach to the social dimension of globalization is based much more on its domestic situation than international legitimacy. In China, the political elites play dominant roles in many areas, so that China's behavior could be explain mainly by its political reference, which basically involves political structure and domestic silence of norms and policies, using the terms of second IR norms scholarship Cortell and Davis (2000). China's political reference are embedded in its "core interests", which was firstly stressed by President Hu Jintao and

explained in 2009 by Dai Bingguo, the ex-state councilor for external relations (Wang, 2011)⁴³. It was officially formulated in *China's Peaceful Development* in 2011:

China's core interests include national sovereignty and security, territory integrity, national unification, national political institutions set by the constitution of China as well as the stability of society and fundamental guarantee for sustainable economic and social development (The author's translation)⁴⁴.

In spite of recently formulated, this definition of China's core interests represents China's long term political preference in coping with external affairs including international diffusion. Regarding political structure, as its core interests defines, national political institutions refer to the regime lead by the Communist Party of China (CPC). This structure decides the domestic silence of norms and policies, including political rhetoric, material interests and socializing forces (Cortell & Davis, 2000) as well as ideological positions, prior beliefs and information about consequences of policy reform (Gilardi, 2010; Volden et al., 2008). In short, the core interests of China stress the importance of political and social stability on the one hand, and sustainable economic and social development on the other hand. In fact, these objectives have been emphasized in a variety of policy documents in past decades. They would help explain China's fundamental positions on the issue of the social dimension of globalization.

Firstly, regarding the CLS, China concerns both social stability and sustainable development. The basic difference between the ratified four conventions and the other four are the degree of sensitiveness. While the former concerns the first generation of human rights, or political and civil rights, which are viewed as high sensitive issues, the other four are on the second and third generation of human rights, social and economic rights as well as the rights of vulnerable groups such as child and women, which might be viewed as the conjuncture of the second and third generation of human rights⁴⁵, and which are low sensitive issues. That is, on high sensitive issues China tends to take resistance to external pressure,

⁴³ See 中央政府门户网站(2010,December 06),戴秉国,中国国务委员戴秉国:坚持走和平发展道路 [Dai Bingguo, the State councilor for external relations: persist to follow peaceful develop road], retrieved 20 July 2013 from http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2010-12/06/content_1760381.htm.

⁴⁴See 新华社(2011, September 06), 国务院新闻办发表《中国的和平发展》白皮书(全文) [China's peaceful development], retrieved 20 July 2013 from http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2011-09/06/content_1941204.htm.

⁴⁵ Up to date there are three generation of human rights in the world. The first generation are essentially liberties and freedoms, comprising civil and political rights which have been advocated by westerners for several centuries. The second generation rights are mainly economic, cultural and social rights, which were initiated by the Soviet Union and the Third World in the post-war period. The third generation of human rights mainly involve the rights of vulnerable groups such as child and women, which have been championed since the 1990s. See R. Gropas (2006), Human rights and foreign policy: the case of the European Union, Ant. N. Sakkoulas .

which is passive and outward-looking response, while on low sensitive issues it shows great flexibility through internalization and emulation of principles in anti-discrimination in workplace, women and children’ rights. This reflects China’s fundamental attitude to broader issues on human rights (Table 2). In the EU-China Summit Statements, China showed commitment to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)⁴⁶. China signed (in October 1997) and ratified (in March 2001) the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), placing reservations, however, on the application of Article 8.1 (a) which is on freedom of association and trade union membership⁴⁷.

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

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

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

Some have noticed that China has been trying to become a responsive speaker rather than a passive audience or receiver of human rights, through actively participating in rethinking and reframing the related notions(陈, 2012) as well as developing alternative approach to make the international communication and debates on human rights “less unbalanced” (Shi-xu, 2012). That is, China has potential to employ norms subsidiarity or rivalry to enhance its international status. In practice, China has taken some steps in that direction in the EU-China relationship. Recently, China downplayed the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue by reducing

⁴⁶ See the EU-China Summit (7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 12th) Statements.

⁴⁷ See Status of Treaties, Chapter IV, Treaty Collection(databases), United Nations, retrieved 10 December 2012, from http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?chapter=4&lang=en&mtdsg_no=IV-3&src=TREATY#EndDec.

its frequency⁴⁸. Little visible achievement in this subfield inevitably stimulates the EU officials' feeling of disappointment and frustration⁴⁹. Further, the Chinese began to address human rights records in Europe in a more emphatic manner than they did in 1990s when China was preoccupied with the defense of its positions when faced EU blames in the UN. That is, the rising China has been gaining increasing confidence and become more active to cope with EU pressure on traditional sensitive issues.

Secondly, China's emphasis on sustainable development is fully reflected in China's attitude to decent work agenda. It actively addresses a wide range of issues related employment, labor relations, social security through translation, localization and active lesson-drawing. In the past three decades, Chinese elites have always tried to learn experiences or models from developed countries to tackle their domestic challenges. With the economic reform from planned economy towards market economy, China's social policy has also been reformulated to tackle great challenges resulted from economic reform such as unemployment, under-employment and social security. Although Chinese scholars follow different approaches to divide and label phases of the social reform process in the past three decades, the beginning years of the 21st century are the turn point⁵⁰. Since 2003, the reform of social policy, including labour policy and social security policy, has been attached more importance than ever by Chinese governments(迎. 李, 2012). Meanwhile, Chinese scholars noticed and introduced developed countries' theories and practices on social policy into China, calling officials to learn from international expertise, particularly those models in Europe (周, 2002, 2003; 培. 李, 王, 梁, 周, & 张, 2004; 王, 雅伦, & 获加, 1998; 陈, 2012). Then Chinese officials at varying levels actively participated in lesson-drawing process which have also been promoted by the EU and other IOs to encourage China's reform. Then a lecturer-audience relationship has been actually established, as the above case show.

⁴⁸ The EU was disappointed by the fact that "China had not agreed to a second session of the dialogue in 2010 and 2011". See EU and China Hold Human Rights Dialogue (01/06/2012) , retrieved 12 December 2012, from http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/press_corner/all_news/news/2012/20120601_en.htm.

⁴⁹ This observation is based on the author's interviews with some EU officers who are familiar with the dialogue with China on human rights. Also see Human Rights Watch (May 25, 2012) "China: EU Rights Talks Sliding toward Irrelevance - Empty Rhetoric Betrays Lack of Strategy", retrieved 9 December 2012, from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/25/china-eu-rights-talks-sliding-toward-irrelevance>.

⁵⁰ See 吴忠民(2004)《从平均到公正：中国社会政策的演进》[From equality to justice: the evolution of China's social policy],《社会学研究》第1期; 景天魁(2008):《引致和谐的社会政策——中国社会政策的回顾与展望》[Social policy towards harmony: the reflections and prospects of China's social policy],《探索与争鸣》第10期; 景天魁(2010)《论中国社会政策成长的阶段》[On phases of China's social policy],《江淮论坛》第4期;王思斌(2004)社会政策时代与政府社会政策能力建设[Social policy age and building capacity of governmental ability on social policy].中国社会科学, 第6期.

However, these activities did not go without doubts. Some have noticed the gap between those theories and advices and China's reality and called for properly and critically application of foreign concepts in China, or localization (徐, 2004; 林, 2008). Other warned the negative side or challenges of European practices which China needed to identify (唐, 2008; 郑, 2011; 黄, 2012; 齐, 曾, & 李, 2011). Yet this remains a challenge for China : how learning from the developed world when clearly knowing its own situation. Therefore, these learning processes are complex swing between rational, bounded and conditional choices. One the one hand, policy makers expect to achieve ideal policy consequences through reform; on the other hand, lesson-drawing was influenced by cognitive-psychological, ideological and social-economic concerns. Finally, active lesson-drawing, translation and localization are overlapping and interwoven through with China struggles to seek ideas of sustainable development from Europe and other regions.

Thirdly, Chinese authorities recently have been actively promoting CSR initiatives as a result of emulation, internalization, lesson-drawing and competition. As case study shown, China's cooperation with the EU, ILO and the UN enable Chinese public and private sectors to attach importance to the CSR. For businesses, positive response to the CSR initiatives would involve a "legitimate concern" (X. Liu, Jia, & Li, 2011). Through the CSR reporting, Chinese government guide and encourage enterprises to adapt to national industry policy reforms and sustainable development strategy⁵¹. Chinese public and private sectors has been successfully lectured through various channels to internalize and emulate western-style CSR norms from Europe and other countries as a whole. Meanwhile, China's CSR is also embedded in its domestic context and driven partly by competition for international market. As Chinese businesses face dilemma of competitiveness due to low cost in labour and environment on one hand and good CSR reputation on the other hand, China realized the importance of shifting "from standard taker to standards-setter" (Gugler & Shi, 2009). As a result, China's CSR standards have been developed through both learning and innovation.

To sum up, the above discussion have covered China's basic positions on the social dimension of globalization and even broader issues overlapping political, economic and social fields. It shows the complexity of the China-EU relations and China-West relations in general in today's world where international diffusion causes more sophisticated relations than

⁵¹ See 人民网 (2013, May 26), 2013中国工业经济行业企业社会责任报告发布会在京举行[Press on 2013 CSR reporting of China Industrial Economy in Beijing], retrieved 12 June 2013, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/finance/2013-05/26/c_124765243.htm.

traditional approaches could frame. Regarding the debates on China's integrations, any simply judgment and assertion based on analysis of narrow area would not help capture the complexity of these relations.

The discussion above would also have implications for theoretical debates on international diffusion. Firstly, case studies indicate both strength and the limitation of the NPA and literature on Europeanization beyond Europe. The EU does play important roles in lecturing China in this field but is unable to force China to accept everything diffused. One limit of the NPA lies in its ignorance of relational nature of international identity :the NPE discourse faces the risk of implying others not as normative power (Diez, 2005; Merlingen, 2007; Scheipers & Sicurelli, 2007). Indeed, normative power needs recognition by others (Kavalski, 2013). The recent research has shown different perceptions of the EU (Chaban, Elgstrom, Kelly, & Yi, 2013; Chaban & Holland, 2010). In fact, non-compliance patterns of states with international law and norms are not unusual even within Europe (Börzel, Hofmann, & Panke, 2012). In addition, the NPE approach seemly also neglected constraints from structural distribution of power in the world (Hyde-Price, 2006; Smith, 2011). While the extent to which the EU can successfully export its norms to the outside depends partly others' responses, the current NPE literature has little investigation of the 'real impact of the EU'(Forsberg, 2011). The existing accounts for the normative impact of the EU tend to stress the internal constraints and inconsistency of the EU (Brummer, 2009; Pace, 2007; Wagnsson, 2010), leaving little theoretical room for external constraints, for instance, the responses of others. Similarly, the Europeanization literature would also ignore that international legitimacy is not a fix fact but a mutually constructed fluid "reality" by different actors who can also alter it. The research on external perceptions of the EU cannot replace the study on the variation of others' responses to the EU as they didn't examine how and why the non-Europeans respond to EU behavior. The case studies above indicate that the future refinement of the NPE and Europeanization literature needs to consider these issues.

Secondly, the NLC model also faces similar problems. As a classical model in explaining international norms diffusion and policy change⁵², it represented the first wave of constructivists efforts in theorizing international norms evolution (Sikkink, 2011). The main

⁵² The NLC model invited debates from in-and-outside constructivist camp. In order to strengthen epistemological rigorousness of norms theorizing, some suggested to introduce positivist approaches to constructivist verbal discourse. For example, Mathew Hoffmann (2005) and Mark Rouleau (2011) advanced the formalization of constructivism in ontological and epistemological directions, by exploring the micro-foundations of norm process and computational social sciences to simulate and formal framing constructivist assumptions.

mechanisms identified by constructivists are the pressure, in terms of morality, self-esteem and international legitimacy, generated by the norms entrepreneurs and international opinion on target states (Gheciu, 2005; Hawkins, 2004). Yet, the NLC model would also risk overrating the pressure of international legitimacy on target actors, because domestic pressure on political elites would probably differ from, and perhaps more important and urgent than, international pressure. Although all the external pressure truly play important roles for many countries, especially small and weak countries, but possibly not for big countries where domestic factors should not be neglected or underestimated in shaping their policies. The above case studies fully illustrated this.

Thirdly, research on international diffusion needs dialogue among international perspective and state/agent perspective, and it would be good time to further think the VOR from agent level. Although it is not easy to overcome the divisions in agent-structural debates, it is still possible and healthy to open dialogue between constructivism and rationalism in the IR research (Klotz, Lynch, Checkel, & Dunn, 2006). Rational choice would complement the constructivist discourse by contributing causal mechanisms and scope conditions from agent perspective, which would be helpful to develop “middle-range socialization approaches” (Jeffrey T Checkel, 2005; Zurn & Checkel, 2005, p. p 1048). In addition, there are also calls for broaden policy transfer analysis through interdisciplinary dialogue, for instance, to concern other topics such as the spread of ideas (Dussauge-Laguna, 2012) and policy assemblages, mobilities and mutation (McCann & Ward, 2012). Some authors have tried to combine constructivist and rationalist approaches in their empirical studies including the process of change within World Bank (Nielson, Tierney, & Weaver, 2006) and norms diffusion driven by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Warkotsch, 2007). All these efforts are informative and inspiring in advancing agent-based approach to complement structural accounts. More importantly, the diffusion literature would enable us to reframe and better conceptualize internationalization, globalization (Jahn, 2006) and the impact of international organizations (Gibaldi, 2012). The introduction of the VOR would facilitate the rethinking or reconceptualizing internationalization, globalization and mutual construction of norms and rules, which could be theoretically open processes containing varying possibilities rather than limited options predicted by conventional insights.

V. Conclusion

This paper addressed one under-researched topic: response of actors (states) to international diffusion of norms and policies. It is noted that without fully problematizing all actors, conventional approaches from international/systematic perspective tend to follow a linear top-down logic and fail to capture the complexity of international diffusion in which there are dynamic interactions among promoters and target actors. In order to better address this issue, this article introduced a new concept : variability of response (VOR) and developed a typology and analytical framework of it. These theoretical tools have potential to advance the research on international diffusion through problematizing and activating the target actors.

This study also employed the theoretical tools advanced above to analyze China's reactions to the initiatives on the CLS, decent work agenda and the CSR in EU-China relations. The VOR framework helps fully illustrated China's positions on broader issues and implications for China's relations with the EU and the West in general. It showed the complexity of these relations, avoiding any simple assertions on China's integration to international system dominated by developed countries. The findings would support a tentative conclusion on this : whereas China has much potential to develop alternative version of international norms, it prefers to actively participate and improve rather than fundamentally challenge the existing international system dominated by the West. That is, as a developing country, China is seemly satisfied with being a "good student" in the audience lectured by the West, in spite that it has its own traditions and preferences. There remains a distance before China can go to the center of world stage.

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