CONFLICTING IMAGES? GERMANY AND THE RISE OF CHINA

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(Very early draft, please do not quote!)

Introduction

German foreign policy toward China under Chancellor Merkel broke a taboo: never before had a German chancellor received the Dalai Lama. Merkel’s reception of the Dalai Lama, who is viewed by Beijing as a “separatist” for advocating Tibetan self-rule, was preceded by public statements and interviews by Merkel in which she claimed to pursue a China policy that was to incorporate “Mut zu kritischen Tönen”\(^1\) (having the courage to raise critical issues).\(^2\) Merkel’s new, and in her own words value-driven, foreign policy, was therefore to set her apart from her predecessor Gerhard Schröder’s one-dimensional China policy. During Schröder’s time in office Germany had promoted closer trade ties and cooperation with, amongst others, China, whilst ignoring, or at best doing little more than to pay lip-service to, normative aspects of German foreign policy such as democracy promotion and human rights. His soft line towards China, had earned Merkel’s predecessor much criticism from

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\(^1\) “China: Mut zu kritischen Tönen”, Interview mit Angela Merkel, ZDF 23.05.06.
\(^2\) All translations were made by the author.
opposition, media outlets and civil society organizations.\(^3\) Merkel’s rhetorical commitment to a “neue, wertegeleitete Aussenpolitik” (a new, value-driven foreign policy) and “Mut zu kritischen Tönen” toward China back then was, and still is, very much in line with public opinion in Germany on China, which tend to associate equally “economic strength” and “human rights violations” with the country.\(^4\) Research on the portrayal of China in the German media similarly illustrate the persistence of a generally rather negative image of the country.\(^5\) The furore over Merkel’s decision to meet the Dalai Lama in Berlin in 2007, and her rhetorical commitment to raise critical issues with Beijing, have at times overshadowed a different set of public communications by Merkel, during which she has portrayed China as a rising power, economic powerhouse and strategic partner for Germany. China’s growing importance for German foreign policy also manifests itself in the fact that Merkel has travelled to China six times; the only non-European country that she has visited more being the U.S.

Based on the assumption that the image(s) policy makers hold of other countries, shape foreign policy making in that they help policy makers to configure their policy preferences based on perceived capabilities and motivations of the other country, this paper is first and foremost concerned with the image(s) Merkel holds of China. Coming from there substantial change in Merkel’s China policy (compared to that of her predecessor) should manifest itself in the (changing) images held of China. Using theoretical insights derived from image theory and leadership analysis, the paper asks which image(s) of China Merkel holds and what their constituent parts and main attributes are. It furthermore inquires on the policy preferences toward China and the impact of the dominant image(s) on the expressed policy preferences.

\(^4\) Huawei Technologies Deutschland, Deutschland Und China – Wahrnehmung Und Realität (Berlin, 2012), 53.
\(^5\) Carola Richter and Sebastian Gebauer, Die China-Berichterstattung in den Deutschen Medien (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll Stiftung, 2010).
To attain these research objectives, this paper uses thematic content analysis of public communications by Chancellor Merkel on China to infer the images and representations of China espoused by Merkel which have shaped contemporary German-Chinese relations. This paper finds that contrary to the few ambitious statements made by Merkel on “kritische Töne”, the overall image held by Merkel on China is increasingly one of a strategic partner, of an economic powerhouse that is a central importance to Germany’s economy, and of a “Gestaltungsmacht” (transformative power)\(^6\) which is increasingly gaining influence in the international system. Against this background, the policy preferences found in her public communications suggest little space for democracy promotion or human rights, and heavily focus on economic cooperation and constructively engaging China in global governance forums. Coming from there, the examination of Merkel’s China image suggests a lot of continuity with regard to Gottwald’s assessment of Schröder’s China policy, which stipulated that: “Realities of German-Chinese relations often do not live up to the expectations created by the ambitious rhetoric of the German government”.\(^7\)

By inquiring on Merkel’s China image(s), this paper more broadly furthermore hopes to shed some light on the extent to which Merkel’s new, value-driven foreign policy was adopted in her public communications on China. What’s more, by following an analytical approach that draws on non-material factors to understand German-Chinese relations, the paper aims to fill a gap in the literature on German-Chinese relations, which so far, with very few exceptions,\(^8\) is devoid of constructivist and / or cognitive studies.\(^9\) Theoretically this paper aims to

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contribute to the debates on image theory and cognitive foreign policy analysis by illustrating that the analytical categories currently used in the literature are ill-suited to explain Germany’s foreign policy. I hold that the theoretical literature on image theory and foreign policy is almost exclusively build on cases involving the U.S. and hereby mainly focuses on high policy issues such as nuclear deterrence. It has therefore produced idealtypes and analytical categories which heavily rest on binary friend-enemy distinctions. Based on the findings derived from the case under study I argue that analytical categories based on friend-enemy distinctions are of little use for theorizing on the (often) low politics of a trading state such as Germany.

Leaders, images and foreign policy

The field of International Relations (IR) has, since the early 1990s, witnessed a “constructivist turn” in that IR scholars have increasingly placed ideational variables, specifically collective identity, at the centre of their attempts to understand and explain international politics. By doing so, they explicitly went beyond material, ‘objective’ factors such as the structure of the international system or domestic decision-making structures. At the heart of the constructivist turn lay the assumption that identity is not a given but is socially constructed, and that language as the medium used to construct identity needs to be taken seriously. More so, constructivists have come to stress the inter-subjectivity of identity construction. The construction of the self does not happen in a vacuum, but takes place in relation to others. Thus perceptions of the self are generated and maintained inter-subjectively through relations with others. Hereby most works focus on how the identities of states are constructed and maintained through exclusion and the portrayal of others as foes or

enemies. Whilst the constructivist turn has stressed the general importance of identity and perception in international politics, it has mainly focussed on the construction of self and others between groups of people, or societies, or states.\(^\text{10}\) Constructive scholarship in IR, however, has paid little attention to the individual level of analysis and has treated the actual decision-makers exogenously from the field of international relations.

Whilst it can be assumed that general factors such as national identities shape the identity of individuals and their outlook on the world to a considerable degree, this should not hide the fact that significant differences between for example members of an administration persist. What’s more, especially in the field of foreign policy certain individuals can be regarded as predominant leaders with the ability to give direction and make choices over a state’s foreign policy.\(^\text{11}\) With regard to Germany it is our working assumption that, despite the fact that all German governments for the last five decades have been coalition governments whereby the junior partner has traditionally held the post of foreign minister, the Chancellor sets the general policy guidelines and direction in foreign policy.\(^\text{12}\) Whilst, as Heisenberg has noted, this assumption was “not always completely warranted, and was especially problematic in the years when Hans-Dietrich Genscher of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) was Germany’s foreign minister during the Kohl-era”,\(^\text{13}\) studies on the Merkel-era have shown that Merkel

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managed to gain wide latitude from her coalition partner (as well as her own party) in handling domestic and foreign affairs.¹⁴

Hence while constructivist IR scholarship pays little attention to the identities and beliefs of individual foreign policy actors as such, cognitive approaches in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) have provided much insight on individual decision-makers. A myriad of cognitive approaches can be found in the field of FPA which inquire on the beliefs and images held by policy-makers, as well as how images and beliefs then impact on decision-making processes.¹⁵ Hereby different approaches have focussed on different aspects of human cognition: Studies on the operational code inquire on the overall beliefs held by policy-makers about the nature of politics in general,¹⁶ cognitive mapping inquires on actors beliefs towards particular issues in world politics,¹⁷ and research on images have emphasized the importance of images held of particular actors in world politics by policy-makers.¹⁸ It is the latter strand of cognitive scholarship, which this paper will mainly draw on. The central claim of image theory is that images predispose actors to pursue certain strategies as they create expectations of other actors’ behaviour and thus shape policy preferences; thereby leading to a propensity for certain policy choices in line with the overall image held of the other state.¹⁹ Images hereby function as organizers of information on the other country and provide

¹⁸ Herrmann and Fischerkeller, “Beyond the Enemy Image and Spiral Model.”
‘summary perceptions of the power, sophistication, threat, or opportunity’ of the other state.\textsuperscript{20} This, in turn, rests on the assumption that ‘policymakers monitor the situation in which they find themselves and engage in decision making that is guided by their cognitions’.\textsuperscript{21}

Attempting to explain the continuously highly adverse, conflictual relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the context of the Cold War, scholars argued that hostile images of the other (in that case the Soviet Union), were by and large self-perpetuating and in turn accounted for the conflict-ridden status quo of U.S.-Soviet relations.\textsuperscript{22} A study on the perceptions held by West Germany’s political elite of the Soviet Union produced similar findings.\textsuperscript{23} Other studies for instance have used this approach to explain the US policy towards Latin America\textsuperscript{24} or during the second Iraq war.\textsuperscript{25} All these studies infer that, once established, images and perceptions of the other state were rigid and resistant to change. Or as Robert Jervis put it: ‘We tend to believe that countries we like do things we like, support goals we favour, and oppose countries that we oppose’.\textsuperscript{26} Coming from there, image theory rests on the claim that the image policy-makers hold of other states are a decisive factor behind the strategies followed and the policies selected.\textsuperscript{27} And whilst the claim that understanding the images policy-makers have of other states can help us predict future

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{c24} Martha L. Cottam, \textit{Images and Intervention: U.S. Policies in Latin America} (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994); Blanton, “Images in Conflict.”
\end{thebibliography}
policies is subject to much debate,\textsuperscript{28} it has been widely argued that such understanding can provide for propensities especially in situations of uncertainty.\textsuperscript{29}

While the research on ‘enemy images’ throughout the Cold War provided significantly to our understanding of foreign policy decision making, it has been criticized for maintaining two large biases: it has almost exclusively centred on the images U.S. foreign policy-makers held of the Soviet Union during the Cold War;\textsuperscript{30} and by doing so, has exclusively focused on issues related to national security and international conflict – that is: “high politics”.\textsuperscript{31} Hence the scholarship on enemy images provides little theoretical guidance on how to approach actors and policy fields that do not fall easily into a friend-enemy dichotomy as well as images about states whose international relations are dominated by issues classified as “low politics” such as for example international trade. More so, the general emphasis in IR on conflict and enmity has been criticized as lacking empirical grounds. Most states more often than do not depict others per se as enemies. And they also more often than not engage in forms of cooperation, rather than enmity, with other states in the international sphere.\textsuperscript{32}

Hence it has been noted that using the enemy image in a generalized way ‘fails to capture the complex variation in images used in different contexts’.\textsuperscript{33}

In a response to the apparent shortcomings of the enemy image theory, scholars have identified additional images and thus extended the theoretical range of image idealtypes. Cottam for instance used three idealtypes of images - dependent, enemy and neutral - to


\textsuperscript{30} Herrmann and Fischerkeller, “Beyond the Enemy Image and Spiral Model,” 423.


categorize the perceptions of policy-makers in her study on U.S. policies towards Latin America.\textsuperscript{34} Herrmann and Fischerkeller suggested categorizing cognitive images of other states into six different idealtypes: enemies, allies, neutrals, dependents, hegemonists, and imperialists.\textsuperscript{35} Later scholarship also stressed the inter-subjective constitution of images of others and images of self. In other words: ‘people judge themselves as they judge others’.\textsuperscript{36} Hence how decision-makers perceive their own capabilities and powers vis-à-vis those of other states then impacts on the strategies chosen and policies implemented, because it can limit or enhance the perceived number of options available.\textsuperscript{37}

In line with this, image theory posits that the image one state holds of another is based on the perception of three dimensions: First, how is the other state perceived in terms of threats, opportunities to exploit, or chances for mutual gains?\textsuperscript{38} This first dimension has also been described as ‘goal compability’.\textsuperscript{39} Second, how is the other states’ relative power perceived?\textsuperscript{40} And third, how is the other state perceived with regard of its culture, its norms, and its values – especially in terms of similarity / dissimilarity to one’s self image? Herrmann and Fischerkeller conceive that: ‘Strategic choices will not be a function of perceived threats, opportunities, and relative power alone. These factors are affected by judgements about the culture of other actors and what norms of behaviour the other actor is likely to respect’.\textsuperscript{41} The perceptions of these three corresponding dimensions – power / capabilities, motivations / goals and values / norms - determine the image(s) that policy makers hold of another state.

\textbf{Methodology}

\textsuperscript{34} Cottam, \textit{Images and Intervention}.\
\textsuperscript{35} Herrmann and Fischerkeller, “Beyond the Enemy Image and Spiral Model.”\
\textsuperscript{36} Cottam, \textit{Images and Intervention}, 24.\
\textsuperscript{37} Blanton, “Images in Conflict,” 25.\
\textsuperscript{38} Herrmann and Fischerkeller, “Beyond the Enemy Image and Spiral Model,” 425.\
\textsuperscript{39} Alexander, Levin, and Henry, “Image Theory, Social Identity, and Social Dominance,” 29.\
\textsuperscript{40} Herrmann and Fischerkeller, “Beyond the Enemy Image and Spiral Model,” 425.\
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
It is certainly hardly possible to measure and observe the attitudes, beliefs or perceptions of any human being directly; that is through for instance a laboratory experiment. Hence this paper relies on at a distance observation of a leader’s perceptions, and the images they hold of other states, through the analysis of public communications made by leaders. Their images and perceptions are inferred from public communications of the leader. To this end this paper first and foremost draws on public speeches given by Merkel domestically and internationally in which she made remarks on China and German-Chinese relations.

The speeches were assembled using a database maintained by the German government (Bulletin der Bundesregierung). Between January 2006 and December 2012 Merkel referred to China in 221 speeches. This paper however is based on a pilot study, which only uses a selection of public communications by Merkel at key events before, during and after China visits by Merkel, visits to Germany by high-ranking Chinese officials, and a number of high-profile national and international events. It has been noted, furthermore, that speeches are often written by speech writers and not the policy makers themselves. In order to try to reduce the impact of these possible distortions, additional units of analysis, especially interviews and press conference statements, are used to balance speeches with data derived from more spontaneous forms of public communication. This serves as a way to be able to account the consistency of perceptions and images beyond data gathered from the analysis of carefully planned and crafted public speeches. Altogether 57 public communications were used for this study.

To identify the core attributes of communications, and to allow for their systematic analysis, the paper uses content analysis. Despite the fact that there is a significant body of theoretical

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43 http://archiv.bundesregierung.de/DE/Home/home_node.html
44 Herrmann, “Using Content Analysis to Study Public Figures,” 153.
literature on image theory and FPA which have established idealtypes and respective analytical categories, this paper follows an inductive approach. This is mainly because the established idealtypical images draw overtly on great power images, traditional measures of power (especially military power and threat perceptions), and related strategic choices such as containment, deterrence and the protection of U.S. geopolitical assets in the Third World.\textsuperscript{45}

With regard to Germany, which has been classified as a ‘middle power’, ‘trading state’ and ‘normative power’,\textsuperscript{46} we hold that employing these idealtypes and analytical categories would put our research design in danger of conceptual stretching. At the same time, there is very little scholarship on German foreign policy inquiring on the cognitive aspects of foreign policy for this paper to draw on as an alternative reference points. All these considerations made a deductive approach to this analysis difficult. What we took on, however, were the three general conceptual dimensions used by O’Reilly, capabilities of the other states, goals / motives of the other state, and policy preferences towards the other state, to guide our content analysis.\textsuperscript{47}

Hence it seemed more reasonable to derive the categories for the content analysis inductively. This was done by following a process of inductive content analysis, starting with the open coding of the material, the grouping of coding categories obtained from open coding under higher order headings, which were then formulated into categories including the respective recording units. To avoid the time-consuming task of reading through all compiled data material, the formulation of categories and recording units this was done on the basis of a


\textsuperscript{47} O’Reilly, “Perceiving Rogue States.”
representative sample\(^{48}\) of the compiled material. The analytical categories (see Tables 1, 2, 3) derived reflect the three general conceptual dimensions (capabilities, goals / motives, and policy actions) used to examine the phenomenon. The recording units established were based on particular conceptual themes rather than conceived as single grammatical entities (i.e. single words). This was done to allow the researcher the use of ‘contextual clues’ within the communications analyzed in order to link single words (or at times whole sentences) to wider themes.\(^{49}\)

\[\text{Table 1. } \text{Powers / Capabilities of China}\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What kind of capabilities does China hold internationally?</th>
<th>Ideational powers</th>
<th>Diplomatic powers</th>
<th>Economic powers</th>
<th>Transformative powers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

\(^{48}\) Out of the 57 public communications compiled for the analysis, we selected a representative sample consisting of speeches, press conference remarks and interviews by taking into consideration the three following criteria: (a) Location: The sampled material should include public communications that took place in China at Chinese institutions, as well as communications delivered outside of China (in Germany) to mainly non-Chinese listeners. (b) Audience: The target audiences should vary between political elites, business elites and civil society (i.e. academics at Universities). And (c) Date: The sampled material should range from 2006 – 2012.

Table 2. Motivations / Goals of China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivations / Goals of China</th>
<th>Improve international image</th>
<th>Increase international political weight</th>
<th>Gain access to international markets</th>
<th>Maintain domestic stability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What kind of motives and goals shape Chinas international behaviour?</td>
<td>Examples for recording unit: „China kämpft sehr darum, nicht als der aggressive Partner auf der Welt wahrgenommen zu werden“.</td>
<td>Examples for recording unit: “China und die anderen Schwellenländer möchten auch mehr Mitspracherechte im IWF, in der Weltbank, im G-20-Prozess“.</td>
<td>Examples for recording unit: “Insofern ist in den letzten Jahren einiges an Investitionen chinesischer Unternehmen in Deutschland (…) passsiert“.</td>
<td>Examples for recording unit: “China will seine Entwicklung Schritt für Schritt fortsetzen, ohne dass es zu inneren Spannungen kommt“.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Policy preferences towards China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic cooperation</th>
<th>International rule of law</th>
<th>Share responsibilities in global governance</th>
<th>Address human rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

However, it needs to be noted that a purely inductive, and in this sense methodologically “uncontaminated”, scan of Merkel’s public texts on China is impossible. The researcher
certainly lacks a pathway to interpret the public communications without imposing some, explicit or implicit, a priori assumptions\textsuperscript{50} – in our case information gathered by the researcher prior to the analysis over the general nature of German-Chinese relations, issues of contestation between the two countries, and important events that have shaped German-Chinese relations. Furthermore, it has been noted that inductive approaches can run into danger of ‘circular reasoning’ as the set of abstract categories is derived from the same body of data as the analysis is based upon.\textsuperscript{51} To minimize the risk for circular reasoning the ad-hoc categories, which were obtained from a representative set of speeches, were later tested against a larger set of public communications during the course of the analysis.

**Chinabilder: Merkel’s perceptions of China**

*Capabilities of China*

The power capabilities attributed to China by Chancellor Merkel are primarily economic. As reported in table 4, almost half the time (46.87\%) when Merkel talks about China’s capabilities and powers in international affairs, China is described as an economic powerhouse. It seems safe to state that China is therefore predominantly seen by Merkel as one of Germany’s most important economic partners and as a dynamic market with continuously strong growth rates. Within this context she often stresses the growing bilateral trade volume, and the fact that China has is not simply buying German products, but has grown to become an export-oriented economy during the last decade.\textsuperscript{52} These data conform to conventional wisdom over the German-Chinese relations. A cursory look at the scholarship


\textsuperscript{52} Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel MdB, Asienkongress der CDU/CSU-Bundestagsfraktion, Berlin 26.10.07.
on German-Chinese relations, as well as media comments and op-eds in German newspaper, reveal that the main prism through which German-Chinese relations are viewed and discussed is economic. During her second term in office, however, a new attribute is added to the image of China as one of Germany’s most important economic partners: that of a competitor. From 2010 onwards China is regarded by Merkel increasingly as a “competitor in many aspects”, and she hereby seems furthermore to assume that this competition will become more and more intense. These “many aspects” are understood to be mainly economic, but also incorporate China’s ideational powers: “The economic competition is getting fiercer, with all the opportunities and risks that globalization entails (…). Yet, there is also a competition over values, ways of life and the way societies operate”. Despite this, Merkel has been quick to state that China, despite its rapid economic growth, is not viewed with suspicion, or as a threat, by her. Rather she has pointed out that she still sees China’s rise predominantly as an opportunity for Germany as a strong export-oriented nation as China’s economic development will increase demands for German products by Chinese consumers. Merkel has described these developments as a “win-win situation” (030212 SP).

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53 Pressestatement von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel am 17. Juli 2010 in Xi’an, Xi’an 17.07.10.
55 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel bei der Eröffnung des Deutsch-Chinesischen Wirtschaftsforums am 3. Februar 2012 in Kanton, Kanton 03.02.12.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power category</th>
<th>No. of mentions</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideational</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$n = 42$

These public communication notwithstanding during various times of her second term Merkel has stressed Germany’s, and since the start of the Eurocrisis also the EU’s, growing dependence on international trade with China: “We are now beginning to realize: If economic growth in these countries (referring to Asian countries, first and foremost China) is slowing down, than the repercussions of this are directly felt by the German economy”.

This assessment of Germany’s, and Europe’s more generally, growing economic dependence on rising powers such as China, is often framed by Merkel’s view of Germany as a trading state and “Exportnation”. Accordingly Germany’s economic growth is viewed by Merkel as largely driven by the export-sector. Adding to this growing perception of Germanys dependence on continuing Chinese growth, Merkel has repeatedly argued that China has managed to overcome the global financial crisis quicker than most other states, and thus has in turn enabled other states, especially Germany, to overcome the crisis as well: “China has managed to surmount the international financial and economic crisis in an impressive manner

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56 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel anlässlich des 10. Deutschen Weltbankforums, Frankfurt 20.11.08.
57 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel anlässlich des Jahrestreffens 2011 des World Economic Forum, Davos 28.01.11.
and has thereby made a contribution to the abilities of others, especially Germany as an export-oriented nation but other nations as well, to overcome the crisis, too”. 58

The increasing dependence on China in the context of the global financial crisis, especially for Germany’s economic growth rates, is, many times in the same sentence, linked to transformative effects China’s rise will have on the international order. 30% of the time when Merkel discusses China’s power and capabilities she does so talking about China’s transformative power. She expressed this for example with regards to the financial crisis by stating that: “The financial crisis will reshuffle the cards as new power-centres and balances will emerge. Now that we emerge from the crisis with renewed growth we only need to look at the economic importance of Asia, especially China, to see evidence for this”. 59 Accordingly, “the rise of China, India and other countries to become dynamic economies has made the world in the 21st century a different place compared to the 20th century”. 60 While these statements could lend themselves to an interpretation of Chinas transformative power simply in economic terms, thus rendering the second analytical category largely obsolete, Merkel mainly discusses what is categorized as transformative power with regard to wider political transformations, such as Chinas increasing influence in international politics, and its importance as an actor involved in the resolution of international conflicts such as North Korea or Sudan. 61 Again, Merkel reiterates hereby that in all those cases solutions will be impossible without Chinese engagement.

Chinas transformative power is viewed by Merkel as strongest when it comes to issues of global governance. A recurring theme hereby is Merkel’s understanding that the G8, because

59 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel anlässlich ihres Besuchs des Instituts für nationale Sicherheitsstudien (Institute for National Security Studies), Tel Aviv 01.02.11.
60 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel vor dem Kongress der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, Washington 03.11.09.
61 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel anlässlich des 10. Deutschen Weltbankforums, Frankfurt 20.11.08.
of the ascendency of China, India and other rising powers, “is not the group anymore which can foster a global order for the world”. Especialy climate change is a global governance issue that according to Merkel is impossible to tackle without China as a “trustful” partner – mainly because China has overtaken the U.S. as the world’s largest Co2 emitter. Other global governance issues Merkel refers to when talking about Chinas transformative power are the regulation of the global financial markets, the global supply of natural resources and energy, and nuclear proliferation. While earlier remarks on Chinas transformative power are often combined with the postulation that China “will take on more responsibilities in the world”, later statements reveal more pessimistic undertones as China is increasingly viewed as reluctant to give up national sovereignties and at times unwilling to become stronger integrated in international multilateral frameworks. During a speech at the G20 summit in Seoul 2011, Merkel stated that: “One has to say that that the companionship of China and India, the question what national sovereignty means, and the question if we are willing to become embedded into international agreements, all present considerable barriers for the finalization of such agreements (the Copenhagen climate accord, the author)” . Hence China is with regards to its growing economic power, and its role as a “Gestaltungsmacht” viewed as an actor that is currently re-shaping and transforming the international order – and China is assumed to enlarge its role hereby in the future.

With regard to the third category, institutional power, we can find a slightly different perception. China’s role in international institutions is mainly portrayed by Merkel as a

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62 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel auf dem Kolloquium "Neue Welt, neuer Kapitalismus", Paris 08.01.09.
63 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel an der Stanford University, Palo Alto 15.04.10.
64 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel vor der Chinesischen Akademie für Sozialwissenschaften am 28. August 2007 in Peking, Beijing 28.08.07.
65 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel beim G20-Business-Summit in Seoul, Seoul 11.11.10.
66 According to the “Gestaltungsmächtekonzept” of the German government (see footnote 5), a Gestaltungsmacht has the power to shape political decision-making processes, to solve macro-level problems and resolve conflict by negotiation.
disabler rather than a transformer or change agent. Especially with regard to its role in the UN China is almost exclusively viewed one-dimensionally as a veto power in the UN Security Council, unwilling to yield their veto powers for a reform of the UN system, and thus as a state which within international institutions operates independently from the demands, and from the influence, of outside powers.\textsuperscript{67} Cooperation with China in international institution, albeit often stipulated by Merkel, is therefore generally viewed as a difficult endeavour - unless in the future “we manage to, at the same time, share common values”.\textsuperscript{68} However, at no time in the public communications analyzed for this paper does Merkel refer to China with regard to its military capabilities, or expresses views regarding China’s future potential to become a security threat.

\textit{Motivations}

When alluding to China’s motivations and aims, Angela Merkel predominantly views China’s motivations to be based on economic objectives, specifically to gain and maintain access to international markets. As reported in table 5, over 40% of Merkel’s public communications on China’s motives and goals in international affairs, as well as with regard to German-Chinese relations, touch on economic aspects. Very much in line with Merkel’s view of China’s capacities and powers, which are also seen as predominantly economic, it can be assumed that Merkel perceives much of China’s international behaviour to be motivated and driven by economic concerns and interests. A key objective of China hereby is to gain market-economy status at the WTO after the expiry of the 15-year transitional period that started in 2001 during which China had agreed upon non-market status. Meanwhile, China in order to gain and maintain access to international markets “orients itself in many

\textsuperscript{67} Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel anlässlich der Veranstaltung der Stiftung Ordnungspolitik, Freiburg 23.02.11.
\textsuperscript{68} Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel auf dem Asienkongress der CDU/CSU-Bundestagsfraktion, Berlin 26.10.07.
directions”. This includes in Merkel’s view establishing ever stronger trade relations with Europe, but also with the U.S. and other regions of the world. With regard to Europe, Merkel believes that Germany, as Europe’s largest economy, plays a central role in the context of Chinas overall aim to augment their international trade relations, as well as with regard to the attempts of the Chinese government to have the EU recognise China as a full market economy under World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules, which would remove many restrictions for Chinese companies. Again, these data seem to confirm conventional wisdom on China’s key interests and objectives in international affairs, which are believed to be mainly driven by economic concerns.

*Table 5. Chinas motives and objectives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation category</th>
<th>No. of mentions</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to int. markets</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain internal stability</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve international image</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase int. pol. weight</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ n = 19 \]

However, a closer look at Merkel’s public communications reveals that during her first term in office Merkel discusses observes China’s economic objectives mainly in terms of gaining access to international markets in order to sell Chinese products and in terms of securing

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69 China schaut sehr interessiert auf die EU”, Interview mit Angela Merkel, Die Welt 01.02.12.

access to natural resources, while later statements also hint at China as a potential investor in Germany. Exemplary for the early view is a quote from a speech given in 2006 in Shanghai: “We know that China pursues a very strategic natural resources policy, and hereby, from our point of view, pays less consideration to questions over which states are strengthened through the trade in natural resources than we’d like it to”.\footnote{Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel vor der Deutschen Handelskammer am 23. Mai 2006 in Shanghai, Shanghai 23.05.06.} China’s hunger for natural resources, which is according to Merkel largely driven by the country’s rapid domestic economic development, is furthermore also having an impact on the price development for natural resources in ways unbeknownst in earlier periods.\footnote{Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel bei der offiziellen Eröffnung der Veranstaltungsreihe „Deutschland und China – Gemeinsam in Bewegung“ am 28. August 2007 in Nanjing, Nanjing 28.08.07.}

While China’s drive to secure access to natural resources by maintaining close trade relations with many different states in different parts of the world, regardless of their regime type or their human rights record, is described by Merkel as not in line with Germanys, in her own words “value driven” foreign policy, China’s overall objective of gaining access to international markets is not endorsed with negative attributes. Quite the contrary, and very much at opposite ends of public opinion, Germany as an “open economy” (offene Volkswirtschaft) will, whilst facing increasing competition from China,\footnote{China schaut sehr interessiert auf die EU", Interview mit Angela Merkel, Die Welt 01.02.12.} allow for Chinese access to the German market – based on fair conditions for free trade between Germany and China such as that “we have a level playing field when it comes to competition conditions” and we “do not face any import barriers”.\footnote{Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel und Ministerpräsident Wen Jiabao in Peking Fr, 16.07.2010, Beijing 16.07.10.}

Merkel’s perception of China’s motives being primarily economic fits with her views on China’s increased willingness to improve its international image and to embed itself in multilateral institutions. Whilst Merkel does not often refer to Chinese attempts to improve
Chinas international image as a main motive behind the country’s international behaviour - only 12% of her public communications regarding Chinas motives and objectives contain references to Chinese attempts to improve its international image – it is nonetheless interesting to note that according to Merkel Chinas attempts to improve its international image will make the country generally more willing to abide to established rules: “China struggles a lot not to be perceived as an aggressive partner on the world stage. And I believe this is why China will also be inclined to stick to certain rules”.75 And further to this: “I am convinced that with the growing presence of Chinese companies on the European markets and on the German market, China will also understand how important it is to protect intellectual property rights(…).76

Similarly the few times Merkel discusses Chinese attempts to increase their country’s international political power in the future, this is always directly linked to multilateral institutions such the IMF, and the World Bank, as well as the G 20 process. Asked in an interview whether China’s foreign policy is about to change from an inward looking, introvert policy to a more expansionist one, Merkel replied that “China is explicitly and resolutely representing its interests. And we do so, too. Against this background we are both trying to tackle the pressing issues of our time”.77

What Merkel does address strongly – in almost 35% of her public communications on China’s motives – are Chinese attempts to maintain the internal stability of the country through continuing economic growth. Accordingly, and despite remarks that Chinas international role is set to grow in the coming years, China is viewed as having a line of

75 „Die FDP ist unser bevorzugter Koalitionspartner“, Interview mit Angela Merkel, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 12.04.08.
76 Pressestatement von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel zur Chinareise am 4. Februar 2012 in Kanton, Kanton 04.02.12.
77 “China schaut sehr interessiert auf die EU”, Interview mit Angela Merkel, Die Welt 01.02.12.
vision that is still mainly inward looking.\textsuperscript{78} Hence fears over a unilateral turn in Chinese foreign policy are not to be found in the public communications analyzed for this paper. Coming from there, Merkel sees Chinas economic motives and objectives in the international sphere as being determined by domestic affairs: “China wants to carry on with its development step by step without the occurrence of internal conflicts and tensions”.\textsuperscript{79} Also, Merkel frequently refers to the “enormous challenges” the Chinese government faces, which range from education to its welfare system, poverty reduction, environmental protection, vast regional differences in terms of economic productivity and standards of living, and infrastructure to name but a few.\textsuperscript{80} These concerns and “fears over a disintegration of China” are said to be reoccurring themes in talks with the Chinese leadership.\textsuperscript{81} More so, Merkel’s perception of Chinas aims and goals in international politics seem to be based on an understanding of China as a country that is still largely inward looking due to numerous domestic challenges.

\textit{Policy preferences toward China}

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Merkel views Germany’s policies towards China mainly through an economic lens. Over a third of her public communications addressing Germany’s strategies and policies toward China do so through the prism of economic cooperation (see table 6). Merkel repeatedly stated that economic cooperation is “without a doubt the most important pillar of the bridge between both our countries”.\textsuperscript{82} The primacy of economic cooperation in Germany’s policies towards China is hereby largely derived from an assessment of the growth potential of the European market – which Merkel numerous times describes as

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel bei der Eröffnung des Deutsch-Chinesischen Wirtschaftsforums am 3. Februar 2012 in Kanton, Kanton 03.02.12.
\textsuperscript{80} Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel anlässlich des 10. Deutschen Weltbankforums, Frankfurt 20.11.08.
\textsuperscript{81} "China schaut sehr interessiert auf die EU", Interview mit Angela Merkel, Die Welt 01.02.12.
\textsuperscript{82} Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel beim 6. Deutsch-Chinesischen Forum für wirtschaftliche und technologische Zusammenarbeit, Berlin 28.06.11.
“limited”, hence concluding that: “We can only grow if we continue to be able to sell our products in Europe and outside of Europe”. Because of Europe’s limited growth potential in economic terms, Germany needs expansion beyond Europe in its search for future partners and markets. In this search, according to Merkel, Germany must not only venture beyond its traditional partners in Europe, but also beyond its transatlantic relations.

Table 6. **Policy preferences towards China**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy category</th>
<th>No. of mentions</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic cooperation</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>35.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International rule of law</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address Human rights</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share responsibilities in global governance</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17.83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ n = 38 \]

Good relations with China are viewed as a “Zukunftsfraue” (literally translated as: question of the future, or better: as a question of great future significance) for Germany. This is because Asia, particularly China, is viewed as the most dynamic markets with strong growth rates. In line with this, and because of Germanys increasing economy dependency on China, good economic relations form in Merkel’s view the backbone of German-Chinese relations. Coming from there, the stable development of China, which Merkel has framed exclusively in economic terms such as continuously high economic growth rates, is central to Germanys

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83 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel vor der Deutschen Handelskammer am 23. Mai 2006 in Shanghai, Shanghai 23.05.06.  
85 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel an der Stanford University, Palo Alto 15.04.10.
overall foreign policy interests. Hence the attributes used to describe German-Chinese relations are positive: China is described by Merkel as a partner and not as an adversary. In line with this she views Germany’s role in its relations with China as that of a reliable partner: “With our 2,500 companies from Germany operating in China we want to be a good, reliable partner for China in the future”. Emphasizing the economic interdependencies between China and Germany, the basis for future partnership and economic cooperation with China rest on open markets, the abolishment of protectionist barriers and free and fair competition. The calls for economic partnerships notwithstanding, Merkel furthermore refers to China, much in line with her assessment of China’s transformative powers, as an increasingly important partner in the field of global governance. Central policy fields mentioned when Merkel’s refers to themes of “shared responsibilities in a globalized world” are climate change, energy efficiency and resource efficiency.

That China is hereby viewed by Merkel as a “harter Verhandler” (a party that is tough in negotiations) is directly linked with her second main policy theme – that of attempts to stronger embed China into multilateral forums in order to ensure China’s abidance by international rules and laws, The latter in turn is viewed as a precondition for the establishment of open markets and free and fair competition. With regard to the compliance with international rules and legal standards, however, China’s lack of compliance is for the time being viewed as a “problem”; and the implementation of existing laws as “leaving a lot


87 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel beim Besuch der Firma Siemens Numerical Control (SNC) zum 10-jährigen Bestehen und zur Einweihung des Erweiterungsbaus am 29. August 2007 in Nanjing, Nanjing 29.08.07.

88 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel zur Einleitung eines Gesprächs mit Studenten des Deutsch-Chinesischen Rechtsinstituts am 28. August 2007 in Nanjing, Nanjing 28.08.07.

89 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel anlässlich der 5. Tagung des Deutsch-Chinesischen Forums für industrielle und technologische Zusammenarbeit, Berlin 29.01.09.

90 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel anlässlich des Besuchs der Chinesischen Akademie der Sozialwissenschaften (CASS) am 2. Februar 2012 in Peking, Beijing 02.02.12.
to be desired”. More so, for Germany as a “Technologieführer”, a leader in technology development, legal certainty, a reliable legal framework, and the compliance with international law are of utmost importance. Showcasing this second theme, and the policy preferences associated with it, is the following statement:

“I myself have time and again indicated, that we, from the German point of view, will act tough (against violations of intellectual property by Chinese companies), because it should be absolutely clear that it is also our technological know-how which helps us maintain our wealth and prosperity. This is why we need international rules. We will therefore, during the German G8 presidency next year, put the protection of intellectual property on the agenda. And because of the fact that China surely is being brought closer to the G8 process, it will be made very explicit that the protection of intellectual property is part of the overall etiquette of conducting international commerce”.

What’s palpable hereby is that China’s integration into multilateral frameworks to ensure its compliance with international law is framed mainly in economic terms: Merkel almost exclusively refers to the protection of intellectual property when discussing the objectives behind policies aiming at China’s integration in multilateral forums - without providing much reference to other, political or security, issues. On the bilateral level, the Rechtsstaatsdialog (rule of law dialogue) between China and Germany, which was initiated under Merkel’s predecessor to “seek improvements in legal and judicial practices” as well as human rights (Gottwald 2006: 252), is frequently mentioned by Merkel as the appropriate forum to discuss problems over the protection of property rights. The importance of pursuing these policies is mainly justified by alluding to Germany’s position as a “Technologieführer“ in the global economy.

Human rights in China, a policy field in which Merkel upon her ascendancy to the Chancellery claimed to distinguish herself from previous governments by having the

91 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel bei der offiziellen Eröffnung der Veranstaltungsreihe „Deutschland und China – Gemeinsam in Bewegung“ am 28. August 2007 in Nanjing, Nanjing 28.08.07.
92 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel auf dem Hochtechnologie-Dialogforum am 22. Mai 2006 in Peking, Beijing 22.05.06.
93 Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel vor der Deutschen Handelskammer am 23. Mai 2006 in Shanghai, Shanghai 23.05.06.
“courage” to voice criticism over the human rights situations in China, are also mentioned frequently in her public communications on Germany’s policy preferences toward China. At all times during her time in office she refers to the human rights aspect in Germany’s foreign policy towards China as “an important part of our cooperation (with China)” and as an issue that is frequently discussed during meetings with the Chinese government. However, when moving beyond the plentiful references to the issue of human rights as a main policy preference toward China, we find a change in the attributes featured in Merkel’s public communications on human rights policies. Whilst she, during her first term in office, has raised the expectation that her strategy if constantly addressing the issue of human rights in talks with the Chinese would, albeit very slowly and only in the long run, lead to an improvement of the human rights situation in China, Merkel increasingly refers to fundamental differences in opinion between Berlin and Beijing over the issue of human rights during her second term. This is in line with Merkel’s assessment of China’s growing powers and assertiveness on the world stage, which do not, in her view, enable Germany to have significant influence on domestic policies in China. Furthermore references to human rights issues such as Tibet are in 2011 and 2012 followed by strong emphasis on a stable development of China as one of Germany’s main trade partners. And whilst Merkel regards human rights as an important part of (contemporary and future) German-Chinese cooperation, at no point does she refer to the differences over the issue as problematic or as an obstacle.

94 “China: Mut zu kritischen Tönen”, Interview mit Angela Merkel, ZDF 23.05.06.
95 Pressekonferenz mit Ministerpräsident Wen Jiabao, Beijing 22.05.06.
96 "China schaut sehr interessiert auf die EU", Interview mit Angela Merkel, Die Welt 01.02.12.
97 “China: Mut zu kritischen Tönen”, Interview mit Angela Merkel, ZDF 23.05.06.
98 Pressestatements von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel und dem chinesischen Premierminister Wen in Peking, Beijing 02.02.12; "China schaut sehr interessiert auf die EU", Interview mit Angela Merkel, Die Welt 01.02.12.
99 Pressestatement von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel zur Chinareise, Kanton 04.02.12.
What’s more, her policy preferences are devoid of any references to policy actions such as policies to contain China, to increase pressure on China or to isolate China.

**Conclusion**

Whilst many-sided, the views held by Merkel over China’s power capabilities and motives are, over the period examined, relatively stable. We found no significant increase or decrease of the number of recording units in any of the analytical categories examined for this paper.

Foremost, the data on Merkel’s views of China’s power and its capabilities illustrate that her dominant perception of China is one of an economic powerhouse. Regarding China as a strong economic player far exceeds considerations over its influence in international institutions and over the competition between the so-called Chinese model of development and the so-called liberal Western model on the ideational level. In describing China’s economic strength and power, however, Merkel also strongly ties China’s economic power with the rise of the country and, according to her view, China’s ability to fundamentally transform the international order in the nearby future.

Furthermore, in describing the motives and objectives of China, Merkel ascribes much of China’s international behaviour as driven by economic concerns. Gaining access to international markets is regarded as China’s primary motive when engaging in international affairs. With regard to such motives, we found a slight shift in Merkel’s description of the country’s economic objectives from simply gaining access to international markets to sell Chinese products to a view that also increasingly views China as a potential investor abroad. Relatively fewer expressions can be found in Merkel’s public communications on Chinese attempts to improve their international image or to increase their diplomatic influence. We assume that this is mainly because of strong references given to the other, according to Merkel, main driver of Chinese foreign policy: to ensure continuously high economic growth.
rates to preserve the internal stability of the country. Nearly as often as she refers to China’s economic power and China’s interest in gaining market access, does she describe China as a country that continues to face enormous domestic challenges. Hence we suggest that Merkel’s view of the main motives / driving forces behind China’s international relations is one that gives strong emphasis to the economic objectives of a still by and large inward-looking nation.

Based on Merkel’s perception of Germany as an export-driven trading state, her policy preferences toward China are equally dominated by economic concerns. Repeatedly it is stressed that good relations with China are a “Zukunftsfrage” for Germany. Hence strong emphasis is given to the abolition of trade barriers between the two countries and the establishment of a level playing field for bilateral commercial relations. Germany hereby first and foremost seeks to be a reliable partner. China’s increasing economic weight, as well as the estimation that it’ll, on the basis of its growing economic strength, transform the international order, are hereby not described as a threat for Germany. None of public communications reveal references made to China as a threat or the need to deter or contain Chinese power. On the contrary, Merkel has spent considerable amounts of time to portray this as an opportunity for an export-driven trading state such as Germany. In line with this, the second main policy preference expressed by Merkel is to embed China stronger in multilateral frameworks such as the WTO to try to ensure future compliance of China to international rules – especially in the domain of intellectual property rights. Again, embedding China in multilateral frameworks is primarily framed by references to commercial interests. Seemingly also driven by the notion of the rise of China are references given to the need to further integrate China in global governance policies, especially with regard to climate change and resource efficiency.
Almost one-fifth of the time that is used by Merkel to describe Germany’s China policy is spend on stressing the need to incorporate human rights aspects. This seems at first sight totally at odds with the previously laid out relationship dimensions as China’s increasing power in world politics, Germany’s growing economic dependency on China, and China’s focus on the maintenance of domestic stability, suggests little room for manoeuvre and even less success in promoting human rights as part of Germany’s China policy. In line with this we suggest that these remarks are primarily directed at Merkel’s domestic audience – this also manifests itself in a significantly stronger emphasis given to human rights issues in China in public communications directed at a German audience – rather than being indicators of a “value-driven” turn in Germany’s China policy under Merkel. And while we found that there is no significant decrease in the salience of human rights issues in Merkel’s public communications on China, said theme is often directly bound up with remarks over the fact that Berlin and Beijing share different views on this issue. If we take a more in-depth look at the content of her public communications made in China on the human rights dialogue and the description of its purpose, it can be noted that the main thread hereby is not so much on human rights per se but on administrative and judicial reform. Also at no time has she alluded to the human rights situation in China as an obstacle, or as something that stands in the way, to Germany’s strategic partnership with China. Generally we noted that the German chancellor, when describing her policy preferences toward China, has avoided any hints that could be interpreted as an “us versus them” image; rather Merkel at all times emphasizes the cooperative nature of German-Chinese relations and the need to further strengthen the existing partnership between the two countries.

With regard to the inference one can make, based on this paper, over the future direction of Germany’s China policy, it needs to be admitted that predicting future policy choices on the basis of general images alone is a very thorny issue. As various studies in the field of Foreign
Policy Analysis have illustrated, decisions are often taken on the basis of a case-specific understanding of a given situation and only on such basis are they then linked to wider, more general images of a particular country. However, this paper illustrates the consistency of Merkel’s China image, which lends itself to the suggestion that future policies are unlikely to alternate between contrasting, or even contradicting, policy preferences as we did not find many expressions over a policy dilemma between “Werten” (values) and “Wirtschaft” (business) in the first place.

With regard to the theoretical framework used for this paper, we illustrated that the main analytical categories in the literature are by and large ill-suited to explain Germany’s foreign policy. This is because the theoretical literature on image theory and foreign policy making almost exclusively have developed idealtypes and analytical categories which rest on binary friend-enemy distinctions derived from case studies in the field of U.S. foreign policy which mainly focus on high politics such as nuclear deterrence. It has therefore so far largely produced idealtypes and analytical categories that are of little use for theorizing on the (often) low politics of a trading state such as Germany.

Bibliography


