

# **Evaluating the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific: The Exercise of Soft Power and Normative Influence from 2008 to the present day.**

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## **Abbreviations:**

- Acronym for Australia, United Kingdom and United States (AUKUS)
- Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)
- ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+)
- ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
- East Asia Summit (EAS)
- European Union (EU)
- Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)
- Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs)
- Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)
- Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)
- The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- United Nations (UN)
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- United States (US)

# 1. Introduction

The South China Sea region has become extremely important in global maritime trade, as it accounts for a third of all trade activities and serves as a crucial transportation route for 60% of China's trade, with the strategic location of the Strait of Malacca playing a key role.<sup>1</sup> China's prioritization of dominance in this region is premised on the crucial role of the South China Sea in its trade network. As a result, the United States (US) views China's recent economic and military expansion in the area as a direct threat to its interests and its primacy in the region.<sup>2</sup> The divergent perspectives have led to growing tensions and numerous disputes, creating a military and political competition for influence. This increased geopolitical importance of the region has led to the concept of the 'Indo-Pacific,' linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans.<sup>3</sup> France, as a resident power in the region, also published its autonomous Indo-Pacific strategy in 2019, emphasizing the importance of its role in the area.<sup>4</sup> The European Union (EU) followed in 2021 with its own 'Strategy for Cooperation' in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>5</sup> Amid this complex geopolitical landscape, the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific becomes a pivotal focus of the investigation. While the US and China engage in military and political competition for influence, the EU's approach centers on leveraging soft power and normative influence.

This thesis will focus on the EU's role as a significant actor in the Indo-Pacific and explore how the EU is shaping the dynamics within this region. The EU's significance in the Indo-Pacific should not be underestimated, it is the largest trader of manufactured goods and services and ranks first in inbound and outbound investments.<sup>6</sup> Since 2001, the EU has substantially increased trade with China which greatly contributed to the increase of European exports of goods and services. Today, the EU represents China's largest trading partner and China represents the EU's second largest trading partner which shows how the relationship grew from 2001 onwards.<sup>7</sup> As the EU formulated its 'Strategy for Cooperation' in the Indo-Pacific, studying its soft power and normative influence in the region becomes essential. By exploring how the EU employs soft

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<sup>1</sup> Rupert Wingfield-Hayes, "South China Sea: What's at Stake?" *BBC News*, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36781975>

<sup>2</sup> John Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 4 (2010): 379.

<sup>3</sup> Wada Haruko, "The Indo-Pacific Concept: Geographical Adjustments and their Implications". S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies Singapore, RSIS Working Paper: 1, (2021). <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/WP326.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> "France's Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific," Ministère des Armées, 2019. Accessed 12 July 2022, [https://dkiapcss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/France-Defence\\_Strategy\\_in\\_the\\_Indo-Pacific\\_2019.pdf](https://dkiapcss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/France-Defence_Strategy_in_the_Indo-Pacific_2019.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, "The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, (2021): 1. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-union-indo-pacific-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-union-indo-pacific-strategy_en)

<sup>6</sup> Luthra Girish, "An Assessment of the European Union's Indo-Pacific Strategy," *Observer Research Foundations* issue no. 504, (2021): 6-7, [https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ORF\\_IssueBrief\\_EUs-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ORF_IssueBrief_EUs-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Girish, "An Assessment of the European Union's Indo-Pacific Strategy," 8.

power tools to gain normative influence, we can gain a deeper understanding of how the EU seeks to promote regional stability, foster cooperation, and advance its values in an increasingly contested geopolitical space.

Thus far, most academic debates on the Indo-Pacific have been focused on how the region is shaped by hard power, competition, and the inherent anarchy of the international system. According to Joseph Nye, power can be understood in various forms. One of these forms is 'hard power,' which involves the use of coercion, threats, and force to influence the behavior of other states and actors in the international arena.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the traditional realist perspective that sees power as solely derived from material capabilities, the constructivist approach acknowledges that power is also socially constructed through interactions, norms, and shared beliefs.<sup>9</sup> As a result, most of the key academic debates concerning the Indo-Pacific region have focused on discussions about the rise of China, the US-China rivalry, and the security dynamics among regional actors.

The focus on hard power and competition in the Indo-Pacific is closely linked to the US-China rivalry, which has emerged as a defining feature of the region's geopolitical landscape. Both the US and China have utilized various manifestations of hard power to assert their respective agendas in the Indo-Pacific. The US, as a historical and established power in the region, has traditionally maintained a strong military presence, alliances, and partnerships with key nations. Examples of US hard power in the Indo-Pacific include maintaining a significant military presence through bases and naval forces, conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) to challenge excessive maritime claims, engaging in joint military exercises with allies, providing arms sales and defense cooperation, forging security partnerships, and supporting regional allies through military assistance.<sup>10</sup> This presence has served not only to safeguard its interests but also to maintain a balance of power that aligns with its strategic objectives. In response to China's growing influence, the US has ramped up its military engagement, conducted joint exercises with regional partners, and increased arms sales to bolster the capabilities of allied nations. The rise of China as an economic and military power has been a central concern in the region, prompting discussions about the potential implications for regional stability and security. China's assertive behavior in the South China Sea, where it has pursued territorial claims and built military installations on disputed islands,<sup>11</sup> has heightened tensions and raised concerns among other regional actors, including the US. The US, as a longstanding regional power, perceives China's rapid ascent as a challenge to

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "PREFACE" in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), page X.

<sup>10</sup> "7th Fleet Cruiser Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in South China Sea." From U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs, official U.S. Navy website, accessed 22 July 2023. <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3233635/7th-fleet-cruiser-conducts-freedom-of-navigation-operation-in-south-china-sea/>

<sup>11</sup> "Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea," the Center for Preventive Action, Global Conflict Tracker, updated June 26, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>.

its own interests and influence.<sup>12</sup> At the heart of this competition lies the concept of hard power – the capability to wield military force and economic leverage as tools of persuasion and control. The intricate relationship between hard power and the US-China rivalry has created a complex geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific. The competition between these two giants transcends traditional notions of rivalry, encompassing economic, military, technological, and ideological dimensions.

The realist perspective underlines that in a global system lacking a central authoritative body, states must ensure their own security.<sup>13</sup> According to realist theories, states within the Indo-Pacific region form alliances based on their power interests with each nation in the region primarily concerned with maintaining its security and exerting influence.<sup>14</sup> The alliances formed, therefore, seem to serve more as a means to individual ends rather than a collective security endeavor. The ultimate effect is a complex network of relationships characterized by both cooperation and competition. These dynamics reflect the core principles of realism, emphasizing the primary role of self-interest, hard power, and survival in shaping international relations.

Yet, while realist perspectives allow us to better understand the rivalry between the US and China, there is a tendency to overshadow other political dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region. For example, John Mearsheimer, a leading voice in this debate, underlines that the changing balance of power between the US and China will lead to more security risks from strategic competition taking place between the two powers, underlining that the US-China rivalry could eventually lead to war.<sup>15</sup> This insight, while critically important, risks overshadowing how other political players act to de-escalate tensions. The EU and its long-lasting partner, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), composed of 11 countries directly located in the region, appear not to have any intention to take part in a regional conflict with China.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is important to move away from the realist vision to illuminate how other players, such as the EU, could have a major influence in the region through other means than military ones.

By contrast, this thesis adopts a constructivist approach to investigate the Indo-Pacific, challenging the dominance of realist arguments in the study of the region. Through a constructivist approach, it highlights the potential that the EU can have in terms of soft power and normative influence. It is crucial to recognize that the region's dynamics are not solely shaped by material capabilities and coercive actions. The constructivist

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<sup>12</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, (2010): 381-382. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poq017>

<sup>13</sup> Arturo Santa-Cruz, “From Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, in three different world(view)s,” *México y la Cuenca del Pacífico*. Vol. 11, 32, (2022): 29.

<sup>14</sup> Arturo Santa-Cruz, “From Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, in three different world(view)s,” 29.

<sup>15</sup> Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia,” 382.

<sup>16</sup> “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” Statements, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, last modified June 23, 2019. <https://asean.org/speechandstatement/asean-outlook-on-the-indo-pacific/>

perspective reminds us that power is also socially constructed through interactions, norms, and shared beliefs. This highlights the importance of understanding soft power and normative influence, which the EU has recently implicitly emphasized in its '*Strategy for Cooperation*' in the Indo-Pacific through the promotion of inclusivity, cooperation stability, prosperity, and sustainable development of the region, based on the promotion of democracy, rule of law, human rights and international law.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of societal and academic significance, my research will offer a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of power in the Indo-Pacific. By expanding the focus beyond hard power and competition, and incorporating soft power and normative influence, scholars can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Indo-Pacific's complex dynamics and the role of different actors, including the EU, in shaping the region's future trajectory. This constructivist approach to investigating the Indo-Pacific holds significant societal relevance as it challenges the prevailing dominance of realist arguments in the study of the region. By shifting the focus towards the potential of soft power and normative influence, this approach recognizes the broader dimensions of power beyond coercive and material aspects. Such an inclusive perspective acknowledges the role of societal interactions, norms, and shared beliefs in shaping regional dynamics.

Throughout my research, I will analyze the exercise of soft power and normative influence by two member states of the EU with a prominent influence in the Indo-Pacific region, and then investigate the EU on a regional level. As one of the EU's founding members and a nation with a robust military presence in the region, France aims to play a prominent role in the region. France considers itself to be a resident power in the region and even stated in its strategy that they are an “Indo-Pacific country” which seeks to deliver answers to the different difficulties that the region's governments face.<sup>18</sup> As Macron stated in 2018, France ‘*is a great power of the Indo-Pacific across all these territories, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia but also Mayotte and Reunion and the Southern and Antarctic Lands.*’<sup>19</sup> France has 1.6 million citizens living on their ‘overseas territories’ which spread from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean and the Arctic seas.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, France argues that their Indo-Pacific policy translates these goals into tangible actions.<sup>21</sup> This involves conducting joint naval exercises with regional partners, such as India and Australia, to enhance maritime

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<sup>17</sup> “EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” European External Action Service, Last modified April 19, 2021, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific-0\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific-0_en).

<sup>18</sup> “France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy”, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Paris, 2nd May 2018. Accessed February 16, 2022. [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en\\_a4\\_indopacifique\\_v2\\_rvb\\_cle432726.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_a4_indopacifique_v2_rvb_cle432726.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> “Discours du Président de la République, Emmanuel Macron, sur la Nouvelle-Calédonie à Nouméa,” Emmanuel Macron, last modified 3 May 2018. Accessed February 16, 2022. <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/05/05/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-emmanuel-macron-sur-la-nouvelle-caledonie-a-noumea>

<sup>20</sup> “Discours du Président de la République à la conférence des ambassadeurs,” Emmanuel Macron, last modified 27 August, 2019. <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/08/27/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs-1>

<sup>21</sup> “France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy,” Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Paris, last modified 2nd May 2018. [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en\\_a4\\_indopacifique\\_v2\\_rvb\\_cle432726.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_a4_indopacifique_v2_rvb_cle432726.pdf)



cooperation and security (such as the annual ‘*La Pérouse*’ joint naval drill).<sup>22</sup> Germany has also recently proposed an Indo-Pacific strategy aligned with the EU's strategy.<sup>23</sup> Germany is committed to the region in part due to their strong economic ties with China, which accounts for a large part of German exports and foreign investment income.<sup>24</sup> Germany’s engagement can also be related to its central role in the EU and the importance they place in shaping the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy. France and Germany are the first EU member states to have adopted their own individual strategies and visions which goes to show how crucial the region is for their foreign policies. Therefore, this study aims to assess France and Germany's involvement in the Indo-Pacific region as well as the EU's engagement on a supranational level.

## 2. Research Question

The central research question of this thesis is: **What role has the EU played in shaping the political dynamics within the Indo-Pacific region, particularly through its exercise of soft power and normative influence from 2008 to the present day?**

This question will be answered through the following three sub-questions:

1. **How has France exercised soft power and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific region?**
2. **How has Germany exercised soft power and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific region?**
3. **What role has the EU played in the Indo-Pacific region through its exercise of soft power and normative influence on a supranational level?**

To comprehensively analyze the EU's role in the region, it is essential to examine how the regional order has transformed from 2008 to 2023 and how foreign powers, more specifically the EU, have played a part in this. The time period that has been selected for analysis will be from 2008 to 2023, beginning with the 2008 financial crisis which had multiple implications for China’s relationship and commitment to Western institutions and values. The year 2008 is important as a starting point for studying the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific region because it marked a significant turning point in global and regional dynamics. The 2008 financial crisis had

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<sup>22</sup> “Multinational Naval Forces Conduct Exercise La Perouse.” From U.S. 7th Fleet Public Affairs, official U.S. Navy website, last modified on 06 April 2021. <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2562180/multinational-naval-forces-conduct-exercise-la-perouse/>

<sup>23</sup> “Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region,” The Federal Government, (2020): 1-12.

<https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Maartje Wijffelaars, Elwin de Groot and Michael Every. “Three scenarios for EU-China relations: But one direction of travel?”. *Rabobank/RaboResearch*, (2021): 1. <https://economics.rabobank.com/publications/2021/august/three-scenarios-for-eu-china-relations/>

multiple implications for China's relationship with Western institutions and values, leading to its increased assertiveness and defiance. This shift in China's behavior set the stage for the emergence of the US-China political rivalry, which has had far-reaching implications for the geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>25</sup> As the Indo-Pacific region became increasingly characterized by heightened political competition and tensions between the US and China, it created a complex and contested environment where the EU's role and potential impact tend to be overshadowed. By studying developments from 2008 onwards, researchers can gain insights into how the EU has positioned itself amidst the changing dynamics and how it navigates its soft power and normative influence strategies in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **3. Historiography**

This section will provide a selective engagement with prior literature, aiming to present an overview of the prevailing perspectives that have predominantly shaped the understanding and study of the Indo-Pacific region. It will also identify the limitations and gaps inherent within these perspectives, which will be explored further in this thesis. The literature review commences by examining the political dynamics inherent in the region, then it assesses the diverse theoretical approaches applicable to the region's analysis. Subsequently, the realist approach will be critically evaluated, highlighting its flaws and limitations. As a result, an alternative analytical framework based on a constructivist perspective will be adopted, perceived as more suitable for comprehending the potential influence of France, Germany, and the EU as a regional entity. Within these theoretical lenses, the significance of soft power and normative influence will be highlighted, serving as instruments utilized by the EU and its member states to advance their interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

#### **Political Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific Region**

The term "Indo-Pacific" has emerged as a significant and widely recognized regional concept in recent years, with various countries such as the United States, Australia, Japan, India, France, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and ASEAN adopting it to symbolize their engagement in the region.<sup>26</sup> This term encompasses a combination of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, and while its general interpretation suggests the inclusion of both oceans and the surrounding countries, each country has its own distinct geographical scope

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<sup>25</sup> David J. Bulman, "The Economic Security Dilemma in US-China Relations," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 22, no. 2 (2021): 50.

<sup>26</sup> Wada Haruko, "The 'Indo-Pacific' Concept: Geographical Adjustments and their Implications," *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies Singapore*, No. 326, (2020): 1.

in mind when using the term.<sup>27</sup> Comprehending the variations in geographical definitions is of paramount importance for two primary reasons. Firstly, the distinct delineations of the Indo-Pacific region adopted by different countries significantly influence their policy formulation and implementation. Overlooking or misinterpreting these variations may lead to incongruent expectations, impede the possibilities for cooperative endeavors, and potentially foster a sense of distrust among nations. Secondly, alterations in a nation's geographical demarcation of the Indo-Pacific can serve as indicative of shifts in its policy priorities and underlying intentions. Such modifications are unlikely to transpire without substantial rationale, hinting at broader strategic or operational adjustments.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, delving into the rationale behind these shifts provides valuable insights into the evolution of policies.

The evolution of the Indo-Pacific concept in diplomatic and security contexts has drawn scholarly attention, with studies exploring its meaning and diffusion. While research has provided insights into individual countries' perceptions of its geographical scope, less attention has been given to how these nations have shaped this scope and the motivations behind any changes. Analyzing official documents reveals that the Indo-Pacific concept didn't merely replace "Asia-Pacific."

In summary, the "Indo-Pacific" has become an enduring and influential regional concept, influencing foreign policy strategies across multiple countries. Recognizing the diverse geographical definitions of the Indo-Pacific is vital to avoiding misunderstandings, but crucial to fostering meaningful dialogues, and supporting effective collaborations. As this concept continues to shape regional dynamics, understanding its evolving geographical contours provides essential insights into the perspectives and priorities of the nations involved. Considering the different ways the term "Indo-Pacific" is used, this study will refer to it as the regions that include both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, along with the countries that are situated along the shores of these oceans.

The Indo-Pacific region has been shaped by a series of historical developments that carry profound implications for its political dynamics. The financial crisis of 2008 marked a significant turning point, highlighting the fragilities within the global economic order. This crisis, which emerged as a result of complex financial interactions, had far-reaching repercussions that extended beyond economics. The global recession not only underscored the vulnerabilities of interconnected economies but also altered the geopolitical landscape. The financial turmoil exposed the weaknesses of dominant players and recalibrated power dynamics, consequently setting the stage for shifts in international relations and strategies. Simultaneously, the Sino-American rivalry emerged as a defining feature in the Indo-Pacific region. This rivalry, which has its roots in historical grievances and competing interests, gained substantial momentum in the aftermath of the

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<sup>27</sup> Haruko, "The 'Indo-Pacific' Concept: Geographical Adjustments and their Implications," 1.

<sup>28</sup> Haruko, "The 'Indo-Pacific' Concept: Geographical Adjustments and their Implications," 1.

2008 crisis. Scholars such as David J. Bulman have meticulously explored the evolution of this rivalry and traced its origin to miscalculations and misperceptions between the two great powers; Bulman's analysis of the security dilemma framework demonstrates how the global recession impelled China to enhance its defensive power, thereby triggering a corresponding response from the US.<sup>29</sup> This mutual escalation in defense investments set the stage for a decade-long economic confrontation that ultimately paved the way for the current military competition in the Indo-Pacific. The emergence of the "Indo-Pacific" concept as a geopolitical construct further interweaves with these historical developments. This term, which has gained prominence among countries that adopted their strategy for the region, signifies a geographical expansion beyond the traditional "Asia-Pacific" framework. The transition to this terminology is closely linked to the response of these nations to China's growing politico-military assertiveness in the region.<sup>30</sup> The birth of the Indo-Pacific concept exemplifies the intricate interplay of economic, political, and military dynamics, highlighting the contested nature of the region.

Understanding these historical trajectories is pivotal for comprehending the complexities of the Indo-Pacific and the motivations behind the EU's engagement in the region. The financial crisis of 2008 altered power dynamics, prompting a reevaluation of national security and leading to strategic adjustments by major players. The subsequent Sino-American rivalry evolved from economic confrontations to military competition, significantly impacting the region's political landscape. These dynamics set the stage for the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a contested geopolitical construct.<sup>31</sup>

Given these historical underpinnings, the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific becomes even more significant. As the EU seeks to exercise soft power and exert normative influence, it must navigate a region shaped by economic vulnerabilities, geopolitical rivalries, and complex power dynamics. Understanding these historical contexts is vital for situating the EU's endeavors within a nuanced understanding of the Indo-Pacific's political dynamics. By recognizing how the financial crisis and the Sino-American rivalry have shaped the region, the EU can effectively tailor its strategies to contribute positively to the evolving landscape of the Indo-Pacific.

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<sup>29</sup> David Bulman. "The Economic Security Dilemma in US-China Relations." *Asian Perspective* 45, no. 1, (2021): 57. <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2021.0013>

<sup>30</sup> Kuo Mercy. "The Origin of 'Indo-Pacific' as a Geopolitical Construct". *The Diplomat*, (2018). Accessed February 16, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/the-origin-of-indo-pacific-as-geopolitical-construct/>

<sup>31</sup> David Bulman. "The Economic Security Dilemma in US-China Relations." *Asian Perspective* 45, no. 1, (2021): 57. <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2021.0013>

## The Indo-Pacific Beyond the Sino-American Rivalry & the Limits of a Realist Perspective

The study of the Indo-Pacific region has often been dominated by a lens fixated on the Sino-American rivalry, a perspective rooted in realist theories, with scholars like John Mearsheimer contributing significantly to this discourse. Mearsheimer's offensive realism underscores the likelihood of conflict among great powers in the region, drawing attention to the security dilemma and potential confrontations between the US and China.<sup>32</sup> The term "Indo-Pacific" itself emerged within the context of the Sino-American rivalry. However, constraining the analysis solely to this rivalry limits our understanding of the diverse and multifaceted interactions that define the region. While the realist perspective offers insights into power dynamics and potential conflicts, it tends to oversimplify the complex interactions and other vital political dynamics that shape the region. In contrast to Mearsheimer's viewpoint, this thesis aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the Indo-Pacific's dynamics. While Mearsheimer emphasizes the security dilemma and potential conflicts, I intend to counter this by emphasizing that shared norms, values and identities would be more important than modern military capabilities. Additionally, I challenge the notion of a binary security dilemma between the two powers, pointing out that regional entities such as the EU actively work to avoid conflict. Interdependence and cooperative frameworks take precedence in the region, overshadowing Mearsheimer's offensive realist projections. Furthermore, Mearsheimer's analogy between the US's past behavior to achieve a dominant position in the American continent and China's role in Southeast Asia oversimplifies the differences between these two contexts.<sup>33</sup> The significant economic development and growth in Southeast Asia create distinct dynamics that Mearsheimer's analysis overlooks. His overemphasis on military dimensions and hegemony neglects the profound impact of soft power and normative influence on shaping the geopolitical landscape.

Within the framework of offensive realism, the Indo-Pacific region emerges as a theatre shaped by intricate power dynamics and strategic rivalries, particularly evident in the actions of key players such as the United States, Japan, India, and Australia.<sup>34</sup> The strategy of these nations in formulating and implementing their respective Indo-Pacific strategies is fundamentally influenced by considerations of power distribution, strategic priorities, power comparisons, shared interests, and broader geopolitical factors.<sup>35</sup> This realist perspective highlights nations seeking self-interest and burden-sharing against China. But this "shirking responsibility" approach has limitations affecting its effectiveness. Offensive realism reveals power dynamics among nations,

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<sup>32</sup> Zhenshuo Hu, "The Indo-Pacific Strategy from the Perspective of Offensive Realism," *Journal of Research in Social Science and Humanities*, Volume 1, No. 1, (2022): 37.

<sup>33</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, (2010): 389. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poq017>

<sup>34</sup> Hu, "The Indo-Pacific Strategy from the Perspective of Offensive Realism," 40.

<sup>35</sup> Hu, "The Indo-Pacific Strategy from the Perspective of Offensive Realism," 40.

emphasizing rivalry and militarism. While insightful, it perpetuates a power-focused narrative, overshadowing other aspects. This narrows discourse to Sino-American rivalry, possibly overlooking the role of norms and values in shaping the region. Another example of a prominent scholar who analyzed the US-China rivalry and the possible resulting outcomes in the Indo-Pacific through a realist perspective is Graham Allison: In his book *'Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?'*<sup>36</sup> Allison draws historical analogies to support his argument. Allison cites examples such as Athens vs. Sparta in Ancient Greece, the Five Hundred Years War spanning the 15th to mid-20th century, and Britain vs. Germany in the early 20th century. He asserts that conflict is likely between a rising power (China) and an established power (the US), rooted in realist assumptions about power dynamics and the tendency for such rivalries to lead to conflict.<sup>37</sup> The central concept in Allison's analysis is the "Thucydides Trap," which posits that when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power, conflict becomes a significant risk. He applies this concept to argue that China and the US are headed for a collision course that could result in war.<sup>38</sup> It's worth noting that Allison's historical analogies can be challenged from alternative international relations theory perspectives. However, it's important to recognize that while realist perspectives provide insights into power dynamics and security concerns, they also tend to perpetuate a narrative of inevitable rivalry and conflict in the Indo-Pacific. This highlights the necessity of considering alternative viewpoints and approaches, such as constructivism, to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the complexities present in the region.

The call to move beyond this dominant perspective of the Sino-American rivalry is rooted in the understanding that the Indo-Pacific is not only defined by the interactions of these two great powers. Instead, it is a complex arena influenced by a myriad of actors, interests, and values. A shift toward a constructivist perspective becomes imperative to explore how norms, identities, and shared interests shape the region's dynamics. This research recognizes that regions are not just geographical entities but are socially constructed through agreements, norms, and shared understandings. The article by Arturo Santa-Cruz, *'From Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, in three different world(view)s,'* offers a framework to consider the Indo-Pacific beyond the confines of a single theoretical perspective.<sup>39</sup> It highlights how realism and constructivism diverge in their conceptualizations of the Indo-Pacific, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that recognizes the region's complexity.<sup>40</sup> While realism focuses on power dynamics, constructivism underscores the role of shared norms

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<sup>36</sup> Graham Allison, "Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?" Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston – New York, (2017): 1-263.

<sup>37</sup> Graham Allison, "PREFACE" in *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston – New York, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Graham Allison, "PREFACE" in *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston – New York, 2017).

<sup>39</sup> Arturo Santa-Cruz, "From Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, in three different world(view)s," *México y la Cuenca del Pacífico*. Vol. 11, 32, (2022): 29.

<sup>40</sup> Arturo Santa-Cruz, "From Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, in three different world(view)s," *México y la Cuenca del Pacífico*. Vol. 11, 32, (2022): 29.

and identities which tend to be overshadowed. Among notable constructivist scholars, Alexander Wendt stands out for his significant contributions to understanding the role of ideas in international relations. His work, particularly highlighted in his book *'Social Theory of International Politics,'*<sup>41</sup> explores the profound influence of state identities and shared beliefs on shaping international relations dynamics. Unlike realism, which emphasizes self-help and competition as inherent traits in the international system, Wendt argues that these concepts are constructed through state interactions and discourses.<sup>42</sup> Wendt's constructivist approach offers a distinct worldview that contrasts with the individualism and materialism associated with mainstream international relations theory. Central to his argument is the concept of "cultures of anarchy," which he defines as Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian roles that states adopt towards each other: enemies, rivals, or friends. These cultures of anarchy are shared ideas that play a pivotal role in shaping state interests, capabilities, and behaviors within the international system.<sup>43</sup> Wendt's ideas challenge the deterministic nature of realism by emphasizing the significant role of ideational factors in shaping international outcomes. This perspective resonates when applied to the Indo-Pacific region. It highlights that the security competition arising from the US-China rivalry is not solely an empirical reality, but also an idea or discourse perpetuated through realist studies. Wendt's constructivist lens illuminates how these ideas and discourses can influence policy decisions and potentially contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy of conflict if not critically examined.

By examining the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific through this constructivist lens, the research will explore how the EU, as a normative power, seeks to shape perceptions, foster shared norms, and influence behavior. The EU's emphasis on human rights, environmental sustainability, and multilateral cooperation aligns with the constructivist view that norms and values play a central role in shaping regional dynamics. This thesis stands as an intervention in the prevailing discourse, moving beyond the fixation on the Sino-American rivalry to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the Indo-Pacific's political dynamics. By employing a constructivist lens, this study aims to shed light on the EU's role in shaping the region through the exercise of soft power and normative influence.

## **Towards Soft Power in the Indo-Pacific Region**

By focusing on the existent material military power dynamics, there exists a notable gap in the analysis of a subtler yet equally influential form of power—soft power—and its normative dimensions, particularly in

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<sup>41</sup> Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge Studies in International Relations, No. 67, 1999): 1-429.

<sup>42</sup> Alexander Wendt, "PREFACE" in *Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge Studies in International Relations: 67, 1999).

<sup>43</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Social Theory of International Politics," Cambridge Studies in International Relations, (No. 67), (1999): 17-18.

relation to the EU's role in the region. Joseph Nye's seminal work, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*,<sup>44</sup> introduces the concept of soft power, emphasizing the ability to achieve desired outcomes through attraction, rather than coercion or inducement. Although Nye's discourse primarily centers around nation-states, the concept's applicability extends to regional actors like the EU in the Indo-Pacific context. While prior research has examined power dynamics in the region through the lenses of military and economic relationships, this approach often fails to adequately capture the influence wielded through culture, norms, and ideas. In addition, Joseph Nye's seminal work, *The Future of Power*,<sup>45</sup> serves as a foundational framework for comprehending power dynamics in the contemporary global context. While Nye's primary focus is on broader global dynamics, his framework provides a lens through which to analyze the EU's potential role in the Indo-Pacific.

Nye's framework invites a comprehensive approach, allowing us to explore how the EU, despite its relative lack of military might, can exert substantial influence by leveraging its regulatory power and cultural appeal. Moreover, Nye's emphasis on soft power aligns with the EU's approach to engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Rather than engaging solely through coercive tactics, the EU's cultural diplomacy, promotion of democratic values, and commitment to human rights align with the principles of soft power.<sup>46</sup> This perspective diverges from the more transactional strategies pursued by the US and China, underlining the EU's distinctive approach to shaping the region's norms and ideals. While Nye may not have explicitly delved into regional entities like the EU, his framework encourages exploration of how the EU navigates this distributed power structure to exert influence within the Indo-Pacific. In addition, Anu Bradford's book *The Brussels Effect* is also very relevant for this study. By shedding light on the 'Brussels effect'—where the EU's stringent regulations resonate globally—Bradford's book can unravel the nuanced ways these norms shape regional political dynamics.<sup>47</sup> Importantly, as Nye acknowledges, soft power is not inherently constructivist, yet my thesis proposes interpreting soft power from a constructivist lens. This intervention bridges a gap in the literature by examining not only the empirical reality of the EU's exercise of soft power but also the normative influence it generates. By taking a constructivist perspective, my research scrutinizes how the EU's cultural appeal and normative commitments shape the region's perceptions, narratives, and ideas.

In sum, Nye's framework provides the groundwork for a more comprehensive assessment of power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific. My research leverages this framework to emphasize the significance of soft power and

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<sup>44</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 1-191.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 1-235.

<sup>46</sup> European Commission, "The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, (2021): 1. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific-0\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific-0_en)

<sup>47</sup> Anu Bradford, *The Brussels Effect*, (Oxford University Press, 2020): 25.

DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190088583.001.0001



normative influence in the EU's role. By intervening in the existing discourse, my research seeks to offer a more nuanced understanding of how the EU shapes the region's political dynamics, moving beyond the narrow focus on military and economic competition.

#### **4. Theoretical Approach**

This research establishes its foundational framework by adopting a constructivist perspective that converges on two primary focal points. The initial facet centers on the utilization of Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, subject to analysis from a constructivist standpoint, to unveil the underlying effect of normative influence. This orientation, in turn, guides the trajectory of the inquiry into how these conceptual components fundamentally shape the essence of the thesis. This theoretical underpinning is regarded as an all-encompassing structure aimed at exploring the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific region, with a specific emphasis directed toward its employment of soft power and normative influence. A constructivist perspective applied to the realm of soft power offers the opportunity to meticulously examine how the EU, functioning as a normative powerhouse, extends its values and principles into the Indo-Pacific sphere. The EU's steadfast emphasis on matters such as human rights, environmental conservation, and sustainable advancement exhibits the significant capacity to shape policy choices and behavioral patterns across the Indo-Pacific, accentuating that influence extends beyond mere military might.

Constructivism, an established theoretical approach within the realm of international relations, posits that regions are intricate social constructs molded by the presence of shared norms, identities, and mutual interests. Within the context of considering the Indo-Pacific as a coherent region, a critical criterion lies in the discernible existence of shared identities and interests among the participating states.<sup>48</sup> Constructivism sheds light on the pivotal role of shared norms, values, and identities in the articulation of the Indo-Pacific, thereby underscoring the influential role that culture and ideas play in the formulation of regional dynamics. In contrast, realism places a more pronounced emphasis on power dynamics and state-level conflicts, portraying the region through the prism of strategic rivalry and national self-interest. Realism stands apart from constructivism, as it predominantly interprets the region through the lens of power struggles and the pursuit of national interest,

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<sup>48</sup> Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, Steve Smith, "Constructivism" in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, (Oxford University Press, Fifth Edition, 2021): 164-165.

assigning diminished importance to shared norms, identities, or potential collaborations via international institutions.<sup>49</sup>

Embedded within the constructivist framework is the notion that the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific is underpinned not merely by power dynamics or self-centered motives, but by the aspiration to propagate norms and values such as democracy, human rights, connectivity, education, and multilateralism.<sup>50</sup> The EU's constructivist paradigm aims to mold regional dynamics by nurturing cooperation grounded in these shared norms and values, transcending reliance solely on military alliances or strategic rivalries. The EU's endeavor encompasses the deepening of economic bonds with Indo-Pacific nations through trade pacts and investment collaborations, with the aim of fostering societal welfare and nurturing global peace. Furthermore, the EU allocates significance to the augmentation of regional institutions like ASEAN, poised to facilitate multilateral collaboration and tackle mutual challenges within the region.

## **5. Methodology & Sources**

To find evidence of soft power and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific region, the research will employ a qualitative research design, focusing on case studies of three key subjects: France, Germany, and the EU on a regional level. This approach will involve an in-depth analysis of their initiatives, strategies, actions, and policies in the region, which can be perceived as tools of soft power and normative influence. Therefore, defining and differentiating between soft power and normative influence is essential, as they are related concepts but have distinct aspects that contribute to France, Germany, and the EU's approach in the Indo-Pacific. Here's how I will define and differentiate these concepts to structure my analysis:

- Soft power refers to a state or entity's ability to influence others' behavior and shape their preferences through attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion or force. It's the capacity to achieve objectives by cultivating positive perceptions, values, and cultural appeal. Soft power relies on intangible assets such as culture, ideology, political values, and foreign policies that generate goodwill and enhance a state's reputation.<sup>51</sup> In the context of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, soft power could manifest through

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<sup>49</sup> Arturo Santa-Cruz, "From Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, in three different world(view)s," *México y la Cuenca del Pacífico*. Vol. 11, 32, (2022): 37.

<sup>50</sup> Arturo Santa-Cruz, "From Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific, in three different world(view)s," *México y la Cuenca del Pacífico*. Vol. 11, 32, (2022): 38.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "PREFACE" in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), page X.

cultural diplomacy, education exchanges, climate change collaborations, economic partnerships, and the promotion of democratic values.

- Normative influence is a subset of soft power that emphasizes the power of norms, values, and shared principles to shape behavior and decision-making. Norms are widely accepted standards of behavior that guide state actions and interactions within the international system. Normative influence involves promoting these norms and principles to establish certain behavioral expectations and to encourage other actors to align their actions with these shared standards.<sup>52</sup> In the context of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, normative influence could involve advocating for human rights, environmental sustainability, democratic governance, and adherence to international law.

By defining these concepts and differentiating their aspects, I will be able to comprehensively explore how France, Germany, and the EU leverage both soft power and normative influence to advance their respective interests in the Indo-Pacific region. To do so, this research will conduct an analysis of official documents, policy papers, and strategic statements released by France, Germany, and the EU pertaining to their Indo-Pacific engagement. By closely examining their initiatives and strategies, the study will identify elements that reflect the use of soft power tools, and normative principles and values emphasized in these documents. However, it's important to acknowledge the inherent limitations of relying solely on official documents for analysis. While these documents offer a structured and curated perspective of the strategies, they may also present a selective view that aligns with the entities' desired image. Official documents might omit certain details, nuances, or behind-the-scenes considerations that could influence their strategic choices. Furthermore, the information presented in these documents may sometimes be influenced by political considerations, aiming to project a specific narrative to international audiences. The potential absence of candid assessments of challenges, constraints, or failures in these documents might lead to an incomplete understanding of the actual dynamics at play. In addition, relying solely on publicly available official documents might not provide a comprehensive view of the entirety of their Indo-Pacific strategies. Certain initiatives, negotiations, or covert actions may not be fully disclosed in these documents, leading to gaps in the analysis.

To assess the impact of cultural and educational exchanges as soft power instruments, the study will also analyze programs and initiatives promoting cultural awareness, educational partnerships, and people-to-people exchanges between France, Germany, the EU, and Indo-Pacific countries. This will help evaluate the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy in shaping perceptions and fostering mutual understanding. It is still crucial

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<sup>52</sup> Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *JCMS Volume 40, Number 2*, (2002): 239.

to acknowledge the dual nature of the sources related to cultural exchange initiatives. On one hand, these sources provide valuable insights into the intent, scope, and outcomes of these initiatives, offering a tangible glimpse into the efforts made by the entities to engage in cultural diplomacy. These sources can offer firsthand accounts, testimonials, and quantifiable metrics that suggest the impact of these exchanges on individuals and communities. However, it's important to recognize the limitations inherent in these sources. Cultural and educational exchange programs often prioritize positive narratives and success stories to highlight their efficacy in promoting mutual understanding and cooperation. Consequently, these sources might downplay challenges, misunderstandings, or instances where the desired impact wasn't fully realized. Moreover, assessing the long-term and multifaceted impact of cultural exchanges solely based on program-related documents might not capture the complete narrative. Long-term shifts in perceptions and attitudes are complex processes influenced by a variety of factors beyond the scope of program documentation, such as media portrayals, geopolitical developments, and broader socio-cultural trends.

The research will also explore the provision of humanitarian aid and development assistance by France, Germany, and the EU in the Indo-Pacific region. This includes disaster relief efforts, infrastructure development projects, and capacity-building programs. The analysis will assess how these actions contribute to building positive relationships and projecting normative values related to global responsibility and cooperation. Like the aforementioned sources, it's important to note the dual nature of aid sources. These documents reveal intentions, scope, and outcomes, showing commitment to progress. They provide data, success stories, and testimonials hinting at impact. However, these sources have limitations. Development aid often highlights positives, possibly overlooking challenges or incomplete goals. Evaluating long-term effects from documents alone might miss the full narrative. Sustainable development's impact involves factors beyond documentation, such as local governance, economics, and geopolitics.

Finally, by analyzing speeches, statements, and diplomatic communications from officials and representatives of France, Germany, and the EU, the study will identify instances where normative principles and values, such as democracy, human rights, and multilateralism, are emphasized. This will reveal how normative messaging is integrated into their foreign policy narratives and how it resonates with Indo-Pacific audiences. Yet, as mentioned previously, there are limitations when relying solely on official communications. Diplomatic rhetoric can align with strategic goals, possibly concealing nuanced perspectives or contradictions. Public statements may favor positive images, downplaying internal disputes. Diplomatic messages may be tailored to various audiences, leading to varying levels of effectiveness based on cultural contexts. Additionally, such messages might not cover all policy facets, internal shifts, or immediate adjustments. While these sources offer

valuable normative perspectives, a comprehensive assessment should acknowledge potential discrepancies, subtleties, and wider contextual influences.

By combining these theoretical frameworks with the qualitative research design and case studies, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how France, Germany, and the EU influence the Indo-Pacific region. It seeks to contribute to the understanding of how these countries and regional entities navigate the complex dynamics of the Indo-Pacific beyond traditional hard power approaches. By first analyzing the soft power and normative influence strategies of individual EU member states, the study gains insight into their unique approaches, strengths, and challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. This individual-level analysis facilitates a nuanced understanding of how national initiatives contribute to the EU's broader influence. Transitioning to the EU as a supranational entity allows for an aggregate-level analysis, offering a comprehensive view of the EU's collective soft power and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific. This approach enables the study to identify commonalities in strategies, areas of collaboration, and the EU's capacity to project shared values at a supranational level.

## **6. Structure**

The main body of the thesis will follow a structured approach, with individual sections dedicated to analyzing France, Germany, and the EU in the Indo-Pacific region. The order of presentation will be chronological, as France's presented their Indo-Pacific strategy in 2019, followed by Germany's strategy in 2020, and concluding with the EU strategy in 2021. Each section will consist of three distinct chapters, culminating in a conclusion. In Chapter 1, I examine the soft power and normative influence-related initiatives of each subject of analysis under the subsection titled 'Initiatives.' Through an extensive investigation of the initiatives mentioned in their respective Indo-Pacific strategies, as well as additional sources such as speeches, policies, and whitepapers, I aim to comprehensively assess the soft power and normative tools employed by France, Germany, and the EU. This analysis will shed light on the strategic approaches adopted by each actor to project influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Moving on to Chapter 2, titled 'Soft Power,' I assess the impact of soft power on the Indo-Pacific region. Within this subsection, I delve into the effects and advantages that soft power initiatives offer to Indo-Pacific countries. By presenting an alternative solution to address regional challenges, soft power has the potential to alleviate

tensions between the US and China. Through a systematic examination of soft power initiatives, I aim to gain insights into how they contribute to shaping regional dynamics and fostering cooperation among countries in the Indo-Pacific.

Subsequently, in Chapter 3, titled 'Normative Influence,' I explore the role of soft power in exerting normative influence within the region. This section investigates the effects of soft power on the power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific and how these effects may be perceived as normative influence. I analyze how Indo-Pacific countries, seeking a way out of the power dynamics between the US and China, may find the attractiveness of soft power approaches compelling. This exploration will illuminate how soft power can serve as a catalyst for shaping regional norms and values.

Each chapter concludes with a final subsection summarizing the findings. The conclusion of Chapter 1 highlights the strategic advantages of soft power initiatives and their potential impact on normative influence in the Indo-Pacific. In Chapter 2, the conclusion emphasizes the effectiveness of soft power in contributing to regional stability and cooperation. Finally, Chapter 3's conclusion underscores the transformative role of soft power in influencing normative dynamics within the region.

By adopting this systematic approach, the thesis aims to present a comprehensive analysis of how France, Germany, and the EU employ soft power and normative influence strategies in the Indo-Pacific. The chronological order of examination allows for a clear understanding of the evolving contributions of each subject over time. Moreover, the exploration of soft power effects and normative influence will contribute to a nuanced understanding of the EU's aspirations as a major actor in the region while navigating the geopolitical complexities between the US and China.

## **I. France's Indo-Pacific Analysis**

Within the broader context of this research, which examines how France's exercise of soft power and normative influence enhances the EU's overall approach in the Indo-Pacific region, a specific sub-question comes into focus: "How has France exercised soft power and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific region?" This chapter delves into this inquiry by adopting a constructivist lens to analyze France's strategic approach in the Indo-Pacific. By doing so, it aims to elucidate the nuances of France's role in the region and shed light on the intricate interplay between soft power, normative influence, and the EU's overarching foreign policy objectives.

France's strategic approach in the Indo-Pacific, delineated in the 2019 *'Defence strategy in the Indo-Pacific,'* can be viewed through a constructivist framework. At its core, France's strategy relies on multilateralism, the rule of law, and a commitment to shared values, manifesting soft power's subtle sway over conventional power dynamics.<sup>53</sup> Evident within France's strategy is an emphasis on connectivity, underscoring its commitment to international conventions and open markets. Moreover, France's resolve to combat climate change and promote sustainable ocean management aligns with the ethos of soft power, emphasizing shared ideals and cooperative engagement. France's protection of freedom of navigation and the rule of law embodies cooperation's role in maintaining regional order. Notably, France's intent to bolster the EU's presence in the Indo-Pacific can also be seen as a soft power instrument in promoting change through multilateral avenues. France's Indo-Pacific strategy encompasses a nuanced application of constructivism, echoing the facets of soft power and normative influence. By anchoring their approach in shared values, multilateral cooperation, and cooperative stability, France asserts its role in shaping regional dynamics beyond traditional power paradigms focused on hard power.

### **a) Initiatives in the Indo-Pacific**

This section delves into the tangible outcomes of France's Indo-Pacific strategy, examining its initiatives that align with the exercise of soft power and normative influence. France's strategic principles and ambitions, delineated in their Indo-Pacific strategy provide a basis for evaluating its accomplishments and commitments

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<sup>53</sup> Florence Parly, "French Defence Minister, Florence Parly's Speech at the Shangri La Dialogue." *Consulate General of France in Bombay*, accessed July 25, 2022, <https://in.ambafrance.org/French-Defence-Minister-Florence-Parly-s-speech-at-the-Shangri-La-Dialogue-16807>.

within the region. These initiatives, stemming from the 2022 iteration of the French strategy, serve as pivotal instances that underscore the application of soft power in shaping regional dynamics.

### **Economics, Connectivity, and Research & Innovation**

France's Indo-Pacific initiatives manifest its commitment to fostering economic engagement and innovation. Collaboration with regional countries and institutions such as The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) underscores France's emphasis on the blue economy.<sup>54</sup> This strategic partnership expands economic prospects, spanning energy, health, transportation, sustainable cities, water management, and the digital economy. One example of this that is directly mentioned in their Indo-Pacific strategy is the involvement of the French Pasteur Institute, which exemplifies soft power in action by combating diseases and bolstering regional health security.<sup>55</sup>

### **Multilateralism & Rule of Law**

France's engagement in multilateral initiatives resonates with soft power's cooperative ethos. Collaborative endeavors with regional partners like, ASEAN, IORA, and IOC underscore France's dedication to multilateralism, rule of law, and shared values.<sup>56</sup> Their active participation in regional organizations, including Shangri La Dialogue and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), illustrates soft power's emphasis on cooperative stability and shared governance principles.<sup>57</sup>

### **Climate Change, Biodiversity & Sustainable Management of Oceans**

In their Indo-Pacific strategy, partnerships with key players like India and Australia in addressing climate change, biodiversity, and sustainable ocean management echo soft power's emphasis on cooperative endeavors. Initiatives such as the Kiwa project and participation in IORA underscore France's commitment to environmental preservation and multilateral cooperation.<sup>58</sup> These initiatives align with the principles of soft power, emphasizing shared values and collaborative approaches to global challenges.

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<sup>54</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (France). "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy," 17-19.

<sup>55</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (France). "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy," (2022): 17-19.

<sup>56</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (France). "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy," (2022): 34.

<sup>57</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (France). "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy," (2022): 17.

<sup>58</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (France). "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy," (2022): 45-50.



## European Action

France's commitment to enhancing the EU's involvement in the region through a strategic partnership between the EU and ASEAN underscores shared values and principles that mirror soft power's focus on promoting effective multilateralism and the safeguarding of a rules-based international order. Under the terms of the strategic alliance, leaders from the EU and ASEAN have agreed to conduct regular summits that identify five major goals based on the shared values and principles of respecting international law, promoting multilateralism, and making it easier for the two parties to work together. Through their strategy, France promotes rules-based trade with a concentration on sustainable development; promotes rules-based connectivity; promotes effective multilateralism and a rules-based international order; and promotes security, with a concentration on maritime security.<sup>59</sup> This alignment with a European strategy for the region can also be viewed as a soft power tool in shaping regional dynamics through diplomatic channels and cooperative ventures.

## Security & Defense

France's Indo-Pacific Strategy tends to focus on the implementation of security and defense initiatives. France supports the security of the Indo-Pacific region by collaborating with other nations through the South Pacific Defense Ministers Meeting and the Quadrilateral naval exercises with Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. The French military also sends troops from New Caledonia and French Polynesia to the Pacific to strengthen cooperation with Australia and New Zealand.<sup>60</sup> While these endeavors emphasize cooperative security and stability, they can also be perceived as instruments of hard power projection in the region. The multilateral military exercises, involving various Western countries, presumably prioritize maritime security through cooperative efforts. However, they also carry the potential for showcasing military capabilities and reinforcing strategic alliances, aligning with traditional hard power objectives. Similarly, France's cooperation with South Pacific nations in strengthening security can be interpreted as part of its broader hard power strategy, aimed at securing its sovereign interests and enhancing regional influence.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (France). "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy," (2022): 72.

<sup>60</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (France). "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy," (2022): 24.

<sup>61</sup> David Scott. "France's "Indo-Pacific" Strategy: Regional Power Projection." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Vol. 19, Issue 4, (2019), 88.

By engaging in collaborative efforts, fostering multilateral cooperation, and addressing global challenges, France's initiatives align with the tenets of soft power and normative influence, shaping the region's political dynamics through shared values and cooperative approaches. However, these initiatives demonstrate the complexity of employing both soft and hard power elements within a single approach. While France's engagement in the Indo-Pacific seeks to promote regional stability and cooperation, the inclusion and focus of security and defense aspects underscores the multifaceted nature of its strategy. This hybrid approach reflects the intricate balance between cooperative endeavors and the preservation of strategic interests. The challenge lies in striking the right equilibrium between fostering regional trust and projecting influence through security cooperation, underscoring the intricate interplay between soft and hard power dynamics in France's engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

## **b) Soft Power**

### **How France's strategy is linked to the concept of Soft Power.**

Central to France's strategic posture is the preservation of its strategic independence.<sup>62</sup> This concept serves as a foundation for its engagement in the Indo-Pacific, allowing France to assert its soft power influence while avoiding entanglement in the overarching US-China rivalry and military competition. By positioning itself as an alternative partner that transcends the confines of this rivalry, France presents itself as a credible actor that seeks to collaborate without succumbing to divisive power dynamics. This positioning is intended to resonate with regional countries that may feel entrapped in the complex interplay between the US and China, offering them an alternative partner that emphasizes cooperative multilateral solutions and shared interests, leading to greater influence in the region.<sup>63</sup>

Another main tenet in France's Indo-Pacific Strategy is the fact that it strategically situates itself as a regional player by leveraging its geographical presence through its overseas territories. Highlighted in France's Defense Strategy in the Indo-Pacific, the country boasts the world's second-largest exclusive economic zone (EEZ),

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<sup>62</sup> Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (France). "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy," (2022): 5.

[https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en\\_dcp\\_a4\\_indopacifique\\_022022\\_v1-4\\_web\\_cle878143.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_dcp_a4_indopacifique_022022_v1-4_web_cle878143.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> 'Governments throughout East Asia support independence, equality and the rule of law, concepts that facilitate their contribution to and shaping of international relations, despite power asymmetries. Those concepts gird their resistance to domination by outside powers — or any major power' – Brad Glosserman, "Asia pretty much prefers the world as it is," *The Japan Times*, July 11, 2023, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2023/07/11/commentary/world-commentary/asia-global-governance/>

spanning approximately 11 million square kilometers. A significant portion of this expanse is attributed to French Polynesia, contributing over 45 percent to France's EEZ, an area comparable to that of the EU.<sup>64</sup> This extensive maritime reach provides a geostrategic advantage, enabling effective engagement and fostering substantial developmental prospects within the region. This distinctive geographical placement, encompassing personnel, exclusive economic zones, and French territories, serves as a potent soft power tool for France. By positioning itself within the region, France aims to underscore its commitment to upholding a rules-based order. This strategic positioning not only enhances France's legitimacy but also signifies its responsibility in maintaining stability and promoting multilateralism. In doing so, France aims to assure nations concerned with shifting power dynamics that it seeks to advance its interests through peaceful means, contributing to regional harmony and cooperation.

In this context, France's focus on strengthening multilateralism, engaging with regional partners, and aligning with the broader European agenda becomes integral to its soft power strategy. By actively participating in regional international organizations, France demonstrates its commitment to cooperative solutions, shared governance, and regional stability. This engagement portrays France as a constructive global actor that seeks to build bridges, promote dialogue, and address common challenges through collective action. Furthermore, by aligning its initiatives with European principles of respect for international law, multilateralism, and sustainable development, France strengthens its reputation as a normative power that supports values beyond national interests. This linkage accentuates France's commitment to fostering a rules-based international order, which resonates with regional countries seeking stability and adherence to shared norms.

France's strategic independence, commitment to multilateralism, and alignment with European values in the Indo-Pacific region collectively form an intricate web of soft power tactics. By offering an alternative to the dominant US-China rivalry, presenting a principled approach, and engaging in cooperative efforts, France positions itself as an appealing partner that navigates the complex geopolitical landscape with sensitivity and constructive intent.

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<sup>64</sup> Ministry of Armed Forces (France), "France's defense strategy in the Indo-Pacific," (Paris: DICoD Délégation à l'information et à la communication de la défense, 2019), accessed 11 August 2022, 7. <https://apcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/France-Defence-Strategy-in-the-Indo-Pacific-2019.pdf>.

## France's Indo-Pacific Strategy in the Face of China's Ascendancy: A Soft Power Perspective

The discourse surrounding France's Indo-Pacific strategy becomes increasingly intricate when viewed through the lens of China's growing assertiveness. This complexity is illuminated by key academic works that offer insights into the intricacies of France's approach within this dynamic region. Notable among these works is Frédéric Grare's article titled '*France, the Other Indo-Pacific Power*,'<sup>65</sup> Grare's analysis serves as a cornerstone in comprehending France's multifaceted strategy. The article delves into the core tenets of France's approach, spotlighting its emphasis on maintaining a rules-based order, championing multilateralism, and advancing economic interests.<sup>66</sup> These focal points provide a comprehensive overview of France's strategic intentions, shedding light on its commitment to shaping regional dynamics while contending with the complexities posed by China's ascent. One of the critical contributions of Grare's work lies in its discussion of the challenges France confronts as it navigates an evolving regional landscape dominated by China's influence.<sup>67</sup> This dimension introduces a critical juncture where France's strategic goals intersect with the shifting power dynamics. Grare's analysis thus creates a foundation for understanding the intricate balance France must strike in pursuing its objectives while engaging with a rising China. France's pursuit of an autonomous strategy in the Indo-Pacific region has been subject to a range of demonstrative instances indicating that its policy actions can provoke significant responses from both the US and China. A recent case in point is President Macron's 2023 visit to China, which triggered a robust response from US officials, who voiced strong critique concerning his diction and the overall nature of the visit.<sup>68</sup> This episode underscores the intricate nature of soft power, a form of influence that hinges on attraction and persuasion, thereby operating indirectly and often inviting strong criticism. The strong reaction from the US has the potential to yield unfavorable consequences, potentially diminishing France's allure to regional nations with close ties and affiliations to the US. Conversely, nations in the region committed to avoiding excessively exclusive stances towards China may perceive France as a more appealing partner. Hence, while France's utilization of soft power through its autonomous strategy carries evident advantages and favorable aspects, it also underscores that the efficacy of these affirmative outcomes is to some extent contingent upon the responses of the US and China to its policy overtures.

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<sup>65</sup> Frédéric Grare, "France, the Other Indo-Pacific Power," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (2020). <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/21/france-other-indo-pacific-power-pub-83000>

<sup>66</sup> Frédéric Grare, "France, the Other Indo-Pacific Power," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (2020). <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/21/france-other-indo-pacific-power-pub-83000>

<sup>67</sup> Frédéric Grare, "France, the Other Indo-Pacific Power," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (2020). <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/10/21/france-other-indo-pacific-power-pub-83000>

<sup>68</sup> Washington Post Editorial Board, "Emmanuel Macron should have stayed home," *Washington Post*, April 17, 2023, accessed April 28, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/04/16/emmanuel-macron-china-trip-xi-ukraine>

France's strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific region is marked by a series of official documents that shed light on its intentions and priorities. With a distinctive focus on safeguarding sovereign interests, territories, and citizens, France's Indo-Pacific strategy reveals a multi-faceted approach that intertwines defense and security considerations with economic interests. A pivotal aspect of this strategy is the recognition of the region's importance for France's military industry expansion, which is intricately linked to economic growth. The defense and security dimension, integral to France's foreign policy, underscores the imperative of securing resources for military modernization.

Notably, France's strategy reflects its recognition of strategic uncertainty in the region. This premise forms the foundation of its defense and security stance, as it seeks to establish itself within the regional security framework. France's aspiration to assume a role in Southeast Asia's security landscape is driven by the perception that the evolving China-US competition might lead to power shifts that reverberate globally.<sup>69</sup> As a leader in Europe, France envisions a pivotal role in bridging Europe and Asia, aspiring to foster regional unity and stability. France's strategy aligns with the principle of acting as a buffer between major powers, namely China and the US while defending the rules-based international order. France aims to contribute to a multipolar region, providing other nations with an intermediary for negotiations. This potential role as a third party offers nuanced possibilities for shaping regional dynamics without provoking either major power. Crucially, the publication of official documents on the Indo-Pacific strategy serves to provide transparency, guide policymakers, and offer clarity on France's objectives. By examining France's intentions, it becomes apparent that the country seeks to wield soft power instruments subtly to influence regional dynamics. Its positioning as a third party, advocating for a fair playing field, suggests a strategic deployment of normative influence to navigate the US-China rivalry and contribute to regional stability. This approach aligns with France's broader aim of uniting Europe and Asia, envisioning a constructive role in shaping the Indo-Pacific's future.

### **c) Normative Influence**

On July 25th, 2023, French President Emmanuel Macron made a visit to New Caledonia to "unite," in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea to "shine internationally."<sup>70</sup> The reported visit of the French President to Vanuatu and

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<sup>69</sup> Amruta Karambelkar, "An analysis of the French strategy in the Indo-Pacific." *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, (2021): 2. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09733159.2021.1962040>

<sup>70</sup> Jean-Tenahe Faatau, "Indopacifique : Emmanuel Macron en Nouvelle-Calédonie pour 'rassembler', au Vanuatu et en Papouasie pour 'rayonner à l'international'," *outremers360*, July 2023, accessed on August 12, 2023, <https://outremers360.com/bassin->

Papua New Guinea exemplifies France's strategic focus on the exercise of soft power in the Indo-Pacific region, aiming to project influence, foster relationships, and expand normative influence through various avenues. Through discussions, cultural interactions, and cooperative projects, France aims to build positive perceptions and enhance its reputation within the region. Of particular significance is the emphasis on the French and Francophone communities and cultural exchanges. By adopting a constructivist lens, we can see that France seeks to leverage its linguistic and cultural ties to establish connections with the local populations. This not only strengthens human connections but also promotes French values and norms, contributing to the expansion of France's normative influence. Furthermore, the visit by Macron highlights France's focus on humanitarian aid and environmental concerns. By addressing regional challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss,<sup>71</sup> France positions itself as a responsible global actor, thus enhancing its normative appeal. The commitment to proposing diversified projects in the Pacific region showcases France's dedication to contributing positively to the region's development and prosperity. Such efforts can promote economic growth, social well-being, and goodwill among local communities, all contributing to France's normative influence. In addition, Macron's omission of direct references to China or the US aligns with a soft power approach, focusing on a non-confrontational narrative that seeks to foster cooperation and understanding rather than direct confrontation.<sup>72</sup> By defending French interests without invoking specific rivals, France positions itself as a cooperative partner, projecting an image of diplomacy and mutual respect.

Symbolism also plays a role, as Macron describes the visit as "historic" and "first of its kind."<sup>73</sup> In this specific context, France's symbolism refers to deliberate and strategic actions characterized by the use of highly significant and emblematic gestures during President Macron's visit to the Indo-Pacific region. These symbolic gestures can leave lasting impressions, reinforcing France's image as an innovative and pioneering partner in the region. In addition, the symbolism that is seen through this visit is intricately linked to France's Indo-Pacific strategy and its pursuit of normative influence in the region. By describing the President's visit as "historic" and "first of its kind," France reinforces its commitment to the region, shapes positive perceptions, and builds a narrative of proactive engagement. In this way, symbolism effectively complements France's strategy of

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[pacifique-appli/indopacifique-emmanuel-macron-en-nouvelle-caledonie-pour-rassembler-au-vanuatu-et-en-papouasie-pour-rayonner-a-linternational](https://outremers360.com/bassin-pacifique-appli/indopacifique-emmanuel-macron-en-nouvelle-caledonie-pour-rassembler-au-vanuatu-et-en-papouasie-pour-rayonner-a-linternational).

<sup>71</sup> Jean-Tenahe Faatau, "Indopacifique : Emmanuel Macron en Nouvelle-Calédonie pour 'rassembler', au Vanuatu et en Papouasie pour 'rayonner à l'international'," *outremers360*, July 2023, accessed on August 12, 2023, <https://outremers360.com/bassin-pacifique-appli/indopacifique-emmanuel-macron-en-nouvelle-caledonie-pour-rassembler-au-vanuatu-et-en-papouasie-pour-rayonner-a-linternational>.

<sup>72</sup> "Emmanuel Macron hits out at 'a new imperialism' in Indo-Pacific," *Financial Times*, July 27, 2023, accessed on 29 July 2023. <https://www.ft.com/content/6851331a-1c43-4053-83da-5bc42a812539>.

<sup>73</sup> Jean-Tenahe Faatau, "Indopacifique : Emmanuel Macron en Nouvelle-Calédonie pour 'rassembler', au Vanuatu et en Papouasie pour 'rayonner à l'international'," *outremers360*, July 2023, accessed on August 12, 2023, <https://outremers360.com/bassin-pacifique-appli/indopacifique-emmanuel-macron-en-nouvelle-caledonie-pour-rassembler-au-vanuatu-et-en-papouasie-pour-rayonner-a-linternational>.

expanding its influence without relying solely on coercive methods. While the prevailing scholarly discourse frequently interprets France's emphasis on its sovereign status in the Indo-Pacific as primarily indicative of power projection involving conventional military activities such as maritime exercises, safeguarding territorial waters, and fostering military partnerships, a constructivist lens reveals an alternative perspective. Within this interpretative framework, the symbolic significance of this visit underscores that France's assertion of its sovereign identity in the Indo-Pacific region can serve as a strategic instrument of soft power which in turn fosters normative influence. In this context, the recognition of the socio-cultural implications and shared historical narratives associated with sovereignty can significantly shape how regional stakeholders perceive and engage with France's policies and diplomatic undertakings. Thus, perspectives rooted in constructivist analysis emphasize that the implications of emphasizing national sovereignty reach beyond mere militaristic connotations, rendering them pivotal in molding regional narratives and interactions in the Indo-Pacific.

In examining France's approach to the Indo-Pacific, an important viewpoint emerges from Mathieu Duchâtel's work titled '*France's Indo-Pacific Ambitions*.'<sup>74</sup> Duchâtel's insights provide a broader perspective on the concept of soft power and its application within France's strategic framework in the region. Duchâtel's analysis offers a multifaceted understanding of France's Indo-Pacific strategy. He underscores the region's economic and strategic significance for France, while also delving into historical ties that bind the country to the region. Importantly, Duchâtel argues that these historical connections have cultivated a unique relationship between France and the Indo-Pacific, influencing France's strategic orientation in the area.<sup>75</sup> This lens provides a nuanced perspective on the role of sovereignty in France's engagement. Instead of viewing sovereignty as merely a platform for hard power projection, France leverages its sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific as a soft power instrument. The historical ties, coupled with strategic interests, form a narrative, influencing how France's presence is perceived in the region. This narrative highlights how France's emphasis on its sovereign identity translates into normative influence and partnership-building, advancing its interests through historical connections. This perspective adds depth to the exploration of France's Indo-Pacific strategy, demonstrating that sovereignty can serve as a tool for cultivating positive relationships and expanding normative influence in the region.

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<sup>74</sup> Mathieu Duchâtel, "France's Indo-Pacific Ambitions," *The Diplomat*, September 27, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/frances-indo-pacific-ambitions/>

<sup>75</sup> Mathieu Duchâtel, "France's Indo-Pacific Ambitions," *The Diplomat*, September 27, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/frances-indo-pacific-ambitions/>

France's recent joint positioning with the Netherlands, as underscored by President Emmanuel Macron's assertive statements advocating for a more autonomous European foreign policy, is a pivotal development.<sup>76</sup> It signifies a potential departure from a conventional transatlantic alignment, implying a distinctly European approach in geopolitical scenarios, particularly those involving China. This evolving stance underscores a subtle yet vital aspect: France's soft power projection and normative influence. By asserting Europe's ability to forge its own path, distinct from the US, France fosters a narrative of autonomy and independence. This narrative, founded on the principles of soft power, offers an alternative avenue for nations navigating the complex US-China dynamic. In this context, France's positioning underscores the capacity of soft power to influence perceptions and in turn normative influence, enabling the EU to carve an autonomous trajectory while enhancing its diplomatic maneuverability.

#### **d) Conclusion**

Ultimately, France's pursuit of soft power enables the promotion of its values and principles and is directly linked to how normative influence is also a focus of France's approach. Collaborative endeavors, cultural exchanges, shared challenges, and contributions to regional development position France as a positive force aligned with the region's interests.<sup>77</sup> This strategic approach can lead to a more receptive audience for French ideas, gradually expanding influence.

From a constructivist perspective, the interplay between France's Indo-Pacific initiatives and its self-perceived role as a sovereign nation in the region reflects a concerted effort to shape the international social context within the Indo-Pacific. This approach underscores the profound impact of norms, values, and identities in influencing state behaviors and interactions. France's emphasis on its status as a sovereign nation within the region serves as a symbolic assertion of its identity, values, and norms. This self-legitimization is designed to foster a sense of credibility and authority in its regional engagements. By presenting itself as a sovereign actor, France seeks to establish its normative stance as an influential player within the region, effectively positioning itself as a role model that promotes and upholds certain norms and values. This alignment with particular norms

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<sup>76</sup> Philippe Jacqu , Fr d ric Lema tre, Philippe Ricard, and Thomas Wieder. "Europe divided over Macron's remarks on Taiwan." *Le Monde*, 20 April 2023. Accessed 20 April 2023. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/04/13/europe-divided-over-macron-s-remarks-on-china\\_6022789\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/04/13/europe-divided-over-macron-s-remarks-on-china_6022789_4.html)

<sup>77</sup> 'Governments throughout East Asia support independence, equality and the rule of law, concepts that facilitate their contribution to and shaping of international relations, despite power asymmetries. Those concepts gird their resistance to domination by outside powers — or any major power' – Brad Glosserman, "Asia pretty much prefers the world as it is," *The Japan Times*, July 11, 2023, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2023/07/11/commentary/world-commentary/asia-global-governance/>



and values such as multilateralism, rule of law, connectivity, education, human rights, and climate change contributes to the construction of a normative framework that encourages regional states to emulate and internalize similar principles. In doing so, France seeks to foster a sense of shared identity and shared norms that engender cooperative behaviors and facilitate harmonious interactions among regional states.

Furthermore, France's tangible presence in the form of substantial army personnel directly located within the region underscores its commitment to translating its normative aspirations into concrete actions. This serves as a pragmatic manifestation of its identity-driven initiatives. By substantiating its rhetoric with a visible military presence, France not only reinforces its normative stance but also projects a capacity to ensure the enforcement of shared norms and values. This projection aims to influence regional states' behaviors by highlighting the potential for cooperation, security, and stability within a norm-based framework.

France's decision to maintain a substantial military presence within the Indo-Pacific region, while viewed differently from constructivist and realist perspectives, underscores the complexity of its motivations and objectives in the region. From a realist perspective, France's military presence is seen as a way to project its power and influence in the region. This aligns with the traditional view that states prioritize their security and influence in a competitive international environment. France's military actions could be a response to the changing dynamics driven by China's increasing assertiveness. However, looking through a constructivist lens, France's military presence gains a deeper meaning. Constructivism focuses on how shared values, norms, and identities shape state behavior. France's approach, distinct from the US strategy of containing China, aims to promote values like the rule of law, cooperation, and human rights. This suggests that France is using its military presence not just to exert power, but also to promote these norms. This approach contradicts the notion of France merely countering China's assertiveness with its military; instead, it indicates a desire to influence the region's dynamics through normative means. This perspective suggests that France seeks to influence state behavior not through military coercion but through the dissemination and reinforcement of norms that encourage cooperative and peaceful interactions. In this context, France's military presence can be understood as an instrument that reflects the constructivist aims of norm diffusion and value promotion. France's autonomous stance further underscores its commitment to shaping the regional dynamics based on its own principles rather than being a mere follower of existing power blocs. The constructivist approach highlights how France's military presence is intended to contribute to the establishment of a normative order that prioritizes cooperation, diplomacy, and the protection of shared values. This approach provides deeper insights into the underlying motivations and objectives behind France's regional actions, offering a more comprehensive understanding beyond traditional power-based interpretations.

The analysis of France's Indo-Pacific strategy holds particular significance in the context of Germany's and the EU's strategies in the region. Understanding how France maneuvers through the geopolitical complexities provides valuable insights into potential soft power interventions, collaborative approaches, and opportunities for diplomatic influence. By examining France's approach alongside those of other European powers, a comprehensive understanding of the Indo-Pacific's evolving dynamics can be obtained, enabling an informed assessment of the EU's broader regional engagement.

## **II. Germany's Indo-Pacific Analysis**

Situated within the overarching context of this research, which investigates the ways in which Germany's exercise of soft power and normative influence bolsters the broader EU strategy in the Indo-Pacific region, a specific sub-question comes to the forefront: "How has Germany exercised soft power and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific region?" This chapter delves into this query, utilizing a constructivist framework to analyze Germany's strategic approach in the Indo-Pacific. By doing so, it aims to unravel the intricate dynamics of Germany's role in the region, illuminating the interplay between soft power, normative influence, and the EU's comprehensive foreign policy agenda.

Much like France, Germany's '*Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific*' are framed around seven core principles (European engagement, multilateral cooperation, upholding the rules-based order, advancing United Nations (UN) Development Goals, promoting human rights, fostering inclusivity, and forging partnerships of parity).<sup>78</sup> Germany's policy directives for the Indo-Pacific region strongly emphasize the pivotal role of upholding the international rules-based order. This encompasses ensuring the safeguarding of key freedoms such as navigation, overflight, and lawful utilization of the sea. Equally significant is the amicable settlement of disputes and the facilitation of unfettered trade and investment. These guidelines underscore Germany's profound vested interest in preserving an Indo-Pacific region that thrives on openness, collaboration, and adherence to a rules-based framework.

Moreover, the guidelines underscore the imperative for Europe to contribute towards establishing a level playing field, safeguarding human rights, and upholding democratic values. This underscores how Germany's concerns encompass not only matters of law, trade, and multilateralism but also the environment and security, all directly linked with Europe's broader interests. This further accentuates how Germany's Indo-Pacific strategy aligns with the concepts of soft power and normative influence by prioritizing shared values, cooperation, inclusivity, and principled approaches. Instead of relying solely on coercion or force, the strategy seeks to exert influence through attraction, values, and setting positive norms, contributing to Germany's image as a constructive and influential global actor.

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<sup>78</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." *Federal Foreign Office*, (2020): 4-5. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

## a) Initiatives in the Indo-Pacific

This section explores the concrete results of Germany's Indo-Pacific approach, analyzing its endeavors that coincide with the utilization of soft power and normative sway. Germany's strategic objectives and aspirations, outlined in the Indo-Pacific guidelines introduced in 2021, offer a foundation for assessing its achievements and dedications in the area. These actions, inspired by the 2021 German directives for the Indo-Pacific region, stand as crucial examples highlighting the implementation of soft power to influence regional dynamics.

### Economics, connectivity, Research and Innovation

Germany's Indo-Pacific Strategy aims to enhance rules-based, fair, and sustainable trade through digital transformation and networking. It actively promotes equitable trade, investment, and free trade agreements. Germany supports infrastructure projects via the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and fosters digital connectivity through initiatives like the Digital Belt and Road and ASEAN Smart Cities. It participates in sustainable connectivity efforts, including the Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>79</sup> Through research, technology transfers, and innovation partnerships, Germany engages in Indo-Pacific research and innovation initiatives. Lastly, it seeks to foster peace and understanding via cultural, educational, and scientific exchanges.<sup>80</sup> By actively advocating for fair and sustainable trade and investment, Germany projects itself as a promoter of economic growth under a rules-based framework. This aligns with soft power tactics, as it presents Germany as a partner committed to mutual benefit and cooperation. In addition, Germany's support for establishing a free trade agreement between the EU and ASEAN underscores its dedication to rules-based systems. This emphasis on norms and adherence to established procedures showcases normative influence, encouraging a cooperative approach among nations. The focus on cultural, educational, and scientific exchanges embodies soft power principles by promoting understanding, collaboration, and mutual respect. This approach creates lasting connections and influences regional dynamics through non-coercive means.

### Multilateralism & rule of law

By engaging in ASEAN-led regional forums like the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), Germany promotes open dialogue on

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<sup>79</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." *Federal Foreign Office*, (2020): 6. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

<sup>80</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." *Federal Foreign Office*, (2020): 7. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

regional issues, fostering understanding and cooperation. Collaborations with the UN to address climate change, sustainable development, and human rights further demonstrate its commitment to norms and values that resonate across the region.<sup>81</sup>

Germany's initiatives, such as the Alliance for Multilateralism and the Group of Friends on Climate and Security, spotlight its dedication to the rules-based international order.<sup>82</sup> These efforts are mechanisms through which Germany wields soft power, advocating for cooperation, inclusivity, and adherence to international norms. By actively contributing to these platforms, Germany aims to shape a peaceful and stable Indo-Pacific region that upholds the rule of law and respects international norms. In doing so, Germany positions itself as a constructive and influential actor, leveraging its soft power to foster positive regional dynamics aligned with its values. This underlines how Germany employs soft power tools and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific through active participation in multilateral forums and collaborative initiatives.

### **Climate change & human rights**

Germany also leverages soft power tools and normative influence to address pressing challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, including climate change, environmental protection, and human rights promotion. As part of its commitment, Germany initiates and participates in international climate initiatives, demonstrating its normative influence by advocating for ecological responsibility and sustainable development.<sup>83</sup> By expanding climate risk financing solutions, Germany showcases a practical approach to addressing environmental concerns while engaging in soft power diplomacy. Emphasizing resource management, endangered species protection, and addressing urbanization issues, Germany not only advocates for ecologically responsible development but also sets normative examples for balanced progress.

Furthermore, Germany's commitment to human rights promotion is a cornerstone of its Strategy for the Indo-Pacific,<sup>84</sup> reflecting its soft power orientation. Increasing project funds for human rights initiatives and countering disinformation through the Regional German Information Center highlights Germany's normative

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<sup>81</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." *Federal Foreign Office*, (2020): 10. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

<sup>82</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." *Federal Foreign Office*, (2020): 10. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." *Federal Foreign Office*, (2020): 25. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

<sup>84</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." *Federal Foreign Office*, (2020): 29. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

influence in promoting democratic values and inclusivity.<sup>85</sup> By integrating ecological responsibility, human rights, and social stability, Germany demonstrates its dedication to shaping positive norms, fostering cooperation, and advancing its interests through non-coercive means in the Indo-Pacific.

## **European Action**

By strengthening the EU's strategic partnerships with countries like Japan, India, South Korea, and ASEAN,<sup>86</sup> Germany fosters diplomatic ties that emphasize shared values and collaboration, showcasing its normative influence. Germany's advocacy for the EU's digital partnership aligns with soft power principles by encouraging connectivity, innovation, and cybersecurity cooperation. By promoting digital advancement, Germany positions itself as a forward-thinking collaborator, furthering its normative influence through practical means.

The success of Germany's European Action initiative is evident in the development of a European Strategy for the region in 2022.<sup>87</sup> This achievement underscores how Germany's use of soft power and normative influence has effectively contributed to shaping a united, cooperative, and stable Indo-Pacific. The push for an EU Indo-Pacific strategy demonstrates Germany's soft power approach to shaping norms and promoting a united stance. By establishing a common approach and guidelines, Germany influences European countries to cooperate based on established principles, also enhancing its normative influence and collective presence in the region.

### **b) Soft power**

#### **How Germany's strategy is linked to the concept of Soft Power.**

Germany's strategy prominently showcases the utilization of soft power tools, differing from France's Indo-Pacific approach which places more emphasis on security and defense aspects. Germany's strategy prioritizes economics, connectivity, and multilateralism while upholding the rule of law, human rights, and addressing

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<sup>85</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." Federal Foreign Office, (2020): 29. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." Federal Foreign Office, (2020): 10. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." Federal Foreign Office, (2020): 11. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

climate change. Germany's focus on economics and connectivity, coupled with its commitment to multilateralism, signifies a direct soft power approach. Its emphasis on these aspects reflects an understanding of how fostering economic cooperation and modernization can be appealing, promoting norms of progress and collaboration. Notably, Germany's endorsement of infrastructure development and digital connectivity through the AIIB, Digital Belt and Road, and ASEAN Smart Cities projects,<sup>88</sup> serves also as a strategic use of soft power, positioning Germany as a facilitator of sustainable growth and innovation.

Germany's assumption of the EU presidency in July 2020 held significant strategic implications.<sup>89</sup> During its tenure, the Covid-19 pandemic was the priority of Germany, which pushed for making vaccines available throughout the whole world, including the Indo-Pacific region which helped bolster Germany's regional influence.<sup>90</sup> Notably, Germany's Indo-Pacific strategy which was presented during the EU's presidency tenure sought to cultivate a comprehensive EU approach to the region.<sup>91</sup> Noteworthy in its approach to China, Germany's stance during its EU presidency demonstrated a delicate equilibrium between economic interests and security considerations. It sought to engage China on matters like climate change, trade, and human rights, while concurrently expressing reservations about China's regional actions.<sup>92</sup>

Concurrently with these initiatives, Germany's presidency of the EU serves as a prime example of using soft power tools to advance its interests in the Indo-Pacific. By introducing an Indo-Pacific strategy that prioritizes rules-based order, trade, and human rights, Germany projects a positive and cooperative image, aiming to influence regional dynamics through diplomacy and collaboration. Its approach to China, emphasizing engagement, competition, and systemic rivalry, reflects a nuanced strategy that leverages soft power to address both economic interests and security concerns. This multifaceted approach aligns with soft power principles, demonstrating Germany's skill in influencing the Indo-Pacific narrative while fostering cooperative relations and shaping norms through dialogue and engagement.

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<sup>88</sup> The Federal Government of Germany, "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." Federal Foreign Office, (2020): 6. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

<sup>89</sup> Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, "German Presidency of the Council of the EU," *eu2020.de*, 2020, [https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/eu-council-presidency/eu-council-presidency\\_node.html#:~:text=In%20this%20time%2C%20Germany%20is,the%20second%20half%20of%202021](https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/eu-council-presidency/eu-council-presidency_node.html#:~:text=In%20this%20time%2C%20Germany%20is,the%20second%20half%20of%202021)

<sup>90</sup> Council of the European Union, "Message from Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel and Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa to mark the end of Germany's Presidency of the Council of the EU and the handover to Portugal," *eu2020.de*, 31 December, 2020, <https://www.eu2020.de/eu2020-en/news/article/video-message-angela-merkel-and-ant%C3%B3nio-costa-eu-council-presidency/2431234>

<sup>91</sup> The Federal Government of Germany, "Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific Region." Federal Foreign Office, (2020): 7. <https://china.diplo.de/blob/2381212/5038169e5f7c5eee4136c32ca183f75e/200904-indopazifik-data.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> Council of the European Union, "The EU and China: Agreement in principle reached on investment," *eu2020.de*, 30 December, 2020, <https://www.eu2020.de/eu2020-en/news/pressemitteilungen/china-investitionsabkommen-einigung-eu2020/2431418>

## Germany's Indo-Pacific Strategy in the Face of China's Ascendancy: A Soft Power Perspective

During its tenure as the EU presidency, Germany hosted the EU-China Summit, an event designed to encourage the EU's engagement with China on matters encompassing trade, investment, climate change, and human rights. However, the summit faced overshadowing concerns pertaining to China's human rights record and its actions in Hong Kong and Xinjiang.<sup>93</sup> Notably pragmatic, Germany's approach to China is aimed at navigating the delicate balance between economic interests and human rights concerns. This nuanced approach, while perceived by some as too lenient, endeavors to align with soft power principles by promoting dialogue, cooperation, and adherence to norms. For example, the US has been a vocal critic of China's actions in the Indo-Pacific, particularly its territorial claims in the South China Sea and its treatment of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang. The US has called on its allies, including the EU, to take a tougher stance towards China on these issues.<sup>94</sup> This strategy also encounters debates within the EU. Advocates assert that a robust economic relationship with China, as suggested by the European Chamber of Commerce in China, can address shared global challenges, such as climate change.<sup>95</sup> China has reacted negatively to the EU's more critical stance towards China, particularly on issues such as human rights and cybersecurity, accusing the EU of interfering in its internal affairs and has retaliated against countries that have criticized its human rights record.<sup>96</sup> China has also criticized the EU for not treating China as an equal partner and for taking a confrontational approach towards China,<sup>97</sup> which is problematic for EU policy. China's reaction to the EU's more critical stance highlights the complex landscape. China's negative response and accusations of interference underscore the intricacies of employing soft power tools, revealing the potential pitfalls of pursuing a cooperative approach. In addition, Germany's new China strategy, as formulated by the foreign ministry, presents a crucial framework that aligns with a European consensus favoring "de-risking" over "decoupling" in its approach to China.<sup>98</sup> This strategy serves as a strategic tool to navigate the complex relationship with China, particularly given the backdrop of diverging views on human rights. The strategy's emphasis on economic de-risking underscores Germany's intention to reduce dependencies on China in critical areas while factoring in geopolitical

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<sup>93</sup> "EU presses China on market access, human rights during virtual summit," Europe, France24, last modified 14 September 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200914-eu-presses-china-on-market-access-human-rights-during-virtual-summit>

<sup>94</sup> US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: China (Includes Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet)," US Department of State, 30 March 2021, accessed 27 April 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/china-includes-hong-kong-macau-and-tibet/>

<sup>95</sup> European Chamber. Position Paper 2021/2022. European Chamber of Commerce in China. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.europeanchamber.com.cn/en/publications-position-papers>

<sup>96</sup> DW News, "China sanctions EU officials over Uyghur row," DW, March 22, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/china-sanctions-eu-officials-over-uyghur-row/a-56977155>

<sup>97</sup> "China warns against EU 'confrontation' after MEPs call for sanctions," Reuters, March 11, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-eu-sanctions-idUSKBN2B21K5>.

<sup>98</sup> Liana Fix and Caroline Kapp, "A More Strategic German Foreign Policy?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, In-brief, (2023), [https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/more-strategic-german-foreign-policy?utm\\_medium=social\\_owned&utm\\_source=li](https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/more-strategic-german-foreign-policy?utm_medium=social_owned&utm_source=li)



considerations.<sup>99</sup> By doing so, Germany aims to fortify its position and resilience against potential vulnerabilities arising from overreliance on China. This proactive stance demonstrates Germany's awareness of the challenges posed by its engagement with China, especially concerning issues like human rights.

Furthermore, Germany's emphasis on cooperation within the strategy is in line with its use of soft power tools. By recognizing climate change and person-to-person exchanges as important cooperation domains,<sup>100</sup> Germany showcases its commitment to engaging with China on shared global challenges. This cooperative approach allows Germany to engage with China on common ground while also addressing human rights concerns through diplomatic channels and international cooperation. In terms of soft power, Germany's strategy also aligns with the EU's policy of viewing China as a partner, competitor, and rival. By acknowledging the increasing rivalry and competition with China, Germany maintains a balanced posture that combines cooperation with prudent caution. This approach is crucial for managing a difficult relationship with China, particularly in light of their differing views on human rights issues.

Similarly to France's strategy, Germany's use of soft power tools is multifaceted, marked by both advantages and challenges. While Germany's strategy promotes dialogue and engagement, its effectiveness is inevitably influenced by the reactions of powerful actors like the US and China. This underscores the delicate balance and intricate dynamics involved in leveraging soft power in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **c) Normative Influence**

Germany has expanded its presence in the Indo-Pacific through significant diplomatic engagements. In June 2022, Federal President Dr. Steinmeier underscored the region's significance during visits to Singapore and Indonesia.<sup>101</sup> Federal Chancellor Scholz's April 2022 visit to Japan included the announcement of forthcoming German-Japanese intergovernmental consultations. Likewise, in July 2022, Foreign Minister Baerbock's journey from the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Indonesia extended to Palau and Japan, where she

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<sup>99</sup> Liana Fix and Caroline Kapp, "A More Strategic German Foreign Policy?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, In-brief, (2023), [https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/more-strategic-german-foreign-policy?utm\\_medium=social\\_owned&utm\\_source=li](https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/more-strategic-german-foreign-policy?utm_medium=social_owned&utm_source=li)

<sup>100</sup> Liana Fix and Caroline Kapp, "A More Strategic German Foreign Policy?" *Council on Foreign Relations*, In-brief, (2023), [https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/more-strategic-german-foreign-policy?utm\\_medium=social\\_owned&utm\\_source=li](https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/more-strategic-german-foreign-policy?utm_medium=social_owned&utm_source=li)

<sup>101</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Progress report on the implementation of the German Government policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region," (2021): 3.

introduced the new Special Envoy for the Pacific Island states.<sup>102</sup> The Federal Government's decision in June 2022 to reinstate bilateral development cooperation, particularly with Laos, Mongolia, and Nepal,<sup>103</sup> demonstrates Germany's commitment to fostering shared values, understanding, and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. These diplomatic initiatives highlight Germany's strategic use of normative influence to advance its interests in the region, accentuated by its recognition of regional importance and its approach to respectful engagement and sustainable development. These collaborative efforts align with Germany's broader strategy, establishing itself as a constructive and influential partner.

Germany's active engagement in research, technology transfers, and innovation partnerships exemplifies not only the application of soft power but also the strategic deployment of normative influence to advance its interests in the Indo-Pacific region. By sharing knowledge and fostering collaboration, Germany aligns seamlessly with the norms of open exchange and cooperative development, thereby solidifying its reputation as a constructive contributor to the regional development landscape. This engagement mirrors Germany's commitment to fostering mutual understanding and equitable growth, elements widely regarded as positive normative influence in this context. This commitment is vividly demonstrated by the culmination of fourteen agreements during the Indo-German intergovernmental consultations in May 2022, spanning crucial sectors including climate, energy, agroecology, security, health, workplace safety, research, and migration.<sup>104</sup> Notably, the Partnership for Green and Sustainable Development stands as a remarkable testament, channeling a substantial 10 billion euros to bolster India's pursuit of ambitious national climate and sustainable development goals by 2030.<sup>105</sup> These multifaceted engagements not only illuminate Germany's effective utilization of soft power tools like collaboration and knowledge sharing but also underline its skillful application of positive normative influence in shaping cooperative norms, mutual aspirations, and sustainable growth paradigms within the Indo-Pacific region.

Additionally, Germany's focus on cultural, educational, and scientific exchanges embodies principles of normative influence by promoting understanding, collaboration, and mutual respect and norms. Germany's commitment to uniting people through culture, education, and science takes on a strategic dimension that dovetails with its use of normative influence to advance its interests in the Indo-Pacific. This approach aligns

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<sup>102</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Progress report on the implementation of the German Government policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region," (2021): 3.

<sup>103</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Progress report on the implementation of the German Government policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region," (2021): 3.

<sup>104</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Progress report on the implementation of the German Government policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region," (2021): 3.

<sup>105</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Progress report on the implementation of the German Government policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region," (2021): 3.

seamlessly with the principles of cooperation and shared progress, which are considered key facets of positive normative influence in this context. Demonstrating this commitment, Germany and the Republic of Korea initiated three collaborative research projects in robotics and lightweight technologies/carbon during the autumn of 2021.<sup>106</sup> This cooperative endeavor involves German and Korean research institutes, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises, pooling their expertise. Germany and the Republic of Korea's joint funding of 1.8 million euros each<sup>107</sup> not only underscores their commitment to innovation but also showcases their willingness to foster collaborative, equitable partnerships—attributes that exemplify normative influence. By supporting these cultural, educational, and scientific initiatives, Germany's normative influence reinforces the values of mutual respect, cooperation, and knowledge-sharing, ultimately advancing its interests in the Indo-Pacific region through collaborative means.

Germany's dedication to rules-based systems is exemplified by its endorsement of a free trade agreement between the EU and ASEAN. Germany has amplified its collaboration with ASEAN, emerging as a pivotal stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific arena. Since the inception of 2021, Germany's financial backing of newly launched climate and environmental protection initiatives, such as the ASEAN-German Climate Action Programme.<sup>108</sup> In support of organizational development, Germany extended assistance to the ASEAN Secretariat and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance, while also facilitating expert seminars on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.<sup>109</sup> This is a prime example of Germany using normative influence to advance its interests in the Indo-Pacific by demonstrating a commitment to established norms and values that emphasize collaboration, cooperation, and mutual support. Germany's intensified cooperation with ASEAN reflects its intent to shape the norms and values of regional interactions. By deepening collaboration with ASEAN and investing in projects that promote these norms and values, Germany positions itself as a positive influencer, shaping regional dynamics while advancing its own interests.

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<sup>106</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Progress report on the implementation of the German Government policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region," (2021): 11.

<sup>107</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Progress report on the implementation of the German Government policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region," 2021, 11.

<sup>108</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Progress report on the implementation of the German Government policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region," 2021, 5.

<sup>109</sup> The Federal Government of Germany. "Progress report on the implementation of the German Government policy guidelines on the Indo-Pacific region," 2021, 5.

#### **d) Conclusion**

Within the context of the EU's evolving role in the Indo-Pacific, Germany's nuanced approach and dual identity present an intriguing case for analysis through a constructivist lens. The EU's uncertainty about its role in the region stems from divergent opinions among its leaders, leading to unclear policy implementation and varying degrees of engagement. In contrast, both France and Germany, as individual nation-states, exhibit a greater degree of certainty regarding their roles and positions in the Indo-Pacific.

However, it is Germany's "dual identity" that offers a complex but potentially constructive perspective when examined through a constructivist framework. This dual identity encapsulates Germany's engagement with China—a juxtaposition of vocal criticism of China's human rights abuses alongside close economic ties as its largest trading partner. While this duality may seem contradictory, from a constructivist standpoint, it can be interpreted as a manifestation of the multi-dimensional nature of power, norms, and interests. Constructivism posits that international relations are shaped by shared norms, values, and identities, and that the interactions between actors contribute to the construction of those norms. In Germany's case, its dual identity reflects the complexities of navigating normative considerations and realpolitik interests. By expressing vocal criticism of China's human rights abuses, Germany signals its alignment with a normative framework that prioritizes human rights and democratic values. Simultaneously, its robust economic engagement with China showcases the pragmatic need to balance normative concerns with economic interests, considering China's significant role in the global economy.

From a constructivist perspective, Germany's dual identity can be interpreted as a positive engagement strategy. While it may appear confusing on the surface, it reflects the adaptability of states in responding to evolving norms and interests. This dual identity opens avenues for dialogue and influence—Germany's criticism of human rights abuses aligns with normative pressure exerted by like-minded countries, potentially contributing to the shaping of international norms in the region. Moreover, its economic engagement can be viewed as a soft power instrument, fostering economic interdependence and encouraging China to align its behavior with international norms. Furthermore, Germany's focus on economics and connectivity can be analyzed constructively as a means to promote shared norms and values indirectly. Economic interdependence and connectivity initiatives have the potential to foster regional cooperation, enhance stability, and promote norms such as openness and collaboration. By engaging in economic initiatives and connectivity projects, Germany is indirectly contributing to the construction of a regional identity that emphasizes economic cooperation and mutual benefit.

In essence, Germany's dual identity, while appearing contradictory, can be seen as a constructive expression of the complex interplay between norms, interests, and power dynamics. From a constructivist lens, it reflects the malleability of state behavior and the dynamic process of shaping norms through interactions. As Germany balances its normative concerns with economic interests, it contributes to the ongoing construction of a regional identity that integrates shared norms, values, and interests—ultimately fostering a more stable and cooperative Indo-Pacific region.

In conclusion, Germany's normative influence strategy in the Indo-Pacific region manifests through its multifaceted engagements and diplomatic initiatives. Through diplomatic visits and engagements with regional partners, Germany projects its commitment to shared values, understanding, and cooperation, strategically utilizing these interactions to shape cooperative norms. Moreover, Germany's active involvement in research, technology transfers, innovation partnerships, and cultural exchanges underscores its dedication to positive normative influence, fostering understanding, collaboration, and mutual respect while advancing its own interests. However, German-China relations expose complexities due to potential disagreements and concerns on some aspects such as human rights. As we transition to the next chapter on the EU's use of soft power and normative influence, it becomes evident that Germany's strategic normative influence aligns with the EU's broader approach to shaping cooperative norms and values on the international stage.

### **III. The EU's Indo-Pacific Analysis**

Embedded within the broader context of this research, which aims to explore the role of the EU in the Indo-Pacific region through its exercise of soft power and normative influence on a supranational level, the central research question that guides this inquiry emerges: "What role has the EU played in the Indo-Pacific region through its exercise of soft power and normative influence on a supranational level?" This chapter stands as a key component in answering this research question by meticulously examining the contributions of France and Germany to the EU's collective endeavors in the Indo-Pacific. Through an assessment of their distinct soft power and normative influence strategies, a comprehensive understanding emerges of the EU's broader impact and effectiveness in the region.

As outlined in the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, the designated geographical scope of the region extends from the eastern shores of Africa to the Pacific Island States.<sup>110</sup> The EU's overarching objective is to foster deeper engagement within this expanse, cultivating partnerships that bolster the foundations of the rules-based international order. This collaborative approach seeks to tackle global challenges while laying the groundwork for a rapid, fair, and enduring economic resurgence that paves the way for sustained prosperity.<sup>111</sup>

Both France and Germany play pivotal roles in shaping the EU's soft power and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific. A comprehensive analysis of France's soft power and normative influence, along with a parallel assessment of Germany's role, underpins the broader impact of the EU in this region. By collectively leveraging their respective strengths and historical ties, these countries contribute to the EU's strategic endeavors in the Indo-Pacific. This collaborative synergy amplifies the effectiveness of the EU's employment of soft power and normative influence to advance its interests in the region.

The Indo-Pacific area has swiftly risen in significance for Europe, primarily due to its burgeoning economy, expanding population, and escalating political sway. Consequently, Europe's vested interest in this region not only stands as justified but imperative. For Europe to effectively realize its aspirations and responsibilities, its approach to the Indo-Pacific must pivot on the foundational pillars of democracy, the rule of law, human rights,

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<sup>110</sup> European Commission, "The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*, (2021): 1.

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-union-indo-pacific-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-union-indo-pacific-strategy_en)

<sup>111</sup> European Commission, "The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," 1.

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-union-indo-pacific-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-union-indo-pacific-strategy_en)

and shared commitments.<sup>112</sup> These core principles not only underscore the EU's intentions but will also serve as the bedrock for their application of soft power and normative influence, facilitating the advancement of their strategic objectives in the Indo-Pacific.

### **a) Initiatives in the Indo-Pacific**

This segment delves into the tangible outcomes of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, examining its interests that align with the exercise of soft power and normative influence. The EU's strategic principles and ambitions, outlined in its Indo-Pacific strategy document, provide a basis for evaluating its accomplishments and commitments within the region. These initiatives, guided by the EU's approach to the Indo-Pacific, serve as pivotal instances that underscore the application of soft power in shaping regional dynamics.

#### **Economics, connectivity, Research and Innovation**

In terms of concrete steps towards achieving the stated objectives, the EU has announced several funding initiatives that will support its Indo-Pacific strategy. The EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region is closely aligned with the use of soft power tools and normative influence to advance its interests. Concrete steps are evident through various funding initiatives that promote sustainable infrastructure projects and economic opportunities in the region. For example, in September 2021, the EU announced a new €1 billion investment program to support sustainable infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>113</sup> This funding is aimed at promoting the EU's values and interests, such as sustainable development, climate action, and digitalization, while also creating economic opportunities for EU businesses. While a comprehensive evaluation of the EU's implementation of its Indo-Pacific strategy is yet to be conducted, the EU has embarked upon some preliminary measures to set the initiatives in motion. Additionally, the EU has also disclosed that it will be funding initiatives to support its objectives outlined in the strategy.

Some experts argue that the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region can contribute to strengthening the rules-based international order, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing connectivity in the region. For example, a policy brief by the European Policy Centre highlights the potential of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy to promote sustainable development in the region through its support for the UN's Sustainable

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<sup>112</sup> European Commission, "The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," 1.  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-union-indo-pacific-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/european-union-indo-pacific-strategy_en)

<sup>113</sup> European Commission, "EU announces €1 billion investment program in the Indo-Pacific," (2021).  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_4606](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_4606)

Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change.<sup>114</sup> The policy brief states that the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy recognizes the importance of achieving the SDGs, which aim to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, and address climate change, among other goals.<sup>115</sup>

In terms of enhancing connectivity, the EU has proposed a "Connectivity Partnership" with the Indo-Pacific region, which aims to improve digital, physical, and people-to-people connectivity. This initiative could potentially have a positive impact on the region's connectivity and economic integration. According to the policy brief by the European Policy Centre, the Connectivity Partnership will provide an opportunity to create a "digital Silk Road" between Europe and Asia, promoting sustainable development through enhanced trade, investment, and infrastructure development.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, the policy brief suggests that the EU's focus on promoting sustainable connectivity will help ensure that development in the region is environmentally friendly and socially inclusive. The proposed "Connectivity Partnership" embodies the use of soft power tools and normative influence as well, aiming to improve digital, physical, and people-to-people connectivity. This initiative not only fosters economic integration but also upholds sustainable development principles.

## **Multilateralism & rule of law**

There is some evidence to suggest that the EU has been successful in cooperating with national and multilateral partners to achieve its objectives in the Indo-Pacific region, although there have also been challenges in building effective partnerships with regional organizations. One example of successful cooperation can be seen in the EU's efforts to combat climate change in the region. The EU has worked with partners in the Indo-Pacific to promote sustainable development and combat climate change through initiatives such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process, which brings together representatives from 53 countries to discuss a range of issues, including environmental protection and sustainable development.<sup>117</sup> This collaborative effort is a crucial component of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy, which seeks to promote a rules-based international order and address global challenges such as climate change through multilateral cooperation.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> European Policy Centre, "The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy: an opportunity for sustainable development," *Policy Brief*, (2021), accessed on 22 July 2023, <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/The-EUs-Indo-Pacific-strategy~3b3b3a>

<sup>115</sup> European Policy Centre, "The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy: an opportunity for sustainable development," *Policy Brief*, (2021), accessed on 22 July 2023, <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/The-EUs-Indo-Pacific-strategy~3b3b3a>

<sup>116</sup> European Policy Centre, "The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy: an opportunity for sustainable development," *Policy Brief*, (2021), accessed on 22 July 2023, <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/The-EUs-Indo-Pacific-strategy~3b3b3a>

<sup>117</sup> John Humphrey and Ruth Taplin, "Green shoots: The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and sustainable development," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 44, no. 3 (2014): 451.

<sup>118</sup> European Commission, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy," 2021, accessed on 23 July 2023 <https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/eus-indo-pacific-strategy>



In terms of building effective partnerships with regional organizations, there have been some challenges. For example, the EU has struggled to build strong relationships with ASEAN, in part due to differences in values and approaches to governance, the lack of a clear EU strategy towards ASEAN, and the tendency of ASEAN to prioritize regional over extra-regional relationships.<sup>119</sup> However, the EU has made efforts to engage with ASEAN through initiatives such as the EU-ASEAN Dialogue on Sustainable Development, which aims to promote sustainable development and address environmental challenges in the region.<sup>120</sup>

On February 22, 2022, during the French Presidency of the EU Council, a significant Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific took place with the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, jointly leading the effort.<sup>121</sup> The forum in Paris brought together key participants, including European institutions, Foreign Affairs ministers from all 27 EU countries, and around 30 representatives from the Indo-Pacific region, along with representatives of regional organizations from both the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean areas.<sup>122</sup> The forum had a clear aim: to collectively reaffirm commitment to a rules-based international order built on democratic values. A crucial focus was on strengthening multilateralism and upholding the rule of law. Participants agreed on the importance of following international law, with a particular emphasis on essential principles such as freedom of navigation as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).<sup>123</sup>

This collaboration extended beyond talk, with an emphasis on adopting a sustainable, inclusive, and rules-based approach. Discussions highlighted the need for robust cooperation in central regulatory frameworks, aligning with the aim to develop secure and resilient physical infrastructure. In parallel, the EU harnessed tools of soft power and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific. This diplomatic strategy aimed to promote shared understanding and adherence to the principles voiced in the forum. The EU leveraged alignment on democratic values, multilateralism, and the rule of law as a means to project its influence in the region. This approach

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<sup>119</sup> Tommy Koh, "ASEAN and EU: Similarities and Differences" in *ASEAN-EU Partnership*, *Asia Europe Journal*, 13(3), (2020): 322.

<sup>120</sup> European Commission. (2021). EU-ASEAN Dialogue on Sustainable Development. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/partners/asean\\_en#EU-ASEAN\\_Dialogue\\_on\\_Sustainable\\_Development](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/partners/asean_en#EU-ASEAN_Dialogue_on_Sustainable_Development)

<sup>121</sup> "Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," European Union External Action, last modified February 22, 2022, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific\\_en#:~:text=On%2022%20February%202022%2C%20the.the%20Indo%2DPacific%20bringing%20together](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific_en#:~:text=On%2022%20February%202022%2C%20the.the%20Indo%2DPacific%20bringing%20together)

<sup>122</sup> "Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," European Union External Action, last modified February 22, 2022, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific\\_en#:~:text=On%2022%20February%202022%2C%20the.the%20Indo%2DPacific%20bringing%20together](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific_en#:~:text=On%2022%20February%202022%2C%20the.the%20Indo%2DPacific%20bringing%20together)

<sup>123</sup> "Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," European Union External Action, last modified February 22, 2022, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific\\_en#:~:text=On%2022%20February%202022%2C%20the.the%20Indo%2DPacific%20bringing%20together](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific_en#:~:text=On%2022%20February%202022%2C%20the.the%20Indo%2DPacific%20bringing%20together)

showcased the EU's strategic use of soft power to enhance its image as a committed partner dedicated to upholding principles that contribute to regional stability, cooperation, and prosperity.

### **Climate change & human rights**

The Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific underscored the mutual aspiration among participants to foster the advancement of the Indo-Pacific region and to strengthen the bonds connecting the EU and its partners in the region.<sup>124</sup> This was to be achieved through collaborative efforts and acts of solidarity, built upon the bedrock of shared commitments. A pivotal facet of these discussions delved into the realm of climate change combat and the safeguarding of human rights. The discourse delved into the strategic pathways necessary to actualize ambitious measures for mitigation, considering the vulnerabilities prevalent in various Indo-Pacific countries. Emphasis was laid on the imperative of adaptation as well as the pursuit of an equitable energy transition. This commitment resonates deeply with the EU's strategic use of normative influence. By promoting the principles of climate action and human rights, the EU enhances its position in the Indo-Pacific region, projecting itself as an advocate for shared values.

During the discussions, Ministers and EU delegates underscored two noteworthy projects: the Varuna initiative and the MarEco endeavor. Both of these initiatives benefit from the patronage of the French Development Agency.<sup>125</sup> They collectively serve to enhance the management of marine ecosystems and resources while simultaneously propelling the advancement of a sustainable blue economy. These endeavors bear testament to the EU's strategic approach of employing normative influence. By investing in projects that directly address ecological preservation and sustainable economic growth, the EU not only exhibits its commitment to shared values but also reinforces its position as a pivotal partner in shaping the Indo-Pacific landscape. These discussions not only signified collaborative endeavors but also accentuated the strategic harmony between climate change and human rights advocacy, interwoven with the EU's calculated employment of normative influence to assert its integral role in shaping the Indo-Pacific landscape.

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<sup>124</sup> "Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," European Union External Action, last modified February 22, 2022, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific\\_en#:~:text=On%2022%20February%202022%2C%20the.the%20Indo%2DPacific%20bringing%20together](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific_en#:~:text=On%2022%20February%202022%2C%20the.the%20Indo%2DPacific%20bringing%20together)

<sup>125</sup> "Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," European Union External Action, last modified February 22, 2022, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific\\_en#:~:text=On%2022%20February%202022%2C%20the.the%20Indo%2DPacific%20bringing%20together](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific_en#:~:text=On%2022%20February%202022%2C%20the.the%20Indo%2DPacific%20bringing%20together)

## **b) Soft power**

### **How the EU's strategy is linked to the concept of Soft Power.**

The EU's utilization of soft power to advance its interests in the Indo-Pacific region is evident through its multifaceted initiatives. As was mentioned in the previous section, these endeavors encompass economics, connectivity, research, innovation, multilateralism, rule of law, climate change, and human rights. By strategically leveraging normative influence, the EU aims to project its values and principles, fostering cooperation, stability, and sustainable development in the region. The EU's multifaceted initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region, coupled with its strategic focus, exemplify its use of soft power. Through these diplomatic channels, the EU advances its interests by fostering a common understanding, strengthening regional cooperation, and projecting its image as a partner dedicated to upholding principles that contribute to the region's prosperity and stability.

According to McCarthy, Kwon, and Lockwood, Macron's visit to China in 2023 shows that France and the EU are acting autonomously in the Indo-Pacific and not aligning themselves with the US camp, which favors a policy that counters China's influence.<sup>126</sup> Macron has demonstrated his commitment to collaborating with China while condemning some of its actions, such as human rights violations and economic sanctions. Although the joint call for restraint may not be seen as significant progress, it is a step towards leveraging the EU's strengths to promote regional stability, prosperity, and sustainability. The visit was also accompanied by the Head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. Their joint trip highlights a recent push from European leaders to engage with China. Macron and von der Leyen jointly visited China to engage with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the ongoing Ukraine conflict and to address the increasingly fraught trade relationship between the EU and China. Macron took a conciliatory approach in engaging with Putin, while von der Leyen took a more assertive stance due to her close relationship with US President Joe Biden and her support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s position. Macron has found common ground with Chinese proposals on ending the war, while von der Leyen has criticized Xi for his friendship with Putin and has called for a "de-risking" approach to China, where Europe engages in tougher diplomacy, diversifies

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<sup>126</sup> Simone McCarthy, Jake Kwon, and Pauline Lockwood, "Macron counting on China's Xi 'to reason' with Russia over Ukraine war." *CNN*, Updated April 6, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/06/china/macron-xi-jinping-beijing-china-ukraine-war-intl-hnk/index.html>

its trade sources, and protects its trade and technology.<sup>127</sup> This visit demonstrates the EU's willingness to engage with China independently, separate from the US, and address the Ukraine conflict and trade relations with China. The different approaches of Macron and von der Leyen show that the EU is willing to take a multifaceted approach to engage with China, which is in line with the EU's autonomous Indo-Pacific strategy. The decision for Mr. Macron and Ms. von der Leyen to travel to Beijing together was a smart one, as it gives Mr. Macron a credible claim that his visit is on behalf of Europe, not just France, and also shows Mr. Xi that he cannot just expect to have bilateral deals with Paris and Berlin and circumvent the EU. This decision holds significance in terms of soft power because it leverages the perception of a united and cohesive European stance, rather than individual national interests. This unity enhances the EU's soft power by projecting a stronger and more influential presence on the international stage. It signals to China that any engagement or negotiation should consider the EU as a whole, promoting the EU's normative influence and diplomatic clout. However, confusing messaging from other European leaders along with the de-risking approach proposed by Ms. von der Leyen will become harder and more costly the longer it takes to align policy with words. While the visit could serve to make clear demands and lay down red lines, the messaging remains unclear, causing some doubt about Europe's attitude shift among the Chinese government.<sup>128</sup>

In contrast, Macron's recent state visit to China has been heavily criticized for exposing disunity in Europe regarding China and handing Chinese President Xi Jinping a propaganda victory. Macron's adoption of Chinese talking points about a new "multipolar" world and the end of a "Cold War mentality" drew criticism, but according to the Washington Post, the biggest mistake came during his flight home when he suggested that Europe should not follow the US in defending Taiwan.<sup>129</sup> This comment caused outrage in the US, across Europe, and in Taiwan. The Washington Post has been highly critical of Macron's visit, calling it "disastrous" and arguing that he should have focused on domestic problems rather than creating new problems overseas. Overall, Macron's visit revealed the complexities of Europe's relationship with China and the challenges it faces in presenting a unified front on this issue. The implementation of any action indicating the EU's commitment to an independent approach is likely to encounter significant opposition from US policymakers.

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<sup>127</sup> Janka Oertel and Andrew Small, "Bad cop in Brussels: How the European Commission is driving the China narrative – again," European Council on Foreign Relations, March 31, 2023, accessed April 28, 2023,

[https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_bad\\_cop\\_in\\_brussels\\_how\\_the\\_european\\_commission\\_is\\_driving\\_the\\_china\\_narrative\\_again/](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_bad_cop_in_brussels_how_the_european_commission_is_driving_the_china_narrative_again/)

<sup>128</sup> Janka Oertel and Andrew Small, "Bad cop in Brussels: How the European Commission is driving the China narrative – again," European Council on Foreign Relations, March 31, 2023, accessed April 28, 2023,

[https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_bad\\_cop\\_in\\_brussels\\_how\\_the\\_european\\_commission\\_is\\_driving\\_the\\_china\\_narrative\\_again/](https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_bad_cop_in_brussels_how_the_european_commission_is_driving_the_china_narrative_again/)

<sup>129</sup> Washington Post Editorial Board, "Emmanuel Macron should have stayed home," Washington Post, April 17, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/04/16/emmanuel-macron-china-trip-xi-ukraine>, accessed April 28, 2023

French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Beijing, alongside Ursula von der Leyen, serves as a compelling illustration of the EU's strategic use of soft power and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Macron demonstrated the EU's intent to independently pursue diplomatic initiatives. This sends a clear message that the EU can assert itself as a significant diplomatic player, capable of facilitating dialogue and influencing outcomes. Discussions between Macron, von der Leyen, and Chinese President Xi Jinping exemplify the EU's commitment to regional stability and adherence to international norms. This reflects the EU's normative influence strategy, aimed at promoting diplomatic solutions, multilateralism, and cooperative problem-solving in the region. Importantly, the visit showcases the diverse approaches that the EU employs to exercise its influence. Macron's conciliatory stance with Putin and alignment with certain Chinese proposals illustrate the EU's flexibility in seeking common ground. Conversely, von der Leyen's assertive posture and alignment with NATO's position demonstrate the EU's readiness to adopt varying tactics to address complex issues. This diversity of approaches not only strengthens the EU's influence but also enables it to engage with different stakeholders on their own terms. The reasons behind this strategic utilization of soft power are multifaceted. First and foremost, the joint visit of Macron and von der Leyen underscores the EU's pursuit of regional autonomy. By engaging with China independently, apart from the US, the EU establishes its unique diplomatic identity, signaling that it is a formidable autonomous actor capable of shaping regional dynamics. Additionally, the visit highlights the EU's commitment to multilateral engagement and the promotion of international norms. Through discussions on pressing issues like the Ukraine conflict and trade relations, the EU underlines its dedication to cooperative problem-solving, adherence to the rule of law, and the propagation of diplomacy.

In conclusion, Macron's and von der Leyen's visit to China exemplifies the EU's skillful use of soft power and normative influence in the Indo-Pacific. Through autonomous engagement, emphasis on stability and international norms, and diverse approaches to diplomacy, the EU positions itself as a pivotal player in shaping the region's dynamics. This strategic approach is designed to assert the EU's values, foster cooperation, and contribute to regional stability, aligning seamlessly with the principles of soft power and normative influence.

### **The EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy in the Face of China's Ascendancy: A Soft Power Perspective**

In terms of promoting an independent strategy in the face of a more assertive China, the EU has taken a firm stance on issues such as human rights violations, trade practices, and cybersecurity concerns. As was mentioned in the section on initiatives, the EU has also sought to diversify its economic and security partnerships in the region to reduce dependence on any one country. China has reacted cautiously to the EU's initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region, expressing concerns about the EU's intentions and warning against interference in the

region's affairs. In 2018, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson criticized the EU's Connectivity Strategy for Asia, saying that it '*seems to target China, [and] is full of Cold War thinking*'.<sup>130</sup>

However, China has also expressed a willingness to engage with the EU on issues of common interest and has participated in some joint initiatives: in 2019, the two parties issued a joint statement reaffirming their commitment to the Paris Agreement on climate change and agreeing to cooperate further on climate action.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, in 2020, they held a high-level dialogue on environment and climate change, where they discussed crucial issues such as carbon neutrality and biodiversity.<sup>132</sup> These initiatives demonstrate the EU and China's willingness to cooperate despite their differences and seek common ground on issues of mutual concern.

Amidst the rise of a more assertive China, the EU employs tools of soft power in the Indo-Pacific region through various strategies. The EU's approach involves taking a strong stance on key issues such as human rights, trade practices, and cybersecurity. Additionally, the EU aims to diversify its economic and security partnerships in the region, reducing reliance on any single country, including China. In response to the EU's initiatives, China has shown caution and expressed concerns about perceived intentions, warning against interference in regional affairs. The EU's new Indo-Pacific strategy has also drawn China's concern, prompting calls to avoid geopolitical confrontations. Despite tensions, the EU and China have engaged in cooperative efforts. These instances highlight the EU's soft power utilization. By addressing shared concerns and engaging with China on areas of mutual interest, the EU showcases its diplomatic finesse, aiming to bridge gaps and create avenues for cooperation amidst differences. The EU's strategic use of soft power navigates the complex landscape of the Indo-Pacific, fostering collaboration while asserting its own interests and values.

### **c) Normative Influence**

The EU has consistently positioned itself as a principled normative force on the global stage, aligning with Ian Manners' concept of "Normative Power Europe."<sup>133</sup> This approach presents the EU as a collective embodying

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<sup>130</sup> Bruno Maçães, "Europe's emerging Indo-Pacific strategy and China. The Pacific Review," 33(5), (2020): 693, doi: 10.1080/09512748.2020.1810255

<sup>131</sup> Bruno Maçães, "Europe's emerging Indo-Pacific strategy and China. The Pacific Review," 33(5), (2020): 694, doi: 10.1080/09512748.2020.1810255

<sup>132</sup> Alice Ekman, "China and the EU in the Indo-Pacific: Prospects for engagement and competition," European View, 20(1), (2021): 130, doi: 10.1007/s12290-021-00904-2

<sup>133</sup> "The concept of normative power Europe is an attempt to refocus analysis away from the empirical emphasis on the EU's institutions or policies, and towards including cognitive processes, with both substantive and symbolic components" - Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *JCMS Volume 40, Number 2*, (2002): 239.

liberal principles and norms, with foreign policy focused on advancing and safeguarding the rules-based international order rooted in liberalism. The dynamics between the EU and ASEAN reveal both convergence and divergence of principles. The EU's normative power clashes with the "ASEAN Way" of non-interference, as seen in its "quiet diplomacy" stance on issues like Myanmar under military rule. The EU's commitment to democracy, rule of law, human rights, and international law contrasts with ASEAN's conservative and authoritarian regional stance. Despite this divergence, the EU's normative power is pivotal for its own political evolution and long-term strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. Maritime security is a component of this power, evident through the EU's advocacy for freedom of navigation, maritime multilateralism, and rules-based sea governance. The EU also tackles marine environmental degradation arising from global warming, pollution, and illegal fishing through mechanisms like the "carding scheme" targeting IUU fishing since 2010. The EU and ASEAN converge on several normative agendas, including UN sustainable development goals, ocean governance, gender equality, the Paris Agreement, and post-COVID recovery. In contrast to the US approach that emphasizes minilateral frameworks like the Quad and AUKUS (acronym for the trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the EU engages with ASEAN-led multilateral institutions and the ASEM process, prioritizing ASEAN Centrality. This pragmatic approach allows cooperation while maintaining the EU's normative stance.

However, the EU's division between pragmatic and normative power sometimes leads to incoherence in its Indo-Pacific policy. To bolster its comprehensive partnership with ASEAN and enhance its regional presence, the EU should emphasize and advocate for ASEAN Centrality in the long term. This strategic move aligns with the EU's normative power and enhances its standing in the Indo-Pacific. It is evident that the EU and ASEAN both share mutual concerns regarding the future of the Indo-Pacific region. The pressing requirement is the establishment of a collaborative vision and a robust action plan to drive engagement and effective implementation across the region.

Both the French and German strategies in the Indo-Pacific region demonstrate the use of soft power and normative influence to advance their respective interests while contributing to the EU's broader regional presence. France's strategy, exemplified by President Macron's visit to Beijing and cooperation with China on issues like ending the war in Ukraine, showcases its commitment to pursuing an autonomous strategy in the Indo-Pacific. France's emphasis on stability, rules-based order, and engagement with regional partners aligns with its normative values and promotes its soft power. Additionally, France's geographical positioning within the region, reinforced by its overseas territories, legitimizes its role in the area. This positioning presents France as a regional actor directly connected to the Indo-Pacific, fostering perceptions among regional countries that France is an ally distinct from the US-China rivalry, further enhancing its normative influence. Germany's

strategy, particularly the focus on "de-risking" and diversifying its economic partnerships in the region, reflects a pragmatic approach to safeguarding its interests. This strategy utilizes economic tools to foster cooperation, aligning with Germany's normative stance on fostering multilateralism and dialogue. By pursuing sustainable development, climate action, and connectivity initiatives, Germany aims to project a positive image and shape the regional discourse through shared values and cooperation, thus exerting normative influence.

When combined, the French and German initiatives contribute to the EU's role as a regional entity in the Indo-Pacific. By showcasing a coordinated approach, the EU reinforces its collective identity and normative values. The convergence of French and German strategies within the broader EU framework amplifies the EU's soft power by presenting a united front, which increases the bloc's influence in shaping regional norms, policies, and dialogues. This unity demonstrates the EU's commitment to promoting stability, prosperity, and sustainable development, enhancing its role as a normative power in the Indo-Pacific.



## **Conclusion**

In the complex geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific, the strategic approaches of France, Germany, and the EU illustrate the astute use of soft power and normative influence to navigate this dynamic region. In this exploration, the intricate interplay between soft power and normative influence has been unveiled, showcasing their intertwined yet distinct roles in shaping international dynamics. Soft power's emphasis on attractiveness, cultural resonance, and fostering positive perceptions has been juxtaposed with normative influence's focus on shared values, guiding principles, and behavioral expectations.

Divergence further emerges in their methods of engagement. Soft power tactically employs cultural exchanges, educational ties, and economic collaborations to subtly reshape perceptions, while normative influence takes a more direct route through diplomatic channels, international organizations, and cooperative endeavors to advocate for and defend established norms. The objectives of these two forces diverge as well. Soft power seeks to sculpt preferences, generating goodwill through positive impressions, whereas normative influence strives to establish enduring behavioral expectations and encourage adherence to specific values. While their spheres of impact partially overlap, their scopes differ. Soft power transcends the confines of norms, encompassing a wider spectrum of mechanisms for influence, whereas normative influence hones in specifically on the power inherent in shared principles and norms. Moreover, the duration of their effects varies. Soft power's sustained positive relationships and heightened receptivity to a state's interests can endure over time. Conversely, normative influence aims to institutionalize certain norms and principles, ensuring their persistence in shaping international behavior in the long run. While these concepts might overlap, the distinction between soft power and normative influence becomes apparent, yet their harmonious coexistence reveals the multifaceted arsenal that states and entities can wield to navigate complex international terrains.

France's proactive engagement, as seen through President Macron's diplomatic efforts, artfully deploys soft power mechanisms such as cultural exchanges and economic linkages to cultivate favorable perceptions. Leveraging its strategic geographic positioning in the region, France also wields its normative influence, presenting itself as a partner that transcends the confines of the US-China rivalry.

Germany, in parallel, adopts a pragmatic stance that prioritizes "de-risking" while harnessing soft power tools to propagate shared values. By emphasizing sustainable development, climate action, and connectivity, Germany projects an image of constructive engagement while simultaneously advancing its normative goals.

Crucially, the EU amalgamates the soft power and normative influence strategies of both France and Germany into a cohesive framework. This integration empowers the EU to wield its collective identity and advocate for stability, prosperity, and sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific. This unified front not only cultivates favorable perceptions but also works toward reinforcing shared behavioral expectations and enduring principles. The EU has significantly shaped the Indo-Pacific region through its exercise of soft power and normative influence on a supranational level. Employing its attractive cultural appeal, the EU has engaged in cultural exchanges, education initiatives, and economic partnerships, fostering positive perceptions. Simultaneously, the EU's normative influence has been evident in its diplomatic efforts, engagement within international organizations, and cooperative ventures, all aimed at promoting and defending shared values and principles. These combined strategies have enabled the EU to position itself as a pivotal player, contributing to regional stability, sustainable development, and connectivity. By utilizing both soft power and normative influence, the EU has not only advanced its interests but has also reinforced its role as a key regional entity with a proactive and comprehensive approach in the Indo-Pacific.

The primary objective of this thesis was to bring into focus the often-overlooked perspective offered by the constructivist lens and its application in achieving a comprehensive grasp of the EU's strategy. Despite the insights provided by a constructivist approach, its limitations were evident, as observed in the sections dedicated to France and Germany. These sections revealed instances where the interpretation of soft power and normative influence tools could diverge from the constructivist framework, which emphasizes the impact of shared values and norms on countries' behaviors. Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge the necessity of adopting a holistic approach when assessing the Indo-Pacific region, which demands the incorporation of various other international relations theories. While the constructivist perspective enhances our understanding of the EU's approach to the region, it is prudent to recognize that alternative viewpoints and arguments from other theories also hold significance. Such a consideration enables us to uncover potential limitations within the constructivist framework. It is imperative to avoid constraining our analysis to a single theory, as every international relations theory contributes unique insights. The rejection of other theories' arguments in favor of one risks oversimplifying a region characterized by a multifaceted geopolitical landscape.

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