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Interest groups in shaping Germany's foreign policy towards China

Introduction and theoretical framework

In the realm of international relations, the formulation and implementation of foreign policy are critical to a nation's standing on the global stage. Traditionally, foreign policy was largely perceived as the domain of state actors and diplomatic elites, driven by geopolitical considerations and national interests (Alolaimy 2020). However, in contemporary democracies and pluralistic societies, the landscape of foreign policy decision-making has evolved to encompass a diverse array of stakeholders, with interest groups emerging as influential actors in shaping a country's international engagements (Nye & Keohane 1989).

Classically, an interest group is defined as "a person, group, or institution that aims to define and represent the interests of a specific societal, economic, or professional group. These representations are also commonly referred to, sometimes with a negative connotation, as lobbies" (Schneider & Toyka-Seid 2021). Often, such representations emerge as pressure groups in conflict situations, attempting to exert pressure on decision-makers. The more likely such pressure is to result in success, the more influential the interest group becomes. Interest groups are those actors in the democratic process who have an established goal or set of goals, but who are neither political parties nor formal agendas of the state (Alderman 1984). Thus, interest groups should be understood as organisations, varying in their level of institutionalisation, that seek to assert their influence over the operation of public authority in the distribution of resources. However, they do not take action to assume responsibility for the exercise of power. In doing so, interest groups form structures that primarily have their own organisation, their own system of norms, and their own expert base.

As Andrew Heywood states (2007), in most liberal democracies, advocacy groups often utilize the bureaucracy as their primary avenue of influence. This

is because, within liberal democracies, the bureaucracy holds significant decision-making power. The objective of these advocacy groups is to sway members of the legislature to support their causes by voting in a manner that aligns with their interests. However, access to this channel of influence is typically restricted to groups with insider status, such as large corporations and trade unions. On the other hand, groups with outsider status usually face challenges in meeting with government officials or ministers to discuss policy matters.

It is important to recognize that the key relationship in the bureaucracy is often between senior bureaucrats and prominent business or industrial interests. This underscores the notion that groups with substantial financial resources tend to have a greater capacity to influence the government's decision-making process. Large businesses, in particular, enjoy advantages primarily because of their significant contributions to the national economy as key producers (Hajnal & Clark 1998). As a result, their interests hold considerable importance to the government.

George Monbiot points out that the influence of big business has been reinforced by the ease with which corporations can relocate their production and investments in the global economy (Monbiot 2000). This indicates that, in the ever-evolving modern world, big businesses play an increasingly influential role in shaping the bureaucracy and, consequently, the government's decision-making processes. Yet, in a democratic society, decision-making should be representative and inclusive, considering the diverse interests and opinions of citizens. Interest groups should thus act as vital channels that facilitate citizens' participation and engagement in shaping public policies and laws. Therefore, interest groups play multifaceted roles in democratic decision-making, acknowledging the potential benefits and the importance of vigilance to safeguard democratic integrity. These roles are centred around i). representation of interests of specific constituencies or communities; ii). advocacy for policy positions; iii). strive to influence decision-makers and to shape legislation and regulations; iv). dissemination of information to share expert knowledge and research; v). bridging citizens and the national government or international community (Giger & Klüver 2016). To fulfil these roles, interest groups influence the decision-making process in democratic states through lobbying, contributing to political campaigns, doing research and sharing specialist knowledge, and raising public awareness (Klüver & Pickup 2019).

Interest groups are active participants in the political processes implemented in the Federal Republic of Germany. Since 1949, Germany's political system has been based on the principles of federalism, separation of powers, self-government, the social state, and democracy. The latter principle has since the late

1970s taken into account the increasing importance of civil society and the political parties, NGOs, and trade unions that function within it (Risse-Kapfen 1991). The German system is thus shaped by participatory democracy, whereby citizens are included in the processes of state governance (Gabriel 2020). This participatory democracy is an attempt to go beyond the formal political institutions of parliamentary democracy and at the same time is a kind of self-restraint of the public administration for the fulfilment of public needs and interests. In turn, the realisation of the demands of the idea of participatory democracy results in the emergence of a broad spectrum of actors who represent the interests of specific social groups (Armingeon 2007; Geissel & Newton 2012; Holtmann 2005).

Concerning the German political system, Sebastian Harnisch (2009) points out that it is interest groups that constitute participants in the democratic process who have an established goal or set of goals and who, although they are neither political parties nor formal agendas of states, significantly influence policy-making. Yet, the widely available literature on German foreign policy (Cziomer 2005, 2010; Crawford 2007; Hofhansel 2005; Karolewski 2011; Kiwerska 2011) gives only limited consideration to the role that non-state actors play in the country's foreign policy process and their impact on the formation of international relations strategies (Bohnes 2012; Malinowski 2013; Sus 2011).

To analyse the influence of interest groups on German foreign policy towards China, the assumptions of the liberal theory of international relations are used. Investigating German foreign policy through the lens of liberal theory, societal interests are believed to be channelled into the political system through assertive intermediary institutions (i.e. business associations or NGOs) and then, according to the institutional possibilities for participation (such as the number of institutional players represented by the parties in power) to the federal government and the governments of other states (Brummer & Oppermann 2014). In liberal theory, the distribution of foreign policy decisions thus has the following correlation with society as a whole or part of it – the broader the distributional effect, the more important the attitude of the population as a whole towards the decision to be made; the more the distributional effects affect interest groups, the more these groups will try to influence the policy pursued by the state (Harnisch 2017). Different weights are applied to the priorities of political and economic values and assertiveness in government policy (Moravcsik 1997, 2008) to explain the complementarity of these preferences with those of third countries.

About relations with China, it is important to note that German perceptions of cooperation with the People's Republic of China (PRC) have so far

been studied mainly at the state level (Heiduk 2014; Runge 2002; Szczurowicz 2013) and shaped by an interest in mutual economic benefits and the maintenance of an economic, trade and investment order that complies with international law (Fung 2018). Indeed, since the introduction of the inter-governmental consultation mechanism in 2011, the signing of agreement on the strategic partnership in 2014, and the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative concept in 2013, there has been a significant intensification of political and economic contacts between the two countries (Schiek 2017; Schüller & Schüler-Zhou 2015; Stanzel 2016), which today constitute key economic partners for each other.

Significantly, however, from 2016 onwards, when there was a wave of acquisitions of strategically important German companies by Chinese investors, there was also a huge increase in the interest of the public and non-state actors in Chinese activity in Germany and vice versa (Miller 2017). Analysing the media discourse, it is clear that various interest groups in the Federal Republic begun to play an increasingly vital role in shaping relations with China, emphasising the importance of not only economic cooperation but also focusing i.e. on human rights. Examples may refer to the Amnesty International Germany, which publishes reports on human rights abuses in China, thereby influencing policy discussions in Germany (Poon 2018) and the Tibet Initiative Deutschland (TID) which focuses specifically on Tibetan rights and actively lobbies German officials to ensure that the issue remains part of diplomatic talks with China (*Tibet Initiative Deutschland e.V.* 2014). Additionally, Uyghur Groups in Germany organize protests and media campaigns to highlight the human rights crisis in Xinjiang, which has a significant impact on public opinion and policy. Their involvement translated in particular into the activity of the former MFA, Heiko Maas, who repeatedly expressed support and interest in this topic in German-Chinese relations (Karnitschnig 2020). These activities resulted in, among others, the establishment of the Uyghur Parliamentary Group in the Bundestag (World Uyghur Congress 2023). Nevertheless, the influence of various interest groups on German politics remains quite fresh in academic discourse and has so far not yet been sufficiently researched. Using the tenets of liberalism in the context of Germany's foreign policy towards China, it therefore seems reasonable to fill this gap.

In outlining the theoretical perspective, it is worth noting two, opposing, approaches to analysing the meaning and role of interest groups. Pluralist and elitist perspectives are contrasting theories that seek to explain the role and influence of interest groups in the political process, including how they shape

public policy and decision-making. The pluralist perspective posits that societies are characterized by a diverse and fragmented distribution of power. According to this view, interest groups are seen as essential components of a democratic system, representing various societal interests and providing avenues for citizens to participate in the political process. In a pluralist framework, power is widely dispersed among competing interest groups, and no single group or elite holds a monopoly on influence (Berry & Wilcox 2018; Dahl 1961; Schattschneider & Adamany 1973). The elitist perspective, in contrast, contends that power and influence are concentrated in the hands of a small, privileged elite within society. According to this view, the political system is not truly pluralistic, and decision-making is heavily influenced by a select few who hold significant economic, social, or political power. Elitists argue that interest groups are merely a means for the ruling elite to maintain control and manage potential challenges to their authority (Lindblom 1980; Wright Mills 1956). In the case of this text, the author shares the pluralist perspective, recognising the key pluralist assumptions in the analytical case: group pluralism, competitive politics, access, and participation (Dahl 1961). Utilizing a pluralist perspective to analyze German interest groups influencing foreign policy towards China is crucial for a nuanced understanding as it acknowledges the diversity of voices, ranging from business circles to think tanks, each contributing in varying degrees to policy decisions. This multifaceted view reveals how these groups interact dynamically, negotiating and compromising with governmental bodies. In a democratic society like Germany, a pluralist understanding provides a framework for checks and balances, ensuring that no single interest dominates and that ethical considerations are included.

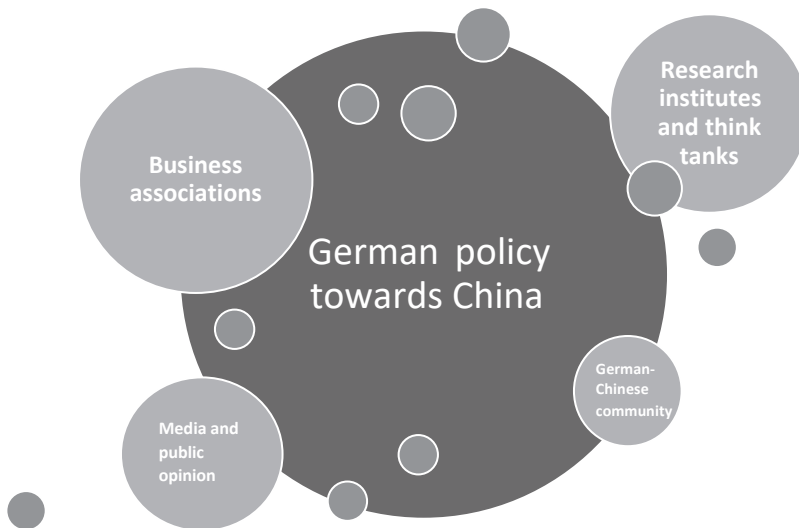
Interest groups can be divided into five categories: 1. groups representing economic interests, 2. causal groups, 3. groups representing public interests, 4. groups representing the interests of private and public institutions, and 5. unaffiliated groups (Knoke 1986). The subject of the conducted research concentrates however only on selected interest groups – i). business associations (belonging to category 1), ii). research institutes and think tanks (category 4), iii). media and public opinion (category 3), and iv). the Chinese diaspora in Germany (belonging to category 5) (see graph 1).

The final selection of these interest groups followed a series of expert interviews with academics involved in the study of the German political system (five semi-structured interviews with 16-20 questions, conducted between December 2019 and December 2022 at Institute of East Asian Studies of Universität Duisburg-Essen, Institute for Political Science of Justus-Liebig Universität, Institute for Political Science of Goethe Universität), interviews

with German think tanks involved in German foreign policy analysis (four structured interviews with 21 questions each, conducted between November 2021 and May 2023 in German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik), interview in German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (structured interview with 16 questions) and interview in German Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels (structured interview with 10 questions). The expert interview scenario examined the influence of key interest groups on German policy toward China and their goals. Experts assessed the scale of influence of these groups on policy decisions regarding China, also analyzing conflicts of interest and mechanisms of influence on the decision-making process. Long-term trends in interest group influence and possible future directions were also explored.

Graph 1

Groups influencing the formation of German policy towards China



Source: own elaboration.

This paper is therefore based mainly on qualitative methods – literature review (institutional searches, document analysis) and in-depth interviews with scholars and experts analysing Germany’s foreign policy, as well as with the officials responsible for cooperation with China. A comparative analysis of the results of the interviews was also carried out, resulting in a picture of German interest groups lobbying for specific solutions in German foreign policy towards the PRC.

In the course of the analysis, the author has put forward several research hypotheses:

- H1: Interest groups, including business associations, research institutes and think tanks, the mass media and public opinion, and the Chinese-Germany community, significantly influence the shaping of Germany's foreign policy toward the PRC.
- H2: The influence mechanisms of interest groups are derived from their capacity to effectively convey social interests into the political system and capitalize on institutional opportunities for participation.
- H3: The varying distribution of power among competing interest groups in Germany, may be explained (according to the pluralist perspective) by indicating that power is not concentrated within a small, privileged elite but is rather fragmented among different groups. The role of expert knowledge, the importance of the Chinese diaspora and the interest of the public and the media is significant.

From the methodological point of view, the author seeks to clarify the hypothesis, based on the liberal assumption that social actors and their interests (independent variable) influence and shape the foreign policy behavior of a state or its government (dependent variable). Investigating this causal relationship is necessary to confirm to what extent the interests and needs of individual interest groups are taken into account in the construction of Germany's foreign policy strategy towards China.

This text is structured as follows – after an introduction which includes an outline of the issue of interest groups in the scholarly literature, theoretical approaches and possibilities of analysis in the context of German-Chinese relations and research hypotheses, the second part sketches relations between Germany and the People's Republic of China in the post-war period. Subsequent parts of the text focus on the issue of specific interest groups that have been identified as key in determining Germany's policy toward China – business associations, think tanks, mass media and public opinion, and German-Chinese community. The outcomes of the analysis are summarized in the conclusion.

Overview of German-Chinese relations

The relationship between Germany and China has a fairly short history, which has intensified considerably over the last 30 years. Indeed, the first German-Chinese relations date back to the mid-17th century and have developed with little intensity over the next two centuries (Behrendt 2017; Kitchen 2011).

After the Second World War, a bipolar world was created, which affected German-Chinese relations. East Germany maintained relations with the PRC for ideological reasons, while West Germany avoided it because of Hallstein's policy. It was only in the 1950s that China took the initiative to establish relations with West Germany, but this was rejected for political reasons and American pressure. It was not until the 1960s that Willy Brandt's foreign policy resulted in the normalisation of relations with China and the subsequent intensification of ties (Cziomer 2006).

Subsequently, Helmut Schmidt and Helmut Kohl continued to develop relations with the PRC, which resulted in a huge increase in German interest in Asia. Germans recognised the potential of China's development and sought to strengthen economic cooperation. A Foreign Chamber of Commerce in China was created, which supported German companies in expanding into the Chinese market (Möller 1996). In 1993, Kohl's cabinet presented the "Asian Strategy Document", detailing Germany's foreign policy strategy towards countries on the Asian continent (*Asien-Konzept der Bundesregierung* 1993). Due to the enormous growth rate in China since the 1990s and the importance of exports for the development of the German economy, increasing trade cooperation between the PRC and Germany became a high-priority objective (*How Germany opened the door to China — and threw away the key* 2020).

This "Chinese euphoria" was also continued by Gerhard Schröder, who jointly signed the "Strategic Partnership for Global Responsibility" with prime minister Wen Jiabao. This document made it possible to increase the dynamics of trade relations, investment relations, environmental cooperation, or cultural and scientific cooperation. It was Schröder who also initiated the establishment of the German-Chinese Rule of Law Dialogue and Dialogue on Human Rights (Ciesielska-Klikowska 2020).

Nevertheless – as with his predecessors – the diplomacy of this Social Democratic chancellor was characterised by a high degree of pragmatism, which meant that the problems of human rights, in Taiwan and Tibet, which often complicated the PRC's relations with other Western countries, did not play a significant role. This was due to Berlin's dominant attachment to the economic nature of the relationship and the mutual recognition of the role of partners in the world. For many years, there was a conviction in Germany that to pursue an effective policy towards China, it was necessary to understand and consider the local circumstances and the great diversity of this country. Thus, German policy towards the PRC developed over the years as a strategy of so-called "silent diplomacy", i.e., not raising sensitive topics for Beijing, geared exclusively towards building intensive economic cooperation, also on a multilateral level,

including in the G20 and G8+5. At the same time, the German side hoped that through close economic cooperation with Western countries, a democratic transformation would take place in China. Anyway, this well-known paradigm of “change through trade” (*Wandel durch Handel*) has only in recent years been judged ineffective (Ciesielska-Klikowska & Kamiński 2021: 31-32).

Under Angela Merkel, German-Chinese relations went to an even higher level. This was the result of several intertwining events. Firstly, Germany came to the forefront of the European Union because of the perturbations that affected the EU after the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008 and the eurozone crisis from 2010 onwards. Secondly, Germany began to search for new partners outside Europe, and the desire to increase Germany's role in Asia was high. Third and finally, China, experiencing an unprecedented period of prosperity and increasingly involved in international affairs, seemed an ideal candidate for closer cooperation in response to new challenges (Ciesielska-Klikowska 2021).

Thus, in 2011, the German-Chinese government consultations, a bilateral communication mechanism reserved for Germany's key partners, were implemented as a mechanism for biennial meetings. Three years later, during President Xi Jinping's state visit to Germany, the cooperation formula was elevated to the “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” (*China, Germany establish comprehensive strategic partnership – Global Times* 2014). Today, there are more than 80 dialogue mechanisms at the intergovernmental level between ministers, secretaries of state, heads of departments, and heads of government agencies. Key formats include the Strategic Dialogue of Foreign and Security Policy Ministers and the High-Level Fiscal Dialogue of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Directors. In addition, there are more than 1,000 cooperative partnerships between universities and research centres, and foundations are increasingly working together (*Interview with a German government official* 2019).

Importantly, Germany also became the main architect of the “Comprehensive Investment Agreement” (CAI) between the EU and the PRC, adopted at the end of December 2020. Indeed, this very document was to become, in a way, the culmination of the German vision for shaping the EU's relationship with China under Angela Merkel's chancellorship. The very process of its formation and negotiation, with the great involvement of the German side, indicated that Berlin plays an important (if not even a key) role in shaping the European Union's policy towards the PRC.

Following the announcement of the CAI – which has not entered into force so far due to the lack of ratification of the document by the European Parliament because of the sanctions imposed mutually by the EU and China in spring 2021 (Lau 2021) – the German media were full of criticism, pointing

out that the “Chinese euphoria” to date should be replaced by “hard pragmatism”. It was written that this agreement was “a mistake that would turn against the European Union”, including the Federal Republic itself. The pursuit of an agreement with the PRC at all costs was seen as an abandonment of the EU’s tough stance or a weakening of the provisions of the March 2019 document “EU-China – a strategic outlook”, where China was explicitly called a strategic partner but also a systemic rival. Chancellor Merkel’s policy towards China began to be seen as a trough (Reimers & Brussee 2021).

When the new chancellor Olaf Scholz and his cabinet took office in December 2021, it was settled in the coalition agreement that all three parties in the government (Social Democrats, Greens, and Liberals) would strive to develop the first-ever German strategy towards China. Its final text was published on 13 July 2023, closing, in a way, the current stage of German-Chinese relations and pointing them in a new direction (Bartsch & Wessling 2023).

The strategy consists of 6 parts, which present the following – the state of bilateral relations with China, the German vision of a strategy towards the PRC within a common EU policy, the need to strengthen the position of Germany and the EU towards the PRC, the importance of international cooperation to counterbalance Chinese influence in the world, and a look at the actors involved in shaping German policy towards China. These elements add up to an exceptionally comprehensive, well-thought-out, and far forward-looking strategy for building Germany’s multi-level relations with China (Die Bundesregierung 2023).

Importantly for the further elaboration in this text, this strategy made key German interests very clear, but it did so based on the needs of various non-state actors – from business circles to academic institutions and think tanks, to federal states and cities, and finally to the concerns of German citizens. The strategy thus created a kind of bracket for the research conducted by the author of this research paper.

Interest groups influencing the formation of German policy towards China

1. Business associations

Undoubtedly, the focus of mutual cooperation lies in economic collaboration. Back in 1978, the Federal Republic ranked fourth among China’s global trade partners and first among European trade partners. However, during that

time, Germany's primary post-war partners were the United States and France, while China remained a secondary partner mainly due to political reasons. The situation started changing in the mid-1990s when Kohl's "Asian Strategy Document" was published, aiming to enhance economic cooperation with Asian countries and to address Germany's investment deficit and representation in the region (Szczurowicz 2013).

The role of China as an economic partner for Germany has been growing dynamically since the beginning of the 21st century. Within 10 years, from 2001 to 2011, trade turnover between Germany and the PRC has increased more than fourfold (Baur & Flach, 2022). As mentioned, the strategic partnership was concluded in 2004, and intergovernmental consultations were established in 2011. Important was also the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) proposed by Xi Jinping in September 2013. The BRI is now recognized as the largest infrastructural and investment project in history, encompassing 151 countries with 75% of the global population (5.8 billion people) and contributing to almost 50% of world GDP (Sahakyan 2023). From 2013 onwards, the BRI garnered considerable attention from Asian and European countries, including Germany, leading to extensive cooperation between the two nations. This collaboration extended not only at the state level but also involved various regions, cities, and individual economic sectors. Consequently, Germany and China became extremely close economic partners. The data reflects the remarkable growth of bilateral economic transactions, increasing from nearly EUR 170 billion in 2016, to EUR 199.3 billion in 2018, and reaching EUR 298 billion in 2022 (*The People's Republic of China is again Germany's main trading partner* 2023). As a result, Germany and China emerged as each other's most crucial trading partners.

The implementation of the BRI project has made it possible to raise German-Chinese economic relations to a higher level, although it should be noted that Germany has not signed the memorandum of understanding with China regarding BRI and, from a political point of view, has been rather sceptical about this initiative as a tool for expanding Chinese influence in Asia or Africa. Nevertheless, it certainly facilitated better systemic cooperation between the two countries, presenting vast opportunities for joint investments in infrastructure projects. German expertise in engineering, manufacturing, and sustainable development complements China's massive infrastructure development plans, enhancing connectivity and trade routes between Europe and Asia. It facilitated economic cooperation by enabling faster technology transfer and innovation. German companies have been actively involved in sharing technological expertise and know-how with Chinese partners, contributing to

the modernization of China's industrial sector (IFW Kiel Institute 2022). Conversely, China's burgeoning technology sector has become a significant source of opportunities for German companies, fostering innovation and competitiveness on a global scale (Hering 2023).

This deep cooperation has been animated intensively by German business circles, which play a key role in shaping the German-Chinese economic cooperation. German business associations actively seek collaboration with Chinese enterprises while also advocating for a specific framework aligned with European and German laws to safeguard against takeovers by Chinese ventures. This is of particular importance in the context of the acquisitions of several strategically important German companies in 2016 (i.e. KUKA and KraussMaffei), which generated enormous interest and public discourse in the Federal Republic (Ciesielska-Klikowska 2019: 101-104). Today, through engagement in seminars and meetings with government representatives, think tanks, and NGOs, German entrepreneurs identify profitable areas of cooperation with China while highlighting potential risks of partial or complete takeovers. They propose measures for the federal government to facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation.

The pivotal role in this matter is played by the Federal Association of German Industry (*Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie BDI*), which is the leading organization representing German industry and industry-related service providers. *BDI* influences state policies, advocating for cautious approaches to Chinese investments without compromising competitiveness. Yet, *BDI* emphasizes the importance of fair trade and investment rules rather than coercive measures, opposing approaches resembling trade wars (Morozowski 2022: 315-316). This is an important assumption, because it is often pointed out that German business has no scruples, and wants to do "business as usual" without even considering i.e. the social costs (Wurzel 2021).

BDI's stance on China was lucidly articulated in their 2019 document titled "Partners and system competitors – how should we deal with a Chinese state-controlled economy?" (*Partner und systemischer Wettbewerber – Wie gehen wir mit Chinas staatlich gelenkter Volkswirtschaft um?*). The paper emphasized systemic competition between the liberal European market economy and the state-directed Chinese economy, highlighting China's growing role as a research and development center and a competitor for German corporations. *BDI* provided support for foreign investments, including those from China, but called for new instruments to protect market and competition at the EU level to ensure a balanced economic relationship with China (*BDI* 2019). These provisions were maintained by Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (*DIHK*) (Morozowski 2019: 5).

The publication of the *BDI's* document sparked enormous public interest in the importance of Germany's relationship with China. Also, German authorities perceived *BDI's* strategy as a crucial factor in shaping public discourse and media reporting on China. It was underlined, that Germany aims for a balanced response to China's policies, avoiding isolation and promoting structured cooperation in line with international regulations (Interview with German government official 2019).

Yet, as the interviewed experts pointed out, it is not only the *BDI* that influences the shaping of the German political and economic strategy *vis-à-vis* China – in fact the palette of actors is wider. Based on interlocutors' statements, six main associations were identified as having a major influence on the development of German policy towards the PRC. In addition to the *BDI*, the main actors include: Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (*Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag, DIHK*), *AHK Greater China* (*Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag Greater China*, an umbrella organisation for the German Chambers of Commerce in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong), German Chamber of Commerce in China (*AHK China*), East Asian Association (*Ostasiatischer Verein e.V.*), German Engineering Federation (*Bundesverband der Deutschen Exporteure von Maschinen, Anlagen und Ausrüstungen, VDMA*).

From the interviews conducted, a number of assumptions can be drawn about the importance of business associations in shaping German policy towards China. Firstly, the relationship between Germany and China holds immense significance in the realm of global geopolitics and economic dynamics. Both countries recognize the strategic importance of fostering strong diplomatic ties, given their positions as major economic powerhouses. In shaping Germany's policy towards China, experts consider the active involvement of business circles and associations as a critical factor (Interview in German Institute for Global and Area Studies 2022).

Secondly, economic interdependence between Germany and China forms a strong foundation for their bilateral relations. Business circles and associations, representing German companies and industries, serve as essential conduits for articulating the economic interests and concerns of the German business community in China. By acting as intermediaries between the private sector and the government, these entities provide valuable insights to policymakers regarding the potential impact of policy decisions on trade, investments, and market access (Interview in Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik 2021).

Thirdly, one of the primary roles of business circles and associations is to advocate for German business interests in China. Through dialogues with Chi-

nese authorities and policymakers, these entities promote fair trade practices, address market access barriers, and safeguard the intellectual property rights of German companies operating in China. By voicing the concerns and aspirations of the German business community, these entities play a vital role in shaping Germany's policy towards the PRC in a way that fosters a conducive business environment and protects the interests of German firms (Interview in German Permanent Representation to the EU in Brussels 2023).

Fourthly, business circles and associations possess comprehensive knowledge and expertise about the economic landscape in both Germany and China. Through regular interactions with businesses, industries, and governments in both countries, these entities gain valuable insights into the complexities and opportunities of the bilateral relationship. This expertise enables them to provide policymakers with informed recommendations and advice on crafting policies that promote mutually beneficial economic cooperation and sustainable development (Interview in Institute for Political Science of Goethe Universität 2023).

The experts agreed that the key German corporations whose interests are represented by the aforementioned business associations are mainly car manufacturers (*Volkswagen Group, BMW Group, Daimler AG*), chemical corporations (*BASF SE*), pharmaceutical and life sciences companies (*Henkel AG & Co. KGaA, Bayer AG*), technology and engineering companies (*Siemens AG, Robert Bosch GmbH, Metrohm AG*) and software corporations (*SAP SE*). These indications are also confirmed by publications of other authors (Beckert 2022; Qin 2020).

Navigating the cultural and regulatory differences between Germany and China can be challenging for policymakers. Business associations play a crucial role as intermediaries, fostering mutual understanding and facilitating communication. By conveying the nuances of business practices, legal frameworks, and cultural norms, these entities assist policymakers in formulating policies that align more effectively with the realities of the bilateral economic relationship.

Yet, the influence of large German corporations on shaping Germany's strategy towards China is a significant but often complicated element in the dynamics of bilateral relations. Companies such as *Volkswagen, Siemens* and *BASF* have significant interests in China and play an important role in the German economy, which makes their voices in the discussion on relations with the PRC very important. This was clearly visible during the debate on the adoption of Germany's new strategy towards China, when the positions of politicians and business clashed during many months of discussions.

Member of the Board of Management of *Volkswagen AG*, Ralf Brandstätter, summed up these debates with the statement: “trade is a tool of resilience in geopolitical tensions and a driver for growth. If you broaden your stance, you don’t fall over so easily” (Cranenbroek 2023). These corporations, which depend on the Chinese market for both supplies of raw materials and sales of products, often put pressure on the government in Berlin to avoid a confrontational attitude towards Beijing. This may have an impact on political decisions such as those relating to human rights issues, intellectual property rights or even national security aspects. In practice, this means that the German government may have to fight on two fronts – securing corporate interests and maintaining stable trade relations, while at the same time considering a long-term strategy of de-risking and diversification. In situations where business interests conflict with diplomacy or national security, the direction of foreign policy may be the subject of intense discussion and negotiation. Therefore, even if there is political will to act decisively towards China, the influence of large corporations often makes decisions more balanced and cautious than a more unilateral approach to relations with China might suggest (Chazan et al. 2023).

Overall, experts acknowledge the vital influence exerted by entrepreneurs in shaping Germany's policy towards the PRC. It is worth noting, however, that none of the experts pointed out the importance of medium-sized companies (*Mittelstand*) in formulating German policy towards China. Meanwhile, their involvement in the PRC is significant and still growing. As the newest analysis prepared for a consulting company *FTI-Andersch* shows, 26% of medium-sized German manufacturing companies want to relocate their production capacities from Germany to abroad. 40% of these companies want to move to Asia, and 15% explicitly to China. In companies with more than 1,000 employees, 23% want to move to China (Kantar-Untersuchung 2023). A survey by the German Chamber of Commerce in China also recently concluded that medium-sized companies are investing in China to an increasing extent. Medium-sized companies do not ignore the China risk, but the economic reality and the dwindling attractiveness of Germany make the country indispensable from the perspective of many companies (Gusbeth 2023).

Although not indicated in expert interviews, it should be assumed that both huge corporations and medium-sized entities influence the temperature of German-Chinese relations and the amount of trade and investment. The economic interdependence, advocacy for business interests, expertise, cultural bridging, and diplomatic strengthening provided by these entities are crucial components in formulating policies that promote sustainable cooperation be-

tween the two countries. As the global landscape continues to evolve, the active involvement of business communities in shaping policy will remain pivotal in driving the Germany-China relationship forward.

Research institutes and think tanks

Certainly, the interests of business circles are far too little to comprehend the landscape of German policy toward China. Their important co-creators are also think tanks. Think tanks play a significant role in the German political system, acting as independent research institutions that generate policy-oriented analysis and recommendations on issues related to politics, economics, and society. They contribute to shaping public policy debates and providing expertise to policymakers, politicians, and the public. Think tanks in Germany conduct extensive research on a wide range of domestic and international issues. They analyze data, collect evidence, and develop policy proposals to address pressing challenges faced by the country (Blum & Schubert 2013). Moreover, they offer expert knowledge and analysis to government officials, political parties, and other stakeholders. Think tanks serve furthermore as intermediaries between academic research and the political sphere. They take scholarly findings and translate them into practical policy recommendations that are accessible and relevant to policymakers (Thunert 2000).

Interviewed experts pointed out that several research centers play an important role in the context of relations with China. They include German Institute for International and Security Affairs (*Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP*); German Council on Foreign Relations (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik, DGAP*); German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA); and Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS). In addition, the *Bertelsmann Stiftung* and foundations affiliated with political parties – the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (*Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, KAS*, affiliated with the Christian Democratic Union), the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (*Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, FES*, affiliated with the Social Democratic Party), and the Heinrich Böll Foundation (*Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, affiliated with the Greens) were also pointed out.

Throughout last decades, think tanks have played a crucial role in influencing German policy towards China through their expertise, research, and engagement with policymakers. *SWP*, *GIGA* and *DGAP* conducted extensive research on China's political, economic, and foreign policy developments, offering valuable insights into China's actions and their implications for Germa-

ny. The aforementioned think tanks regularly publish policy recommendations and white papers on various aspects of China-Germany relations, providing concrete and practical guidance to policymakers in shaping their approach towards China (Carry et al. 2023; Godement & Wacker 2020; Spillner & Wolff 2023). Furthermore, they foster public awareness and facilitate dialogue on the complexities of the China-Germany relationship by organizing events, seminars, and conferences that bring together policymakers, scholars, and business leaders (DGAP 2023).

Some of them (like DGAP) engage in diplomacy, facilitating dialogues between German and Chinese representatives. These interactions provide opportunities for candid discussions and influence official government positions. Additionally, think tanks collaborate with academic institutions to foster research partnerships and academic exchanges between Germany and China, deepening the understanding of each other's societies and strengthening bilateral relations.

Think tanks also monitor human rights and rule of law issues in China, advocating for human rights and democracy (like Heinrich Böll Foundation and DGAP), which can influence German policymakers' positions in their relations with China (Obermaier 2010). They also contribute to shaping Germany's economic policies towards China by analysing trade relations, investment patterns, and economic opportunities (MERICS and Bertelsmann Stiftung 2023).

Furthermore, think tanks analyze China's military and security actions in the Asia-Pacific region, evaluating strategic challenges for Germany and its allies. This analysis informs German defense and security policies in the context of China's growing influence (Legarda 2023).

Some think tanks (like KAS and FES; moreover Goethe Institute as an institution that promotes German language and culture globally) engage in promoting soft power and cultural diplomacy between Germany and China, including educational and cultural exchanges to foster mutual understanding and cooperation (CGTN 2023).

SWP, GIGA and DGAP are instrumental in shaping public opinion and advising policymakers on Germany's relationship with China. Each of these think tanks has its own unique perspective and emphasis, which in turn impacts the German government's stance and policies toward China in varying degrees. Their comparative influence concentrates on four issues:

- policy breadth – SWP provides the most comprehensive range of policy recommendations, followed by GIGA and then DGAP;
- scope of analysis – GIGA tends to focus on broader, global implications, while SWP is more focused on bilateral relations and DGAP on European dynamics;

- political reach – *SWP*'s close advisory relationships with governmental bodies give it a direct channel for policy influence. In contrast, *GIGA* and *DGAP*'s influence is more indirect, often shaping public discourse and contributing to a broader policy environment;
- sectoral influence – *SWP* is generally more influential on security and human rights issues, *GIGA* on regional and global strategy, and *DGAP* on EU-level diplomatic initiatives.

Their collective inputs offer a multifaceted and layered influence on German policy formulation *vis-à-vis* China.

During the conducted interviews, experts underlined however that currently the leading think tank in Germany that specializes in China-related research is the Mercator Institute for China Studies (Interview in German Institute for Global and Area Studies 2022). Interlocutors pointed out, that MERICS provides the broadest and the most detailed analysis and expertise on China's domestic developments, foreign policy, economic strategies, and technological advancements, aiming to contribute to a better understanding of China's role in the world and its implications for Germany and Europe.

Founded in 2013, MERICS has swiftly risen to a prominent position, shaping Germany's and Europe's perception of China's politics, economy, and foreign policy. Situated strategically in Berlin, the institute enjoys proximity to policymakers, diplomats, and relevant stakeholders, amplifying its influence and outreach. With China's increasing global impact and its ramifications for Europe and the world, MERICS fills an important knowledge gap, empowering policymakers, businesses, and academia with well-informed decision-making. Clearly, MERICS' strength lies in its interdisciplinary approach, convening experts from diverse fields such as political science, economics, international relations, and area studies. The holistic methodology enables the institute to effectively address intricate matters like the BRI, digital transformation, and engagement with global governance structures (MERICS Researching contemporary China in Europe 2021).

The breadth of MERICS' research output spans various topics encompassing domestic political developments, economic policies, technological advancements, foreign policy strategies, and social issues in China. The institute's analysts are prolific publishers of in-depth reports, policy papers, and expert commentaries, which are widely recognized and cited in policy circles.

Noteworthy among MERICS' achievements is its skilful balance between academic rigor and practical relevance. While conducting scholarly research, the institute ensures that its findings and recommendations are accessible and applicable to policymakers and stakeholders. This approach bolsters MERICS'

influence, extending beyond academia to reach decision-makers and media discourse (MERICS 2023).

Institute's reputation for independence and objectivity has been pivotal in garnering trust among policymakers and the public. The institute steadfastly maintains a non-partisan stance, safeguarding its research and analyses from ideological bias. This autonomy enables MERICS to navigate sensitive issues and contentious topics concerning China's political system, human rights, and international conduct, positioning it as a dependable and credible source of information (Interview in Institute for Political Science of Goethe Universität 2023).

Enhancing its impact through public engagement, MERICS frequently hosts events, seminars, and conferences, creating a platform for constructive debates on China-related matters, cultivating a deeper understanding of China's intricacies across diverse audiences. MERICS is moreover an official partner of the Munich Security Conference (Bridging the gap 2023) and serves as an academic partner for the bi-annual Hamburg Summit "China meets Europe" (Hamburg Summit 2018). Additionally, the institute has forged partnerships with the Faculty of East Asian Studies at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum and the University of Duisburg-Essen (Interview in Institute of East Asian Studies of Universität Duisburg-Essen 2019).

As a think tank dedicated to providing comprehensive and objective analysis of China, MERICS plays a significant role in shaping Germany's policy towards China in several ways. Considering the interviews conducted and the observation of MERICS' activities, several assumptions can be made about the role of the institute. Firstly, it conducts in-depth research and analysis on various aspects of China. Policymakers in Germany rely on MERICS' expertise to gain insights into the complexities of China's actions and their implications for Germany and Europe.

Secondly, MERICS formulates policy recommendations based on empirical evidence and analysis. These recommendations offer guidance to German policymakers in dealing with the challenges and opportunities presented by China.

Thirdly, the institute serves as a bridge between academia and policymakers. By translating scholarly findings into accessible language and practical policy suggestions, the institute facilitates a smooth flow of information between researchers and policymakers.

Fourthly, its reports, policy papers, and expert commentaries contribute to public discourse on China-related issues, what provides diverse viewpoints on China.

Fifthly, MERICS also influences broader European perspectives and policies towards China. Its analyses and policy recommendations have the potential to shape EU-China relations and the EU's approach to issues concerning China.

The role and importance of MERICS was particularly highlighted during the discussion on the establishment of Germany's newest strategy towards China. Experts from the institute played a key role in assisting policy-makers in outlining the imperative fields of cooperation and competition with the PRC (Ciesielska-Klikowska 2023), which was also manifested by the presentation of the text of the strategy at the MERICS headquarters in Berlin in July 2023 (German Foreign Minister Baerbock on the future of Germany's China strategy Merics 2023).

While German think tanks play an essential role in shaping German policy towards China, policymaking is a complex process involving multiple actors, including government agencies, political leaders, business interests, but also civil society. Think tanks provide valuable input and analysis, but their influence is complemented by other factors shaping Germany's policies towards China. Media reports also play an important role here, influencing the increasing interest in the topic of China in Germany itself.

Media and public opinion

Mass media and public opinion play a multi-faceted role in analyzing German foreign policy. Firstly, media reporting on foreign policy decisions and actions ensures transparency in the government's conduct. It serves as a watchdog, holding policymakers accountable for their choices and actions, ensuring they align with national interests and public preferences. Through media coverage, the public becomes aware of international issues and the impact of foreign policy decisions on citizens' lives (Interview in Institute for Political Science of Justus-Liebig Universität 2022).

Secondly, media and public opinion shape the perception of Germany's role in the world and its relations with other countries. Positive or negative public sentiment can influence diplomatic relations and affect Germany's standing on the global stage. The image projected by media can have far-reaching implications for Germany's soft power and public diplomacy efforts.

Thirdly, public opinion, as expressed through media coverage and polls, can also influence policymakers' decisions. Elected officials often consider public sentiment when formulating foreign policy, especially on issues of na-

tional interest or sensitivity. Media and public reactions provide valuable insights into how the public perceives foreign policy decisions and their potential consequences, acting as a feedback mechanism for policymakers (Meyen et al. 2014).

Additionally, media reporting on foreign policy issues sparks public debate and policy discourse. This open exchange of ideas fosters more informed and nuanced foreign policy discussions within the public sphere and among experts, enriching the overall understanding of the country's international engagements (Erk 2003).

In times of crisis or international conflicts, media plays a significant role in informing the public about the situation, potential risks, and government responses. Public opinion can shape the public's expectations for crisis management and influence policymakers' decisions in these critical moments (Hänel 2021).

Ultimately, in democratic systems like Germany, public opinion is a fundamental aspect of governance. It is essential for foreign policy decisions to be informed by and responsive to the will and interests of the citizens.

What refers to relations with China, Germany's interest in Chinese topics has evolved over time. In the first decade of the 21st century, German public opinion towards China has shown a positive trend, particularly in the context of increasing economic cooperation and the growing activity of German companies in the PRC, as well as Chinese companies in Germany. Media coverage often highlighted Chinese investments made under the auspices of the Belt and Road Initiative, contributing to this favourable perception (Ciesielska-Klikowska 2019).

Two studies conducted on behalf of Huawei Technologies and *DGAP* (in 2012) and Huawei Technologies with *GIGA* (in 2014) shed light on the social attitudes towards China in Germany. The results indicated an overall optimistic view, though opinions on bilateral political and economic relations were more varied (Huawei Studie 2012). The People's Republic of China was generally seen as a global and dynamic economic power, but 49% of German respondents expressed some level of caution or fear towards China. Specifically, 43% of politicians and 51% of economic decision-makers held reservations. The study also revealed that 60% of Germans believed China's influence on the German economy to be significant, and 35% perceived mutual benefits from technological cooperation. However, a notable 58% of Germans also believed that domestic producers were facing pressure from Chinese manufacturers, indicating some concerns about the impact of Chinese economic activities on local industries (Huawei Studie 2014).

The positive perception of China persisted in a repeat study in 2016. Among the general population, reservations about China decreased slightly to 44%, while politicians and entrepreneurs exhibited a decrease of around $\frac{1}{4}$ in their fear of Chinese economic power, reducing the percentages to 35% and 34%, respectively. The study also highlighted the persistence of stereotypes in both societies. When asked about spontaneous associations, Chinese respondents associated Germans with a strong economy, the automotive industry, and German character traits. In contrast, many Germans associated China with economic strength, demographic growth, and Chinese food (Noesselt et al. 2016).

Despite the generally positive sentiment towards China in the second decade of the 21st century, there has been a decline in positive perception, likely influenced by media reports about the situation of – especially – ethnic minorities in China. A study conducted in the spring of 2018 by the Pew Research Center revealed that more than half (54%) of Germans held unfavourable views of China, with 88% being aware of the issue of human rights violations in the Middle Kingdom (Wike et al. 2018). This topic has become one of the most important points of interest for German public opinion, which is strongly oriented towards issues of democracy, the rule of law, human rights protection, and ecology. None of the interviewed experts, however, identified third sector groups, fighting for human rights, as a crucial (or one of the crucial) actors influencing the shaping of German policy towards China.

Undoubtedly though the increase in negative perceptions of China grew in the following years, which was the result of increasing media pressure to tell the story of the current political, economic and social situation in the PRC (Vogel & Jia 2017). In spring 2022, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of surveyed Germans held a negative perception of China (Pew Research Center 2022). This trend can be seen in the graph 2.

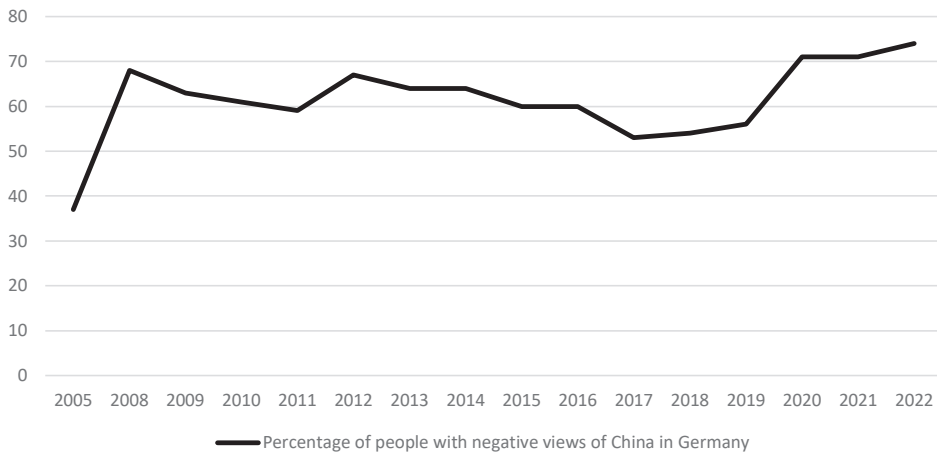
Germany is not an isolated case, as in all major countries of the Global North, China is perceived negatively by most of the population (Ibidem). A survey conducted by the think tank European Council on Foreign Relations in April 2023 in 11 EU member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and Sweden) reaffirmed this finding – out of over 3,000 surveyed Germans, 16% considered China an enemy, and 32% viewed it as a rival (Puglierin & Zerka 2023: 5).

Over the years, intriguingly, various opinions have been voiced, highlighting concerns about the absence of neutrality in reporting on China, potentially influencing attitudes towards the country (Thimm et al. 2014: 19-42; 53-55). Indeed, several studies in Germany have addressed the issue of media coverage on China, attempting to present a more comprehensive view. These studies

have found that the focus of media reporting on the PRC tends to revolve heavily around political and economic aspects, while social and cultural matters receive less attention (Changbao et al. 2021: 17; Hufnagel et al. 2022: 13-18; Richter & Gebauer 2010: 43-78; Thimm et al. 2014: 23; Vogel & Jia 2017: 9).

Graph 2

Percentage of people with negative views of China in Germany (2005-2022)



Source: own elaboration based on Pew Research Center (2022).

These studies also highlight that China tends to be depicted in a monolithic manner in the media, with limited representation given to Chinese perspectives (Changbao et al. 2021: 8; Richter & Gebauer 2010: 16; Thimm et al. 2014: 38). Additionally, media reporting has been criticized for perpetuating existing stereotypes, portraying China mainly as a “cheap producer” or an “attractive growth market” and for lacking diversity, often influenced by German interests and judgments based on German or Western values.

A 2021 study on reports from the first half of 2020 revealed that nearly 90% of media coverage was critical or highly critical of China in terms of domestic policy, with almost 70% adopting a critical stance on international relations (Changbao et al. 2021: 22-27). Notably, a 2022 study analysing German media coverage from 2000 to 2019 suggests a significant shift in China's perception around 2016/2017, transitioning from a portrayal as a partner to being depicted as a competitor to Germany (Hufnagel et al., 2022: 16-18). This shift might have been influenced by several issues – political tensions and disagreements between Germany and China (i.e. aforementioned acquisitions of strategically

important German companies); economic competition, trade imbalances, and issues related to intellectual property and market access; China's human rights record, including issues such as censorship, treatment of minorities, and restrictions on freedom of expression; China's actions in global affairs, such as its role in the South China Sea, relations with neighbouring countries; as well as differences in social values, cultural practices, and lifestyle between China and Germany (Ciesielska-Klikowska 2019).

Mass media and public opinion play a significant and influential role in shaping German policy towards China for several reasons. Media reporting on China-related issues provides transparency and accountability, ensuring that policymakers' decisions are scrutinized and aligned with public interests. Public opinion acts as a crucial feedback mechanism, informing policymakers about citizens' perspectives, concerns, and expectations regarding China. Moreover, media coverage fosters public awareness and understanding of China's complexities, influencing public sentiment towards the country. In the German case, elected officials often consider public sentiment when formulating China-related policies, especially on sensitive issues like human rights and trade relations (Talmon, 2020). Public opinion, as reflected in media coverage and public discussions, can sway policymakers' decisions (Interview in Institute for Political Science of Justus-Liebig Universität 2022).

German-Chinese community

The Chinese diaspora in Germany also plays a role in this jigsaw of German interests and goals towards China. Its importance was pointed out by several experts (Interview in Institute of East Asian Studies of Universität Duisburg-Essen 2019; Interview with Norbert H. Kern and Cengiz Hendek 2023). This is interesting because the Chinese diaspora in Germany is relatively small. Nevertheless, it plays an important relational role for the German and Chinese communities (Interview with Dr. Olivier Franke 2019).

According to the data from 2017, the number of Chinese citizens in Germany has risen to 136,460, up from approximately 78,000 in 2007 (*Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung* 2017). These figures account only for registered Chinese citizens, excluding German-born individuals of Chinese descent who hold German citizenship. The broader Chinese community in Germany was estimated by the Federal Statistical Office to be around 146,450 in 2023 (Bocksch 2023). It is paradoxical, but although Germany and China have been the closest partners in international trade for years, the group of Chinese liv-

ing in Germany is quite sparse compared to other expats. Among all foreign residents in Germany, China ranks fourth among non-EU countries, following Turkey (1.5 million), Syria (440,000), and the USA (324,000) (Statista 2023a).

Unlike other Western nations, Germany does not have officially recognized Chinatowns. However, there was a thriving Chinese quarter, *Chinesenviertel*, in Hamburg's inner-city district of St. Pauli during the 1930s. While it was closed down during the Second World War, it has recently shown signs of resurgence.

The majority of Chinese migrants in Germany are young, with an average age of 32 years. Most of them come to Germany for studies and subsequently find employment opportunities. By the year 2000, Chinese students had become the largest group of foreign students in Germany, with their numbers growing from 10,000 in 2002 to 27,000 in 2007. In the winter semester of 2018/19, nearly 43,000 Chinese nationals were enrolled in German higher education institutions, comprising approximately 10% of all foreign students. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, their numbers have declined in recent years, and statistics show that there are now 40,122 students from the PRC in German universities (for a total group of 440,564 foreign students) (Erudera 2023).

The extensive academic cooperation between Germany and China is made possible through bilateral agreements signed between German and Chinese higher education institutions as part of the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership", facilitating a widespread exchange of students and scientists. Germany hosts various institutes and academic associations with a focus on China, with a total of 33 such institutions scattered across cities like Berlin, Hamburg, Duisburg, Kiel, Göttingen, Cologne, and Munich. Moreover, the presence of Confucius Institutes in Germany plays a crucial role in enhancing cultural exchange and understanding. There are 19 Confucius Institutes located in various German cities, and Confucius classes are organized in selected schools (*Deutsche Welle* 2023). Although it should be emphasized that in recent years their activity in Germany has come under criticism. On the one hand, these institutions are promoted as cultural centers aimed at educating about Chinese language and culture. On the other hand, they are often criticized for acting as a propaganda tool of the Chinese government, aimed at influencing foreign academic communities and shaping a sugar-coated image of China.

In Germany, the activities of Confucius Institutes have been scrutinized especially for their potential impact on academic research freedom (Ciesielska-Klikowska 2021). Some German universities and scientific institutions have expressed concerns that cooperation with Confucius Institutes may lead to censorship or restrictions on academic freedom, particularly on issues related to human rights in China, the situation in Tibet or Xinjiang, and China's role on

the international arena (Scholz 2021). Moreover, in Germany as in other Western countries, there are concerns about the possibility of using Confucius Institutes for intelligence purposes or to collect information about people critical of Chinese policy. In response to these controversies, some German universities have decided to end or rethink their cooperation with Confucius Institutes (i.e. in Stuttgart and Bonn) (Jacobs 2015; Wein 2020). Other institutions continue to maintain relationships, but with certain controls in place to safeguard academic freedom and independence (Zoske 2023). The need to regulate cooperation between German universities and Confucius Institutes has been discussed in the federal government for several years now. Such opinions were presented by the former Minister of Education, Anja Karliczek, and the current head of this Ministry, Bettina Stark-Watzinger (Gillmann & Neuerer 2022). This topic is very delicate, because the German side does not want to harm the educational and tourist sectors, for which Chinese citizens are appreciated target group.

And this group is becoming indeed an increasingly important point of interest for tourist organizations and institutions (*Tagesschau* 2023). Chinese tourists have been visiting Germany in growing numbers in recent years, often combining business trips with leisure travel. In 2018 and 2019, almost 2,9 million overnight stays were booked by Chinese tourists in Germany, which was a significant rise compared to previous years (*Statista* 2023b). Currently, the number of Chinese tourists in Germany is unknown. It can be speculated that it was close to zero at the time of the pandemic, and only since the end of lock down in the PRC in January 2023 has it been able to grow.

The importance of the German-Chinese community in shaping German policy toward the PRC should be also mentioned. The diaspora is relevant, though not crucial. However, it is worth noting what tasks the people-to-people contacts can play. Foremost, the German-Chinese community has unique cultural and linguistic understanding, which allows to provide nuanced insight into the complexities of bilateral relations, bridging communication gaps and facilitating mutual understanding.

Members of the German-Chinese community often have direct ties to China through family bonds or personal experiences. Their perspective offers valuable insight into China's domestic developments, social issues and public sentiment, enriching the analysis of German policy toward China.

Furthermore, many people from the German-Chinese community are involved in business and trade between the two countries. Their experiences and knowledge of economic ties provide valuable information on the impact of political decisions on businesses and trade relations (Interview with Norbert H. Kern and Cengiz Hendek 2023).

Some individuals from the German-Chinese community have links to policymakers in both Germany and China. These connections can serve as channels for constructive dialogue and information sharing among policymakers, improving the formulation of well-informed policies.

In addition, the German-Chinese community is involved in civil society organizations advocating for issues related to Germany-China relations, including human rights, environmental issues and educational exchanges (Interview in Institute for Political Science of Justus-Liebig Universität, 2022). Their involvement in these areas allows policymakers to understand public sentiment and concerns.

Conclusions

The presented analysis sheds light on the evolving landscape of foreign policy decision-making in contemporary democracies and pluralistic societies, with a particular focus on Germany's foreign policy towards China. The author assumes, that the traditional perception of foreign policy as the domain of state entities and diplomatic elites has evolved, encompassing a diverse array of stakeholders, with interest groups emerging as influential actors in shaping the country's international engagement.

In the German political system, interest groups play a multi-faceted role in the democratic decision-making process. They represent specific electoral districts or communities, advocate for political positions, seek to influence decision-makers, disseminate information, and connect citizens with the government or the international community. Their influence on German foreign policy towards China has become increasingly evident, prompting both public and non-state actors to take a more active interest in Sino-German relations.

Business associations, especially those with insider status, enjoy greater access to decision-makers in the German bureaucracy, allowing them to exert significant influence on political decisions concerning China. Meanwhile, research institutes and analytical centers bring valuable expertise and knowledge to shape German foreign policy. Mass media and public opinion play a vital role in raising awareness and highlighting issues beyond mere economic cooperation, such as human rights. Additionally, the Chinese diaspora in Germany acts as a significant link between both countries, promoting understanding and cooperation. As a result, these interest groups act as a driving force for multi-faceted German-Chinese cooperation, making it better thought out and considering the interests of various stakeholders. The methodological approach of

qualitative research, including literature review and in-depth interviews with experts and scholars, provided valuable insights into the mechanisms and consequences of interest group influence on Germany's foreign policy.

The research hypotheses posed in the introduction were largely confirmed. The first hypothesis, which posits that various interest groups such as business associations, think tanks, media, and the Chinese diaspora significantly impact Germany's foreign policy towards China, was proven. The text underscores the advisory role of think tanks like *SWP*, *GIGA*, *DGAP*, and especially *MERICS*, illustrating how they shape the strategic direction of German foreign policy. Moving on to the second hypothesis, the article focuses on the mechanisms these interest groups use to channel their influence. It elaborates on their ability to represent public interests effectively and to leverage institutional opportunities for participation. The paper verifies this hypothesis by detailing how these groups translate social interests into the political system, often capitalizing on expert knowledge and platforms for lobbying or public discourse. Lastly, the article addresses the third hypothesis concerning the distribution of power among these interest groups. By adopting a pluralist perspective, the text supports the idea that power is not concentrated within a small elite but is instead fragmented among a variety of groups. While think tanks might have a more direct advisory role, the article highlights that the media and public opinion also significantly influence policy decisions. These points to a diverse distribution of power, substantiated by the existence of competitive politics and citizen participation.

In conclusion, interest groups have become significant actors in shaping Germany's foreign policy towards China, reflecting the growing importance of civil society and non-state actors in the decision-making process. The changing role of interest groups in foreign policy is a key aspect to consider for both policymakers and researchers to ensure a more inclusive and representative approach to international engagement in contemporary democracies.

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Słowa kluczowe: Niemcy, Chiny, grupy interesu, think tanki, stowarzyszenia biznesowe, media, opinia publiczna

Keywords: Germany, China, interest groups, think tanks, business associations, media, public opinion

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to explore the multi-faceted dynamics of interest groups in the process of shaping Germany's foreign policy toward China. The analysis focuses on understanding the role of various interest groups and their influence on decision-making, as well as showing the complexity and implications of this influence in the context of a democratic society.

The main thrust of the text is to understand how various interest groups in Germany influence its foreign policy toward China, particularly in the context of mutual economic benefits and the development of political relations. The study focuses on identifying key interest groups and analysing the mechanisms and implications of their impact on decision-making processes.

The text poses several research hypotheses: 1) interest groups, such as business associations, research institutes and think tanks, the mass media and the general public, as well as the Chinese diaspora in Germany, play a significant role in shaping Germany's foreign policy towards China; 2) the mechanisms of interest groups' influence stem from their ability to channel social interests into the political system and take advantage of institutional opportunities for participation; 3) the varying distribution of power among competing interest groups in Germany, may be explained by indicating that power is not concentrated within a small privileged elite but is rather fragmented among different groups. The role of expert knowledge, the importance of the Chinese diaspora and the interest of the public and the media are all significant factors.

The article uses literature analysis and qualitative research based on expert interviews with academics, researchers, think tank representatives, and government officials. These interviews provide valuable information on the mechanisms of interest groups' effect on German foreign policy.

The article demonstrates that interest groups play an important role in shaping Germany's foreign policy toward China and that this influence results from their capacity to represent public interests and take advantage of institutional opportunities for participation, which is consistent with the liberal paradigm of international relations. A pluralist perspective on analysis emphasizes the importance of competitive politics and citizen participation in decision-making processes. Maintaining democratic integrity and transparency in Germany's international operations requires an understanding of these complex relationships.



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Wyższy Sąd Krajowy w Poznaniu 1939-1945. Zarys działalności wraz z wyborem dokumentów

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Wyższy Sąd Krajowy w Poznaniu był najważniejszym sądem powszechnym w Kraju Warty i jedną z głównych instytucji niemieckiego terroru. Pod pozorem czynności prawnych zwalczał on bezwzględnie wrogów III Rzeszy.

Przed sądem odbywały się przede wszystkim rozprawy dotyczące przygotowywania zdrady stanu. Były to sprawy polityczne wymierzone w Polaków, którzy przynależeli do organizacji konspiracyjnych. Drugim ważnym polem orzeczniczej działalności sądu były sprawy o defetyzm, którego dopuszczali się Niemcy. Przed Wyższym Sądem Krajowym stanęło ogółem blisko 1700 osób. 472 oskarżonych skazano na karę śmierci.

Publikacja, wydana jako XVIII tom w serii Documenta Occupationis, zawiera ponadto wybór wyroków wydanych przez sąd – w języku niemieckim oraz w tłumaczeniu na język polski. Jej istotną częścią jest także obszerny aneks z wykazem przeprowadzonych rozpraw oraz alfabetycznym spisem osądzonych osób.

Książka ukazuje nie tylko różne aspekty działalności sądu, ale jest także punktem wyjścia do charakterystyki funkcjonowania niemieckiego wymiaru sprawiedliwości w Kraju Warty.