(working title)

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Abstract

The study of ‘power’ is probably among the most arduous tasks in the realm of IR; defining power “remains a matter of controversy” (Waltz 1986: 333). Especially when it comes to explain power shift in contemporary world politics existing concepts of power in political science (hard and soft power) are shortcoming (Nye / Keohane: 2001, Keohane: 2003), either because of the fact that existing concepts are lacking at the level of operationalization (soft power), or because of the act that existing approaches (hard power) are no longer suitable to explain the whole range of empirical power phenomena in 21st century international relations, characterized by global interdependence and a setting of mutual integration of actors. International trade is maybe the most interdependent sector of international relations, characterized by mutual dependence of the states involved. By looking at hard or soft power capabilities, power shift in international trading system can only be explained in rudimentary ways. This project is going to address this problems, by focusing on the policy of three most important trading entities (the U.S., EU and China), in contemporary world politics accounting for approx. 33% of total global share in trade (WTO: Trade Statistics, Bonn Power Shift Monitor: 2010), and tries...

1. ...to investigate the ontological character of the structure of the international trading system in terms of the relationship between structure, units and political power.

2. ...to investigate the ontology of (structural) power within this relationship and to answer the question how does power work in the sector and through which transmissions channels it is exercised and to conceptualize sector specific structural power capabilities for this sector and developing appropriate indicators.

3. ...to identify sector specific structural power capabilities of the “big three” in international trade (EU, US, China).

4. ...to answer the question under which conditions these sector specific structural power capabilities transmits successfully into the ability of one state to achieve its preferences and to shape the structure in the case of the “big three”.

5. ...to answer the question if there has taken place a power shift between the “big three” in the international trading system by incorporating the results from 1-4 in synoptical comparative analysis.