

Partner, Competitor or Rival? The German China Strategy in Turbulent Times

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Abstract

In recent years, an increasing number of researchers have focused on China's global role and its relations with EU Member States. Germany, as the EU's leading economic power, plays a significant role for the Asian country. At the same time, global developments, and the growth of Chinese influence in Europe are often challenging for the partner country. The main aim of this paper is to examine the extent to which German-China relations in the past decade can be considered successful and to what extent Hanns W. Maull's concept of civilian power explains German foreign policy behaviour towards China. In my research, I conclude that while German-China ties have deepened over the past decade, especially in economic terms, these relations are not balanced and, in many cases, have increased Germany's exposure. As for the second research question, both primary and secondary research confirm that German foreign policy towards China acts as a civilian power for which it is essential to establish trade relations and thus to civilize international relations through relations with the partner country, which it also applies in a multilateral formation, as in the case of Germany, the EU.

Absztrakt

Az elmúlt években egyre több kutató foglalkozik Kína globális szerepével, illetve az EU tagállamaival kialakított kapcsolataival. Németország az EU vezető gazdasági hatalmaként jelentős szerepet tölt be az ázsiai ország számára. Ugyanakkor a globális folyamatok és a kínai befolyás Európán belüli növekedése sok esetben kihívások elé állítják a partnerországot. Jelen dolgozat fő célja annak vizsgálata, hogy mennyire tekinthető sikeresnek az elmúlt évtized német-kínai kapcsolatok, valamint, hogy mennyiben magyarázza Hanns W. Maull polgári hatalom koncepciója a német külpolitikai viselkedést Kína irányában. Kutatásom során arra következtetésre jutok, hogy ugyan a német-kínai kapcsolatok elmélyültek az elmúlt évtized során, elsősorban gazdasági tekintetben, ugyanakkor ezek a relációk nem kiegyensúlyozottak és sok esetben növelték Németország kitettségét. A másik kutatási kérdés esetében elmondható, hogy mind a primer, mind a szekunder kutatás is alátámasztja, hogy a német külpolitika Kína esetében olyan civil hatalomként viselkedik, amely számára lényeges a kereskedelmi kapcsolatok kialakítása, valamint ezáltal a nemzetközi kapcsolatok civilizálása a partnerországgal kialakított kapcsolatok révén, amelyet multilaterális formációban is alkalmaz, ahogy Németország esetében az EU is megjelenik.

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Introduction

Germany's leading role not only at regional level but also in world politics and economics is unquestioned. The Federal Republic of Germany is not only a major player in European integration, but its economy is also the fourth largest in the world, and for this reason it is often seen as the number one economic engine of the European continent (Marshall 2017:134). The People's Republic of China has undergone a much more rapid development process in the new millennium. Thanks to market reforms in trade, it is now considered the second largest economy in the world (International Monetary Fund 2024:5). Not only its economic power, but also its political and military power, has made it a major player in shaping the day-to-day development of world politics and economics. The economic power of the People's Republic is also felt on the European continent. Beijing is the number one trading partner not only of the European Union but also of Germany (Ischinger, 2020:276). The growing economic partnership plays a prominent role in the political dialogue between the two countries. More than 80 dialogue mechanisms are in place between Berlin and Beijing at different levels ranging from economic, political, cultural and legal issues to human rights issues (Molnár, 2018).

Germany, as the European Union's number one economic power and one of its most influential member states, has set itself the goal of building a stable, multifaceted relationship with China in the economic interest of the country (Die Bundesregierung 2006:48). However, recent events such as the rise of Beijing's international influence, human rights issues, and the Russian-Ukrainian war and the resulting world order transformation processes have challenged the federal government in Berlin and are challenging the relationship between the two states. The relationship between the two countries is of great relevance for all EU Member States, including Hungary. For while Germany is a military ally, a member of the European integration process and the most important economic partner, trade with Beijing and growing Chinese investment in the Central European region are of growing importance. For these reasons, the future of Europe and its stability will depend on the development of German Chinese relations and Germany's cooperation with Beijing.

The main focus of this thesis is the examination of German Chinese relations over the past decade and, in particular, Germany's policy towards China since Xi Jinping came to power in 2013. In my research, I seek to answer the question of what events and factors have shaped the relationship between the two countries and how these have influenced the Berlin federal government's approach to China. In my thesis, I seek to answer the following question. To what

extent does Hanns W. Maull's concept of civilian power explain German foreign policy behaviour towards China?

I want to reflect on the German Federal Government's relations with China in the past decade and on the German intentions behind the events in the German-China relationship and, in turn, on German foreign policy behavior by means of a secondary and primary research as well as a concept based on a specific foreign policy behavior. Although China's relations with the European Union and other states have been gaining ground in recent times and the relationship between the two countries and the German federal government's relations with China are often the subject of investigation in German academic public discourse, there is little foreign and Hungarian literature that seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of the subject by applying an international political theory.

In terms of its relevance, the thesis examines a topical problem: while Western states are facing more and more challenges in both the domestic and the international context, China's international expansion calls for a reinterpretation of the foundations of the current world order. Germany and the EU Member States have recently not only developed closer ties with China but have for years been trading the most with the Asian country. Increasing investment, exports and imports have led to a growing economic, technological and in many cases geopolitical dependence on Beijing. Although German Chinese relations are developing dynamically in many areas, various German economic and political decision-makers often express concern about their exposure to China. As the economic and political influence of the People's Republic grows at regional and global level, leading European and German politicians are increasingly raising their voices and calling for "de-risking" from China. In addition to the topicality of the subject, I chose this topic for several reasons. Firstly, it is interesting because of the duality of the federal government's approach to China, which can be observed in some areas in the political action against Beijing and in the growing importance of economic relations between the two countries. Secondly, since Russia's offensive against Ukraine in 2022, Western states have been seeking to minimise their economic and political exposure in all areas, which has a significant impact not only on German China policy, but also on the Europe-China relationship. Moreover, the development of relations between Berlin and Beijing is not irrelevant for Hungary.

In terms of structure, the thesis can be divided into three major units. In addition to the theoretical framework, secondary research and a case study from primary research form the basis of the thesis. Following the introduction, I will first present the theory of civilian power foreign policy as developed by Hanns W. Maull and applied in this thesis, including the most

important characteristics of German foreign policy behaviour and the main focus of the foreign policy strategy of the federal governments in relation to German-Chinese relations. I will also discuss the methodology of my primary research. Afterwards, I will first outline the secondary and then the primary research, which will form the main part of my thesis. While the secondary research will be based on various primary sources, such as journals, books, articles in newspapers and on websites, my primary research will be based on interviews with people who are familiar with the subject. In the conclusion of the research paper, I summarise and synthesise the findings of the secondary and primary research, summarise my answers to the research question on which the research is based, and summarise the potential further research opportunities on the topic. Before the main subject of the thesis is presented, I will illustrate Hanns W. Maull's concept of civilian power (Zivilmacht), which serves as the theoretical framework for my research paper.

1 The theoretical framework of the research paper

There are several different theories that can help in the analysis of the foreign policy behaviour of a given state. This includes the three grand theories of international relations, realism, liberalism and constructivism, which are among the most commonly used theoretical frameworks (Kiss J. 2009:214-215). Maull's thesis of civilian power as the theoretical framework to be applied to examine German Chinese relations and the federal government's policy towards China. The theory provides a specific interpretation of the German state's foreign policy behavior and understanding of power dynamics, which I intend to examine in relation to a relationship with another state. As already mentioned in the introduction, primary research will be conducted alongside the secondary research. The primary research will be based on structured interviews with experts and policy makers. Thus, in this chapter, the most important features of constructivism and the concept of civilian power will be presented, alongside the methodological background of my primary research.

1.1 The main features of constructivism

Constructivism is the youngest of the three main theories, dating back to the 1980s within the field of international relations, when critical and postmodern theories proposed different alternatives for understanding the concepts of reality, truth and structure (Smith 1995: 25). In the 1990s the theory became known and associated with the names of scholars such as Peter J. Katzenstein and Alexander Wendt. Alongside Katzenstein and Wendt, several others within the international relations discipline challenged the material interest-based approach of realism and liberalism at the end of the Cold War. They argue that the international political system is primarily not the result of objective factors but of socially constructed ideas that can be understood through transnational and social relations (Flockhart 2016:79-93). Wendt (1999) also argues in his seminal work that the world of international politics is a constructed idea that reflects a certain type of shared knowledge and a set of norms about reality. He also highlights the central role of ideas and norms, which he argues are essential for understanding the structure of the international system and the behaviour of states (Wendt, 1999).

According to the constructivist approach, the international order is fundamentally governed by norms and rules (Wendt, 1987). Within this system are individuals, states, non-state actors, whose behaviour is determined not only by objective factors but also by different norms, rules, social values, national identities and political culture. For the proponents of this

theory, the world is based on the interaction between these actors and the structures that make up their environment, i.e. it is socially constructed. In contrast to previous mainstream theories, it does not focus on the particular interest of a foreign policy actor, but rather explores how a particular interest is shaped through the interaction of the actor and the environment (Barnett, 2017). Both political culture and national identity are seen as widespread properties of communities within a given society. However, not only communities within a society, but also different processes and external factors can shape the behaviour of an actor. To a significant extent, a state's foreign policy is influenced by its integration into international institutions (e.g. UN, NATO, EU), as foreign policy behaviour needs to be aligned with the framework of norms, values and principles that are established within a given community and that these institutions transmit to their members (Kiss, J. Kiss, 2009:379). At the same time, the state can be not only the subject but also the shaper of the institution's normative system.

Within constructivism, one possible way of examining the relationship between the identity of the state and its foreign policy behaviour is the so-called role concept (Aggestam, 1999). By role concept, we can understand the set of norms of actors that are expressed in reality, in the state's foreign policy behaviour and in the direction of foreign policy action. The role thus represents an essential link between the actor and the international system, as it connects foreign policy behaviour with identity (Hollis-Smith 1990:9; Kiss J., 2009:382). The role concept can thus also be used as a tool to simplify the complexity of foreign policy reality (Goldstein - Keohane, 1993:3). The formation of the role concept is shaped both by the expectations of the actor's own society and by those of other states. Thus, in the end, the state pursues one particular behaviour rather than another option (Barnett 1993, 279; Kirste-Maull 1996).

1.2 The concept of civilian power

One such role concept is the concept of civilian power by Hanns W. Maull, a German political scientist, first published in a 1990 issue of Foreign Affairs, and subsequently formulated a fourteen-point thesis on the principles and main goals of Germany's international civilian power role (Maull, 1990; Maull, 1992). In his view, the civilisation of international relations by civilian power is necessary and can only be achieved by reducing the use of realistic military-power instruments and by using them only within the framework of international norms and decisions. In his view, states should strive for international cooperation and integration into international organisations rather than self-interest and individual preferences. The German

scholar considered it important to adopt the German social and political history antecedents, which stem from Germany's role in World War II (Bischof 2020b:43). According to Maull (1992), countries that are civilian powers can only pursue their foreign policy goals and interests within the framework of a civilized international system. However, the German political scientist also stresses that decision-making within the civilian power does not only operate through governmental institutions, but also involves actors in society, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), political parties, trade unions and even economic actors, as they also have a significant influence on foreign policy decisions (Maull 1990). In 1996, Maull and Knut Kirste published a joint study in which they set out the principles, objectives and norms of the role of civilian power and, using the aforementioned role theory, illustrate the characteristics of the international behaviour of states that are emerging as civilian powers, especially Japan and Germany (Kirste - Maull, 1996). According to the authors' interpretation, the term 'civil' refers mainly to the goal of civilising international relations, while the adjective 'power' refers more to their capacity to shape them (Bischof 2020b:43).

The concept of the role of civilian power is not a theory in the traditional sense, but rather a precise delineation of the characteristics and culture of the Federal Republic's foreign policy. The need to shape international politics appears in the case of civilian power. There is a demand for actors to play a leading global role in the civilisation of international relations, shaped primarily not through leadership but rather through collective or partnership-based efforts. In the case of national and international conflicts, civilian power avoids the use of force, but sees the framework of international systems and institutions as the most appropriate form of conflict resolution (Kirste-Maull, 1996:301). Nevertheless, it cannot be called pacifist and does not completely reject the use of force, but only in limited circumstances and always in a multilateral context, it uses military force against the aggressor when they contribute to the civilisation of international relations by reinforcing international norms. For nearly two decades, the policy of Hans-Dietrich Genscher, former German Foreign Minister, was characterised by this approach, that "one does not want to be an enemy, but rather wants many friends and respect" and "does not want war either, but rather advocates a policy of détente worldwide" (Bischof: 2020; Bellers 1999: 118). He is sceptical about the use of military force, takes a cautious stance, and sees the UN Security Council as the legitimate authoriser of force for collective security measures (Kirste-Maull, 1996:303). Civilian powers are willing to collectively sanction violations of international norms, but they prefer to sanction them by economic rather than military means (Kirste-Maull, 1996:302). In addition, they are committed

to a value-oriented foreign policy based on the promotion of democratisation and constitutional processes, the rule of law, respect for human rights, including minority rights, market economy structures, environmental and climate protection (Mauß, 1990; Tewes, 1997). This includes the promotion and encouragement of good governance in other states, which includes a critical voice against the political systems or human rights situations of countries that are perceived to have problems in this area. Finally, Mauß (1990) also stresses that civilian power does not only operate through government institutions. Civil society actors, such as NGOs, political parties, trade unions and other groups, have a significant influence on foreign policy decisions.

The so-called White Paper (*Weissbuch*) is one of the main guides for German foreign and security policy and elements of the role of civilian power can be found almost entirely in it. The document sets out Germany's national interests, strategic priorities, identity and perception of foreign and security policy at regional and global level. The document not only addresses regional and global challenges, but also sets out the Federal Republic's foreign policy scope, priorities and core objectives. In the introduction to the 2016 White Paper, which is still in force, former Chancellor Angela Merkel points out that the economic and political weight of her country obliges Germans to assume responsibility for the security of Europe together with European and transatlantic partners, in order to jointly defend human rights, freedom, democracy, the rule of law and international law. The former German Prime Minister underlines that they must stand up more strongly than ever for their shared values of security, peace and a rules-based order (Die Bundesregierung, 2016:6). One of the most important characteristics of civilian power is the desire to shape and take responsibility for international peace. In the White Paper, Merkel speaks of Germany's desire to shape the international order together with its Euro-Atlantic allies and partners in order to preserve peace and guarantee security and prosperity (Die Bundesregierung, 2016:25). The paper also refers to respect for fundamental human rights, democracy and the rule of law (Die Bundesregierung, 2016:24). It supports the rule of international law and considers the rule of law and the guarantee of freedom as part of its foreign policy. And it prioritises international cooperation over national action, which it sees as a means to create a rules-based international order.

Civil society attaches great importance to multilateralism and integration processes in the civilisation of international politics. Alongside NATO and the UN, the European Union and EU membership are the most important external influences that shape to a large extent the German room for manoeuvre and the backbone of the country's foreign policy, and at the same

time give it its full commitment to the West (*Westbindung*). Germans see a single stable Europe as the guarantee for economic prosperity (Frenkler 2001:26). Germany's importance as a civilian power within the EU is underlined by its role in norm development and its commitment to civilian approaches in various fields (Schmid et al, Berlin even advocates communitarised policies in the field of security and defence, emphasising its concept of the EU as a civic power (Baykara, 2021). This is in line with the idea that the European Union can also be portrayed as a civic power, emphasising its role in promoting human values and approaches in the international arena (Brljavac, 2012). Germany's changing position within the EU from a 'tamed power' to a more normalised and influential actor with implications for the EU as a whole (Bulmer - Paterson, 2010). Despite its historical background and concerns about dominance, Germany is increasingly taking a leading role in European politics and projecting a strong image of regional power (Karolewski et al, 2020), its political and economic weight, its active participation and its shaping of EU decision-making processes reinforce its central role, which underlines its influence within the institutional framework. The Federal Republic is therefore an integral part of EU decision-making. It is not only a shaper but also a subject of EU decisions, which is why in many cases it is essential to examine the EU and German China strategies together.

The foreign trade orientation and economic interests and factors also play a key role in the German foreign policy culture and concept of civilian power. For civilian power, economic cooperation is important in achieving international goals, for which it can develop bilateral and supranational structures to address critical issues of international governance (Kappel 2014:345). According to Maull, the primary foreign policy goal of civilian power is not simply to improve economic welfare, but thereby to civilize international relations and develop the rule of law (Maull 2007:73-84). Edward Luttwak, like Maull, writes that after the Cold War, the role of military power will be replaced by commercial methods, and that civilian innovation and the influence of the market will determine international relations rather than military-technical development (Luttwak 1999:177). According to Luttwak (1990), the nature of a geo-economic power is determined by the relationship between the state and business. According to him, the relationship between states and private economic actors is determined by mutual influence, as in some cases states can induce large corporations to pursue their own goals, while at other times corporations can shape the decision-making of states and its outcome. Maull (1990) also mentions interdependence in the context of the economy. Interdependence, as an aspect of civilian power theory, emphasises the ability of a nation to engage in cooperative

relations and interconnections with other states (Singelis, 1994). Civilian power thus aims to maximise cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels on issues such as security, human rights, trade or the economy.

Germany's economic strength, trade relations and multinational companies have a major impact on international politics and, more fundamentally, on the country's foreign policy role. Thanks to the economic growth and reforms initiated during the Cold War, Germany has become the world's fourth largest economy and third largest exporter and importer (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz, 2022). Rosecrance (1986) also refers to the Federal Republic as a trading state and a world champion exporter. The essence of the trading state terminology is that the primary concern of the state is the creation of social welfare through foreign economic performance, by which it gains recognition and power for itself in international relations (Bischof 2020a:63). Germany is an active player in international trade negotiations and free trade agreements, as economic interests and the concomitant desire for global stability drive German policy (Staack 2000). Thus, German global and regional strategy can be identified as a geo-economic strategy like Luttwak's.

The forms of co-existence between the German state and business vary (Luttwak, 1999: 185). Luttwak describes this phenomenon as a situation where each side puts its own interests first with the help of the other, which he describes as mutual manipulation, but in many cases these interests are identical (Luttwak, 1999:185). On the private sector side of economic issues, the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce (*DIHK*), the German Association of Commerce (*AVE*), and the German Federation of Industry (*BDI*) stand out alongside companies. The BDI is one of the most important actors in the management of trade policy, because it has a huge amount of expertise and can represent German producer interests, including those of German multinationals, in the most direct way (Falke, 2006:189). The organisation is fully in favour of free trade and is often able to set the trade policy agenda itself, thus being able to influence government decision-makers according to its interests (Falke, 2006:189). In addition to the BDI, German companies often seek to lobby the federal government to pursue policies that are in their favour. In this way, companies contribute to the growth of the country's economy and employment (Kundnani 2011:41). All this allows the Federal Republic to stand out not only from other EU member states but also from other global players through its economic weight and influence. Through bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation, not only close links but also interdependencies are established, especially in the field of economic governance and policy coordination (Steinberg - Vermeiren, 2015). Civilian power thus aims

to establish as much cooperation as possible at bilateral and multilateral level on issues such as security, human rights, trade or the economy. Closely linked to this is the anti-ideological background of the opening up to the East (Ostpolitik) conceived by West German politicians of the 1960s and 1970s, Chancellor Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr, in which trade and democratisation played a key role. The foreign policy opening was based on the idea of “Wandel durch Annäherung”, or “change through rapprochement”, and later on “Wandel durch Handel”, or “change through trade”, which is understood as a guiding principle for relations with hybrid or authoritarian countries in German politics. According to this theory, the best way to bring about change in a politically non-Western state is through increasingly intensive trade, which leads to increasing prosperity and the expansion of the middle class and, inevitably, to the democratisation of the state (Molnár, 2020:4).

1.3 The methodology of primary research

The other major part of my research paper consists of primary research, based on interviews with interviewees who are familiar with German Chinese relations. In addition to the information found in the various primary sources, journals, books, newspapers and websites used for the secondary research, the interviews with partners provide a completely different approach to the topic. The interviews for my research were conducted using structured interviews.

A structured interview is a standard data collection method that uses systematic and predefined questions and evaluation criteria. From the answers given by the interviewees, a lot of information is generated that can be evaluated in an objective and comparable way. One of the major advantages of this empirical method is that it allows the researcher to test research hypotheses and make comparisons based on the responses (Indeed, 2023). Five structured interviews were conducted in order to gain a better understanding of how former and current experts and policy makers in German academic, economic and political life perceive the development of the German-China relationship and German China policy in recent years through a case study. The empirical research is based on five interviews with four experts, all of whom are part of the German economic, political and academic scene. Although they have been and are currently active in different fields, their work has given them relevant experience of the relationship between the two countries.

Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher defined the general purpose of the interview topic and then the interview questions were compiled. When selecting the interviewees, it was

important to ensure that they had relevant experience in German-Chinese relations, while at the same time covering a variety of different fields. The interviews with experts and policy-makers from different fields allowed the research to provide a more concrete picture of Germany's China policy and the factors that underpin the economic and political relationship between Germany and China.

The length of each interview varied, ranging from 30 to 50 minutes. However, the structured format provided flexibility to conduct the conversation without being too limited, while allowing the researcher to create an overarching framework that was later covered with all five interviewees. To conduct the interviews, thirteen pre-recorded questions were prepared (see appendix), on which all five interviewees shared their views on the following topics:

- key features of the German China policy
- the main features of Germany's China policy under the chancellorship of Angela Merkel and Olaf Scholz
- the development of German-China relations over the last ten years
- economic, security and geopolitical aspects of the relationship between the two countries
- Chinese investment in Germany and Europe
- the relationship between Germany's China policy and that of the European Union
- Future challenges and priorities of German policy towards China

The added value of the interviews was further enhanced by the fact that the interviewees came from different backgrounds and thus approached the same topic from different perspectives. After processing the individual interviews, their content and findings were summarised by topic in separate subsections and linked to the relevant related secondary research. As the case study is based on qualitative data from the structured interviews, the content of the interviews includes the results of the primary research. The research does not only focus on past years and current developments, but also tries to find answers to the future of the German-Chinese relationship and possible future priorities and challenges of the German China policy based on the interviews with the interviewees. Before I present my primary research, however, I would like to present the results of my secondary research.

2 Germany's China policy and the development of German-China relations from 2013 to the present

2.1 Background

Germany (then West Germany) and the People's Republic of China established formal diplomatic relations in 1972 (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024). Even before formal relations were established, West Germany had already become Beijing's most important trading partner in Europe. Subsequently, German companies have increased their trade and exported their production to the Asian country. Volkswagen was the first of the German automotive giants to enter the Chinese market as early as the 1980s, followed by large firms from other sectors such as BASF and ThyssenKrupp (Barbato 2022:240). However, with the end of the Cold War, political constraints on Germany were removed, while globalisation and the costs of German reunification put the German economy under greater pressure. As a consequence, German foreign policy increasingly pursued economic rather than political objectives.

Just as Maull (1990) pointed out that civilian power seeks cooperation rather than conflict, German politicians, especially the Social Democrats, have always sought cooperation rather than confrontation with China. The beginning of the visible revival of economic relations can be traced back to the chancellorship of the Social Democrat (SPD) Gerhard Schröder. Partly because of the costs of reunification, and partly following the introduction of the euro, the Schröder-led Social Democrat-Green coalition implemented structural reforms to improve competitiveness, which meant increasing export dependence of the German economy, especially towards the Far East and China (Kundnani - Parello-Plesner, 2012:2). And by the 2000s, it became clear that the dramatic growth of the German economy would rely even more heavily on foreign demand, which led to several large-scale contracts such as Siemens and ThyssenKrupp projects in China (Tilford, 2010:6).

Partly as a result of these structural reforms, the scope of German foreign policy has also become increasingly determined by commercial interests, but above all by the needs of economic actors (Kundnani 2011:39-45). Under Schröder, Germany has prioritised the development of relations with states to its east, especially Russia and China. The social democrat politician's approach to Beijing harked back to the foundations of Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr's Ostpolitik, i.e. the concept of 'change through trade', as increasing trade would thus lead to social change (Schröder 2006:141). Although the Greens and the SPD quickly showed a difference of opinion on China on one of the elementary issues of the civilian power concept,

human rights, during Schröder's chancellorship, the trade volume between Berlin and Beijing almost tripled between 1998 and 2005 (Guo, 2012). In this context, Germany also took a more restrained stance on human rights. Although dialogue on human rights had begun under Schröder, rather than sanctions, 'persistent communication' was the tool of German foreign policy and issues that Chinese partners preferred to negotiate, such as trade issues, were prioritised (Schröder 2006:143). And it was precisely from these advances on economic issues that German politicians expected China to gradually introduce reforms and thus begin to develop the rule of law (Maull, 2007:73-84; Kundnani - Parello-Plesner, 2012:2). Finally, German-China relations were officially upgraded to the level of a strategic partnership (*strategische Partnerschaft in globaler Verantwortung*) in 2004, while human rights and other uncomfortable issues were taken off the German agenda (Grund, 2010). Almost simultaneously with the German-China agreement, the EU-China 'comprehensive strategic partnership' was established in 2003, one year earlier, and its details are set out in the European Commission's accompanying guidance report (European Commission, 2003).

In 2005, the volume of trade between the two countries was approximately EUR 70 billion. Following Gerhard Schröder, the newly elected Christian Democratic (CDU) Chancellor Angela Merkel also planned to visit China at least once a year (Heusgen, 2023:199). With the arrival of the new Chancellor, it initially appeared that Berlin would place greater emphasis on human rights issues. Soon after Merkel's election, Germany's role as a civilian power and norm-setter within the EU became increasingly noticeable (Schmid et al., 2022). The EU's human rights dialogue with China also saw a crackdown when Germany held the rotating EU presidency in 2007. The federal government shaped and set the EU agenda, and in many cases sought to present a common European position similar to its own views. Beijing protested in May 2007 when the EU wanted to invite two NGOs to a seminar. However, Germany, as the rotating EU Presidency, refused to exclude them, leading to the departure of the Chinese delegation (Schnellbach - Man, 2015:9). The case showed that Berlin is able to stand up for its own positions and to project them onto the decision-making of other EU Member States and the EU as a whole. In the same year, it hosted the Dalai Lama, which triggered a crisis in relations between the two states (Kundnani - Parello-Plesner, 2012:4). Berlin finally managed to resolve this by writing a letter to its Chinese counterpart, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, confirming Germany's commitment to the one-China policy and to Tibet as part of Beijing.

Cooperation between Beijing and Berlin has remained unbroken despite the rather volatile political relations. In almost a decade, exports to China have increased more than

fivefold, reaching 37.3 billion euros in 2009, making China Germany's 11th to 16th most important export partner in ten years (Schnellbach - Man, 2015:12). Subsequently, in order to recover from the global crisis in 2008 and the Euro crisis in 2011 and to boost the economy, the German government was expedient to support the groups that form the core of German exports, small and medium machinery and technology firms, as well as car manufacturers, which led to even closer economic ties with China (Schnellbach - Man, 2015:14). During the period of the financial crisis, the influence of the Chinese economy grew not only in Germany, but also in the whole European Union. The rapid recovery of the German economy following the crisis was largely due to exports to China, with trade with Beijing accounting for 0.5 percentage points of German GDP growth in 2011, or around 13 billion euros (Kundnani - Parello-Plesner, 2012). This has ultimately led to an increasing influence of export companies, especially car manufacturers, on foreign policy and an increasing lobbying of the federal government to expand towards Chinese markets (Kundnani, 2014, 204).

2.2 Xi Jinping's rise to power and a new era of German policy towards China

In 2012, following the euro crisis, a new chapter in the relationship between Germany and China, but also between the EU and China, began. The 16+1 initiative was officially launched in 2012, as part of which Beijing wanted to cooperate with 16 Central and Eastern European countries on infrastructure development and investment in the Central and Eastern European region (Elmer, 2019). In the same year, Xi Jinping was elected President of the People's Republic of China and General Secretary of the Communist Party of China. The newly elected Chinese president announces a new cross-border economic and political strategy, one of the foundations of which is the broader Eurasian economic cooperation announced during his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013, which he calls the Silk Road Economic Belt (Xi 2017:324). The 16+1 cooperation, as well as the narrower Eurasian economic cooperation, has evolved into a much broader concept and has become part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to create a new economic corridor in Eurasia, stretching from China to Western Europe (Forbes, 2017).

With Xi's rise to power, German Chinese economic relations have also reached a new dimension. In 2013, Germany alone accounted for 47 percent of total EU-China trade and 28 percent of EU imports from China (Hamberger - Matura-Silágyi 2012:88). The closer relations have led to an upgrade from a strategic partnership to a 'comprehensive' strategic partnership,

with Xi Jinping signalling that Berlin and Beijing are no longer just about economic cooperation, but also about strategic and political cooperation (Molnár, 2018).

In the civilian power's conception of its role, any kind of economic partnership contributes to the civilisation of international relations, so initially even the Germans were positive about the Chinese project. Furthermore, foreign trade plays a significant role in the economy, and the new infrastructure network was seen as a huge potential for accessing new export markets (Gaspers, 2016:24-29). Berlin also hoped that the project would bring cooperation with Chinese companies, which would allow more German firms to enter the Chinese market. In addition, the original plans included two major freight hubs through the ports of Hamburg and Duisburg as part of the project, which led to negotiations in the fields of rail, logistics and shipping (Gaspers, 2016). However, it became clear that the BRI had political implications in addition to the economic side. The initiative has often been criticised by the EU's Western member states, including Germany, as it reinforces the division between old and new EU members and significantly increases Beijing's political influence in the region, in addition to its economic influence (Hamberger - Matura-Szilágyi 2012:14).

Beijing is deliberately trying to weaken the EU's cohesiveness in its relations with China, primarily by building bilateral relations with individual EU member states rather than by treating the European market as a single entity (Hamberger - Matura- Szilágyi, 2012). Although the European Commission wanted to impose the reciprocity principle on China, i.e. Europeans should have the same rights in China's market as Chinese firms in the EU market, Germany did not support the EU measure. Berlin feared that China would retaliate against German firms exporting to and investing in China, so they preferred to make a special deal with Beijing by favouring state interests and ignoring the common EU interest (Hamberger - Matura-Szilágyi 2012:15).

On the tenth anniversary of the 'comprehensive strategic partnership', the EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation was adopted in 2013, providing a guideline for their relationship, including annual high-level strategic, economic and trade dialogue and regular meetings (European External Action Service 2013). A more recent development at EU level was the EU-China Strategy adopted in 2016. The strategy itself did not bring major breakthroughs, but the document stressed the EU's evolving relationship with China, based on a 'principled, practical and pragmatic' approach that seeks to preserve EU interests and values while striving for balanced and mutually conditional economic relations (European Commission, 2016). In addition, the EU's long-term global competitiveness and the development of its industrial base were specifically highlighted (European Commission, 2016).

Not only the EU, but also China issued an official guidance document on the EU in 2003 and 2014. In the document, Beijing continues to define itself as a developing country, but recognises that it is playing an increasingly important role in international and regional affairs (Molnár 2018:5). It is also underlined that there is no conflict of interests between China and the EU and that Beijing is showing greater openness and peaceful development at the international level and wants to promote the development of a new kind of international relationship based on 'win-win cooperation'. Although Beijing wishes to cooperate at the international level, at the same time, the idea of a 'new era' of Chinese power announced by the Chinese leadership seems to be a confrontation based on which a conflict of interests with the United States and other Western powers, including the EU, can be assumed (Panda, 2018; Mardell, 2017; Molnár, 2018).

2.3 The period of disequilibrium

The year 2016 will be a key year for all aspects, not only of the EU-China relationship, but also of the Berlin-Beijing relationship. Firstly, it was the first year in which the People's Republic overtook the United States to become Germany's number one trade partner in goods (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023). As I have already pointed out, there were objective signs of deepening German Chinese economic relations from the early 2000s, from the Schröder coalition government onwards, and the pace of this deepening was further accelerated by the global economic crisis, the euro crisis and measures taken in the interests of German firms and the economy. In the same year, Chinese FDI into the EU set a record, with nearly a third of it (€11 billion) coming to Germany (Molnár 2020:6). 2016 was also a landmark year for German companies. The Chinese company Midea bought the Augsburg robot manufacturing giant KUKA for €4.5 billion. Two years later, the Chinese Geely Group acquired a 10 per cent stake in Daimler, one of Germany's leading car manufacturers. The Chinese company's interest in a stake is perhaps not surprising, given that Daimler sells one in five of its cars in China (Stuttgarter Zeitung, 2018). Finally, in 2019, the Chinese joint venture HNA became Deutsche Bank's largest shareholder with a 10 percent stake (Osman, 12.12.2019). According to him, one out of every three containers in the port of Hamburg already comes from his country, and more than 5,200 German companies are registered in the Asian country, and more than 900 Chinese companies are registered in the Federal Republic (Larres, 2016). However, there have been attempts that have not been successful. The company Aixtron, which produces sensitive

technology for the defence industry, also had a Chinese takeover bid, but it did not materialise, mainly due to pressure from the US administration. This case also made the German government aware of the weakness of the legal framework for foreign investment (Sheahan 2016).

While initially the attitude of German policymakers towards the 16+1 cooperation and the BRI was positive and that of society was reserved between 2013 and 2015, the impact of Chinese investment plans in Central and Eastern European countries in 2015, the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the record number of Chinese acquisitions of German companies in 2015 led to a negative trend in the positive and neutral perception of the situation (Harnisch 2017). The most pronounced change occurred after the acquisition of KUKA, which played a dominant role in the domestic economy as a true national champion. Thereafter, the penetration of Chinese firms into the German market and their penetration within firms became an increasingly frequent topic in Berlin's political discourse (Molnár 2020:6). The reaction of German politics can then be interpreted as a mixture of cooperation and conflict (Harnisch, 2017).

Not only in German Chinese economic relations, but also in global politics, systemic changes have taken place, the impact of which can be felt in German China policy. In addition to the outcome of the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, another major change in not only German but also European politics occurred in the autumn of the same year with Donald Trump's victory in the US presidential election. With the 'Make America great again' policy announced by the Republican president, the US has increasingly turned away from European countries, both politically and economically, and is abandoning various agreements (Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2016). Following the US presidential election and the Brexit result, Merkel has repeatedly stressed in her speeches her country's commitment to a close relationship with the two Anglo-Saxon states, while envisaging greater autonomy in the new situation, in which the market created by China can provide significant support (The Guardian, 2017; Mercator Institute for China Studies, 2017).

For decades, foreign companies have seen China as a bastion of business opportunities, where they could produce their goods cheaply and sell them directly in the huge market it provides. This claim was increasingly challenged. Trends in recent years suggest that while Chinese companies are expected to have access to foreign markets, companies from other countries are almost excluded from critical Chinese infrastructure such as banking or energy, or can only operate as joint ventures, which results in the transfer of technological know-how to a Chinese state-owned enterprise (Naß, 2018). As early as 2017, the Chinese branch of the

European Union Chamber of Commerce in China drew attention to the danger that the Chinese Communist Party would not only have control over foreign intellectual property and technology, but could also be able to influence important business decisions as a result (The European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, 2017). Although Beijing has repeatedly called for a relaxation of strict market regulation in areas such as finance and the automotive industry in response to criticism, no substantive change has been made (Ying, - Zhang, 2018).

2.4 The period of intensified responses

In 2018, bilateral relations between the United States and China reached a low point when, at the beginning of the year, US President Donald Trump imposed punitive tariffs on China over high-tech US products, citing the trade deficit (Huang, 2021). At the same time, there was growing evidence that the majority of German companies operating in China did not expect the impact of the Sino-US trade war to have a significant growth impact, and German companies were increasingly concerned about the growing interference of the Chinese state in economic matters (Molnár, 2020).

For these reasons, and in view of Beijing's economic predominance, the German government developed a dual strategy aimed at tightening not only national but also European FDI regulations. Subsequently, on 19 December 2018, Germany adopted an amendment to the Foreign Trade and Payments Ordinance, which envisaged controls on foreign investment affecting German security interests (Huotari 2017). Almost simultaneously, the Chinese government granted concessions to a number of German companies, including BASF, Allianz and BMW (FAZ 2018). Soon afterwards, the German federal government, mainly under economic pressure, started to take increasingly firm decisions. In January 2019, the Federation of German Industries (BDI) published a policy paper in 2019, which described Beijing as an "important partner" in some areas, but already as a "systemic rival" in others (Federation of German Industries, 2019). The BDI publication highlights an unfolding competition between the 'liberal, open and social German market economy' and the 'state-driven Chinese economy', where it is vital to strengthen and make more resilient the European economy while putting national interests first (Federation of German Industries, 2019).

Barely a month after the BDI's paper, the German Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy (later German Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate) has already come up with concrete steps in the draft document National Industrial Strategy 2030, in which it concretely

states, that in the global economic competition, the focus should be on the German and European champions, because the long-term success and survival of these large companies, such as Siemens, Thyssen-Krupp, Deutsche Bank or Airbus, is in the national and European economic interest (NOVE, 2019).

At the European level, initiatives aimed at greater control of foreign investment and more serious protection against takeovers started already in February 2017, mainly on the initiative of Germany, Italy and France. At EU level, the first results were achieved two years later, when on 19 March 2019 the European Parliament and the Council adopted Regulation 2019/452 establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investment into the EU (European Parliament, 2019). It is evident that, alongside Member States, the European Commission has also started to take a more assertive stance towards Beijing at EU level. Almost at the same time as the FDI Screening Regulation, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued a joint Communication in which China was for the first time identified as a systemic rival, marking a historic turning point in EU-China relations (European Commission, 2019). The Communication is a political response to a long-standing process involving a closer economic relationship between the EU and its Member States and Beijing, as well as the growing confrontation between 2016 and 2019, when Chinese companies have been acquiring a series of stakes in European, mainly German, medium and large companies. However, following the adoption of the Commission Communication, the German government has avoided open confrontation with China. On 26 March, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Chinese President Xi Jinping and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker met in Paris (DW, 2019).

Germany has increasingly adopted a noticeably more restrained stance towards China. This was partly due to fears of a possible economic downturn and the impact of the US-China trade war (Molnár, 2020:9). As both states are Germany's most important trading partners, it was clear that the federal government would not take a position on either side.

Angela Merkel, in her speech at the Munich Security Conference 2019, argued for a multilateral world order more as a true civilian power leader and realistically outlined Germany's neutral position in the trade rivalry between the two great powers (Der Bundeskanzler, 2019). In September of the same year, the Chancellor visited China, where she expressed her appreciation for the Chinese joint venture model, from which German companies could benefit (Barkin, 2019). Following the example of Genscherism, Merkel emphasized more on the opportunities for cooperation and rejected any kind of conflict.

2.5 *German and EU response to the pandemic*

Even before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the German-Chinese relationship was already highly complex and multifaceted. In the pre-Covid period, the repression of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong and human rights violations in Xinjiang Province dominated the public discourse from a political perspective. And economically, growing German exposure and the crisis gave a new impetus to the discourse on German dependence on Beijing. These were to be improved through dialogue and the promotion of a partnership dimension in German-Chinese and EU-China relations (Pongratz, 2020).

Germany took over the Presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2020, with relations with China as one of its main focuses. Both Germany and China were preparing for their first joint meeting as leaders of the European Union. Although it was not possible to organise the EU27-China summit in Leipzig, which was originally planned to be face-to-face, due to the Crown Jewel virus, EU leaders finally managed to meet the Chinese president online. In addition to the pandemic and climate change, the talks focused on the EU-China Comprehensive Investment Agreement (CAI). Negotiations on the agreement began in January 2014 and have lasted 35 meetings over seven years (McElwee 2023:1). The agreement between the two sides aims to regulate certain bilateral investment treaties (BITs) between EU member states and Beijing and how host states treat foreign investors. EU leaders wanted to reach a comprehensive agreement that would increase the low level of European investment in China and provide greater access and more predictable conditions for European firms in the Chinese market (McElwee 2023:1). Negotiations, which have dragged on for years, progressed particularly quickly during the months of the German presidency. All parties were interested in reaching an agreement. Xi Jinping wanted to establish cooperation before the new US administration took office in 2021, fearing that the new Washington administration would be more willing to work with its allies and partners on China (Yuan Yee 2022). For understandable reasons, it was also important for the Federal Republic, as Europe's leading economic power, to negotiate an agreement of this magnitude between China and the EU during its own EU presidency. For this reason, Angela Merkel was enthusiastic all along and in the last days of the year she jointly announced the agreement with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Council President Charles Michel and Chinese President Xi Jinping, which

was submitted to the European Parliament for ratification (von der Buchard, 2020; European Commission, 2020).

Despite years of effort, ratification of the bilateral agreement has been on the agenda for a rather short period of time. In March 2021, the EU, together with the US, the UK and Canada, imposed sanctions on four Chinese officials suspected of involvement in the persecution and mass detention of Uighurs in Xinjiang. In immediate response, Beijing imposed counter-sanctions against four EU organisations and ten EU officials, five of whom are members of the European Parliament (McElwee 2023:2). According to EU Foreign and Security Policy Representative Josep Borrell, Beijing's retaliation has created a new climate and situation in the EU's thinking on China (Borrell 2021). As for the general European discourse on China, a growing distrust was also observed throughout Europe, including Berlin, following the incident (Bloomberg News, 2021). Finally, two months after the sanctions were imposed, the European Parliament voted to suspend the ratification of the CAI, while Chinese sanctions remained in place against EU officials (European Parliament, 2021).

2.6 The beginning of the Scholz era and German Chinese relations in a changing epoch

After 16 years as Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel has been succeeded as head of government by Social Democrat Olaf Scholz. Scholz formed a coalition government with the Greens and the Free Democratic Party in autumn 2021. The new government's policies were set out in the coalition agreement, which also covered future relations with Beijing. The document uses identical terms to the European Commission's March 2019 Communication on relations with China. The new German government also outlined relations within a framework of partnership, competition and systemic rivalry. In principle, the governing parties have defined a values and interests-based China policy, which is part of a common EU-China strategy and is implemented in close transatlantic coordination (SPD 2021:124). Furthermore, they have specifically emphasised the protection of human rights, especially in the case of Xinjiang, and cooperation on the basis of international law. In addition, Berlin expects the Beijing leadership's foreign policy to play a responsible role in maintaining peace and stability, especially in the context of the status quo in the Taiwan Strait in its neighbourhood (SPD 2021:124).

Soon after the new government took office in December 2021, two months later, on 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full offensive against Ukraine. The incident has an impact

not only on European but also on global politics, with states developing new strategies, rethinking their relations with other countries and a new kind of attitude beginning to emerge. On 27 February, Chancellor Scholz addressed the German Bundestag. In his speech, the German Prime Minister underlines that the Kremlin's aggression has ushered in a new era in global geopolitics, which includes challengers to the hitherto Western-led world order, such as Russia and China (Die Bundesregierung, 2022).

In his first full year in office, Scholz paid an official visit to Beijing, where he met Chinese President Xi Jinping. The timing of the trip to the Far East was also peculiar, as Scholz was the first Western leader to visit China following the Crown Prince, and just days before he had been elected as the 20th President of the Chinese Communist Party. The high-level visit was inevitably interpreted as a tacit endorsement of Xi's takeover by many, including the liberals who formed the coalition. It was also during this period that the EU formulated its response to Beijing in the face of economic pressure on Lithuania. The Chancellor was accompanied on his trip by a large business delegation, including German business leaders.

In addition, the extent of Germany's economic dependence on China is a growing concern. It is precisely around this time that the acquisition of a terminal in the port of Hamburg by the Chinese state-owned shipping company COSCO was decided in October 2022, giving COSCO the green light to acquire a minority stake in a container terminal in the port of Hamburg. The deal was finally finally approved by the German government in November 2023, as part of which the company eventually acquired a 24.99 percent minority stake in the container terminal. The compromise triggered fierce opposition not only from German society, but also from its Social Democratic (SPD) coalition partners, the Greens and the Free Democrats (FDP). The other parties considered it a geopolitically wrong decision for the German government to transfer shares in critical infrastructure such as trade and freight transport to a Chinese state-owned company (Spiegel, 2022). The disagreements within the coalition are further reflected in the fact that Scholz himself overruled six ministries and the German secret services, which had proposed to block the minority stake in COSCO, just days before his visit to Beijing (Tao, 2022). The transaction was reviewed when it emerged that the Tollerort container terminal had been classified as critical German infrastructure by the German national cyber security agency BSI in 2023 (Trappe, 2023). Already in 2022, nearly a third of the goods handled at the port were coming from or going to China, and the value of trade between the countries rose to a record high of €300 billion in the same year (Deutsche Vertretungen in China, n.d.).

Sensing the growing exposure not only to China but to other global actors, as well as the increasing criticism of human rights issues in trade, the Law on Corporate Due Diligence Obligations in Supply Chains (Gesetz über die unternehmerischen Sorgfaltspflichten in Lieferketten) came into force in January 2023. The law obliges German companies to assume responsibility for respecting human rights in global supply chains, including the protection of child labour, the right to fair wages and the environment (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2023). The law therefore covers not only factory production, but also the entire supply chain, including the activities of contractors and other indirect suppliers.

In recent years, especially since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war and the EU's designation of Beijing as a systemic rival, the terms decoupling, and de-risking have been increasingly used in European and German political and economic discourse. Decoupling refers to the complete disconnection of relations between two or more economies, involving the dismantling of already established trade and investment links and the severing of supply chains, and aims to create new economic partnerships with other states (Capri, 2023). In contrast, de-risking can be understood as a more deliberate and gradual approach that seeks to minimise the risks involved in economic engagement with a country, which includes diversifying supply chains, goods, services and reducing economic exposures (Capri, 2023). On 30 March 2023, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, called for de-risking relations with China. According to her, while the United States has focused on disengagement during the Trump administration, this would not be a viable option for Europe, and it would be explicitly against EU interests to disengage from China (Cave, 2023). Thus, the main European task for the coming years can be defined as reducing asymmetric strategic dependencies with China, i.e. focusing on de-risking rather than disengagement. In addition, out-sourcing needs to be replaced by near-shoring, i.e. relying on closer physical distances instead of outsourcing production to distant countries, i.e. German industry should also favour sourcing domestically or in other EU Member States.

3 Case study on German China policy and German-China relations

As I explained in the methodology of the research paper, the other major part of the thesis consists of primary research. This is based on five structured interviews with former and current economists, academics, policy experts and policy makers involved in German Chinese

relations. I asked a total of fourteen questions during the interviews (see Appendix). These fourteen questions were divided into the following five themes:

- key features of German China policy
- German China policy under the chancellorship of Angela Merkel and Olaf Scholz
- economic, security and geopolitical aspects of the relationship between the two countries
- the relationship between Germany's China policy and that of the European Union
- future challenges and priorities of German China policy

In this case study, I will take up these five specific themes and present the changes in German-China relations based on the interviewees' accounts. Although they have been and are still active in different fields, they have relevant experience of the relationship between the two countries.

All five interviewees interviewed agreed that the economy can be seen as the main pillar of German-China cooperation. Since 2016, the People's Republic of China has been Germany's number one goods trading partner (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023). One German political leader who has been involved in China and the shaping of German-China relations for many years (hereafter interviewee 1) pointed out that this trend is mainly due to the strengthening of the Chinese economy. Not only the economy, but also industry is very innovative and is at the forefront in artificial intelligence and e-mobility. Another interviewee, a German economic expert whose main focus is on the Chinese economy and trade (hereafter referred to as interviewee 2), said that there have been many changes in the last few years and that several factors have played a role in shaping the relationship, such as the pandemic, which has affected for example supply chains, which is an elementary part of the German-Chinese economic relationship. However, it is also important to highlight the Russian war against Ukraine, which has made all actors in Germany more sensitive to geopolitical risks. Although there was already an awareness, the war acted as a catalyst to make the German population even more sensitive to issues such as economic dependence. As Capri (2023) writes, interviewee 2 also highlights the importance of derisking in supply chains, especially since the pandemic. A third interviewee, a German academic political scientist whose main focus is on the Far East and China (hereafter interviewee 3), foregrounded the role of German companies. The huge size of China is the reason why companies have established themselves and built up their markets. According to him, it is mainly these economic interests that have led companies to choose Asia, as in order to grow they have had to look for external markets where they can achieve higher

growth and the bigger the market, the more interesting the country becomes. Over the last twenty years, China has become a technological and innovative superpower for companies that are present in the technology sector. A third interviewee, a German academic political scientist whose main focus is on the Far East and China (hereafter referred to as interviewee 3), highlighted the role of German companies. The huge size of China is the reason why companies have established themselves and built up their markets. According to him, it is mainly these economic interests that have led companies to choose Asia, as in order to grow they have had to look for external markets where they can achieve higher growth and the bigger the market, the more interesting the country becomes. Over the last twenty years, China has become a technological and innovative superpower for companies that are present in the technology sector. The university professor and China researcher who participated in the primary research (hereafter referred to as interviewee 5) used the terminology of "change through rapprochement", "change through trade" and "rapprochement through concentration" as a starting point for defining German-Chinese relations, as formulated by Egon Bahr, Helmut Kohl and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, respectively. As Bellers (1999) and Molnár (2020) argue, Germany's foreign policy towards non-Western states is right to prioritise trade as the best way to bring about change. Interviewee 5 agrees with this and believes that it is also a fundamental determinant of German policy towards China. However, he believes that this theory is wrong, that good trade relations will not only bring peace but also democratisation.

An important aspect of the thesis was the comparison of the two Chancellors' China policies during the period under study. Since the two chancellors have governed and are still governing in different periods and at different intervals, and since no in-depth research has been done on this topic, I will rely primarily on the interviewees' responses to the questionnaire for the comparison. All five interviewees basically assumed that the two chancellors share the same pragmatic position on China. German foreign policy is defined by the fact that governments are always composed of two or, more recently, three parties. However, when governments change or new coalitions are formed, there is a change of attitude towards Beijing. Although there was already an emerging debate on the relationship with Beijing during Angela Merkel's chancellorship, a more critical attitude has begun to emerge, especially with the formation of new governments, mainly involving the Greens and the FDP. Interviewee 2 and a German think tank expert on East Asia (hereafter interviewee 4) agreed that it was mainly with the Greens' coalition membership that a new turn and a new approach in Berlin's policy towards the Far East came about. There was much more suspicion of Berlin's policy and this kind of pragmatism. Interviewee 3 stressed that Chancellor Scholz's position was similar to that of his

predecessor because Social Democrats were mostly members of Merkel governments. Interviewer 2 stated that the Merkel era was basically about rational insights and balancing. Within the current three-party coalition, Chancellor Scholz similarly takes a more differentiated view of bilateral relations by adopting a rational stance. He has also taken on a balancing role and is trying to moderate the disputes within the government. With the Greens in government, there is a definite shift, including a greater emphasis on values and a stronger focus on human rights and risk awareness. In particular, with the emergence of the Green Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, a values-based approach to foreign policy has become the main focus of German diplomacy. At the same time, interviewee 4 underlined that the Scholz government can still be described as pragmatic in a certain sense. Despite strong dependencies, it is aware of the business case and the profits from China. Moreover, the emphasis is basically on de-risking and not on unbundling. As far as the security of the Far East is concerned, as interviewee 4 put it, in general, the stability of the Taiwan Strait is very important for Germany. A significant part of international trade passes through the South China Sea, and therefore the German economy and prosperity is highly dependent on the security of the Pacific. So Germany is naturally keen to ensure that all parties act in accordance with international law and respect the rules of international courts and institutions, otherwise the security of partners and friends in the region, as well as Europe's trade and prosperity, will be at risk.

Conclusion

In my research, I sought to answer the question to what extent the past decade of German-China relations can be considered successful, and to what extent Hanns W. Maull's concept of citizen power explains German foreign policy behaviour towards China. In my thesis, I conducted a secondary and a primary research and used Hanns W. Maull's concept of citizen power to examine German foreign policy behaviour. Using Maull's concept of the role of civilian power, and examining the determinants of German foreign and China policy and the events of the ten years under study, I conclude that although German-China ties have deepened over the past decade, especially in economic terms, they are not balanced and in many cases have even increased Germany's exposure. The former guiding principle of German foreign policy, 'Wandel durch Handel', has changed to the extent that the change component vis-à-vis China is now an illusion. The emergence of dependencies in the mid-2010s, the supply problems caused by the pandemic and, finally, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, highlighted that some fundamental trends or basic ideas have not been realised and are bringing with them a rude awakening of

German foreign policy. As for the second research question, both primary and secondary research confirm that German foreign policy in the case of China behaves as a civil power for which it is essential to establish trade relations and thus to civilize international relations through relations with the partner country, which is also used in a multilateral formation, as in the case of Germany, the EU is also represented, in many cases shaping each other's positions.

Following the current global trends, one can see the tendency that China and Beijing will increasingly focus on the relationship with the various EU and EU member states. and researcher will address China's global role and its relations with EU member states. It will be crucial not only for Germany, but for the EU as a whole, to have a good and active dialogue with Beijing at different levels in the future. Germany and Europe have benefited greatly from China's economic growth and development over the past four decades. It is therefore important for the future that this kind of productive partnership continues. At the same time, the increasingly frequent criticisms of the respect for human rights and the unbalanced and often quite one-sided economic relations point to the need for a more cautious and conscious stance on the part of both Germany and the European Union.

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Appendix

Questions asked from each interviewee

1. How would you characterize Germany's approach to China over the past decade, and what major factors have influenced this approach?
2. Can you elaborate on any notable shifts or developments in Germany's approach to China in the past years? How much have these ties changed between the countries since the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war?
3. Is there any significant shift in German China-policy and Germany's approach to China between the Merkel's and the Scholz's government?
4. How do economic considerations factor into Germany's political and diplomatic relations with China, especially regarding trade and investment?
5. What are the security aspects of Germany's China policy?
6. With growing global concerns about human rights violations in China, how does Germany balance its economic interests with its values and principles?
7. In light of recent tensions between China and other Western countries, such as the United States and the EU, how does Germany navigate maintaining diplomatic relations with both sides?
8. How has Germany navigated the challenges posed by China's growing influence on the global stage, particularly in areas such as economy, trade, and geopolitics?
9. How does Germany view China's increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly concerning territorial disputes and military expansion?
10. What role has Germany played in shaping European Union policies towards China, and how have these policies evolved in response to changing dynamics?
11. How do you assess the impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative on Germany's economic interests and its broader strategic outlook? What implications does it have for Germany's economic and geopolitical interests?

12. How has public opinion in Germany and the war in Ukraine influenced government decision-making regarding its relationship with China, particularly concerning issues like human rights abuses or trade practices?
13. Can you discuss any instances where Germany has faced criticism or backlash domestically or internationally for its approach to China, and how it has responded to these challenges?
14. Looking ahead, what do you see as the key priorities and challenges for Germany's China-policy in the coming years, and how might it evolve in response to changing global dynamics?