



University of International Relations, China

Aalborg University, Denmark

China and International Relations joint Master's programme

Master thesis

German domestic politics and China

An examination of possible new dynamics
in the German-Chinese relationship

Carmen Mina Seybold

Supervisor A: Qiu Yuhui

Supervisor B: Jesper Willaing Zeuthen

Paper submitted: May 25th, 2022

Paper supervisor A: Associate Professor Qiu Yuhui
University of International Relations, Beijing/China

Paper supervisor B: Associate Professor Jesper Willaing Zeuthen
Aalborg University, Aalborg/Denmark

Abstract

In the setting of a new German government, with another party constellation and the accompanying intentional changes, this paper investigates how the German government incorporates international and domestic factors in establishing German-Chinese strategic narratives. The research provides fundamental knowledge into long-standing German-Chinese relations. This arises in a methodological elaboration on the selection of the German government as the main actor and its newly published coalition agreement, along with the two subordinate actors the European Union and the German population, of which official statements and quantified opinion polls are investigated. In an effort to extract the relevant data from the documents, the concept of coding is applied and altered to address the requirements of this research.

In order to underpin the explanation of new dynamics in the German-Chinese relationship, the theory of strategic narratives is consulted. Therefore, through the theoretical approach, the analysis is structured into three levels, thus illustrating two influencing factors on domestic decision-making and the subsequent foreign policy actions with respect to China that affect the international community: first, the international context is examined, which consists of instruments of the European Union pushing for European sovereignty; subsequently, the sentiment among the German public, which argue for the preservation of human rights in China in addition to sovereignty; and finally, the synthesis of the two factors is examined concerning the final decision-making in conjunction with the formation of a German narrative determined to China.

In doing so, the paper identifies that the German government is balancing the characteristics of both contexts of the maintenance of its political legitimacy by persuading the German public of its approaches while not losing its public credibility. Lastly, this research concludes that German-Chinese relations will not change significantly, although the German government will act more sovereignly and independently towards China during the current legislative period due to dependencies and increasing competition, however, this is consequently not a strategic approach.

Keywords: German government, China, Germany, strategic narratives, legitimacy, German public, European Union, credibility

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. German-Chinese relationship	3
1.2. Problem Formulation	4
2. Methodology	5
2.1. Analytical Process	5
2.2. Choice of Theory	7
2.3. Qualitative Data Analysis	7
2.4. Research Limitations	11
3. Theoretical Framework: Strategic Narratives	12
4. Analysis.....	16
4.1. International Context	17
4.2. National Context.....	21
4.3. Political Context	27
5. Conclusion	45
Bibliography.....	I
Appendix: Original German quotes from the coalition agreement	VI

1. Introduction

The year 2021 demonstrates a major political change for Germany. The German population elected a new government in the federal election on the 26th of September 2021, which aims to bring about reform after sixteen years under the political leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel, as the very title of their consolidated coalition agreement 'Dare more Progress: alliance for freedom, justice and sustainability' (Die Bundesregierung 2021b) illustrates.

The initial legislative period in Germany was governed by a coalition of the Christian Democratic Union/ Christian Social Union and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). With the election of the new government in September, the government constellation changed. The SPD became the strongest coalition party in the Bundestag, with a different party constellation than in previous years, namely with the partners the Alliance 90/ The Greens (The Greens) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP). Furthermore, due to its historical background, the SPD is characterized as a worker's party, advocating individual freedom and the institutionalization of democracy, and equally "want(ing) to provide for changes necessary for a modern successful economy that protects the environment and climate" (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands 2022). Moreover, The Greens combine "ecology, justice, self-determination, democracy and peace" (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen 2020, 10). Likewise, they advocate human rights with equal intensity arguing "human rights are not negotiable" (ibid.). Thus, The Greens have a pronounced focus on ecological aspects and expanded civil rights. On the contrary, the FDP is the "party of freedom and self-determination" (Freie Demokraten 2020) and has a predominantly market-liberal orientation. They are committed to create a new vision for Germany and promote topics such as the economy, education, freedom, and modernization (ibid.).

Nevertheless, in addition to domestic changes, the new government constellation is also leading to "new beginnings" (Hauck 2021) in foreign policy, as the new SPD-led German Chancellor Olaf Scholz promoted when the consolidated German coalition agreement was published on the 7th of December 2021. Especially the economic and political relations with the People's Republic of China (hereinafter the PRC or China) have gained extensive importance in the last decades. Furthermore, relations with China under Angela Merkel to date have been established in partnership, despite initial difficulties. This is also based on the fact that she was the only Western politician to visit China twelve times during her term as Chancellor, which fostered a political and personal bond between the countries, but also between the authorities (Zhang et al. 2021). It was also her who introduced the paradigm of a "strategic partnership" (Federal

Foreign Office 2012, 9) with China and thus significantly shaped German policy towards China. Hence, Germany exercised restraint in criticizing China through Angela Merkel's pragmatic, individual, interest-oriented, and dialogue-focused policy, but nevertheless was able to embrace the idea of robust reactions at the European Union (EU)- level, such as the EU in its strategic outlook at the beginning of March 2019, calling China no longer exclusively a cooperation and negotiation partner, but also an "economic competitor" (European Commission 2019) and "systematic rival" (ibid.). Nonetheless, China is also showing increasing self-confidence vis-à-vis Germany.

Accordingly, it is these controversies that Germany, in association with the EU, has in the past decades desired to counter with the 'Wandel durch Handel' (in English: change through trade) strategic narrative¹. Furthermore, it is therefore strategic because it relies on recipients and thus on the inclusion of mixed standpoints. Moreover, the narrative primarily targets authoritarian states, but also addresses an international community of Western states in order to reach unified viewpoints in the assumption that cooperation at the economic level would prevail to a threefold liberalization of the PRC: Economically, reforms would permit a free market economy; domestically, economic opening would result to pluralization, prosperity, and eventually Western-defined democratization; internationally, inclusion into world markets would promote China's incorporation into the rule-based international order (Rühlig 2022). Nonetheless, international newspaper headlines such as "Germany's "Change Through Trade" Fallacy With China" (Hutt 2020); "Germany's China Policy of 'Change Through Trade' Has Failed" (Fulda 2020); and "Germany still hopes that China will "change through trade." It will not" (Lever 2020) in order to "make way for a new strategy. But what kind?" (ibid.) show that the paradigm was not as successful as expected.

However, distinct bilateral relations are important for both countries, as Chinese Premier Li Keqiang made clear in a message to Olaf Scholz: "China-Germany ties have become one of the most important bilateral relations in the world" (Xinhua News Agency 2021). Notwithstanding, China's economic and political rise challenges Germany in several circumstances, "from the competitiveness of its industry to the robustness of its democratic institutions" (Rühlig 2022, 46). Meeting this systemic challenge is even more difficult given Germany's high economic

¹ According to Miskimmon et al., strategic narratives are characterized as follows, "strategic narratives are a means by which political actors attempt to construct a shared meaning of the past, the present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors" (Miskimmon et al. 2017a, 6), which, in conjunction with the concept of soft power, aim to "getting others to want what you want" (Nye 2008b, 29). For a more detailed definition, see Theoretical Framework in Chapter 3.

dependence on the PRC. In fact, according to data from the Germany's Federal Statistical Office, the PRC is Germany's most important trading partner for exports as well as imports for the sixth year in a row (Statistisches Bundesamt 2022).

1.1. German-Chinese relationship

Germany and China have longstanding, intensive, and equivalent relations. These relations strengthened with the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972. Nowadays, high-ranking political representatives from both countries regularly coordinate in dialogue mechanisms on trade, investment, culture, , environment, security, and science (Auswärtiges Amt 2022). In the following, it is fundamental to provide insights into the bilateral relationship and its existing interdependencies, which subsequently contribute to a coherent development for the narrative expression.

Economic relations between China and Germany have intensified and are now no longer merely optional, but elementary for German foreign trade. Hence, China was Germany's most important trading partner in 2021, ahead of European countries or the US. Therefore, to obtain a detailed insight into the current situation, export and import figures are assessed: The trade between Germany and the PRC was worth around 245 billion Euros last year. Thereby, 104 billion Euros were exports, and 141 billion Euros were Germany's imports. Moreover, it was also the second largest consumer country of German goods (Statistisches Bundesamt 2022). Despite China's great economic importance for Germany, German imports account for only about 3.2 percent of Chinese exports (Muschter 2022).

In addition, scientific and technological collaboration between China and Germany is being continuously expanded and today covers almost all-important subject areas from Industry 4.0 to life sciences, and electromobility. Particularly, the basis for research cooperation between the two countries is an intergovernmental agreement on bilateral scientific and technological cooperation dating back to 1978. This includes project-oriented associations such as the establishment of joint scientific institutions in the sectors of applied research and technological development, but also scientific exchange through university cooperation. (Bundesministerium für Forschung und Technologie 1978)

Nonetheless, despite the overall positive development of bilateral relations, differences of perspectives remain around the issues of the rule of law and human rights. Thus, Germany has shown great interest in the aspiration to develop more binding rule-of-law structures and social systems in China, as well as in increasingly permitting political participation. Dialogues such

as the rule-of-law or human rights dialogues, which are primarily held at the European level, are enabling cooperation based on understanding, reciprocity, and acceptance in order to decipher cultural discrepancies. However, progress is also being done through the qualitative and quantitative expansion of cultural organizations throughout the education system, such as Confucius- or Goethe institutes. (Auswärtiges Amt 2022)

1.2. Problem Formulation

In line with the given political and economic peculiarities between Germany and the PRC, a study by the Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund of the United States shows that 28 percent of respondents from the EU, United Kingdom, the United States (the US), and Canada have a very or somewhat positive attitude towards China's influence in global affairs. Nevertheless, twice as many have a very or somewhat negative stance. In particular, in the areas of human rights, cybersecurity and climate, the majority of respondents prefer a tougher approach towards China, while less than two-fifths would like to see this for trade. (Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund 2021)

Consequently, taking into account the demanding attitude of the Western populations and the fact that the 'Wandel durch Handel' paradigm did not prevail according to expectations, this opens the debate whether the election of a new German government last September and therefore a different party constellation will lead to distinctive focus orientations of German politics and respectively to new strategic narratives towards China, especially since the PRC has gained global influence and hence importance for German politics in recent decades. Therefore, in order to create a holistic understanding of German politics the national German public opinions and the international EU institutions need to be considered as these factors can influence the German government's policy decision-making, and thus could have an impact on the reformation of the German-Chinese strategic narratives.

Thus, the goal of this paper is to answer the following research question in order to acquire a better understanding of the German government's approach towards the PRC:

How does the new German government incorporate international and national factors in establishing German-Chinese strategic narratives?

2. Methodology

This chapter serves as an outline of the paper's design used to conduct this research, firstly including an outline of the analytical process; followed by a discussion of the selection of theory; the method of purposive sampling is used to extract reliable data in an attempt to answer the research question accurately; along with the use of qualitative document analysis. Furthermore, the explanation of the coding performed is highlighted in addition to research delimitations to achieve an enhanced comprehension of the research.

2.1. Analytical Process

In this section, the analytical process of this paper is outlined to ensure a transparent research design for the reader and replicability for further studies. The introductory division identifies a relevant outline on German-Chinese relations and highlights the historical background of the past decades. Furthermore, the objective to answer the research question subsequently influences the data collection process and leads the research paper towards data samples that can be used for theory to gain a constructivist understanding of what strategic approaches the German government projects to China (Bryman 2016). Accordingly, the following presents the methodology of a qualitative document analysis using primary sources (official EU statements, opinion polls conducted in Germany, and the new German coalition agreement), which provides the methodological prerequisites for this work.

Moreover, by applying the scientific theory of strategic narratives, this results in a tripartite analytical framework, each subdivided into a subchapter – international context, national context, and political context – to support the construction of strategic narratives of the German government towards the PRC. In doing so, the first subchapter represents the international context, which considers the EU as the actor in this relation. Therefore, the EU serves as the overarching multinational entity, since in addition to the importance of Germany in the EU and the overlapping identities, the decisions and resolutions within the EU are linked to the subsequent level through media attention, and thus represent an influencing factor on the policies of the German government, which results in a system narrative. The second subchapter presents the views of the German populations, which reflect tendentious opinions through the national views towards China, so that the German population is thus considered as the actor of the national context. Moreover, based on the theoretical framework of strategic narratives, the political context concludes as the last subchapter of the analysis with a synthesis of the international and national contexts, considering the new German government as the main object

of investigation. The focus lies on the legitimacy of approaches and the increase of popularity made by the German government with regard to re-election after this legislative period, but also on securing acceptance and navigating credibility of its potential reforms. According to Miskimmon et al., the first two levels, the national and international level, serve to provide a holistic overview of the emergence of the final strategic narrative. Thus, these levels ensure factors of influence on the focus of the paper, here the third level, the policy context (Miskimmon et al. 2013). Therefore, the research findings from the analysis are recombined and the context-specific narratives are linked to form an overarching strategic narrative on which the German government's China policy builds in the future. In the process, the purpose is to determine the extent to which the resulting policies of the German government are derived from these contexts. The presented research is ultimately closing with answering the research question in consideration of the former conducted analysis as well as theoretical implications.

The analytical procedure described is illustrated by the following diagram. The definitions of the components of the strategic narrative's actor/character, setting/environment/space, conflict/action, and purpose/resolution are provided in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, a detailed assignment of these components of the figure is made in the analysis depending on the context.

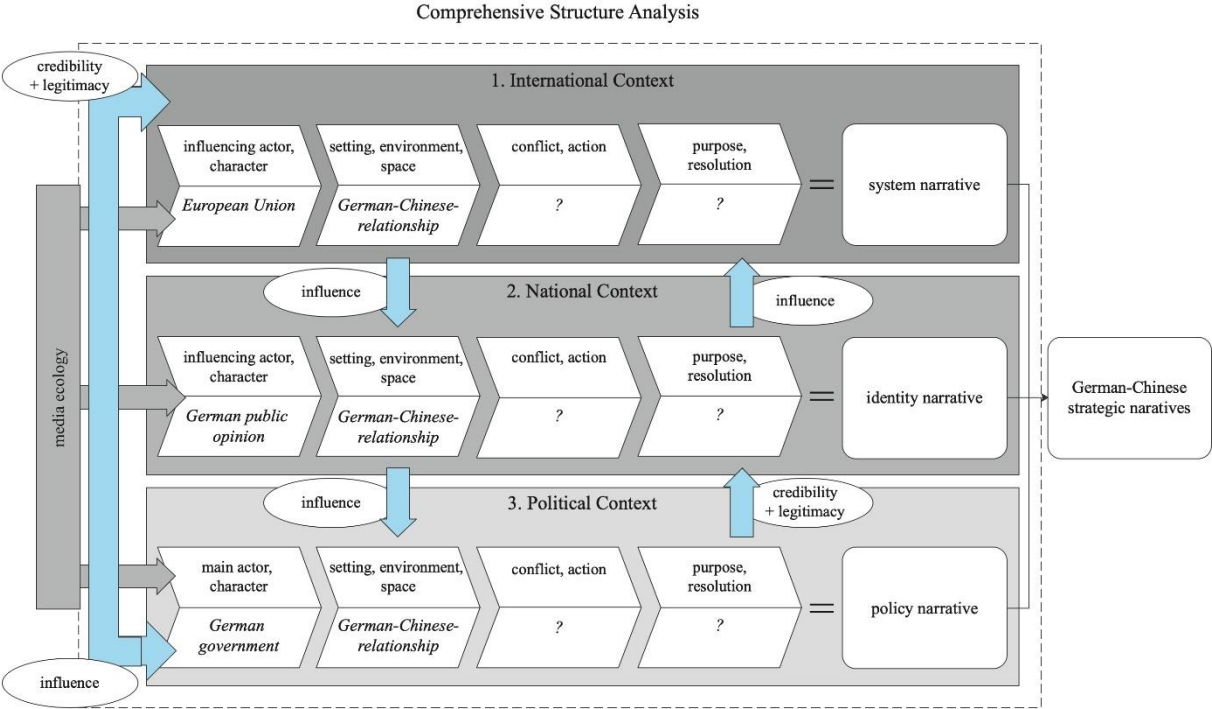


Figure 1: Comprehensive structure analysis
(own illustration)

2.2. Choice of Theory

This paper uses an unconventional approach that conveys a norm-based explanation of power as its theoretical foundation: the strategic narratives. The concept of strategic narratives is based on the findings of Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, who view their theory as an extension of Joseph Nye's examined soft power approach, which prefers the attraction of a country instead of coercion (Miskimmon et al. 2017b; Nye 2008a). Rather than drawing on traditional theories of international relations, such as liberalism or realism, which reveal power relations based predominantly on economic cooperation or material resources, this paper takes an approach that incorporates values and cultural norms grounded in identity. Moreover, in contrast to the considerations of constructivism theory, both theories build on complex identities, but in the theory of strategic narratives these are inevitably linked to actors (Checkel et al. 2004), whereas in constructivism these have to be reconstructed in due course (Sikkink 2011). Besides, constructivism directs on how identity structures the actor's behavior in the world (ibid.), while the presented theory farther allows for a more holistic approach to examine the role of the actor in constructing possible reforms for the German government, which makes this procedure more suitable for answering the research question. Additionally, this is because the theory of strategic narratives considers national factors as well as external international influences; and moreover, the link between power and idea; and state and non-state actors, in order to maintain and preserve its political legitimacy (Miskimmon et al. 2013), so one can understand the extensive "dynamics in international affairs" (ibid. 2017, 1). Furthermore, the theory of strategic narratives, based on soft power capabilities highlight the ideational system, which according to many scholars is an incentive that cannot be ignored in international relations, as it gives a certain power to influence change (see e.g., Roselle et al. 2014). Therefore, this theoretical underpinning can be used for an in-depth understanding of ongoing domestic and international processes which have ultimate consequences for other IR actors.

2.3. Qualitative Data Analysis

In the consecutive method chapter of qualitative data analysis, the scientific principles of the process of data collection are defined and further on the execution of a document analysis as well as the coding procedure are outlined so that their benefit and importance for the research are justified in order to enable a holistic demonstration of the methodological process.

Data Sampling

In the qualitative method of purposive sampling, according to Alan Bryman, the researcher intends to strategically determine "cases/participants" (Bryman 2016, 408) so that they have relevance in relation to the research question and are not arbitrarily chosen as the object of analysis. In addition to answering the research question, sample selection also focuses on defined research objectives. Bryman further states that the researcher "needs to be clear in his or her mind what the criteria are that will be relevant to the inclusion or exclusion of units of analysis" (ibid.). In this research, the 'unit' of analysis is the new German federal government. Even though supplementary actors are considered in the later analysis, as previously stated in the analytical process, the German government remains in the focus of the research as it has the authority to guide German politics at least for the next four years and therefore shapes the future of the German-Chinese relationship (Bryman 2016).

Document Analysis

In order to be able to fulfil the requirements for the methodological prerequisites, documents are the empirical data basis for the secondary research and analysis in this paper. In social science analyses, the focus of document selection is on documents that are not primarily made available for research. Therefore, the quality of a document is measured according to its relevance to the research topic. Furthermore, documents are determined according to their individual authenticity and credibility. While authenticity, according to Bryman, refers to the data source and origin, credibility ensures that the document is trustworthy. (Bryman 2016)

The following section identifies the documents selected through purposive sampling according to the tripartite subdivision in the analysis. In the international context of the analysis, the selected official statements of the EU on China, consisting of documents from main EU bodies such as the European Parliament or Council but also from the European Foreign Office, are examined according to the most significant events in 2021 like the publication of the new EU infrastructure initiative, a new Indo-Pacific strategy but also the first ever published report on EU-Taiwan relations, as these produce the most media exposure, which in turn is important for the following subchapter. Moreover, the EU is selected in the international dimension because its confederation of states indicates that it contains the individual opinion of 27 European states in its publications, with Germany being a major player. At the national level, the focus is on publicly available opinion polls of the German population. Besides, the following studies were collected from the selected German and US institutions Pew Research Center, Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund of the US, and Körber Foundation published in

2021, as they are considered reliable by their long occurrence and citation in other research papers and newspapers. In addition, at both levels, documents that were already published before the coalition agreement was composed were selected in order to measure the direct impact on the German government in connection with the publication of the agreement. Furthermore, all of the above-mentioned quality criteria are examined for all three contexts, nevertheless, due to the importance of the German coalition agreement for this paper, which is thus the primary subject of document analysis in the political context, the following section exclusively examines the quality of the coalition agreement in detail and provides a basic insight into the structure of the selected document.

If the criterion of relevance is taken into account, the coalition agreement is the only document to be considered authoritatively relevant, as it is the first official document after the formation of a new government constellation to provide information on further approaches with China. Moreover, Miskimmon et al. also argue that "strategic narratives are often formalized in policy documents that outline future objectives" (Miskimmon et al. 2017a, 4) and therefore the coalition agreement can thus be seen as a rational document of investigation. Furthermore, authenticity can be considered as given, since the origin of the document lies with the new governing parties, which form a coalition, and as a result are independently responsible for the content of the coalition agreement. Apart from that, of the above-mentioned quality requirements, credibility is the most challenging criterion to answer. Atkinson and Coffey argue that this is conditioned by biases in the production of official documents and by the differential realities of actors, although this demarcation can be useful to the researcher in constructing a discourse and evaluating a subject's reality (Atkinson and Coffey 2001 in Bryman 2016). Notwithstanding, the publicly available coalition agreement, which can be accessed via the official website of the German government (Die Bundesregierung 2021a), is fundamentally addressed to a German audience since it is written in German. It can be surmised to have an international audience due to the presentation of foreign policy issues and Germany's importance in world politics, which makes it a meaningful source of data on international relations, as Hanson demonstrated that "the development of the Internet has increased transparency of governmental actions and events around the world" (Hanson 2008 in Miskimmon et al. 2013, 11). Besides, the credibility of the coalition agreement is based on the one side, on the premise that it was created through the cooperation of three independent parties within two months of negotiations between October and December 2021 (Die Bundesregierung 2021b), each representing its own realities, and, on the other side, the realities of the parties are also based on the differentiated realities of their members.

Additionally, a coalition agreement provides an overview of the government program and the most important plans of the parties emerging from the coalition, in the current joint four-year legislative period of SPD, The Greens, and FDP. Furthermore, in the agreement the parties involved contractually agree on personnel and factual conditions under which they are willing to govern together. Thus, the coalition agreement is not a legally binding contract in the strict sense, but merely a declaration of intent against which the government's performance is ultimately assessed. The published 178 pages are divided into ten chapters, where for the first time China obtained its own section. (Die Bundesregierung 2021b)

Coding

In qualitative research, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to coding, as coding processes are based on the personal involvement and insights of the researcher (Bryman 2016). According to Saldaña, a qualitative code is defined as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña 2013, 3). The official European resolutions and political sentiments at the international dimension of analysis, as well as the German opinion polls at the national level, were loosely coded to capture a broad picture of standpoints towards China in order to provide an overall view of the dynamics influencing the establishment of the coalition agreement.

Furthermore, the coalition agreement is initially open coded. Extensive open coding of the entire textual source assists in filtering out statements about China that are not immediately apparent in order to identify indirect influences and narratives on German-Chinese relations alike. With open coding, this paper relied on literal codes to classify concepts in order to filter out a variety of potential overarching policy areas from the source under study (Bryman 2016). Afterwards, following the methodological approach of the Bertelsmann Foundation which regularly reviews German coalition agreements, recurring content is summarized, resulting from statements that contain a commitment to perform an action or to achieve an aim. Moreover, the codes were classified into tough and soft commitments, as well as rhetorical commitments that imply the unambiguity of how an action or goal is formulated in the potential commitment. Tough commitments are concretely formulated measures or unambiguous aims to be achieved within the government period. For this reason, there is no latitude for interpretation as to how something is to be carried out or what is to be achieved. In the case of soft commitment, contrary, there is scope for interpretation because the statements are less defined. Besides, the rhetorical commitments are not to be considered commitments in the

narrower sense of the term since their adherence is not objectively verifiable due to insufficient information and, in consequence, have limited significance for the formation of strategic narratives. Accordingly, once all of the commitments expound in the German coalition agreement are identified, this threefold degree of commitment enables the later analysis to first categorize in order to verify which commitments the German government is apparent to realize in this legislative period, thus enhancing the strength of the strategic narratives, or which statements are mandatory in the realm of the national and international context and mentioned for the sake of completeness. Therefore, this coding process can contribute to answering the research question (Vehrkamp and Matthieß 2019).

The analytical table provides a final itemization of the coded political writing and prepares it for the narrative-inspired analysis. In doing so, the identified policy areas as well as the content serve later as a guide for structuring the political context section of the analysis:

German coalition agreement on China

Policy area	Content	Significance		
		Tough commitment	Soft commitment	Rhetorical commitment
e.g. economy	e.g. economic related content		x	

Figure 2: Exemplification of the analytical table for the coding process (own illustration; using the terminology of Vehrkamp and Matthieß 2019)

2.4. Research Limitations

The present paper is subject to delimitations that should be considered when replicating the approach or further working with the results performed. Firstly, it is limited to the period between the publication of the coalition agreement in December 2021 and the Russian military operation of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022, so the analysis and derived narratives refer to the period before the event. This omits the meanings of German narratives on national security and the clear convergence of European states, and how these might affect China in the future. (UN News: Global perspective Human stories 2022)

Moreover, the time constraint imposes some limitations on the scope and depth of the research. In the international context of the analysis, no alignment to Germany's alliance with the US is made as Germany maintains a variety of international partnerships in addition to the EU. Likewise, as described in the introductory section, Germany's former China policy under Angela Merkel increasingly represented German domestic interests rather than European,

which makes the EU a more alluring factor for analysis, as coordination with European China policy could be identified.

Besides, since the coalition agreement in the political context of the analysis is written in German, the researcher is obliged to translate it to the English language. In doing so, there are discrepancies between the original language and the translation in the respective interpretation. For example, some expressions have a stronger ambiguity in German than in the English translation, such as the German word 'gegen' or 'entgegen', which can be translated into English as 'against' or 'towards', and thereof consequently limits the significance. In order to overcome these distinctions, the appendix contains an examination of all statements analyzed in the political context in German.

3. Theoretical Framework: Strategic Narratives

The subsequent chapter is an introduction to the theory of strategic narratives, which is used in the tripartite analysis process to investigate the German government's written declaration and overall approach towards China. In doing so, the main assumptions and features of the theory are illustrated, in conjunction with the intended use of the theory to define the basis for this paper. In detail, this paper explains what strategic narratives are and how they can be identified as such. Furthermore, it demonstrates how they are used in a targeted manner to have a lasting impact on international politics, in this paper especially on the bilateral relation between China and Germany.

The theory of strategic narratives can be traced back to research by Lawrence Freedman, who already in 2006 described how narratives can be used meaningfully and strategically to balance military conflict (Freedman 2006). Since then, the field of research has expanded, and gradually strategic narratives are being recognized as research investigations in international relations as well (see e.g., Berenskoetter 2014). Therefore, the goal of strategic narratives in international relations is to create a reality served by the intentions of the narrator through vivid emotional, pictorial, and selective presentation of details, which encourages recipients to interact. Accordingly, strategic narratives are essentially used as a story to favor a positive opinion about one's state or to spread a certain view about other actors, as narratives give meaning to others and to the actor itself (Miskimmon et al. 2017a; Miskimmon 2013). Consequently, one must tell a story sufficiently to selectively choose what the majority of the audience considers factual, achievable, and "(normatively) desirable" (Roselle et al. 2014, 76) in order to accomplish the desired effect, such as creating awareness of threats or opportunities. Moreover, this then results

in morale and possible instructions for action (Fuchs 2018; Holsti et al. 2018). Thus, strategic narratives in international systems have an educative, projective, and disseminative as well as receptive character of ideas (Roselle et al. 2014).

Likewise, the representatives of strategic narratives are Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle, claiming that it is crucial to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between communication and power (Miskimmon et al. 2017b) because this foundation enables to better understand global relationships (ibid. 2017a). However, communication does not have to be exclusively positive. Furthermore, this depends on whether political actors develop a consensus on a common meaning, i.e., a shared strategy on security issues, or whether communication is used exclusively to achieve selfish goals (Rudd 2015).

Furthermore, according to Miskimmon et al., strategic narratives are defined as "representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative tool through which political actors [...] attempt to give specific meaning to the past, present, and future in order to achieve political goals. Crucially, strategic narratives integrate interests and goals" (Miskimmon et al. 2013, 5). In order to systematically connect the time periods, Miskimmon et al. focus on the structure of strategic narratives developed by Kenneth Burke that help identify narratives with their actors and actions, consisting of the following four components: Agent, scene, agency, as well as purpose (Burke 1966 and 1969).

A **character or actor** is the acting figure deemed valuable to the narratives because the state or (great) power in the international context; or the individual, political party, interest group at the domestic level, have the power and resources to shape it. At the same time, the actor is bound to its narratives because following and shaping them creates expectations for the targeted audiences. Thus, the scope of behavior and action within the narratives is limited also for the reason that it is impossible to create a strong and powerful narrative at any given moment, as they require political legitimacy (Roselle et al. 2014). This depends on a country's "prevailing domestic and international understandings and expectations" (Miskimmon et al. 2013, 9), as well as soft power capabilities such as values and norms of multinational populations with different political backgrounds, but also on the integration of the media, as these sentiments are integrated into the decision-making process of political actors (Roselle et al. 2014; Miskimmon et al. 2017a). Concluding, according to Miskimmon et al., political actors pursue to "create a shared understanding of the world, other political actors, and politics" (Miskimmon et al. 2017a, 1) using strategic narratives so that "strong narratives will triumph over counter-narratives, (and) that legitimacy will be strengthened" (ibid.).

The **setting, environment, or space** is seen as the inception for the perspective and depiction of the international system. This starting point determines who the protagonists are in this narrative and moreover, the setting can also consist of subjective possibilities of international cooperation, if the same goals are pursued, but also of enmities. Therefore, it is important to identify what the actors perceive as threatening as it is to examine their approaches to preventing such situations or resolving them. (Roselle et al. 2014)

The **conflict or action** is fundamentally about identifying the interactions and reactions between the affected entities. Thereby, the influence of temporality remains to be considered, since the present is also influenced by past events. Furthermore, the **purpose or resolution** in the direct context is about the link between thoughts and actions. Moreover, it defines what is an acceptable behavior for resolving disagreements and conflicts on the one hand, but also behavior that intends to break the status quo on the other. Therefore, for instance, if soft power resources such as freedom, poverty alleviation, human rights, or democracy are seen as appealing and appropriately because they address individual and collective desires and needs, then actions that do not share the same consensus are harder to legitimize (Roselle et al. 2014). Thus, if policies can be described in a way that fits into an accepted narrative that describes problems and actions that should be addressed and can be achieved, the legitimacy of the policy is enhanced (Miskimmon 2013). Nonetheless, legitimacy fundamentally depends on the opinion of the public as they engage into the decision-making process and act as a counterforce to the identity of decision-makers. However, to achieve a durable goal, political legitimacy is related to how an actor presents itself to the international community (Miskimmon et al. 2017b). This is also reflected in Joseph Nye's closely related soft power concept, as actors try to "getting others to want what you want" (Nye 2008b, 29). Besides, the purpose or resolution of a statement, in addition to the realities just mentioned, can be to spread a positive self-image (Roselle et al. 2014).

Once one has identified what strategic narratives are, they are in turn divided into three different types. The rationale purpose of the tripartite analytical framework is to gain a more precise understanding of how persuasion and influence through communication perform in international affairs, and thus to trace how political actors strategize and are purposefully applied through narratives at different levels (Roselle et al. 2014). First, the strategic narratives about the international system (also known as the system narrative), are predominantly about the actor's understanding of the international order, thus how the system is constructed. However, there are also system narratives that focus attention on a state or institution rather

than describing its standing in the international system, which accordingly consist of identities of an actor such as "beliefs, place, reputation, prestige, credibility" (Miskimmon 2013, 32). Second, the strategic narratives about the national system, which is commonly called the identity narrative. This sets out what (historical) values the political actor but also the state itself holds (ibid.). In this context of characterization, values, norms, and goals, such as freedom, democracy, etc., are specifically addressed (Holsti 1970). The third and final level, the strategic policy narrative level, refers to contextual disputes, which is of central importance over policy outcomes. This problem-oriented narrative provides rational and normative reasons to justify a particular policy and provides insight into "how it can be successfully implemented or accomplished" (Roselle et al. 2014, 76), and thus "shapes(s) the terrain on which policy discussion takes place" (Miskimmon et al. 2017a, 7). In making this distinction, it remains important to note that although these types of strategic narratives have different approaches, they are interrelated, therefore, at best, they should not be considered separately. In this context, strategic narratives used to describe one level can also be an influencing element for narratives at an upstream or downstream level, and thus influence future behavior, and consequently, policy decisions (Roselle et al. 2014). Therefore, especially if the narratives contradict each other on the individual levels, they lose credibility, so that the intended effect and the reliability of the narratives deteriorate (Miskimmon 2013).

However, according to Miskimmon et al. the omnipresent media ecology can also have a projectionist and receptionist effect on all of these three levels, as any media presence of a conception could, but does not necessarily, affect the entire environment, as attitudes, behaviors, and opinions of recipients appear. In this regard, it should be noticed that "since this ecology is the condition that shapes how information flows and knowledge is spread through a society, a changing ecology affects the distribution and form of authority, legitimacy" (Miskimmon et al. 2017a, 10). Moreover, it is relevant to examine which type of media ecology prevails in a society, as these are not established in the same way worldwide but differ depending on the prevailing form of government and are therefore to be evaluated differently (ibid.). Therefore, since German democracy represents freedom of speech of its journalists, the values and interests for an open media economy are considered to be given, so that it can be assumed that they are not completely instrumentalized politically, so that the media ecology thereby attains credibility of audience (Reporter ohne Grenzen 2021).

Furthermore, although the concept of strategic narratives also refers to the resulting power relations in world politics after applying the theoretical framework just mentioned, the focus in

the following work is on soft power capabilities which guide German tendencies towards the PRC, so that the power relations between the two countries should be given secondary attention and are listed primarily for the sake of completeness. In addition, the tripartite analytical framework is applied as, according to Miskimmon et al., strategic narratives are "shaped by domestic and international political contexts, the communication environment" (Miskimmon 2013, 5).

4. Analysis

The following analysis serves to answer the research question of how the new German government incorporates international and national factors into the establishment of German-Chinese strategic narratives. In order to comprehensively understand the new German government's political and consequent strategic approach towards China, the analysis relies on the aforementioned three-part division according to the theoretical framework of strategic narratives and therefore examines the international level, the national level, and the political level in order to later show a holistic representation of the resulting narratives of the German government.

Since the German government with its coalition agreement is the consistent analytical object of investigation throughout, coherent structures of the respective narratives are examined in advance, which persist across contexts. Therefore, the structure of narratives developed by Kenneth Burke with actor, scene, conflict, and resolution or suggested resolution is applied (Burke 1966 and 1969).

Accordingly, the German government is presented as the **main actor** in the following of this paper, since by ruling Germany, it has the necessary power resources to co-determine domestic politics as well as international politics. Moreover, although the main actor remains the German government throughout, the subsequent national and international contexts each identify their own subordinate actors, such as the EU and the German domestic population, as the selection of documents allows.

Furthermore, the **scene** of the narratives is fundamentally based in this paper on the German narratives to the PRC, which is thus considered as the framework to identify the German-Chinese narratives.

Moreover, the **conflict** is distinguished as the described problem or approach towards China in the coalition agreement, which includes the consequences of the agnostic statements analyzed

below. In these upcoming statements, the so-called **resolution** or purpose also becomes clarified, since the way the statements are formulated in the document show which values and actions are justifiable by the main actor, and how a problem addressed from the German government's perspective can be solved.

4.1. International Context

In this subchapter, reference is made to the international framework of the German-Chinese narrative. This examines what value-based opinion the EU disseminates about the PRC, in order that a system narrative is identified as an influencing factor on the national dynamic as well as further on the political level, as Germany is a major player in the EU.

In the policy field of economics, the international context recognizes China as "an economic power and as a foreign policy actor" (European Parliament 2021c) with a "stronger global role" (ibid.). This could imply that China's importance in global politics is well regarded by the EU, and that China is gaining further significance in the international environment. Furthermore, "the EU [...] is committed to open trading relations with China and wants to ensure that China trades fairly" (Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China 2021a), which alludes to mutual principled trade relations, which are accordingly expected by the PRC due to the multiple mentions of 'China', since "the EU and China work together on numerous economic and financial matters" (ibid.). This is also evident in the economic indicators, as Germany in particular, as a participating country in the EU, shows a high economic reciprocity with China, which is demonstrated in the background section. The quoted statement might strengthen the argument that the large number of collaborations is due to the long-standing relations between the EU and China, in which one could already determine various characteristics from the partner. Nevertheless, this might demonstrate that the EU and China still have a different idea of how to address economic relations.

Moreover, the German President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen announced in September a European alternative called Global Gateway Initiative to the Chinese infrastructure project Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which "will invest in international stability and cooperation and demonstrate how democratic values offer certainty and fairness for investors, sustainability for partners and long-term benefits for people around the world" (European Commission 2021). This might indicate that the EU is listing all aspects that allegedly are distorted in the Chinese infrastructure project, so that they could offer an innovative and enhanced alternative. Contrary to the commitments already constructed, in addition, the first details of this infrastructure project were published at the end of 2021, so as

of this date, no expansive implementations have taken place. In this context, the different values from a Eurocentric point of view are addressed, which due to "democratic values and high standards" (ibid.) emerge from the statement of the European Commission that the alternative brings improved requirements for the participating countries. Besides, the fact that the European Global Gateway Initiative acts as an alternative competitor to the BRI in the field of economic cooperation and promotes soft power capabilities such as democratic values and collaborative acceptance also appears to be a solution to the economic challenges described, such as reducing dependencies on China, as alternatives may create a unity of harmonious countries with similar sentiments.

Furthermore, the ratification of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investments (CAI) between the EU and China was not concluded in the beginning of 2021 due to reciprocal sanctions both from China and the EU (see European Commission 2020). In this regard, it can be declared that "the consideration and ratification process for the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) cannot start until the Chinese sanctions against MEPs and EU institutions have been lifted" (European Parliament 2021c). Moreover, the majority of the EU Parliament, which has to ratify the agreement, disagrees with the current terms, such as that the Chinese government reserves the right to enact regulations according to which foreign non-profit organizations are to be managed by Chinese citizens in the future, so that adjustments might be expected from the Chinese side (see European Commission 2022). Consequently, it creates the impression that none of the actors wants to deviate from the appointed sanctions, so that economic inefficiency is accepted on both sides, so that presumably increasingly tougher positions on the part of the EU are to be expected. Further, it can be anticipated that the impact of non-ratification is limited for the EU and thus might cause China to take a step towards European expectation. This could be justified by the fact that China and the EU, due to their supposedly different systematic approaches as mentioned in the introduction section, find it more difficult to reach a consensus on structural economic matters.

In the scientific-technological policy area, the EU insists on multinational cooperation. This is illustrated by its support for the "expansion of contacts between peoples on both sides as well as mutual student exchange visits" (European Parliament 2021c). Moreover, this might include exchange semesters at universities as well as Confucius Institutes in Europe, along with language and cultural institutions of European countries in China, which could minimize cultural differences through mutual understanding. This could be further underlined by the EU's desire to distribute more education and knowledge about China, especially among the younger

European population, as expressed in the term 'student exchange', which could simplify future differences. In addition to cooperation through the exchange of scientific knowledge, however, Europe seems to be aware of China's economic and technological rise, as they want to focus on "strategic autonomy" (ibid.) with "digital and technological sovereignty" (ibid.), and thus might aim to develop an independent approach to this topic area that is less dependent on what is happening in and around China.

Likewise, international collaboration with the PRC and the Asian region is a farther important issue to be considered. This includes dialogues and cooperation mechanisms such as high-level strategic dialogues between EU High Representative Josep Borrell and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, but also Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron calling on President Xi Jinping in April 2021 to maintain dialogue. It could imply that the EU would like to continue economic cooperation with China above all, since constant dialogue with China is desired by high government officials and not only the ministries of the European member states. Regarding the Indo-Pacific, the EU issued an Indo-Pacific strategy last year in September. Aside, the EU's main concern seems to be that "disputes be settled peacefully and in accordance with the rule of law" (Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China 2021b). In addition to "contributing to human rights" (European External Action Service 2021), a decisive reason appears to be the "pressure on trade and supply chains" (ibid.), since the EU is fundamentally dependent on maritime trade in this region and an extensive conflict could affect it. Furthermore, this might indicate that the EU is looking for approaches to solve the issues in the Indo-Pacific in order not to endanger its own economic dependencies, as it simultaneously names this issue bindingly with the expression of economic conditions. Thus, stability in the Indo-Pacific region might have an impact on the European and international economy. Therefore, these remarks give the impression that the EU wants to solve this regional difference "through cooperation with like-minded partners" (European Parliament 2021c). Contrary to the high representatives' dialogues, the EU presumes to want to conduct cooperation talks without explicitly naming China, which could be due to the fact that Germany does not fully trust China, possibly because the cited human rights are attributed a high importance.

Besides, the EU has also been positioning itself more specifically with regard to Taiwan since last year, as the European Parliament issued a report on EU-Taiwan relations for the first time in October based on an "EU-Taiwan bilateral cooperation" (European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan 2021b). However, this is also the first time that the EU has simultaneously disregarded the official designation of mainland China. Along with the published report, the

assessed statement could allow the hypothesis that the EU might not want to maintain relations with mainland China despite all circumstances. Moreover, the report also states that Taiwan and the EU intend to "deepen ties and exchanges" (ibid. 2021a). This might indicate that the EU wants to promote relations with Taiwan on a political level despite China's opposition.

In the policy field of human rights and international law, the EU relies on "democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for the principles of the UN Charter and international law" (Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China 2021b), through which its "external action is governed" (ibid.). Especially the situation in Xinjiang seems relevant, as this region is particularly highlighted and the EU denounces: "large-scale arbitrary detentions of, in particular, Uyghurs in Xinjiang in China" (European Council of the European Union 2021) as well as according to a press release of the European Parliament they "firmly condemn these acts" (European Parliament 2021b). This is also highlighted by the EU sanctions imposed on China in March last year for alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang (European Council of the European Union 2021). Moreover, Hong Kong also appears to have significance, with the European Parliament endorsing a stronger response to political changes in Hong Kong in July 2021, after more than three months of discussions with member states about these circumstances, which may indicate that sentiments on the further Hong Kong approach are divided within the EU countries. In this context, the EU member states consider a "constructive dialogue" (Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China 2021b) important to get both perspectives on this issue, but the EU also makes clear that it is "committed to promoting the universality of human rights and to improving the human rights situation in China in an active and sustained way" (ibid.), so it conveys the impression that Europe expects responses and reactions to these dialogues that could result in a long-term change.

Moreover, European security is ensured by "greater dialogue and cooperation with China on peace and security" (European Parliament 2021c). This remark gives the impression that this is mainly about involving China in global demilitarization, as the EU "seek(s) common ground with China on disarmament, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism" (Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China 2021b). However, the EU seems to have no interest in military cooperation as the "EU and NATO (want) to continue their ambition of protecting our citizens in the best possible way" (European Parliament 2021a), which entails an agreement by both actors to continue the transatlantic security alliance. Further, a possible interpretation could read as follows, that the EU has respect for military confrontations, hence, it is clearly

committed to NATO to generate security within member countries. Therefore, the background of a "common history" (ibid.) also implies to be crucial. Nevertheless, the EU recognizes China's military power as significant to global peace as they work together to "counter-terrorism" (Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China 2021b).

In consonance with Kenneth Burke's structuring of strategic narratives, it can be stated that all four components are present (actor; scene; conflict; resolution or proposed resolution) (Burke 1966 and 1969). The **subordinate actor** or character is presented by individual countries, nevertheless, superordinate united within the EU including 27 member states. In addition, China is a further emerging economic power, which is also recognized as such by the international context, thus shaping the **scene**, as the EU also has economic strength through its association of countries. Furthermore, the conflict or **action** depends on the individual subject areas, as it is clear from the **resolutions** that mutual dialogue and cooperation mechanisms are aspired, particularly in the policy fields of economy, science and technology, and security. Nevertheless, the EU prospects for improved trade fundamentals in economics, where the focus of the resolution is on fair and equal trade, but also in the overarching policy area of human rights and international law, where the EU proposes resolutions for China's development. In summary, the conflicts depend on the individual subject areas, and thus the resolutions, but a cross-issue and holistic more strategic European sovereignty is aspired, making this the system narrative of the international context.

Moreover, it is assumed that events of the international dimension published by the EU are distributed in the German media, as these also have a wide-ranging importance for Germany, so that the German population has access to this information through various media channels. Therefore, this information might influence the population directly or also indirectly in their opinion, although often in the long term, since based on the theoretical framework, narratives can change over time (Miskimmon et al. 2013). In this way, the European dimension supports to create an international strategic narrative that has an impact on the national narrative, but also the political narrative, as the German government presumably aligns its soft power resources with the constitutional principles and interests of the EU.

4.2. National Context

In the following section, the German public's opinion towards China is evaluated, which, in addition to their own values, also represent the characteristics of the German nation state, since the population constitutes an important component of the democracy, however, a state also

needs value-based credibility, which can be generated by equal beliefs. Therefore, the German public's opinion consecutively underpins the German government's written expression in the political context. Although the government, as the responsible institution, makes political decisions that are generally considered legitimate due to democratic elections in Germany, the statements that are made must nevertheless be justified by the majority of the German population. This is based on the fact that the individual coalition parties are concerned to legitimize their decisions and actions within the framework of their election programs, since the parties are individually re-elected after a legislative period on the basis of their convincing performance for Germany or are otherwise replaced at the next election. Thus, public opinion in Germany is an integral part that can help influence the government's thinking about China, as its decisions and actions generally must be legitimate (Miskimmon et al. 2013). In addition, the German government published in the coalition agreement that it "actively seeks dialogue with citizens on the challenges of international politics" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 144).

Furthermore, the documents selected do not indicate any endorsement of the researcher's own views, although this is German. Moreover, the studies do not reflect a diplomatic view. Rather, the subsequent studies are public opinion polls of individuals whose sentiments are fundamentally influenced by multiple factors, such as a lack of in-depth knowledge about China, as well as media ecology coverage. Based on media ecology in the theoretical framework of strategic narratives, it is therefore considered that the German population informs itself about what is happening in world politics via the public media and through other communication channels, which underpins the reference to the first dimension of the international context. Thus, the public opinion contributes to the creation of an identity narrative that can be consistent with the international one (Miskimmon et al. 2013).

For a study published in June 2021 by the Pew Research Center, more than 16,000 adults in 17 countries on four continents (North America, Europe, Asia, Australia) were interviewed by telephone between February and May of last year to examine cross-national views of China as well as of Chinese President Xi Jinping and the backdrop of recognition for Chinese citizens' personal freedoms. As relevant for this work, the results showed that 71 percent of Germans have a deprecatory image of China. Compared to the previous year, the trend is consistent, but is still highlighted with the general trend in Europe by the highest value (Silver et al. 2021), which might be due to the fact that the media environment mostly publishes adverse headlines in order to generate public attention, but possibly also by the different approaches in world politics. In 2006, the value was lowest at 33 percent (ibid.). In general, however, this might

indicate that China's economic power, as mentioned at the international level, is omnipresent, as the majority of Germans have a coherent opinion of China. Moreover, it is striking to see that age plays a significant role, unlike gender and level of education, so that a more negative attitude can be seen among the over 50-year-olds (ibid.). This could be interpreted to mean that in times of globalization, for instance, exchange programs are becoming increasingly important, so that there are minor personal barriers among the younger generation, and these can consequently extend to political issues. Besides, it can be anticipated that the older generation might be satisfied with the current circumstances and therefore do not want any changes. Furthermore, the Pew Research Center study further reveals that 77 percent (a decrease of one percentage point from the previous year and an increase of 18 percentage points from the comparable year 2019 (ibid. 2020)) have no confidence that the Chinese government under President Xi Jinping is taking the right approach to global politics (ibid. 2021), whereas the EU at the international level takes a different view, as they engage in high-level dialogues to benefit from each other. In addition, the respondents of the selected countries were asked whether the Chinese government restricts the personal freedom of its citizens, with German public position agreeing with 85 percent, however, this percentage is below the average value of the countries surveyed, and the trend is further significantly decreasing the last five years (ibid.). It can be presumed that this could be partly due to the issue of Hong Kong, as this is an area of interest that has been widely addressed in the EU and thus also received significant German media coverage. Further, the declining trend may also be due to the fact that stronger narratives have emerged about the situation in Hong Kong, so that they have dissolved into the background. Moreover, the study suggests that Germany prefers an economic relationship with the US at 52 percent, while 21 percent prefer the economic relationship with the PRC, with many German citizens expressing no explicit opinion affiliation (ibid.). The German population's emphasis on this subject is also reflected in the international context, which could be due to the "common history" (European Parliament 2021a) that is also shaped by, for example, security cooperation in NATO, but also that the German population views the US as a "like-minded country" (ibid. 2021c). Aside, the fact that many Germans cannot or do not want to express an explicit opinion on this could be due to the fact that, from one perspective, there is a high economic dependence on China, which also secures jobs in Germany, and, from another perspective, European alternatives such as the Global Gateway Initiative are being founded with the background of reducing these dependencies, which could lead to distraction within the German population.

In addition to the study mentioned, another research from June 2021 by the German Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund of the United States examined

transatlantic perspectives on global challenges, including a focus on Chinese bilateral relations. It surveyed the viewpoints of approximately 1,000 adults from each of 11 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the US) via an online survey from March to April 2021. Relevant to the present work, the survey shows that German perceptions of China's power as an influential player in global politics increased by 2 percentage points from the previous year to 22 percent (Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund 2021). This attitude is also reflected in the media ecology, as the EU in the international context, for example, speaks of a "stronger global role" (European Parliament 2021c) or "numerous economic and financial matters" (Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China 2021a), which is also expressed in the economic indicators, but also politically. Furthermore, the US lost seven percentage points during this period, but the latter continues to lead with 55 percent of mentions. Moreover, despite China's growing influence in global affairs, the German population exhibits a critical attitude towards China. Whereas 61 percent viewed China in a differentiated manner in 2020 (20 percent positively), this figure has risen to 67 percent in the following year, reflecting a similar view to the Pew Research Center but differentiating in the increase. It is also noticeable in this study, that the age of the respondents influences their attitude towards China, which identifies a comparable finding with the study investigated above (see Silver et al. 2021). For example, 42 percent of the Germans surveyed aged 18 to 24 see China as a partner, compared with 28 percent of the total population, or less than a third of respondents. The majority of the overall German sample see China more as a rival (Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund 2021), which may be due to several reasons, conceivably national cybersecurity concerns, but also based on the strength of the Chinese system, which are demonstrated in the international context of the analysis. Following on from the attitudes towards China's growing influence, the study examined various topic areas where respondents indicated whether they would like to see a softer or tougher approach from their government towards China in these areas. On the topics of 'human rights' and 'cybersecurity', the Germans surveyed desire to see the German government take a tougher approach towards China compared to the other countries surveyed (ibid.). This could imply that possibly Xinjiang, which has an overriding importance in the international context, has had an influence on the German population through media reports. Further, these remarks allude to the presumption that the German population could aspire for a clearer positioning on this from the German government, as comparatively at the EU level. Nonetheless, there were five percent in each case who were in favor of a softer approach in these areas. Along with that, in the areas of 'climate', 'territorial expansion', 'trade'

and 'technological innovation', Germany ranked in the middle of the other EU countries in terms of opinion, although with all the countries surveyed calling for a tougher approach in each area (ibid.). Therefore, it is assumed that the German population does not notice the urgency for tougher action in these policy areas because they may perceive no external threat. Furthermore, the study outlines the role of NATO in Germany, whose stance is of secondary importance to China and therefore has only an indirect impact on the PRC itself. 68 percent of the Germans surveyed said that NATO plays an important role in Germany's security (ibid.). This is also reflected in international dynamics, as the US may appear to be standing up for Germany and Europe because of their "common history" (European Parliament 2021a), which intensifies national confidence in this security alliance. Differences emerged within the sample among sympathizers of different German parties and among different age groups. For example, positive correlations emerged among sympathizers of The Green Party, as well as the majority of the older generation who would like to stick with the security alliance (Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund 2021).

Moreover, in the Körber Foundation's study 'The Berlin Pulse: German foreign policy in perspective', published in October 2021, various high-ranking international researchers and authors conducted representative surveys on topics related to German foreign policy last September in order to obtain the latest picture of the German public's sentiment. For this purpose, more than 2,200 adults in Germany were interviewed by telephone (Johnson Sirleaf et al. 2021). In the report relevant for the present paper, 19 percent of respondents replied that it is more important for Germany to have a close relationship with China than with the US. This means the PRC lost 8 percentage points compared to the previous year's figures. The US, in contrast, received 67 percent (Wang and Chen 2021). This decline is contrary to statements in the international context, as Germany and China have a wide range of relations in economic and monetary matters, according to the EU. One could assume that recent negative headlines such as those about the CAI have contributed to this recession, as these headlines might lead the German population to expect more fair exchange with its counterpart the US. In addition, China's growing influence in global politics is seen as an unfavorable development by more than half of the respondents in this study, with only around 10 percent remaining constant in their opinion that the influence brings advantages (ibid.). This could indicate that the German population is perturbed that China's growing influence in political areas will continue to extend to economic areas, such as cybersecurity, international law, and human rights, which can be associated with the studies mentioned above, increasing concern.

Moreover, using Kenneth Burke's concept on structuring strategic narratives, the following identifies actor; scene; conflict; and resolution or suggested resolution for the national context (Burke 1966 and 1969). In the national context, the German population represents the **subordinate actor**, which consists of broad and accordingly differentiated age groups. Therefore, despite the long and intensive existing relations between Germany and China in a wide range of policy areas, the German population currently maintains a demanding stance towards the PRC. However, it can be stated that much depends on the age of the interviewees, which determines the perspective from which they view China. Younger adults in particular see China as an opportunity, while the older generations adhere to traditions and are not fully open to change and the prospects China brings. Furthermore, the **scene** is conditioned by China-themed narratives, since it is predominantly directly projected opinion patterns applied to China. Besides, the **conflicts** and actions are dependent on the respective policy fields, similarly as in the international dynamics. This could also be due to the fact that the frequency of questions asked in each topic area depends on the presence of these in the media ecology, as according to Bryman, data collection is primarily concerned with the topicality and official accessibility of the topics, otherwise no substantial answers can be expected from the respondents (Bryman 2016). Furthermore, the **resolutions** show, based on the studies presented, that the German population has many sympathizers towards the US, especially compared to China in economics, which makes the US appear to be Germany's most important partner. Nevertheless, the Pew Research Center study and the Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund of the US study, for example, differ in their statements, as they report opposite increases and decreases in preferences towards China (Silver et al. 2021; Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund 2021). However, it can be detected that overall tendencies portray a declining image of China in the conglomerate studied. It remains to be noted that many respondents abstain from China-related topics, the reasons are not discernible, but this concludes complex and opaque times. In summary, the German population wants to reduce dependencies, especially in the economy, but also in technological areas, so that the system narrative of European sovereignty is re-identified from the international context, which supports the argument of the theory of strategic narratives that media ecology influences opinions nationally as well as internationally. Furthermore, another identity narrative is that the German population wants to preserve the safety of the people in China, which may be feasible if economic dependencies are first diminished on the political level. Therefore, the identity and values of the German people are seen as grounded in human rights and equality, which, according to the theory, are also reflected in the government.

4.3. Political Context

After providing an overview of the international context, but also of public opinion in Germany in the previous two sections, the aim of this subchapter is to analyze the political context within the new German coalition agreement. Thereby, among others, the public opinion of the German population and the international institutional level of the EU count as factors influencing the resulting political stance and correspondingly the German government's strategic narratives towards China. On the one side, this is based on the fact that the German government wants to integrate the public sentiment of its population into its policies in order to facilitate its national legitimacy (Miskimmon et al. 2013). Therefore, it is surmised that the German government focuses on various surveys of its population on China, and world politics in general, so that it can understand the basic attitude of the German public and adjust their policies accordingly. On the other side, it is also important to maintain credibility at the EU level, as the German government also defines itself much through this context, so that acceptance and legitimization of political decisions is necessary in the long run.

Fundamental understanding of the German-Chinese relationship

The following section assesses the main attributes of the China-Germany bilateral relationship to provide a foundation for understanding the forthcoming narratives and their related explanations and characteristics.

The new German government describes China in standard EU terminology "in the dimensions of partnership, competition and systemic rivalry" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 157), which was already acknowledged in the introductory section. However, this terminology underlies the international context in addition to the introduction part, as these phrases clarify China's "stronger global role" (European Parliament 2021c), otherwise there might be no need to make this stringent distinction. Although the government bases this on the official European denotation, which was first promulgated in a communiqué in 2019, it nevertheless does not allow for any further interpretation. In doing so, the German government records in the coalition agreement that it "wants and needs" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 157) to describe "relations with China" (ibid.) according to this definition. The quoted statement might strengthen the argument that the German government has different levels of relationship in distinct subject areas with China, but that these only differ in the level of characteristics and are not titled as such, since it is not the relationship in the individual policy areas that is represented, but rather

an overarching relationship. In addition, the word 'need' suggests that the German government observes no other alternative than to approach China under these paradigmatic designations, so it does not necessarily represent the opinion of the German government. Despite, Germany's national population, among other things, also reflects the proclamations, as according to the Pew Research Center, the majority of respondents see China more as a rival than as a cooperation partner (Silver et al. 2021). Furthermore, deviating from the official definition of the EU, the German government mentions in the coalition agreement that all authoritarian-ruled states, including supposedly China, are "system competitors" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 143), which could result from the fact that the German population views China critically, thus legitimizing a further declaration. This remark alludes to the presumption that this aberration from the general EU description of China's position could have an impact on the alleged systemic differences between Germany and China, which could broaden the definition to a specific subject area and thus complicate cooperation. Moreover, it could also be interpreted that admitting differences can foster a deeper as well as mutual understanding as actors engage with each other. For the German government in particular, "the commitment to peace, freedom, human rights, democracy, the rule of law and sustainability [...] is an indispensable part of a successful and credible foreign policy" (ibid.), which, in addition to the Chinese recipient, could likewise be addressed to the national population in order to emphasize the basic values of German democracy and thus represent a promise to the population, which is certainly critical of China.

Moreover, taking the analyzed aspects into account, it could be anticipated that the overall attitude towards China will nevertheless be more positive than negative in the future, as the German government maintains to put a partnership with China at the forefront, as this might be needed in overcoming global challenges politically, but also compellingly economically.

Accordingly, this inaugural section is used as the basis for the following to provide a starting point for the German government's comprehension of the bilateral relationship with China, although individual policies must be discussed in more detail below in order to identify their influence on the policy narrative, which may again have a retrospective effect on the fundamental understanding section. As demonstrated in the section of the coding process, the analytical table contains the relevant policy areas with their associated content, focusing on specific issues related to China. The analytical table represented in figure 3 thus distributed as a directory to the upcoming policy areas with their associated content and also clarifies the

significance of individual statements in the coalition agreement in order to identify the strength of the narratives:

German coalition agreement on China

Policy area	Content	Significance		
		Tough commitment	Soft commitment	Rhetorical commitment
Economy	Fair economic relations		x	
	Ratification of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment	x		
	Creation of European alternatives to the Belt and Road Initiative		x	
Scientific-Technology	Promotion of technological competitiveness	x		
	Expansion of China expertise	x		
International Collaboration	Expansion of relations in the Indo-Pacific		x	
	Encouragement of Taiwan's political future			x
	Further development of the China strategy		x	
Human Rights and International Law	Preservation of Hong Kong's autonomy			x
	Condemnation of human rights violations			x
Security	Involving China in disarmament		x	
	Deepening transatlantic understanding	x		
	Formation of democratic alliances			x

Figure 3: Analytical table

(own illustration; according to the German coalition agreement; using the terminology of Seybold 2021)

Economy

Fair economic relations

In the policy area of economy, the German government first discloses its approach on bilateral trade relations. In the coalition agreement, the new German government states that it wants "fair rules in the increasing competition with China" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 157), which is already a mutual requirement in the international context of the EU. The expression 'fair rules' could suggest that, according to the German government, there is more competition between Germany and China but imbalanced under current circumstances, so the government might expect the same conditions on both sides in the future. Furthermore, it implies that the German government is aware that China has gained influence and economic strength in recent years, which can be clearly seen in the economic figures in the background section, which makes China Germany's most important trading partner, and it can be further observed in the international context by declaring China's "stronger global role" (European Parliament 2021c). Besides, surveys by the Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund of the US also support this perception, as German respondents also perceive China's increased influence in global politics and, according to the Körber Foundation, the German interviewees do not endorse the current Chinese approach to politics as they may be concerned about the output on national politics (Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund 2021). Moreover, the coalition agreement formulates "unfair competition practices" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b,

35) as well as "unfair trade practices" (ibid.) towards the PRC, which relates to the above-mentioned expectation of mutual fair relations. Likewise, the term 'unfair' seems to be highlighted here, as it is mentioned in two sentences in a row. This could signify that the economic comprehension of competition is distinct, but also that Germany's economic China policy is somewhat biased. Nevertheless, it can be identified that Germany and China have a shared economic approach that is allegedly different according to the German government, so it could be exposed whether a protectionist or a free-trade economic approach makes more sense in the future. However, these formulations might lead to a more demanding attitude towards China.

Furthermore, as already stated, German policy is affecting European policy and vice versa. This is based on Germany's economic and political power in Europe, therefore, the focus could be increasingly on German stances within the EU, as they occasionally act in a leading manner. In consequence, statements on European China strategy are also encompassed in the following. Moreover, to counteract the measures identified above, the government wants to achieve a "European competition law and the strengthening of the European single market" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 135), which offers no shared strategy with China. Besides, the German government wants European "autonomous trade policy instruments" (ibid., 35) to be created and further developed in order to possibly take a more protectionist approach, so that critical goods or infrastructures could be produced within Europe instead of having to be imported. This could also be related to the mask policy of Germany during the early days of the Covid-19 crisis, where the Germans were highly dependent on China's production and imports. Moreover, taking into account the aspects analyzed, soft commitments can be presumed here, as the measures on how to continue to achieve fair economic relations with China leave much room for interpretation, since they only focus on the creation of a European law that cannot be enforced by the German government alone. Bearing in mind that China and Germany are primarily economically interdependent, continuity of economic cooperation seems to be expected for the time being, despite the basis of these declarations. In the process, however, dialogue could be claimed by the German government so that fair economic conditions could be negotiated again to ensure that German priorities are preserved.

Ratification of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investments

According to the coalition agreement, the ratification of the CAI "cannot take place at present for various reasons" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 35), thus providing no benefits or incentives

for China. This statement gives the idea of being extraordinary, as the former German government under Angela Merkel noticed a great advantage in pushing for the ratification of the investment agreement between China and the EU, especially for the German industry, which is closely intertwined with China's. Nevertheless, this acknowledgment suggests a tough commitment, as it is explicitly stated that under current conditions there is no possibility of ratification on behalf of Germany, and therefore leaves no margin for evaluation. Moreover, this also reflects the national dynamics of the Pew Research Center, as more than half of the respondents prefer an economic relationship with the US (Silver et al. 2021), which could indicate the general trend to trade less under the current circumstances with China in order to become more independent. When it comes to investment agreements, the German government inherently demands "investment protection for companies abroad against direct expropriation and discrimination" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 35), so that bilateral, autonomous trade relations are accessible to foreign companies without restrictions. Furthermore, it "wants to prevent the abusive use of the instrument - even in the pending agreements" (ibid.). Thus, by highlighting this, it could imply that German policy already includes upcoming decisions and suggests that it no longer wants to compromise on this ratification with China. Besides, as the name already suggests, the decision of ratification has to be decided at the EU level and not bilaterally between Germany and China. Therefore, the German government also comments on the European position, as it "wants to better protect European companies against extraterritorial sanctions" (ibid.), which could be a reference to the international context, as this could be related to China's counter-sanctions on the EU, and the government accordingly does not want further imposition of sanctions. Concluding, the non-ratification of the European investment agreement with China could also affect Germany's investment flow as long as the agreement has not been signed. At worst, it could lead to stagnant cooperation until full ratification. Nevertheless, these remarks give the impression that present economic restrictions are not more concise than the current non-ratification. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the benefits of signing the agreement are insufficient for the German government, as well as for the other EU member states, which is also supported by the statements in the international context, as the EU also reinforces non-ratification to the prevailing condition.

Creation of European alternatives to the Belt and Road Initiative

In the following, the creation of European alternatives to the Belt and Road Initiative, also known as the new Silk Road, is investigated from the perspective of the German government.

The EU has planned an alternative to the Chinese BRI, as already identified in the international context. Moreover, the German government supports this project because "the EU's Global Gateways Initiative [...] is an important instrument" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 158) to achieve "infrastructure development according to high quality international standards" (ibid.). One could assume that the government considers the BRI standards as supposedly displeasing if it explicitly names them in its statements. Nevertheless, these statements are classified as soft commitment, as no more precise definitions or differentiations of the international standards are defined or to what extent and degree the counter-project is to be expanded.

Furthermore, the Global Gateway Initiative is to become a European "common railroad network" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 133) and could consequently reduce the "strategic dependencies" (ibid., 157) of the Chinese Silk Road for Germany. From these statements it could be surmised that the German government determines that the PRC wants to make Europe, and in particular Germany, dependent. However, it also implies that the government does not aim at a complete cessation from China, but only wants to reduce these dependencies, which established the reference to the system narrative of European sovereignty. Nonetheless, the German government could expect that the European countries would once again come together collectively and present themselves jointly in international politics, which is reinforced by "seeking cooperation with like-minded countries" (ibid., 157), which is thus not an encouragement to China.

Despite that, the decision on farther procedure depends on the EU level, as it cannot be settled by national decisions and thus only indirectly affects the German-Chinese relationship. Accordingly, the priority of this statement is considered rather low because before a final decision is made, this initially has potential for discussion at the EU level. In conclusion, this counter-model could influence the German relationship with China in the long term, produce a strengthened Europe and reduce dependencies, possibly leading to reduced European participation in BRI projects. Concluding, direct effects in China can only be seen in a few years and not in the current legislative period.

In summary, the policy field of economy demonstrates two soft commitments, and one tough commitment. Since few tough commitments occur throughout the policy context analysis process, the non-ratification of the CAI is assigned a particular significance, especially since the economy is the most important policy field for the German government in its bilateral relations with China. Given the economic dependence on China, this starts from the premise that some jobs within Germany depend on the continuation of economic relations between

Germany and China, as well as a variety of export and import transactions. Therefore, in line with the theory of strategic narratives, the **conflict** is the reliance on economic relations with the PRC, which can then also lead to arbitrary conditions between the two countries to some extent due to the fact that it is a one-sided dependency. Consequently, the German government **results** in the policy field of the economy the strategic narrative of German sovereignty in line with the EU, as the terms "protect" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 35) is highlighted several times in the context of German industry, but also in relation to the European. According to the theory, this can reveal that the government from one side pursues selfish goals by focusing on the protection of Germany itself, but from another side shows common goals of a balanced economic relationship, but this is under the premise that China adapts to the circumstances. Although this could become a long-term process, as one cannot simply make China want what oneself want, as can be observed, for instance, in the CAI. The economic narrative thus represents a direct reference to the system narrative, which subsequently strengthens the political legitimacy of the German government, since the stances of the German population and the government coincide in this policy area.

Scientific-Technology

Promotion of technological competitiveness

The German government comments on technological competitiveness in that it desires to "better protect critical technologies and infrastructure" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 132) so that "Europe's strategic sovereignty" (ibid.) can be increased. This position hereby takes into account the statement of the international context "digital and technological sovereignty" (European Parliament 2021c) and can therefore be identified as direct reference to the system as well as indirect reference to the identity narrative. Furthermore, this could have the goal that its own technological innovations reduce dependencies on China, so that it ultimately leads to more competition between the countries, which does not stimulate interaction by China, however, communicates a German selfish goal. Increasing technological competitiveness is a tough commitment, as there are clearly formulated measures on how this can be achieved, for example by "initiating a European open source 5/6G consortium" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 132) to ensure technological networking within Europe. This measure could at the same time also meet the desire of the German population for a tougher approach to cybersecurity vis-à-vis the PRC (Silver et al. 2021), as networking would allow know-how and competencies in this

area to be better exchanged within Europe without having to make use of a Chinese network. In pursuance of being able to conduct this measure, the German government would like to bring "research and development to the level of the world's best" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 134) with its "European partners" (ibid.) by involving "public as well as private capital" (ibid.). Hereby, it can be presumed that the government acquires to regain its ability to act. Moreover, it can also be supposed that attracting private capital is not a problem for the German government, as the participants in the study who would like to see increased cybersecurity would also tend to be more willing to invest in these technologies. Nevertheless, there is a contradiction in the statements made by the government, as the German government focuses on 'Europe' on the one hand, while seeking "transatlantic dialogue on data sovereignty, net freedom" (ibid., 153) on the other, which implies cooperation with the US. This could be attributed to the evidence that the German government does not count entirely on the European partners regarding their knowledge in the policy area of technology and is therefore considering a partner who transfers the experience to act towards competitors.

Sub-concluding, the focus is predominantly on the European consensus rather than on Germany itself. Accordingly, the German government seems to think that it cannot catch up with China's leading position on their own, which is why Germany would not be able to assert itself without a strengthened intra-European market. Moreover, since Germany is a leader in technological sub-sectors such as the automotive industry, a counterstrategy nevertheless implies to serve the national interest.

Expansion of China expertise

Additionally, the German government has planned the concrete measure to "increase research and innovation" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 24) through the "German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH)" and farther to "significantly expand Asia and China competence" (ibid.). By emphasizing 'significantly', it could be meant that Germany wants to better understand China, through student exchanges to cultivate international relations, and also to bring German citizens closer to the cultural and political diversity of this country, which can lead to shifts in opinion in the national context in the long term, or it can also reinforce the far more positive view of the younger population, as they are already fundamentally more receptive to China according to the opinion polls (Silver et al. 2021; Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund 2021). Moreover, these statements are evaluated as tough commitments in the analytical table, as it has precise channels

and procedures to achieve improved China and Asian expertise. Furthermore, the expansion of the China competency could show China's increasing economic importance for Germany, which can be distinguished in the international context with "mutual student exchange visits" (European Parliament 2021c) but can also be proven nationally by the survey results, so that modern China experts are needed to gain advanced knowledge in the coming years.

Concluding, in the policy field of scientific-technology, the **action** is that the technological and scientific competition between the two economic nations of Germany and China is increasing. Therefore, the German government considers as a **resolution** the protection of critical technologies and infrastructures, possibly due to previous acquisitions of companies in Germany or the large number of joint ventures in China, so that through this protection balanced competition can take place in the future, which in consequence means greater independence from China. Moreover, the German government examines another resolution as building a national understanding with China so that Germany's sovereignty can be fully secured. These strategic narratives are declared as meaningful because in the analysis process of this section, two tough commitments enhance, implying that the German government published precise measures and goals that do not allow for further interpretation, which consequently are also crucial for enhancing the German government's political legitimacy because they are in line with the views of the German population and the EU.

International Collaboration

Expansion of relations in the Indo-Pacific

Moreover, the German government's coalition agreement reveals a desire to strengthen relations in the Indo-Pacific. It requires to advance the "EU-ASEAN partnership" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 157) as well as the partnership with "important value partners such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea" (ibid.), with all of these mentioned countries being localized near China. This could imply that the German government is seeking cooperation with countries that are localized close to China in order to establish and stabilize allies in the Asian region, and this could thereby indicate skepticism on the part of the German government towards China and therefore offers no shared strategy and incentives for China. The fact that China is not explicitly mentioned suggests that the objective is to reduce dependencies by intensifying relations with alternative states to draw new opportunities from the commonalities. Therefore, these possible collaborations could put a hold on the German-Chinese relationship, as China is

almost deliberately left out of the declaration, whereas economic interdependencies could revoke these differences. Nevertheless, the German government would like to promote an "intensive dialogue on peace and security" (ibid.) with China, which is based on statement of the international context, for instance "greater dialogue and cooperation with China on peace and security" (European Parliament 2021c) since the Indo-Pacific is of economic importance for Germany and the EU. This proceeds from the premise that a (military) conflict could harm trade relations in the Asian region. Furthermore, the German government requests China to "maintain a responsible role for peace and stability in its neighborhood" (ibid.) and to "settle territorial disputes [...] on the basis of international maritime law" (ibid.), so that this demand, if executed by China, could cause to reconciliation in this matter from a mutual perspective. The statements made above imply soft commitments, since no defined measures were mentioned, as it was simply referred to legal frameworks and to hold dialogues. Besides, no other political implications, such as sanctions are mentioned, which could be due to reciprocal economic relations, as the German government does not want to provoke any economic damage by its proclamations. Nonetheless, depending on the circumstances this issue will be given high priority in German foreign policy, since the Indo-Pacific region is of seldom relevance on the cooperation agenda and, moreover, the formation of closer relations is to be conducted through the EU. Likewise, the national context expresses an opposite opinion towards the government, as according to the Pew Research Center, more than three quarters of Germans are dissatisfied with China's approach to global politics, while the German government enhances dialogues and identifies no precise factors for this statement, which can be seen in the topic of the Indo-Pacific (Silver et al. 2021).

Encouragement of Taiwan's political future

Furthermore, one subject that was already an area of conflict under Angela Merkel is Taiwan, which elevates it to be monitored under the new government more closely. In the coalition agreement, the German government states that it "supports the relevant participation of democratic Taiwan in international organizations" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 157). This rhetorical commitment indicates that the German government is aware of naming and publicizing this issue, but no goals or measures are mentioned on how to achieve this integration into international organizations. Therefore, it can be assumed that it is a weak influencing factor for the policy narrative and thus represents little influence on German's foreign policy with China. Despite all this, even though the German government lists the desired cooperation with

Taiwan, it also emphasizes an important condition: the German government adheres to the EU's "One-China policy" (ibid.). This statement seems contradictory, since from one perspective the German government would like to integrate Taiwan more into international organizations, while from another perspective Taiwan's affiliation with mainland China is accepted governmentally. Furthermore, it is debatable since the EU has published a joint paper with Taiwan but also the new EU-China strategy, as demonstrated in the international context, does not demonstrate the affiliation to the 'One-China policy', which could affect this argument in the long-term (European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan 2021b; European Parliament 2021c). Although it appears that the German government demands to integrate Taiwan more into international affairs, while at the same time emphasizing the One-China policy in the coalition agreement, it cannot be assumed that this will result in major changes in foreign policy decisions with mainland China and thus this is not evaluated as a call for China to adjust its approach. The German government will most likely not accept significant economic losses with the purpose of developing strong political relations with Taiwan. Aside, this is also reflected in the national context by the fact that, with less than half of the respondents, Germany is in the lower range of the countries surveyed on territorial expansion that would like to see the issue addressed more strongly (Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund 2021).

Further development of the China strategy

Additionally, the German government expresses its views on a China strategy on three levels: nationally, with the EU, and with the US. At first, it implies a German China approach "within the framework of the joint EU-China policy" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 157), in which it desires to "continue government consultations and make them more European" (ibid.). The inclusion of the European perspective may be due to the fact that the German government wants to be more committed to the common EU's China policy again, and not make a sole national effort as especially with the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In addition, this is the first time that the German government intends to develop a "comprehensive China strategy in Germany" (ibid.), so it might imply that China has gained global importance from the German government's point of view, in line with the international context. Thus, this legislative period, the coordination of Germany's China strategy is to take place through a referendum of the individual ministries, not just the Chancellor's Office, as it was the case under the Angela Merkel era. Therefore, the increased power of the Chancellor on China policy might be adjusted, and nationwide ministries could be allowed to give their individual assessments.

Moreover, all perspectives from the various departments can be included in order to adapt German relations with China to the current world politics.

Furthermore, at the EU level, the German government wants to "replace the unanimity rule in the EU Council of Ministers in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) with qualified majority voting" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 135), which may have an indirect impact on the German China policy. This measure would apply, for example, to cases where Hungary has blocked the Hong Kong package of measures, with the result that the EU can "appear more unified" (ibid.), according to the German government. Moreover, resolutions regarding China could be obstructed. The timely implementation of this measure depends on long-term unity at the EU level as to whether the other member states also declare in favor of upsetting this voting right, and thus only peripherally affects Germany's policy on China. Nevertheless, a direct impact on the government's policy narrative is not discernible, also due to the fact that it is only a soft commitment, since no precise measures are defined for China after the majority balloting is enforced.

Besides, the German government admires to hold a "transatlantic coordination in China policy" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 157) with the US. One can assume that it requires reducing dependencies on China and consulting with the US to do so. At the same time, this might not indicate that the German government is unthinkingly following the American approach, but only that a dialogue regarding China could take place. Nevertheless, a closing in on China policy could be observed in that it is "seeking cooperation with like-minded countries" (ibid.), which could lead one to believe that the German government sees different values and norms in China than Germany itself represents, which can be referred to the tripartite terminology of the German government as well as on the EU level. However, according to the Körber Foundation study, a correlation of the national context with the political context can also be seen here, as respondents fundamentally expect less relationship with China, but seek more coordination mechanisms and trade relations with the American point of view (Wang and Chen 2021). Nonetheless, due to German power within Europe, these arrangements could also have an influence on European China policy, which could be a direct proposition to China and an incentive to adjust its policy.

The former described statements and the resulting impact on relations between the PRC and Germany are assessed rather positively for further intensive bilateral relations. The **conflict** of the policy area international cooperation consists of economic dependencies on China, but also of the disagreement on decisions towards China within the individual EU countries. Besides, a

strong influence on the German-Chinese relationship cannot be expected despite the previously given positioning towards the Indo-Pacific region and the Taiwan region. This is because the German government has not yet given sufficient priority to this region and lacks a concrete plan, which can be seen from the soft and rhetorical commitments. Moreover, this is also underpinned by the fact that although the German government tries to take into account the sentiments of the German population to some extent through contradictory statements, the latter ultimately relies on European terminology diplomatically in order not to jeopardize economic relations. Thus, the **resolution** is that the German government would like to improve dialogue and cooperation with the EU, the US, and ASEAN countries but also other value partners so that an enhanced cooperation and a unified approach to China can be anticipated. Furthermore, a dialogue mechanism with the PRC is to remain in place, which could thereby reduce discrepancies and thus emphasize a shared strategy, although it seems that the German government is waiting for a reaction from China.

Human rights and international law

In the following, general influences on the policy areas of human rights and international law are first identified, followed by detailed contents, which are defined in the analytical table. The survey results for human rights and international law are equally elevated as those for cybersecurity, making these issues an outright priority for the German population, in part because the quantified statements evaluated in Germany are the highest among the countries assessed in Europe (Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund 2021). Thus, the German government should address the human rights situation in China and the compliance with international law accordingly to maintain its legitimacy. Consequently, the German government authoritatively states in the coalition agreement that it "seeks cooperation with China wherever possible on the basis of human rights and applicable law" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 157). However, the word 'basis' could give the impression that German cooperation with China is questioned on all policy fields as long as the observance of human rights are not considered to be given according to the German government, as it represents the opinion that "human rights [...] form our compass" (ibid., 143), which is assessed as a demand on China, and thus initially offers only limited incentives to China. In addition, it could be presumed that an agreement to cooperate on human rights issues and international law on the part of China is desired by the government. Therefore, these could take the form of dialogues.

Preservation of Hong Kong's autonomy

In connection with Hong Kong, the German government also applies the internationally anchored principle of "One Country - Two Systems" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 157), which according to the German government "must be reasserted" (ibid.). The former represents a contradiction with the topic of Taiwan under the chapter international collaboration, since the One-China policy was propagated, under which also Hong Kong would be integrated. However, the cited quote from the German government conveys the contradictory. The efforts of the former German government, namely former Chancellor Angela Merkel, to build stronger ties with Hong Kong by hosting human rights activist Joshua Wong in Berlin, Germany, could also bring a more pronounced potential for conflict to the sensitive foreign policy issue of Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, these statements on Hong Kong are brief and undetailed, which makes them a rhetorical commitment, as no action and precise objectives describe how to deal with this issue in the future besides reassessment. However, statements on Hong Kong at the EU level have tended to be based on concerns over the past few years, as seen in the international context, often resulting in disagreements and evolving agreements between EU countries, while ultimately still seeking a "constructive dialogue" (Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China 2021b) with the PRC, while there are no discussions on respect and protection of human rights among the German population, showing a high degree of unanimity compared to the international context. Nonetheless, as a result, no drastic changes in German-Chinese relations can be expected as a result of this statement in the coalition agreement, which could consequently limit the credibility and legitimacy of the German government facing its population. In summary, while Germany may continue to express its concerns about China, there might be no excessive interference in mainland China's affairs vis-à-vis Hong Kong.

Concern about human rights violations

Furthermore, the German government also comments on the alleged human rights violations against China by saying "we clearly thematize China's human rights violations, especially in Xinjiang" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 157), without commenting on possible consequences, which makes this statement a rhetorical commitment according to the analytical table. In this statement, the focus is unambiguous on Xinjiang, with the German government resorting to a graduated choice of words by phrasing it as 'thematize', while the EU implies condemnation in

the international context. Moreover, according to the Pew Research Center, more than three-quarters of German respondents are concerned about the human rights situation in China, as it is perceived that personal freedoms are being restricted (Silver et al. 2021). Thus, the German government could be trying to represent the opinion of its population here in order to gain legitimacy at the national level so that it can ultimately accompany expanded measures in international politics, but it is not succeeding in doing so because, in contrast, the German population and the EU are calling for tougher approaches, while the German government is holding back on its choice of words. However, it could also be due to Germany's economic dependence on China that the government remains within diplomatic limits.

The ongoing debate on different views on human rights and the statements and subsequent criticism by the German government in this context could lead to tensions in German-Chinese relations. In an international view, this could also lead to states communicating their differing views. The very fact that the German statements do not offer China dialogue or cooperation in coming to terms could also increase predicted tensions between the two countries and perhaps even international society. The economic ties and the possible sanctions imposed by China, which represent a high risk for European countries, including Germany, could prevent this issue from becoming a major conflict.

Concluding, although the German population is centrist about enhancing human rights and respecting international law, the German government uses solely rhetorical commitments, which could partially limit the legitimacy of the German government. Nevertheless, the German government appears to compute respect for human rights in the PRC, while making opposing statements that contradict its own, which could be due to the theory's state self-protection plan, as it was able to preserve Germany's sovereignty by making statements to the contrary while representing its identity without confronting China. Despite the rhetorical commitments, it is evident that both the German government as well as the German people, in their **actions** and **resolutions**, consider human rights and the observance of international law as their domestic norms and values. Conclusively, according to the theoretical framework, the identity of the German government is rooted in the protection of human rights and international law disclosed through the analyzed German policy approaches, or more precisely, its identity is based on supporting the protection of these rights in China (Miskimmon et al. 2013).

Security

Involving China in disarmament

During the entire process of coding, it can be deemed that global disarmament, particularly with reference to nuclear weapons, is important to the German government, as this subject is addressed at length in the coalition agreement. In this regard, it is essential for the German government to involve China in such commitments. Furthermore, the German government proclaims that "nuclear weapon states such as China [...] should be more involved in nuclear disarmament and arms control" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 145), which may indicate an intensified disarmament dialogue and interaction between Germany and China, thus at first creating incentives for the PRC through the cooperation mechanism. Among other things, it implies that by including China in the disarmament talks one can more easily achieve the government's interest in a "nuclear weapons free world (Global Zero)" (ibid.), but it could also be considered that this is mainly guided by respect for China. Moreover, it could mean that the Western alliance of NATO can no longer provide sufficient protection to the German population, so the German government is looking for measures to reduce the threat level. The goal of achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world in the long term is made in this context with the measure of including nuclear-weapon states in dialogue mechanisms, while further no other actions are offered to achieve the goal of global disarmament, which makes it a soft commitment.

In addition, the government desires a general "revival of international disarmament" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 143) to ensure the "security and protection of our livelihoods" (ibid.) whereas it needs a "global cooperation, a strengthening of the [...] rule-based international order" (ibid.). Moreover, the German government seems to demand a stable and peaceful international system, also to possibly ensure balance of trade relations, but above all to ensure the protection of its own population. One could assume that a fundamental reason is that Germany itself would hardly have its own weapons or military available in case of conflicts. Despite all this, it could be stated that this issue needs multilateral dialogue and cooperation that goes beyond bilateral discourse between Germany and China.

In summary, it can be considered that China should be increasingly involved in international agreements, which will lead to more cooperation and integration. However, the results of the dialogue are dependent on China's concessions, as German foreign policy alone is not decisive enough, and international initiatives and agreements are necessary.

Deepening transatlantic understanding

Moreover, a tough commitment to elaborating the transatlantic alliances, in particular NATO, is evident throughout the codification process of the coalition agreement. The German government affirms that this alliance is a "central pillar and that NATO is an indispensable part of our security" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 153), which can be interpreted as a further commitment that is not open to further interpretation, since the alliance is designed for the long term. Furthermore, it is expressed that the German government wants to "strengthen the European pillar in NATO and advocate a more intensive cooperation between NATO and the EU" (ibid., 144/145), which is a further accomplishment, so that changes regarding a military unification can finally be excluded. This could also be stated by the fact that Germany would like to include "NATO command structures and capabilities" (ibid., 136) in the European army in the future, which is currently in development, so that a NATO-compatible European military could represent an important element of transatlantic burden-sharing, and, in conclusion, the transatlantic bond would emerge strengthened. Moreover, this Western-oriented approach is also supported by the German population, as almost two-thirds of respondents believe that NATO plays an important role in Germany's security, which enhances the government's political legitimacy (Bertelsmann Foundation and The German Marshall Fund 2021). There is nevertheless the possibility that this could change fundamentally in the coming decades, especially among the younger generation, as a result of international collaborations such as the expansion of China's capabilities, since the influence of the older generation in particular, which witnessed the "common history" (European Parliament 2021a) described in the international context, is waning.

It is therefore to be expected that the German government will remain in the security alliance at the transatlantic level, which in turn could make a German-Chinese security alliance less likely, which also illustrates the tough commitment. However, this shows that no change is to be expected for either Germany or China, which thus does not entail any advantages or incentives for China and thus no common strategy.

Formation of democratic alliances

In addition to the existing security alliance, the German government has stated in the coalition agreement its intention to form another alliance consisting of democratic states. The German government outlines the commitment for this alliance as follows:

"The goal is multilateral cooperation in the world, especially in close association with those states that share our democratic values. This also involves system competition with authoritarian-ruled states and a strategic solidarity with our democratic partners" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 143).

It can be strongly assumed that the government desires to strengthen consensus among states that have supposedly similar democratic values in order to counteract rivalry with the other system in a better position. However, since the system rivalry with China was described earlier in the political analysis and in the broader international context and refers to the differentiation between the two state systems, democratic and authoritarian, it could be interpreted that China is to remain excluded from this democratic alliance by the German government. Another narrative which occurs predominantly in the EU context is the German accentuation of its stances towards the principle of "Europe's strategic sovereignty" (ibid.), which is to be increased and may only be possible by linking countries with the same basic value characteristics. Therefore, the emphasis of the system narrative can be directly linked to the influence on the political context. Furthermore, a democratic alliance could be seen as an additional security foundation before encounters with China, which in this case could also reveal a seldom wariness of the security alliance with the US, since the German government may not want to become fully dependent on this either, but rather establish alternatives.

Furthermore, it is expressed that the government would like to increasingly join forces so that a "renewal and dynamization of transatlantic relations with the US" (Die Bundesregierung 2021b, 153) occurs in order to defend "our values of freedom, democracy and human rights" (ibid., 143). This might suggest that the existing balance of power will change to the disadvantage of democratic states due to the aforementioned system competition. Additionally, the West and Germany appear to be concerned about its Western dominance, as China, through its strong development and political set-up, could manage to exert a great attraction on other countries. Meanwhile, the statements made in the coalition agreement on the formation of a democratic alliance must be classified as rhetorical commitments, as no goals or measures to achieve this are mentioned, and it might rather look like a manifestation of the measure. Therefore, it can be argued that for Germany, despite the undeniable economic interdependence of the two countries, the economic consequences are less important than the preservation and safeguarding of a democratic national order and this also beyond Germany's borders. Once a democratic alliance is formed, China could expect from it a more consistent approach to foreign policy issues. Moreover, whether and how an alliance of countries representing democratic values would materialize can only be conjectured, since such an alliance also depends on the

participation of other nation-states as well as their inclination to become politically involved in such an alliance.

To sum up, according to the theoretical framework of strategic narratives in the policy field of security, the **conflict** is to liberate the world from nuclear weapons so that international security, but also domestic security, can be guaranteed. Therefore the **resolution** shows that the German government first expresses itself on threat reduction by involving China in disarmament, but also by clearly committing to the NATO security alliance. Accordingly, a cooperative security agreement between China and Germany is not to be expected in the next four-year legislative period but the German government wants to form a democratic alliance that can provide further protection for the German population, although this implementation is uncertain, as this is a rhetorical commitment. Thus, this does not represent a shared strategy between China and Germany, but only selfish goals of the German government to protect the security and sovereignty of the country.

5. Conclusion

In the presented research paper, a tripartite analysis procedure is applied based on the theory of strategic narratives with international, national and political context. In the international context, the system narrative at the EU level is identified as creating more European strategic sovereignty. Further, the German public in the national context equally wants to pursue more German sovereignty, but with the added emphasis on upholding the preservation of human rights and international law in China, as indicated by the identity narrative. At the last level of analysis, the political context, the cross-contextual policy narrative is the reclamation of Germany's state sovereignty in line with the EU, although this is differentiated across the individual policy areas. Accordingly, on the one hand, the recipients of the German government's narratives are therefore the German domestic population since the coalition agreement is written in German as well as the EU, as the German government includes these two contexts in decision-making about its China policy by replicating its approaches and disseminating them at the policy level. On the other hand, it can be detected that both China, since they are addressed in the coalition agreement, but also other (Western) states, such as the US, inform themselves about the political declaration of intent of Germany, which is important in global politics, and thus become recipients, at least indirectly. Consequently, even though the German government inherently operates within an open framework, it narrows this framework itself, as this incorporates the sentiments of the two levels of influence analyzed, which do not differ significantly from one another. In doing so, the German government is

challenged to navigate and balance the values and attitudes of the EU and the German population in a way that maintains its credibility both nationally and internationally, but also convinces the respective preceding levels and the international audience of the appropriateness of the government's actions. The main result of the study, which enables an answer to the research question of how the new German government incorporates international and national factors in establishing German-Chinese strategic narratives, is that although the German government has little margin with the two levels, it can be identified that it has more convergence with the EU in the international context, as the latter does not include the preservation of human rights and international law in China as a tough commitment in its overarching approach, thus, the European context can be established as the primary recipient. Moreover, underlying this is also the use of contradictory phrases of the German government with regard to sensitive issues that could indicate consequences in bilateral relations, but there is a lack of effectiveness in implementing these policies out of concern for declining economic prosperity, as indicated by the degree of significance in the analytical table. This is partly because the German government desires to contest an increasingly unified European China policy, but this is seen here as a commitment rather than a narrative. Moreover, this is constructed by the fact that the coalition agreement mentions many statements in relation to the EU, so that action without the unification of the EU is partly impossible. Therefore, the widely divergent positioning of Germany's neighboring countries, reflecting their respective interests and vulnerabilities, should above all be brought together on a common platform. Accordingly, a Europe-wide debate on the role of a sovereign Europe is necessary for the German government to achieve these goals for itself. Consequently, the trade-offs between telling the German public something that aligns with their values and telling China in public what they want to hear has become increasingly challenging for the German government in recent years without exhausting its economic foundation. Therefore, it can be stated that although the narratives are strategically formulated by the German government, they do not qualify as strategic in terms of the theoretical framework of this paper because they cannot operate effectively according to Joseph Nye's definition of "getting others to want what you want" (Nye 2008b, 29), since no direct effects or reactions from China's side can be expected through German and European sovereignty due to dependencies and competition. Thus, it depends on the recipients and on the inclusion of different perspectives in German China policy whether a reformed prioritization will occur, as the future of bilateral and multilateral exchanges are influenced not only by German decision-makers but also by their European and Western partners.

It can be concluded that the German government's new coalition agreement entails a clearer, more European, and more realistic approach towards the PRC, thus creating immediate momentum in debates about German China policy through new rhetorical expressions. Therefore, the new German domestic adjustment of China policy can be emphasized here, which should lead to an additional German China strategy of its own alongside the European one. However, those aspirations still need to be translated into concrete policy measures, so the coming months will be crucial for the new government and may therefore be relevant for further research. The interdepartmental process is expected to be complex and extensive, mainly because the German government aims to implement real policy corrections rather than settle for symbolic but insubstantial approaches. This initiative for new beginnings in Germany's China policy shows parallels with the first years of Angela Merkel's chancellorship, although a possible initial assertiveness by the new government need not fundamentally alter relations between China and Germany in the long term, as mutual trust and reciprocal understanding must first be accumulated.

In summary, German-Chinese relations will not change significantly by virtue of the new German government constellation, although it is anticipated that certain policy areas will be persecuted more resolutely, but these are nevertheless balanced at all times facing economic consequences. Furthermore, more protectionist approaches can be supposed, which may lead to more considerate trade with China despite its high economic dependence, as the self-determination thus gained should make Germany more capable of acting and more independent.

Bibliography

- Abraham, John (1994). Bias in science and medical knowledge: the Open controversy. *Sociology* 28 (3), 717–736. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038594028003005>.
- Atkinson, Paul/Coffey, Amanda (2001). Analysing documentary realities. *Ethnography* ; Vol. 3: [Issues in ethnography].
- Auswärtiges Amt (2022). Deutschland und China: Bilaterale Beziehungen. Available online at <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/laender/china-node/bilateral/200472> (accessed 4/7/2022).
- Benaquisto, Lucia (2008). Open Coding. In: Lisa M. Given (Ed.). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Los Angeles, Ca., Sage, 581–582.
- Berenskoetter, Felix (2014). Parameters of a national biography (Volume 20), 262–288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066112445290>.
- Bertelsmann Foundation/The German Marshall Fund (2021). Transatlantic Trends 2021. Transatlantic Opinion on Global Challenges. Available online at https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/TT2021_Web_Version.pdf (accessed 4/7/2022).
- Bryman, Alan (2016). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Bundesministerium für Forschung und Technologie (1978). Bekanntmachung des Abkommens zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Regierung der Volksrepublik China über wissenschaftlich-technologische Zusammenarbeit. Bundesminister für Forschung und Technologie. Bonn. Available online at https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?start=%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgbl278s1526.pdf%27%5D&m sclid=6c812cb8b19d11ecb73d33995e4b629b#_bgbl_%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgbl278s1526.pdf%27%5D_1649336491396 (accessed 4/7/2022).
- Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (2020). “...to Respect and to Protect...”. Change Creates Stability. Available online at https://cms.gruene.de/uploads/documents/20210311_Grundsatzprogramm_EN.pdf (accessed 3/24/2022).
- Burke, Kenneth (1966). *Language as Symbolic Action. Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. In: *Language as Symbolic Action*. University of California Press.
- Burke, Kenneth (1969). *A rhetoric of motives*. Berkeley, Calif., Univ. of California Press.
- Checkel, Jeffrey T./Hopf, Ted/Nau, Henry R./Zehfuss, Maja (2004). Social Constructivisms in Global and European Politics: A Review Essay. *Review of International Studies* 30 (2), 229–244. Available online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20097911>.
- Delegation of the European Union to the People’s Republic of China (2021a). Economic Relations, Trade and Investment. Press and information team of the Delegation to CHINA, Press release 2021. Available online at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/china/economic-relations-trade-and-investment_en?s=166 (accessed 4/23/2022).
- Delegation of the European Union to the People’s Republic of China (2021b). Political Relations & Human Rights. Press and information team of the Delegation to CHINA, Press release 2021. Available online at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/china/political-relations-human-rights_en?s=166 (accessed 4/23/2022).

- Die Bundesregierung (2021a). Koalitionsvertrag zwischen SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen und FDP. Available online at <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/koalitionsvertrag-2021-1990800?msclkid=a5e0cc3fa78711ecb5f078235357679a> (accessed 3/23/2022).
- Die Bundesregierung (2021b). Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit. Die Bundesregierung. Berlin. Available online at <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/1990812/04221173eef9a6720059cc353d759a2b/2021-12-10-koav2021-data.pdf?download=1> (accessed 3/23/2022).
- European Commission (2019). JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL. EU-China - a strategic outlook. Strasbourg. Available online at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf> (accessed 3/25/2022).
- European Commission (2020). EU and China reach agreement in principle on investment. Brussels, Press release 2020. Available online at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2541.
- European Commission (2021). Global Gateway: up to €300 billion for the European Union's strategy to boost sustainable links around the world. Brussels, Press release 2021. Available online at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6433.
- European Commission (2022). EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment: Milestones and documents. Available online at https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china/eu-china-agreement/milestones-and-documents_en (accessed 4/23/2022).
- European Council of the European Union (2021). EU imposes further sanctions over serious violations of human rights around the world. European Union, Press release 2021. Available online at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/22/eu-imposes-further-sanctions-over-serious-violations-of-human-rights-around-the-world/> (accessed 4/23/2022).
- European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan (2021a). "2021 EU-Taiwan Relations" Published. Available online at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/taiwan/2021-eu-taiwan-relations-published_en (accessed 4/23/2022).
- European Economic and Trade Office in Taiwan (2021b). EU-Taiwan relations. Taipei. Available online at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021_eu-taiwan_relations_brochure.pdf.
- European External Action Service (2021). EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. European Union, Press release 2021. Available online at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific-0_en (accessed 4/23/2022).
- European Parliament (2021a). EU-NATO cooperation in the context of transatlantic relations. Available online at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0346_EN.html (accessed 4/23/2022).
- European Parliament (2021b). MEPs continue to firmly condemn human rights abuses in China | News | European Parliament. European Union, Press release 2021. Available online at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210323IPR00601/meps-continue-to-firmly-condemn-human-rights-abuses-in-china> (accessed 4/23/2022).
- European Parliament (2021c). REPORT on a new EU-China strategy. Available online at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0252_EN.html (accessed 4/23/2022).

- Federal Foreign Office (2012). Shaping Globalization – Expanding Partnerships – Sharing Responsibility. A strategy paper by the German Government. Berlin. Available online at <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/610644/49a58b5ecfd5a78862b051d94465afb6/gestaltungsmaechtekonzept-engl-data.pdf> (accessed 3/25/2022).
- Freedman, Lawrence (2006). Networks, culture and narratives. *The Adelphi Papers* 45 (379), 11–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/05679320600661640>.
- Freie Demokraten (2020). Beschluss des Bundesvorstandes: Freiheit und Verantwortung für die Zukunft. Available online at <https://www.fdp.de/beschluss/beschluss-des-bundesvorstandes-freiheit-und-verantwortung-fuer-die-zukunft> (accessed 3/24/2022).
- Fuchs, Werner T. (2018). Warum das Gehirn Geschichten liebt. Mit Storytelling Menschen gewinnen und überzeugen. 4th ed. Freiburg, Haufe Gruppe.
- Fulda, Andreas (2020). Germany’s China Policy of ‘Change Through Trade’ Has Failed | Royal United Services Institute. Available online at <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/germanys-china-policy-change-through-trade-has-failed> (accessed 4/23/2022).
- Hanson, Elizabeth C. (2008). The Information Revolution and World Politics. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 5 (4), 415–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331680802555101>.
- Hauck, Uli (2021). Koalitionsvertrag unterzeichnet: Erst Inszenierung, dann Alltagsgeschäft. *tagesschau.de* of 2021. Available online at <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/koalitionsvertrag-161.html> (accessed 3/24/2022).
- Holsti, K. J. (1970). National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy. *International Studies Quarterly* 14 (3), 233–309. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3013584>.
- Holsti, Ole R./Siverson, Randolph M./George, Alexander L. (Eds.) (2018). *Change in the international system*. London, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Hutt, David (2020). Germany’s “Change Through Trade” Fallacy With China. *The Geopolitics of 2020*. Available online at <https://thegeopolitics.com/germanys-change-through-trade-fallacy-with-china/> (accessed 4/23/2022).
- Johnson Sirleaf, Ellen/Espinosa, Patricia/Rudd, Kevin/Hasina, Sheikh (2021). *The Berlin Pulse 2021/22: Chances in Change. German Foreign Policy in Perspective*. Berlin. Available online at <https://www.koerber-stiftung.de/en/the-berlin-pulse/202122> (accessed 4/7/2022).
- LeCompte, Margaret D./Goetz, Judith Preissle (1982). Problems of Reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research (52), 31–60. Available online at https://www.colorado.edu/education/sites/default/files/attached-files/LeCompte_Goetz_Problems_of_Reliability_VValidity_in_Ed_Re.pdf.
- Lever, Paul (2020). Germany still hopes that China will “change through trade.” It will not. *Prospect Magazine* of 2020. Available online at <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/germany-merkel-china-xi-trade-huawei> (accessed 4/23/2022).
- Miskimmon, Alister. (2013). *Strategic narratives. Communication power and the new world order*. New York/London, Routledge.
- Miskimmon, Alister/O’Loughlin, Alister/Roselle, Laura (2013). *Strategic narratives : communication power and the new world order*. New York, Routledge.
- Miskimmon, Alister/O’Loughlin, Ben/Roselle, Laura (2017a). Introduction. In: Alister Miskimmon/Ben O’Loughlin/Laura Roselle (Eds.). *Forging the World. Strategic*

- Narratives and International Relations. Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 1–22.
- Miskimmon, Alister/O’Loughlin, Ben/Roselle, Laura (Eds.) (2017b). Forging the World. Strategic Narratives and International Relations. Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press.
- Muschter, René (2022). China - Wichtigste Exportländer 2019 | Statista. Available online at <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/167157/umfrage/wichtigste-exportlaender-fuer-china/#professional> (accessed 4/7/2022).
- Nye, Joseph S. (2008a). Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (1), 94–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>.
- Nye, Joseph S. (2008b). *The Powers to Lead. Soft, Hard, and Smart*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, USA.
- Reporter ohne Grenzen (2021). RSF 2021 Index: EU struggles to defend values at home. Available online at https://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Downloads/Ranglisten/Rangliste_2021/RSF_Nahaufnahme_EU-Balkan_2021.pdf (accessed 5/16/2022).
- Roselle, Laura/Miskimmon, Alister/O’Loughlin, Ben (2014). Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power. *Media, War & Conflict* 7 (1), 70–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635213516696>.
- Rudd, Kevin (2015). How Ancient Chinese Thought Applies Today. *New Perspectives Quarterly* 32 (2), 8–23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/npqu.11509>.
- Rühlig, Tim (2022). Action Plan for China and Foreign Policy. What Germany Must Do to Hold Its Own in the Systemic Competition with China. In: German Council on Foreign Relations (Ed.). *Smart Sovereignty. 10 Action Plans for Germany’s New Federal Government*. Berlin, 45–54. Available online at <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/action-plan-china-and-foreign-policy>.
- Saldaña, Johnny (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London, SAGE Publishing.
- Seybold, Carmen Mina/Albrecht, Gioia Sophie/Kammerer, Fabienne Sihua (2021). *New Tendencies in Sino-German Relations. An Assessment of German Foreign Policy Priorities Towards China*. Stuttgart. (accessed 5/23/2022).
- Sikkink, Kathryn (2011). *The Justice Cascade. How Human Rights Prosecutions are Changing World Politics*. New York, W.W. Norton & Co.
- Silver, Laura/Devlin, Kat/Huang, Christine (2020). Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries. Majorities say China has handled COVID-19 outbreak poorly. Washington. Available online at <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/> (accessed 4/7/2022).
- Silver, Laura/Devlin, Kat/Huang, Christine (2021). Large Majorities Say China Does Not Respect the Personal Freedoms of Its People. Unfavorable views of China also hover near historic highs in most of the 17 advanced economies surveyed. Washington. Available online at <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/06/30/large-majorities-say-china-does-not-respect-the-personal-freedoms-of-its-people/?msclkid=cf324deaae8e11ecb26c5d25bc23cc> (accessed 4/7/2022).
- Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (2022). *Werde jetzt SPD-Mitglied! Soziale Politik für Dich – für 83 Millionen. Für Dich – und mit Dir*. Available online at <https://www.spd.de/unterstuetzen/mitglied-werden/> (accessed 4/7/2022).

- Statistisches Bundesamt (2022). Die Volksrepublik China ist erneut Deutschlands wichtigster Handelspartner. Available online at <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Wirtschaft/Aussenhandel/handelspartner-jahr.html> (accessed 3/24/2022).
- UN News: Global perspective Human stories (2022). As Security Council meets on Ukraine crisis, Russia announces start of 'special military operation'. Available online at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1112592> (accessed 3/23/2022).
- Vehrkamp, Robert/Matthieß, Theres (2019). Besser als ihr Ruf. <https://doi.org/10.11586/2019051>.
- Wang, Yiwei/Chen, Chai (2021). Shared Leadership for Climate Protection? China is implementing the standards of developed countries into the realities of developing countries – within 30 years. Berlin. Available online at <https://www.koerberstiftung.de/en/the-berlin-pulse/202122>.
- Xinhua News Agency (2021). Xi says China to enhance relations with Germany. Available online at http://www.news.cn/english/2021-12/08/c_1310359388.htm (accessed 3/24/2022).
- Zhang, Hui/Liu, Xin/Bai, Yunyi (2021). China-Germany ties under Merkel a model for Europe, may briefly suffer after she leaves - Global Times. Available online at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1235056.shtml> (accessed 3/25/2022).

Appendix: Original German quotes from the coalition agreement

Policy area	Content	Page	Quotations
Fundamental understanding of the German-Chinese relationship		143	Der Einsatz für Frieden, Freiheit, Menschenrechte, Demokratie, Rechtsstaatlichkeit und Nachhaltigkeit ist für uns unverzichtbarer Teil einer erfolgreichen und glaubwürdigen Außenpolitik.
		143	Dabei geht es auch um den Systemwettbewerb mit autoritär regierten Staaten.
		153	Gemeinsam wollen wir die regelbasierte internationale Ordnung stabilisieren, autoritären Entwicklungen begegnen.
		157	Wir wollen und müssen unsere Beziehungen mit China in den Dimensionen Partnerschaft, Wettbewerb und Systemrivalität gestalten.
		157	Um in der systemischen Rivalität mit China unsere Werte und Interessen verwirklichen zu können, (brauchen wir eine umfassende China-Strategie in Deutschland im Rahmen der gemeinsamen EU-China Politik).
Economy	Fair economic relations	35	Wir nutzen das europäische Wettbewerbsrecht und die Stärke des europäischen Binnenmarktes gerade mit Blick auf unfaire Wettbewerbspraktiken autoritärer Regime. Wir unterstützen die Schaffung und Weiterentwicklung der autonomen handelspolitischen Instrumente gegen unfaire Handelspraktiken auf europäischer Ebene.
		157	Wir wollen im zunehmenden Wettbewerb mit China faire Spielregeln.
	Ratification of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investments	35	Eine Ratifikation des EU China-Investitionsabkommens im EU-Rat kann aus verschiedenen Gründen zurzeit nicht stattfinden. Wir werden uns für Reziprozität einsetzen. Wir setzen uns für Investitionsabkommen ein, die den Investitionsschutz für Unternehmen im Ausland auf direkte Enteignungen und Diskriminierungen konzentrieren und wollen die missbräuchliche Anwendung des Instruments – auch bei den noch ausstehenden Abkommen – verhindern.
		132	Europäische Unternehmen schützen wir besser gegen extraterritoriale Sanktionen.
	Creation of European alternatives to the Belt and Road Initiative	133	Eine europäische digitale Infrastruktur, ein gemeinsames Eisenbahnnetz.

		157	Wir suchen die Zusammenarbeit mit gleichgesinnten Ländern um strategische Abhängigkeiten zu reduzieren.
		158	Wir wollen uns aktiv für eine Infrastrukturentwicklung nach qualitativ hohen internationalen Standards einsetzen. Die Global Gateways-Initiative der EU ist dabei ein wichtiges Instrument.
Scientific-Technology	Promotion of technological competitiveness	132	Wir werden kritische Technologie und Infrastruktur besser schützen, Standards und Beschaffung daran ausrichten und ein europäisches Open Source 5/6G-Konsortium initiieren.
		132	Die strategische Souveränität Europas wollen wir erhöhen. Dies bedeutet in erster Linie eigene Handlungsfähigkeit im globalen Kontext herzustellen und in wichtigen strategischen Bereichen, wie Energieversorgung, Gesundheit, Rohstoffimporte und digitale Technologie, weniger abhängig und verwundbar zu sein, ohne Europa abzuschotten.
		134	Forschung und Entwicklung auf dem Niveau der Weltspitze sind Voraussetzungen für die europäische Handlungsfähigkeit und Wettbewerbsfähigkeit im 21. Jahrhundert. Dafür werden wir die Initiative ergreifen und mit unseren europäischen Partnern eine Investitionsoffensive anstoßen, die sich auf transnationale Projekte mit einem Mehrwert für die EU als Ganzes fokussiert sowie dem Lückenschluss von Netzen eine besondere Bedeutung zumisst. Dabei soll sowohl öffentliches als auch privates Kapital eine Rolle spielen.
		153	Wir suchen den intensiven transatlantischen Dialog zu Datensouveränität, Netzfreiheit und künstlicher Intelligenz.
	Expansion of China expertise	24	Wir werden die institutionelle Förderung vom Deutschen Akademischen Austauschdienst (DAAD) und Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung (AvH) analog zum Pakt für Forschung und Innovation erhöhen. Asien und China-Kompetenz wollen wir deutlich ausbauen.
International Collaboration	Expansion of relations in the Indo-Pacific	157	Wir wollen gemeinsam einen intensiven Dialog zu Frieden und Sicherheit im indo-pazifischen Raum befördern. Die EU-ASEAN Partnerschaft wollen wir vorantreiben. Wir wollen die Asien-Pazifik Konferenz der deutschen Wirtschaft politisch aufwerten. Wir wollen den Ausbau unserer Beziehungen, inklusive auf parlamentarischer Ebene, mit wichtigen Wertepartnern wie Australien, Japan, Neuseeland und Südkorea vorantreiben.

		157	Unsere Erwartung an die chinesische Außenpolitik ist, dass sie eine verantwortungsvolle Rolle für Frieden und Stabilität in ihrer Nachbarschaft spielt.
		157	Wir setzen uns dafür ein, dass territoriale Streitigkeiten im süd- und ostchinesischen Meer auf Basis des internationalen Seerechts beigelegt werden.
	Encouragement of Taiwan's political future	157	Im Rahmen der Ein-China-Politik der EU unterstützen wir die sachbezogene Teilnahme des demokratischen Taiwan in internationalen Organisationen.
	Further development of the China strategy	135	Die EU muss international handlungsfähiger und einiger auftreten. Wir wollen deshalb die Einstimmigkeitsregel im EU Ministerrat in der Gemeinsamen Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik (GASP) durch Abstimmungen mit qualifizierter Mehrheit ersetzen und dafür mit unseren Partnern einen Mechanismus entwickeln, um auch die kleineren Mitgliedstaaten auf diesem Weg angemessen zu beteiligen.
		157	Um in der systemischen Rivalität mit China unsere Werte und Interessen verwirklichen zu können, brauchen wir eine umfassende China-Strategie in Deutschland im Rahmen der gemeinsamen EU-China Politik. Wir wollen die Regierungskonsultationen fortsetzen und stärker europäisch ausgestalten.
		157	Wir streben eine enge transatlantische Abstimmung in der China-Politik an und suchen die Zusammenarbeit mit gleichgesinnten Ländern um strategische Abhängigkeiten zu reduzieren.
Human rights and international law		143	Die Menschenrechte als wichtigster Schutzschild der Würde des Einzelnen bilden dabei unseren Kompass.
		157	Auf der Grundlage der Menschenrechte und des geltenden internationalen Rechts suchen wir die Kooperation mit China, wo immer möglich.
	Preservation of Hong Kong's autonomy	157	Dem Prinzip „Ein Land – zwei Systeme“ in Hong Kong muss wieder Geltung verschafft werden.
	Concern about human rights violations	157	Wir thematisieren klar Chinas Menschenrechtsverletzungen, besonders in Xinjiang.
Security	Involving China in disarmament	143	Wir setzen uns für eine Wiederbelebung der internationalen Abrüstung und Rüstungskontrolle ein. Unsere Sicherheit und der Schutz unserer Lebensgrundlagen erfordern globale Zusammenarbeit, eine Stärkung der Vereinten Nationen sowie eine regelbasierte internationale Ordnung.

		145	Unser Ziel bleibt eine atomwaffenfreie Welt (Global Zero) und damit einhergehend ein Deutschland frei von Atomwaffen. Wir setzen uns mit Nachdruck für ein Nachfolgeabkommen zu NewSTART ein, das neben neuen strategischen Nuklearwaffensystemen auch solche kurzer und mittlerer Reichweite umfasst. Wir setzen uns für Verhandlungen zwischen den USA und Russland zur vollständigen Abrüstung im substrategischen Bereich ein. Nuklearwaffenstaaten wie China wollen wir stärker in nukleare Abrüstung und Rüstungskontrolle einbinden.
	Deepening transatlantic understanding	136	Bei allen diesen Schritten muss die Interoperabilität und die Komplementarität mit Kommandostrukturen und Fähigkeiten der NATO gesichert bleiben.
		144	Die NATO bleibt unverzichtbare Grundlage unserer Sicherheit.
		145	Wir unterstützen die Bemühungen des Bündnisses zu konventioneller und nuklearer Abrüstung sowie Rüstungskontrolle. Wir werden den europäischen Pfeiler in der NATO stärken und uns für eine intensivere Zusammenarbeit zwischen NATO und EU einsetzen.
		153	Das transatlantische Bündnis ist zentraler Pfeiler und die NATO unverzichtbarer Teil unserer Sicherheit.
	Formation of democratic alliances	143	Die strategische Souveränität Europas wollen wir erhöhen. Ziel ist eine multilaterale Kooperation in der Welt, insbesondere in enger Verbindung mit denjenigen Staaten, die unsere demokratischen Werte teilen. Dabei geht es auch um den Systemwettbewerb mit autoritär regierten Staaten und eine strategische Solidarität mit unseren demokratischen Partnern.
		143	Wir nehmen sie an und werden in unserer Außen-, Sicherheits- und Entwicklungspolitik Partnerschaften vertiefen, neu begründen und unsere Werte von Freiheit, Demokratie und Menschenrechten verteidigen. Dafür suchen wir die enge Zusammenarbeit mit unseren demokratischen Partnern.
		153	Die transatlantische Partnerschaft und die Freundschaft mit den USA sind ein zentraler Pfeiler unseres internationalen Handelns. Wir treten für eine Erneuerung und Dynamisierung der transatlantischen Beziehungen mit den USA und Kanada ein, die wir europäisch ausgestalten wollen. Gemeinsam wollen wir die regelbasierte internationale Ordnung stabilisieren, autoritären Entwicklungen begegnen und in der östlichen und

			südlichen Nachbarschaft der EU verstärkt zusammenarbeiten.
--	--	--	--