

## **The Impact of the Russo-Ukrainian War on Sino-German Relations**

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates how Sino-German relations would be impacted by the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022. The relations between both Eurasian partners were found to be significantly influenced by US-German relations. The theory of Historical Cycles by cultural philosopher Oswald Spengler was used as an analytical tool. As a consequence of the war, findings suggested a far-reaching, permanent decline of Germany's industrial-financial base until the 2030s. A potential Trump government could facilitate such a result. Also triggered by the war, Berlin would predominantly act in alignment with an American lead – Beijing and Berlin's strategic partnership could fail.

While China and Russia would most likely stay free of America's influence, Washington would probably be able to dominate Germany, Europe, the West, and perhaps most of the world.

**Keywords:** *China, Germany, Oswald Spengler, America, Donald Trump*

## 1. Introduction

The intent of the comparativist, qualitative research was to examine how Sino-German political relations would be affected by the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022. Also, development trends and future projections for US-German political relations were analyzed by focusing on historical, geopolitical, cultural, and economic aspects. Such an analysis mattered, as US-German political relations posed as the most significant factor impacting Sino-German relations. The Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 was understood as a proxy war between a rising Eastern camp with Russia and China – and a Western bloc with the United States of America and Germany.

Although Russia's large-scale invasion of neighbouring Ukraine began on 24th February 2022, the roots of the conflict go back to 2014. In February 2014, pro-Russian Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych was overthrown because of a pro-Western revolution. In response, Moscow occupied the Ukrainian Crimea peninsula with Russia's most important naval base in Sevastopol in March 2014 – and later annexed it. Moreover, Russia has supported the eastern Ukrainian, self-declared rebel republics of Donetsk and Luhansk in their attempt to break away from Kyiv's control since April 2014. The territories of both separatist entities were settled by ethnic Russians (Mbah and Wasum, 2022: 145; Oxford Analytica, 2022a: 7; van Bergeijk, 2022: 581). In February 2022, Russian troops entered Ukrainian territory from the north, south, and

east. The biggest land war in Europe since 1945 began, judging by the territorial size of the nations involved. While the Russians had to give up an attempt to seize the capital city of Kyiv, and while Russian troops were advancing slowly, the Russian army could seize large territories in eastern and south-eastern Ukraine – including a land corridor to the Crimea peninsula. Western nations were quick to provide military and humanitarian support to Ukraine – to condemn the Russian actions – and passed sanction packages of many dimensions, far exceeding economic restrictions during times of the Cold War. The purpose was to hurt Russia economically which Moscow could to a considerable extent circumvent due to increased oil and gas prices (Mbah and Wasum, 2022: 149-151; Oxford Analytica, 2022a: 6; van Bergeijk, 2022: 572-573).

Political experts (Oxford Analytica, 2022b: 9) attested to the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022's long-term potential in affecting relations between Beijing and Berlin. Members of the German Green Party, part of a newly elected government coalition since 2021, have already opposed Beijing accessing sensitive German technology and stronger economic links between both Eurasian partners (*ibid.*: 11). A decline in economic collaboration could then also easily affect political relations (Ehret, 2019: 3). More studies were needed to understand the research topic to its full extent, especially since the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 was still ongoing and events were unfolding (Oxford Analytica, 2022a: 7). The relations between both Eurasian partners would also significantly be affected by US-German relations as the single most influential variable (Ehret, 2019: 14-15).

Preceding research literature on US-German relations, especially during Trump's reign (Aunesluoma, 2020: 14; Felbermayr, 2018: 260; Kanat, 2018: 10-11; Mahmood and Cheema, 2018: 17-18), overlooked largely the nature and extent of the existing rivalry. A study of the Trump administration provided insight, as bilateral conflict potential was

more obvious to notice (Brattberg, 2020). But researchers often used only limited theoretical frameworks, producing only limited results (Ehret, 2019: 7). In a comparison with the preceding Trump presidency and to identify similarities and differences, US-German relations were also analyzed, with a focus on the Biden presidency from 2021 on.

Research intent was to answer three research questions: how would the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 impact US-German relations? How would US-German relations affect Sino-German relations? How would the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 affect if the partnership between the USA and Germany remained politically more important than the one between China and Germany? Germany served as a facilitator for either the USA to maintain its current power position or for China to become the leading power on the planet. The research was important, as the end of the US-German conflict would eventually decide about the status of the globe's strongest power.

Research hypotheses were that the US-German rivalry would reach its conclusion in the 2020s or the early 2030s (Spengler, 1918, 1922 / 1998: 93). The conflict could be resolved with an essential decline in Germany's economic and political status. Berlin's irreversible links with the United States would be more important than Germany's relations with Beijing. Both Eurasian nations' strategic partnership would probably not survive. Their economic cooperation would experience a decline. Moreover, America would remain the world's dominant but limited power.

German historian Oswald Spengler's theoretical framework proved valuable in the study context. Spengler had identified eight highly developed cultures that went through the same stages of development within approximately 1,000 years. Each high culture had unique elements that were different from any other, but the developments would

follow very similar patterns. The development patterns of an older high culture, like the Greek-Roman Ancient one, could therefore be projected against Western future developments. The theory of Historical Cycles allowed the study of relations between Western countries like the United States and Germany, including conflict potential, but also the study of interactions between Western countries and non-Western ones like China. Moreover, the explanatory model allowed not only the study of Russia's relations with the West but also examination of the US-German rivalry in its real nature and to a broader extent. Spengler disapproved of the common notion that history would develop in a linear form.

## **2. Literature Review: Study Context and Background**

### ***2.1. American-German Relations in the Build-up to the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 (2017-2022)***

The keywords “American”, “German”, and “relation” were researched on multiple Internet media platforms with academic background, focusing on content published in 2016 or later. The publications were used for literature review. Also, the Russo-Ukrainian War already existed during this time but had a more limited scope. The self-declared rebels in the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk have tried since 2014 to achieve independence from the central government. As it could provide insight into eventual future developments, investigating the political nature of US-German relations during the time of the Trump presidency (2017-2021) was important. Plus, studying US-German relations during the time of Trump enabled a comparison with the time of Biden. Of both US presidents, Trump could connect better with Russia's Vladimir Putin. The academic mainstream reached the consensus that American-German relations reached a new low during the reign of Trump. The real estate mogul in the White House believed

that Germany could not be trusted as it would be acting against vital US interests (*Financial Times*, 27th April 2018). Moreover, Trump even complained about Germany using EU institutions as a tool to establish cultural and political control over Europe (Ivanov, 2019). He denounced the German government for using a weaker euro to help its export-based economic system (*Asia News Monitor*, 7th February 2017). Because of the competitive German automotive industry, Trump even threatened the entire EU with a trade war (*Asia News Monitor*, 4th November 2020). Trump's attitude caused an appropriate response in the EU. Germany began a closer security and military collaboration with neighbouring France (Reuters, 16th February 2018). Berlin also perceived France's privileged UN status and its intelligence services as useful (Lehne and Grabbe, 2017). Paris offered the German government to create a united European Union Army for protection against a potential American threat (Aunesluoma, 2020: 14; Ehret, 2019: 7).

One of Trump's targets was the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. The Trump administration imposed sanctions against the project to protect national interests (Larres and Wittlinger (eds.), 2020: 67). Berlin and Moscow had decided in 2015 to create another pipeline on the ground of the Baltic Sea, which would directly lead from the German Greifswald to the Russian Ust-Luga (Stent, 2019: 97-123). Escobar (2021) explained that the pipeline would give Germany its independence back, put Germany in charge of Europe's energy security, and strengthen Berlin's power over Europe. Moreover, the pipeline could enable a close partnership between Germany, Russia, and China, which would end American world dominance due to its natural strength (Escobar, 2021). Russia would serve as the Eurasian land bridge between Germany and China.

In 2016, the American intellectuals Mills and Rosefielde published a work on the challenges of future US foreign policy – and what role

Trump could play to address them. The publication helped the reader better understand how Trump and his voters were thinking. The writers described Germany as America's opponent, who could defeat the US (Mills and Rosefielde, 2016: 68). According to both scholars, the Western world was then divided into the EU under Berlin's control and North America and the United Kingdom under Washington's leadership. By extending the EU towards the east, Germany could move the US into a confrontation with Russia. Also, a weakened euro would only help the export-based German economic system (*ibid.*: 141). Mills and Rosefielde (2016: 145) indirectly justified an eventual US aggression against the EU. The writings were both alarming and misguided. America was driving Germany into a confrontation with Russia. The Obama administration strongly encouraged the 2014 revolution in Ukraine, which significantly ended Moscow's influence on its neighbouring country (Hahn, 2018: 327). Polish-born, former American national security advisor Zbigniew Brzeziński already made it clear in *The Grand Chessboard* that Russia should be limited to being a "gateway to Asia" (Brzeziński, 1997: 52). The result is well known: the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2014, which escalated in 2022 into a major conflict.

Also, Mills and Rosefielde's remarks on how the euro was used by Germany and how Germany dominated the EU were out of place. While the euro undeniably helped German exports, a common European currency had been a condition by France to agree to the German reunification in 1989-90 (*Spiegel Online*, 30th September 2010). France benefited most from the euro. Mill and Rosefielde's propagandistic and anti-German statements misrepresented the political situation but have to be taken seriously as they might inspire the foreign political actions of a future White House administration. Conflict potential between both Washington and Berlin was based on their divergent national interests

and existed because of structural reasons. Previous research had largely ignored how substantial the conflict potential was.

During the reign of Biden, trans-Atlantic relations began to improve. One factor supporting the improvement was the participation of the German Green Party in a government coalition after the federal German elections took place in September 2021. In alignment with Washington's interests, the Green Party supported a tough stance against both Russia and China (Lees, 2021: 7). But also, the Biden administration pushed Germany to give up the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline (de Jong, 2022: 12). When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, US-German relations were heavily affected as a result. From then on, the Western world was united under Washington's leadership. While previous chancellor Angela Merkel had strongly protected the setup of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, the new Scholz administration in Berlin withdrew from the energy project as part of an extensive anti-Russian sanctions package (Nelson, 2022: 50-51). As a consequence of the sanctions, Germany had to expect the loss of its competitive industrial advantage. Drastically increasing oil and gas prices would not only impact private citizens but also the national industry. Germany had to fear a long-lasting, permanent loss of economic wealth. The situation could eventually force Berlin to reconsider its political stance against Russia: to access cheap Russian energy again, that it needs to produce at competitive prices. Such a scenario might revive the full conflict potential between America and Germany.

On 26th September 2022, several explosions destroyed both strings of the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline and one of the two strings of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. The incidents appeared as acts of sabotage perpetrated by a state actor (BBC, 28th September 2022; *Télévision Française 1*, 3rd October 2022), which would render them the most important terrorist attack in the 21st century so far. At the same time, the

explosions would constitute the result of a military attack against both Germany and Russia. Western governments were quick to blame Russia's Putin for having destroyed Russia's own essential infrastructure worth billions of dollars and useful as a means of pressure against the European Union (Bloomberg, 30th September 2022). The Russians implied that the United States was responsible (*Al Mayadeen*, 1st October 2022). The attacks were carried out in NATO-monitored waters, nearby the Danish island of Bornholm, which served as a training ground for US Navy Seals. Also, until 20th September, a US naval ship, the USS Kearsarge, was in the area (*Télévision Française 1*, 3rd October 2022). Investigation results by Swedish authorities were not disclosed to the public but treated as classified information (Reuters, 15th October 2022).

US president Biden had already announced during a press conference on 7th February 2022, that the US would be able to bring an end to the Nord Stream 2 project (*The Local*, 28th September 2022). As a result, Germany depended even more heavily on very expensive US-sourced liquified natural gas (LNG). Plus, many major German companies seriously considered heavily moving production capacities to the United States with its cheaper energy costs, including Volkswagen, Lufthansa, Siemens, and BASF (*Handelsblatt*, 29th September 2022). Washington possessed both the means and the motivation to carry out the attack. If the Russian allegations were true, the United States would have militarily attacked Germany, its nominal ally, for the first time since 1945. Russia's Putin offered to deliver gas through the one remaining string of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline (*Deutsche Welle*, 12th October 2022). If Germany would accept this offer to ensure its economy's survival, conflict potential with the US would drastically increase. On the other hand, if Washington dominated Germany, it could eventually block China from emerging as the strongest world power.

More research is needed to examine past, current, and future trends in US-German relations in their true nature and full scope.

## **2.2. Chinese-German Relations in the Build-up to the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 (2017-2022)**

The keywords “China”, “German”, and “relation” were researched on multiple Internet media platforms with academic backgrounds, focusing on content published in 2016 or later. The publications were used for literature review. Also, the Russo-Ukrainian War already existed during this time but had a more limited scope. The self-declared rebels in the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk have tried since 2014 to achieve independence from the central government. As it could provide insight into eventual future developments, investigating the political nature of Sino-German relations during the time of the Trump presidency (2017-2021) was important. President Donald Trump used antagonistic measures against Putin’s partners in China. Also, Sino-German relations began to worsen. But most academicians would support the perception that Trump’s reign pushed both Eurasian partners initially into stronger cooperation with each other. Both countries perceived a shift from an America-centered to a multipolar world order as being in the making (Ehret, 2019: 3). The bilateral collaboration seemed to offer benefits for both Beijing and Berlin. Therefore, China would like to be Germany’s long-term ally. Yet, such an alliance was improbable from ever happening, as it was prevented by Germany’s membership in US-dominated, trans-Atlantic organisations (Cunha, 2017: 16). Decisive questions from Cunha were: could Sino-German relations dominate US-German relations in terms of political relevance? Would Washington take decisive measures to prevent this result from happening? (*ibid.*) The researchers answered these questions in the study context.

Beijing understood that a political confrontation with the United States was unavoidable. In comparison, there was no essential conflict potential in Sino-German relations: the cooperation rather offered plenty of opportunities at a low risk. At the centre of the bilateral political relations was economic collaboration. Both nations acted as strong investors in their respective partner nation (Amendolagine *et al.*, 2017: 235). By working together in and with the rising Chinese market, German businesses could secure long-term growth for the national economy. China, on the other hand, would be the benefactor of knowledge sharing, entering the German industry branches of space travel, robots, information technology, and digitisation (Ehret, 2019: 3-4). As a result, Beijing could be enabled to realise its grand plan “Made in China” until 2025 (*ibid.*: 4). Beijing wanted Germany to be a part of its ambitious mega-infrastructure project, One Belt, One Road (OBOR) / Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): creating Eurasian land- and sea connectivity with investments valued at 900 billion dollars. After initial reluctance, German interest in Beijing’s version of the Marshall Plan increased after 2015 (*ibid.*: 3). China also planned to replace the dollar in the long run as the sole reserve currency through a mix of different currencies; this endeavour required German support as the mix would, in addition to the Chinese renminbi also include the euro (Staack, 2018: 45). Lastly, Germany and Europe were also the locations in which Chinese and American companies competed for market shares, often using political means.

As of 2022, the strategic partnership between both Eurasian powers was still intact. But in the essential years of 2019, 2021, and 2022, Sino-Chinese relations were declining as tensions were rising. The influx of Chinese money into Germany was increasingly seen as a problem (Barkin, 2020). Berlin tried to establish a tighter protocol when Chinese companies tried to merge with German businesses possessing critical

technology. China was also more and more seen as a country that was competing with Germany for market shares (Shi, 2021: 52, 71). The European Union even declared Beijing in 2019 to be a “systemic rival and competitor”. Former German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas openly disliked aggressive Chinese rhetoric targeting a Czech politician who had visited Taipei (Karnitschnig, 2020). The rise of the German Green Party because of the September 2021 federal elections further fueled the decline of bilateral relations. The Green Party advocated the importance of human rights in Sino-German relations. As self-declared defenders of ethical values, party representatives publicly criticised how China treated the Muslim community in Xinjiang, Western China (*ibid.*). Especially outspoken was the new German Foreign Minister from the Green Party, Annalena Baerbock. She already asked for a stronger anti-Chinese position before the 2021 federal elections took place. Animosities between the West and China were rising when high-ranking US political veteran Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022. Baerbock was quick to alert Beijing on the possibility of facing severe reactions from the West should China attack Taiwan by using military force (*Deutsche Welle*, 5th August 2022).

The perceived fate of the Muslim community in Xinjiang led to a diplomatic process of equivalent retaliation between the European Union and China. In March 2021, Brussels imposed the first meaningful sanctions since 1989 on Beijing to punish perceived human rights violations. In an act of retaliation, China enforced sanctions against European Parliament members (*Deutsche Welle*, 28th April 2021). Moreover, an extensive investment deal that had been seven years in the making was stopped. The legal framework in negotiation would have been favourable for Germany (*ibid.*). There were clear indicators of a decline in bilateral relations. Several academic scholars have already

attested to the rise of bilateral tensions between Beijing and Berlin. The increasing political frictions would negatively impact the trade volume exchanged between both Eurasian partners. Political problems could then also lead to a decline in economic relations as a consequence (Whitten *et al.*, 2020: 1). The political climate between China and Germany got colder, despite the lack of any major structural reasons in the bilateral relations justifying it.

According to academicians, the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 would just add to a further worsening of Sino-German political relations. The 2021-elected German Green Party, part of a government coalition, advocated the priority of ethical principles in Sino-German relations (Oxford Analytica, 2022a: 4). Current German Foreign Minister Baerbock wanted to defend moral values against non-democratically elected governments in general, including China and Russia (Karnitschnig, 2020). Beijing could be barred from obtaining critical German technology and know-how. An increased economic collaboration between the economic spaces of the European Union and China would eventually not take place (Oxford Analytica, 2022a: 4). A deterioration of economic Sino-German relations could significantly impact political relations in the same way (Ehret, 2019: 15). As the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 was still unfolding, academicians should produce more scholarly works analysing the development of Sino-German relations over a longer period of time. Beijing faced a serious situation that would determine the future status of its nation. China's bilateral relations with Germany could enable or prevent the Asian nation from becoming the world's leading power in the foreseeable future.

### 3. Oswald Spengler's Theory of Historical Cycles

German historian Oswald Spengler's theory of Historical Cycles provided a suitable explanatory framework to examine major historical trends, encompassing US-German as well as Sino-German relations. Spengler's most influential publication was *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*) (1918-1922). Spengler disapproved of the common notion that history would unfold in a linear form. He concluded that there were eight high cultures. Four of these high cultures were still alive. While the Western high culture would still be in the developmental stage, the very old Indian, Chinese, and Arab-Oriental high cultures would be in a fossilised or petrified form. Within approximately 1,000 years, all high cultures would move through the same development stages. Oswald Spengler named the four stages: spring, summer, autumn, and finally winter. The cultural, or inner, development happened within the first three stages. The civilizational, or outer, development occurred in the last stage of winter. A hegemonic nation would unite all the lands of a high culture under its leadership to create a final empire. Apart from the common development stages, each high culture also had specific elements. The elements were organised around a prime symbol (Spengler, 1918, 1922 / 1998: 70, 233-234, 579-617).

Spengler's theory seemed to be forgotten during the time of the Cold War (1947-1991). When Donald Trump was surprisingly elected US president in 2016, the need for Spengler's explanatory strengths resurfaced. Belgian historian David Engels successfully applied Spengler's works to study Western development trends over the course of several centuries. Engels expressed the need to produce more research based on Spengler, delivering comparisons between Western and the Ancient high cultures (Engels, 2018: 462-465). Purpose of the research was to deliver upon Engels's request.

### **3.1. Ancient Greek-Roman and Western High Culture**

Analysing the distinct Greek-Roman Ancient high culture was already a very useful approach understanding developments occurring in the Western world. As both cultures were related through parental patterns, especially meaningful comparisons could be drawn. Geographic home locations of the Greek-Roman Ancient high culture were the shores of the Mediterranean at the intersection of Europe, Africa, and Asia. The solid body was its cultural prime symbol. While the Ancient Greeks functioned as carriers of culture, the Ancient Romans projected civilizational power. Cultural development stages over spring, summer, and autumn began about 1100 BC and ended about 300 BC. The so-called winter of civilization concluded about 200. Rome fought with Carthage in three Punic Wars from 264 BC until 146 BC for hegemony. The wars ended with a genocide against the Carthaginians – and the physical destruction of their city state. Rome united then the Ancient world under its rule (Ehret, 2019: 11).

Geographical home locations of the Western high culture were most of Europe and later also North America. The infinite space was its cultural prime symbol. Western man was obsessed with wanting to project his will into the infinite distance – and created therefore an unseen technology as the ultimate tool to power. While the Occidental Europeans functioned as carriers of culture, the Americans projected civilizational power (Ehret, 2018: 17). Cultural development stages over spring, summer, and autumn began about 900 and ended about 1800 (Spengler, 1918, 1922 / 1998: 88-89). The winter of civilization already lasted since about 1800. The United States fought with Germany in two world wars from 1914 on for hegemony (Ehret, 2019: 11). The West could reach the point of its developmental completion in the 23rd century (Spengler, 1918, 1922 / 1998: 93).

### **3.2. Oswald Spengler on England, America, and Germany**

According to Oswald Spengler's initial prediction, the North German state of Prussia, leading Germany, would subdue its cultural cousin and rival England – to unify the Western world under its rule. With Prussian socialism on the one side and commercial imperialism on the other, Prussians and English would carry meaningful political concepts (Spengler, 1919: 21-58). Spengler was wrong about the impact of the United States. Bearing the same political concept as England, Washington had successfully defeated Germany as a result of the two world wars.

English traditions derive from the plundering schemes of the Vikings; they were basically settled pirates, living on an island. The island location required no powerful government for security means – and allowed the rise of commercial imperialism (Otte, 2018: 381, 390). Foreign markets were robbed; money was not earned but made without the contribution of labour (Otte, 2019: 388-389). America, positioned on a continental peninsula, shared a geographical and political fate with England in the form of commercial imperialism (Otte, 2018: 382-386). Prussian traditions derive from the Teutonic Knights Order. The location in the middle of Europe required a powerful government for security reasons. In the Prussian state, every citizen was part of a greater whole, embedded in a system of servitude, solidarity, and ultimately hierarchy (Otte, 2018: 384, 390, 407; Spengler, 1919: 26, 40). Prussian businesses tried to make decisions that would work in the long-term, based on sustainability (Otte, 2018: 383). The Prussians created a state with political independence from commercial corporations. The antagonism between English-American commercial imperialism and Prussian-German socialism was the struggle between the hegemony of economy or politics (*ibid.*: 388). Commercial imperialism, with its speculative business endeavours, was supplanting Prussian socialism, based on a

productive economy, more and more (*ibid.*: 392). In financial terms, Germany had become a foreign-controlled region within global markets, and Prussian socialism was in the process of dying (*ibid.*: 361, 369).

### **3.3. Oswald Spengler on China**

Spengler also contributed to a deeper understanding of the East Asian Chinese culture and civilization. The way, also called *tao* (道, *dao*), was its cultural prime symbol. Many Chinese believed that their way through this world was within flexible limitations already prearranged. Cultural development phases over spring, summer, and autumn began about 1300 BC and ended about 480 BC. The so-called winter of civilization concluded about 76 BC. China was now still in its final, civilizational stage – but in a fossilised, petrified form (Spengler, 1918, 1922 / 1998: 70, 910-911, 1186). Was Spengler wrong about China? The philosopher attested to the status of fossilisation or petrification in the Chinese high culture. China would in such a position never be a world power again, but it would simply be capable of fighting off Western attacks (Reilly, 2003: 153). Yet Ashley Smith (2013) believed that China was a rising power with worldwide impact. Plus, not only China proved to develop relatively dynamically despite being fossilised already, but so did another old civilization: India (Merlio, 2018: 534). To what extent was China suited for being a world power?

Spengler believed that a world power had to project power over the oceans. But the philosopher had to admit already about a century ago that land power lines could possess a similar importance as so-called sea power lines (Gehler, 2018: 172-173). The largest interconnected global land mass consisted of the Eurasian and African continents combined. Overland power lines dominating this huge area could therefore establish effective hegemony over most of the planet. Beijing could therefore utilise its land power in order to emerge as a world power. But

using land power alone would be insufficient to establish full planetary supremacy (*ibid.*: 173). China's OBOR project was therefore a suitable tool to project influence across the Eurasian landmass from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east. China might even be capable of rising as the leading global power, but it would not be capable of establishing total global hegemony (*ibid.*: 166). Gehler's contributions were relevant in the research context. Should China be able to integrate Germany into its alliance system, it could emerge as the leading power on the planet. To be able to effectively compete with the United States, China also needed access to Western technology. Spengler believed that such a transfer of know-how might provide essential assistance to support an Asian power in its rise (Spengler, 1931: 86). Spengler's considerations matter directly in the context of Sino-German relations.

#### 4. Methodology

Due to the controversial nature and polarising potential of Spengler's theories, the applicability of Spengler's work needed to be determined. The verification process was initially conducted within the context of an earlier study (Ehret, 2019: 8-11), but its results also applied to the current study. The researcher picked as a place for this undertaking the 2nd Herrmann Ehlers Symposium (HES), which was held in Aachen, Germany, in late October 2018. The conference topic focused on world leaders like Trump, Putin, and Xi – and how these leaders would affect Europe. Therefore, the conference and its topic mattered in the context of the study. The conference organiser was the Ferdinand Friedensburg Foundation, whose self-declared objective was supporting political education (Bede, 2016). The political positioning of the conference could be described as centre-right, despite its self-declared political neutrality. While this might have created a pro-Spengler bias, this

effect would have been very limited. The conference overall still represented the academic mainstream. Conference attendants were either academics, holders of a higher educational degree, or students. Conference attendants were usually of German or Austrian descent and possessed political knowledge; these factors contributed to the current study, whose objective was to utilise the writings of a German philosopher to comment also on Germany's political development (Ehret, 2019: 8).

Apart from delivering a lecture, the conference organisers allowed the researcher to hold a workshop on Oswald Spengler. Since academic knowledge about Spengler was rather uncommon, the attendants needed to learn the essentials about Oswald Spengler's work before they could provide an opinion judging its usefulness. Overall, 18 out of about 70 conference attendees participated in the workshop, what represented more than 25 per cent of all participants. The remaining attendees, a bit less than about 75 per cent, participated in other workshops taking place in parallel. The participants of the Spengler workshop attended a lecture on the German philosopher, lasting about an hour. The presentation was followed by a debate for half an hour, focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the theory of Historical Cycles. At the end of the workshop, the researcher conducted a survey and structured expert interviews (*ibid.*: 9).

Survey participants had in the first of three survey parts to provide personal information about education degree, academic background, age, sex. The second survey component assessed knowledge about Spengler before and after participating in the workshop. The third survey part required workshop attendants to answer eleven questions to assess the usefulness of Spengler's work as a tool of prediction, focusing on the Western world, including nations such as the United States and Germany, China, India, and Muslim countries – studying political and

economic developments in the near and far future. The second and third survey components employed a 5-point Likert scale. Knowledge of Spengler could be rated between the two extremes of “very familiar” and “not familiar at all”. Spengler’s usefulness for future forecasts could be assessed between the extremes “very relevant” and “not relevant at all”. The higher the score, the more familiar and relevant it was (*ibid.*).

Study participants were on average male and 40.44 years of age. There were huge age discrepancies: one participant was 80 years old, another only 20. 44.44 per cent of the participants possessed an education degree higher than a bachelor’s: whereby the PhD was the highest degree. 16.67 per cent had a bachelor’s degree. 38.9 per cent had only obtained a degree qualifying them to study at a university. 60.98 per cent of all workshop attendants had a background in the natural sciences. 39.02 per cent of all participants had a background in social studies. Of the 61.11 per cent of participants possessing a bachelor’s degree or higher, the participants with a social studies background were better positioned: while only 54.55 per cent of the participants with a natural sciences background possessed such a degree, 71.42 per cent of the participants with a social studies background did (*ibid.*).

The average score obtained, assessing the usefulness of Spengler’s work for forecasts, was 2.49 out of 5 possible points at the maximum, which was very close to the average of the entire range. Within the context of question 3, Spengler’s work, especially the theory of Historical Cycles, was perceived as a better forecast tool to outline processes until 2040, then until 2100 in the context of question 4. In the first case, 2.83 points were yielded; in the latter case, only 2.56 points. Spengler’s work was especially focused on predicting far-reaching trends. Therefore, this result was surprising. Questions 7, 9, and 10 achieved higher scores than the average, with 3.33 points, 3.22 points, and 2.94 points, respectively. These questions assessed, in the following

order, knowledge and opinion about the future of the entire Western world in political terms and about political future development trends in America and Germany. The overall results were not overwhelming, but support was indicated for questions 3, 7, 9, and 10. These questions were also the ones useful for interpreting American-German relations during the time of the Trump administration and understanding future development trends in the Western world for the near future. They mattered in the study's context. Due to the likely political centre-right positioning of the workshop attendants, the results seemed to reflect the academic mainstream on Oswald Spengler (Ehret, 2019: 9-10). The survey confirmed the applicability of Spengler's theory of Historical Cycles to the current study, bearing the above limitations in mind. It was noticeable during the structured expert interviews that some of the study participants expressed a lack of support for Spengler's work because of their party-ideological positions. Independent from these positions, Spengler's applicability could therefore be much higher than expressed through the results of the survey (*ibid.*: 10-11). Renowned scholars from relevant academic disciplines, possessing more knowledge on the study topic than the workshop participants, such as historian David Engels, already approved of Spengler's model as a useful tool for outlining 21st century macrotrends (Engels, 2018: 453). The researcher proceeded after the survey by applying Spengler's model carefully.

## **5. Applying Spengler's Theory of Historical Cycles**

The theory of Historical Cycles by Oswald Spengler served as a useful model for examining how the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 connected to the research intent: how the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 impacted US-German relations. How US-German relations affected Sino-German relations. How the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 would affect if the

partnership between America and Germany remained politically more important than the one between China and Germany. The outcome of the war affected more than just the two nations at war. Therefore, it was difficult to ignore the impact of the war.

### ***5.1. Applying Spengler's Theory of Historical Cycles on American-German Relations***

Apart from the possibility of lasting for several years and probably reshaping the political boundaries of Ukraine, the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War seemed to prepare a path, fundamentally changing European and global security architecture. As one result, Western countries penalised Moscow with harsh sanctions, exceeding the scope of animosities during the times of the Cold War by far (Cecchetti *et al.*, 2022). A bipolar world was emerging, in the West dominated by the United States and in the East led by Russia's partner China (Zhao, 2022: 173-174). The intra-Western division between US-led North America and German-led Europe came to an end. Suddenly, by 2022, the West appeared united in a way that seemed impossible during the reign of Donald Trump. However, this displayed unity came at great costs and did not bear signs of lasting stability. It was again Germany that was paying the political price (Oxford Analytica, 2022a: 5). As the political tensions with Russia increased in early 2022, the newly elected German government, pressured by US president Biden, agreed not to certify the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline (Reuters, 22nd February 2022), which connected Germany and Russia directly and which would have provided Germany's energy sovereignty. Moreover, and because of the war, Berlin was also forced to give up on significant amounts of gas that it was already receiving from Russia via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline (Mahlstein *et al.*, 2022). While the Russians could find alternative buyers for their gas, Germany could not simply, immediately, and for the

same low costs replace the Russian gas supplies. All alternative options considered by Berlin in the aftermath of Russia's aggression against Ukraine meant that the cost of living with regards to private energy supplies in Germany would skyrocket. Furthermore, the export-oriented German economy would not be able to produce at the same level of competitive costs anymore. Germany could experience the most massive decline in welfare and economic strength since the end of World War II (*ibid.*). In effect, anti-Russian sanctions would hit the target Russia much less than Washington's nominal ally Germany. The consequences of the war could, in the long-term, affect Germany much more than Russia. In the same context, the current war would have a tremendous impact on American-German relations. The impact went so far that German Foreign Minister Baerbock was already afraid of a "popular uprising" of the German people in July 2022 (*RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland*, 21st July 2022a). After 75% of the two Nord Stream pipeline capacities had been destroyed on 26th September 2022, Germany was technically mostly incapable of hypothetically turning its political stance towards Russian energy (BBC, 28th September 2022; *Télévision Française 1*, 3rd October 2022). Considering the dramatic consequences of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War, the war could possess the potential to deliver the final economic weakening of Germany – and therefore the resolution to the more than a century-long American-German conflict.

The nature of the binational conflict and the impact of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War were better understood, when studying American-German relations during the reign of the Trump administration from 2017 until 2021. Such a comparison mattered for two reasons: first, Trump was already US president when the preceding 2014 Russo-Ukrainian War was happening at a lower scale of intensity than the current one. Plus, there was also a high chance that Trump could be US president again while the current Russo-Ukrainian War would still be

lasting. If the latter were to happen, Trump could, and very probably would, significantly impact American-German relations. Therefore, Trump's way of acting in politics must be understood by studying his recent term in the White House. As the strongest anti-German sentiments in the 21st century surfaced in the US under Trump, and as the current Russo-Ukrainian War had the potential to deliver the outcome of the American-German conflict, there was a high chance that a potential future Trump administration would be involved. In a systematic approach and by applying Spengler's theory, Trump's political actions were compared to the activities of politicians in Ancient Rome. Such a comparison was necessary to deliver analogies explaining why Trump could be reelected during the time span of the current Russo-Ukrainian War. First, aspects that could be explained by Spengler's theory were presented; then, aspects that could not, or not entirely, be explained by the theory. Trump's anti-German attitudes were analyzed; his intentions seemed to come to fruition now – during the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War, when Germany was cutting its energy supply from Russia to a considerable extent (Mahlstein *et al.*, 2022). A comparison between Ancient Greek-Roman high culture and Western high culture was used to arrive at new findings. Such a comparison was necessary to prove that there was a high chance of Trump returning to office. Trump's potential return to the White House mattered, as it would, in the context of the current Russo-Ukrainian War, significantly impact American-German relations. As Spengler had shown that time periods between different high cultures could be analogous to each other, a comparison with the Ancient high culture was especially useful since it was the one high culture that was most related to the West by parental heritage patterns. In the next step, Spengler's theory was successfully applied to work out an analogy between the US under Trump's presidency and Ancient Rome during the time of the Gracchi

brothers. Both the US and the late Roman Republic were formally democratic states in the compared time periods. Both had successfully dominated their intra-civilizational rival. Both faced similarly severe internal unrest. Both tried to expand the influence of their powers beyond the current reaches of their respective cultural zones.

Donald Trump has been compared to a variety of historical leaders. In an exaggerated and demonising attempt, he was equated with the infamous dictator Hitler, with Ancient Roman real estate mogul Marcus Licinius Crassus (Douthat, 2017), and even with Ancient Roman consul Gaius Julius Cesar (Luyendijk, 2017). Yet, the probably most useful analogy in the context of domestic politics, as explained above, would be Tiberius Gracchus (163-133 BC), who held the office of plebeian tribune in Rome in 133 BC. He advocated radical land reforms, wanting to redistribute farmland to the poor masses, and was finally beaten to death by members of the Roman senate (Calder and Demandt (eds.), 1990: 283). Gracchus divided historians. Some perceived him as a revolutionary, an advocate for the interests of the people. Others saw in him the destroyer of the Roman Republic, who enriched himself by corrupt means and unleashed the power of the Roman mob (*ibid.*). Similarities to Donald Trump were easily noticeable. The real estate billionaire was by supporters seen as a man of the people – what a man of his wealth could hardly be. But Trump and his family clan also engaged in self-dealing; they caused a constitutional crisis by challenging the results of the US presidential elections in 2020 and, at least indirectly, unleashed the power of the American mob, storming the US Capitol on 06th January 2021 (*The New York Times*, 13th February 2021).

After Tiberius Gracchus's death in 133 BC, his brother Gaius Gracchus (154-121 BC) occupied the office of tribune in 123 and 122 BC. He caused a constitutional crisis, and in 121 BC, members of the

Roman Senate killed him like his brother before (Calder and Demandt (eds.), 1990: 283). The era of the Gracchi brothers lasted 12 years, from 133 to 121 BC. Should Trump run as the Republican candidate for the US presidential elections in 2024, his reign could last until 2029. There is a very high chance that Donald Trump will be the Republican candidate (Kagan, 2021). The era of Trumpism would then range over a period of 12 years as well, from 2017 until 2029. If the historical analogy holds up, Trump's second term in office would not be much more successful for him than the first one. By 2029, the era of Trumpism could likely come to an end.

After establishing the analogy between the Trumps and the Gracchi brothers, Spengler's theory was utilised to understand the long-term meaning of Trumpism for Western populism – by comparing the contribution of the reign of the Gracchi to the Roman movement of the *populares*. Both Gracchi brothers represented a larger faction in the intra-Roman power struggles of their time: the *populares*, a movement based on the power of the plebeian masses. Their opponents were the *optimates*, who represented the Roman Senate and the established nobility (Calder and Demandt (eds.), 1990: 172). Power struggles between both factions lasted for over a century, with the *populares* winning a decisive victory under Gaius Julius Cesar in the Roman Civil War from 49 to 45 BC. After the Roman transition from republic to empire was completed, both political movements lost their importance (*ibid.*: 373). In an analogy, Trumpism appeared to represent the first phase of populism in the intra-Western power struggle between the populist and the globalist camps. This power struggle would likely continue even after the end of Trumpism, probably throughout the entire 21st century. Only after the unification of the Western world and its transition into an empire are completed, both factions will likely lose their importance. After Spengler's theory was applied within a

comparison to Ancient Rome to establish a deeper understanding of Trump's role in domestic US policy, there were also aspects where the theory could not be entirely successfully applied.

Since Donald Trump lost the 2020 US presidential elections, there is a possibility that he will not be US president again. If this were to happen, the reign of Trump would be much shorter than that of the Gracchi brothers. Yet, there seemed to be a high chance of Donald Trump returning to the White House. By late 2021, Joe Biden had achieved only a low level of popularity, while political experts expected Donald Trump to be the presidential candidate of the Republican Party for the 2024 US presidential elections (*FOCUS Online*, 23rd December 2021). If Donald Trump returned to the White House, he would follow the pattern of the Gracchi brothers. After Tiberius Gracchus died, his brother took his place when later coming to power. But Donald Trump would, in the event of his return to power, be the main leader figure of Trumpism all the time, whereby a comparative leader position was during the time of the Gracchi brothers divided amongst two people: Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus. Another important partial deviation could be observed with regards to foreign policy. While Tiberius Gracchus would serve as a fitting analogy to Donald Trump in the context of domestic politics, he was, to a lesser extent, fitting when it came to foreign policy. Gracchus had participated as a soldier in the last and Third Punic War from 149 to 146 BC, which brought about the annihilation of Carthage, Rome's opponent in the power struggle for the control of the Ancient world (Calder and Demandt (eds.), 1990: 166, 468, 482). But while Tiberius Gracchus was in political office, Carthage simply did not exist anymore, whereas Germany, America's civilizational-internal opponent, still existed while Trump was in office. This mismatch exposed a less useful aspect of Spengler's model.

Scipio Aemilianus (185-129 BC), a Roman statesman and general, would, in terms of foreign policy, therefore probably function as a better analogy than Tiberius Gracchus. He was responsible for the final extermination of Carthage (*ibid.*: 182). In comparison, the anti-German sentiment of Trump and his supporters has already been explained above.

In the near future, if the current Russo-Ukrainian War is ongoing and if the economic crisis within the Western world worsens, tensions in American-German political relations could increase. Germany had two options left: first, to accept its current fate of being cut off from Russian energy supplies and a significant decline in economic importance in alignment with being Washington's political vassal. This scenario could play out with America's support, as it would deliver the desired outcome from Washington's perspective. The other option was to rebel against Washington and to re-establish an energy alliance with Moscow. This action would protect Berlin's vital interests – but would undoubtedly bring Germany into conflict with America. Washington could retaliate through economic means. A Trump administration would be a likely political entity to deliver such an outcome. Trump's past anti-German measures against perceived German trade advantages would allow one to anticipate a return of such behaviour in the future (*Asia News Monitor*, 7th February 2017).

Spengler measured in the non-changeable units of human generations (Spengler, 1918, 1922 / 1998: 762). To embed findings in a wider context, the three Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage lasted from 264 to 146 BC, over a period of 118 years (Calder and Demandt (eds.), 1990: 488, 502). Counting 118 years from the beginning of the First World War, the first major conflict between Americans and Germans for the dominance of the Western world, we reach the year 2032. Around 2032, the American-German conflict could be resolved.

Of course, Spengler's theory of Historical Cycles worked with approximations only. As explained above, it was more likely that a Republican administration, under a leader with a more radical mindset like Trump, would resolve this intra-Western conflict. Therefore, it would be more likely that the American-German conflict would reach its resolution during Trump's potential second term in office as US president: until 2029. The comparison between the Western and Ancient worlds was useful, as it provided a better understanding of the timescale of developments. But since 2029 is in the future, researchers would need to observe the situation until at least then to verify or contradict the projection. Again, whether Germans would accept the detrimental impact of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War or try to fight it, the current war in East Europe definitely possessed, as a trigger event, the potential to deliver the above resolution of the American-German conflict. Taking the impact into account that the current Russo-Ukrainian War has already had on Germany, it could, within certain limitations, be perceived as the Western analogy to the Third Punic War. As in World War I and II, Germany and Russia were in a confrontation, although they were not fighting each other directly with military means, and America was benefitting.

During the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War, already in the aftermath of the European debt crisis from 2009, and during the refugee crisis from 2015, it was noticeable how reluctantly Berlin acted in protecting vital German interests. A reason why German interests were put second could be the German national self-concept, which was associated with World War II and therefore had a negative connotation (Losch, 2017: 8). Many Germans believed that they had to compensate for past national sins (Harnisch *et al.*, 2015: x-xii). Since a German identity was not perceived as desirable anymore, America or the European Union became alternative cultural reference points. To understand the problematic

German identity in the context of American-German relations in full scope, one must consider that the American nation, or regional culture, of Yankeedom created the modern United States after the American Civil War from 1861-1864 (Woodard, 2011: 216-218). Comparatively, Prussia created modern Germany after the three German Unification Wars in the 1860s and 1870s. The American-German conflict was therefore, at its core, a conflict between Yankees and Prussians. But Prussia's eastern lands had been ethnically cleansed of Germans (de Zayas, 1994: xvi, 84), and the Prussian state was dissolved in 1947. With the disappearance of Prussia, the core of modern German identity was removed (Ehret, 2018: 17). The strongest elements of Prussian identity survived in East Germany, the least Americanized part of Germany. The tensions in the American-German political relations from 2017 until 2021 were not suddenly appearing problems, only caused by Trump, but they brought symptoms of a deeper and underlying structural conflict in a clearer form to the surface. Based on the cultural differences between the Western world and the Ancient world, which Spengler had presented, Germany's final defeat would probably play out differently than the one of Carthage. While North African Carthage was a city-state, physically annihilated through war, Germany was a country of much larger size, and there would probably be no armed conflict between America and Germany. Instead, Germany's defeat would probably happen in the form of an essential economic weakening in alignment with deindustrialization and by cutting its potential to exercise an independent foreign policy, especially with Russia. Again, the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War possessed all the elements of a trigger event that could potentially deliver this outcome. Due to unique Western technology, which the Ancient Romans did not have at their disposal, Americans would probably also project power by means of sophisticated modern media propaganda. Spengler (1919: 104) had predicted that the

conflict between Anglo-Saxon commercial imperialism and Prussian socialism would continue until only one political idea would survive. Donald Trump could serve eventually as a facilitator of this outcome, should he return to the highest political office in the US, following a political pattern comparable to the Gracchi brothers of Ancient Rome.

### ***5.2. Applying Spengler's Theory of Historical Cycles on Chinese-German Relations***

The 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War affected Chinese-German bilateral relations. As a close partner of Moscow, China's non-democratic government was perceived as more critical than before. The newly elected Green Party in Berlin declared wanting to reduce the dependency on authoritarian governments (Oxford Analytica, 2022b: 11), what included China. Ideological and political motivations for the actions of the new German government coalition became more important than in the preceding Merkel era (2005-2021). Moreover, Huawei's access to sensitive German IT infrastructure could be increasingly hindered, following to a considerable extent the harsh example of the United States. The EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, especially beneficial for Germany, would probably never be ratified (*ibid.*).

Washington issued a warning against Beijing not to break the sanctions against Russia, imposed by the West – unless Beijing wanted to face severe consequences (Lee, 2022). The 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War put Beijing in a difficult position. While Russia was an important strategic and geopolitical partner, the value of economic trade with the European Union and the US outweighed by far the benefits of breaking anti-Russian sanctions (*ibid.*). Therefore, Beijing mostly played along. Yet, the current situation would probably just strengthen China's resolve to become more independent from the West in economic and

technological matters. China was playing to win time: until its own geopolitical bloc, including Russia, was ready to sever political and economic ties with the West.

The 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War served, according to the American CIA, as an important precedent case for China (*RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland*, 21st July 2022b). Beijing could learn what mistakes to avoid and how to prepare for international sanctions in case it tried to move its military against the island of Taiwan. The Communist Chinese government considered the democratically ruled island a separatist part of China. According to the CIA, a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would happen within the next few years, within the 2020s (*ibid.*). The CIA was, by nature, no objective source of information. Washington had an interest in stirring up anti-Chinese sentiment. In the event that Beijing moved its navy against Taiwan, a similar Western response as in the case of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War was to be expected: Western countries would probably treat China as a diplomatic outcast and unleash painful economic and financial sanctions, including a freeze of Chinese overseas assets. In the event that such a situation occurred, the nature of Chinese-German relations would probably abruptly change and even turn hostile. It was to be expected that Berlin would follow Washington's lead. The planet's division into two hostile blocs would reach an irreversible point. However, in 2022, there was no indication that military action against Taiwan was imminent.

The 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War could, in the long run, significantly impact China's ability to economically rise, which was based on Chinese access to Western technology. America's intent was to dominate the entire planet by becoming a world empire (Gehler, 2018: 163, 175). Washington's will to power was projected into the infinite distance to result in total global dominance. Beijing could not accept being dominated by a foreign power with so little historical weight as the US.

The way to prevent America's total dominance was to outcompete the US in economic terms. In the years to come, China's GDP could and probably will exceed the GDP of the US. To achieve economic growth, China depended on the implementation of Western technology, which the West had created as an expression of its will to master its natural environment. As a non-Western power, China was naturally disadvantaged compared to the US. The Chinese did not share the inner desire to construct Western technology (Merlio, 2018: 532). Spengler perceived all high cultures as having the same value. To Spengler, it was entirely possible that a non-Western power would successfully adopt Western technology and even master it on a far more superior level than the original Western creators (Spengler, 1931: 86). The example of Japan's rise in the 19th and 20th centuries would provide evidence. What was possible for Japan to achieve should be possible for China as well. In comparison, Spengler perceived China as the more genuine culture, having provided more essential inventions to the world than the Japanese culture (Spengler, 1918, 1922 / 1998: 615). Spengler perceived Chinese technology as the most advanced form of technology any non-Western culture had developed independently from the West (*ibid.*: 1186). Renowned journalist Peter Scholl-Latour would have agreed that the West strongly underestimated the Chinese ability for creativity and innovation (Scholl-Latour, 2014: 237).

To access Western technology for its economic rise, China depended on collaboration with a Western power. Naturally, China's biggest rival, America, would be most reluctant to support Beijing. Therefore, China focused on knowledge transfer from Germany. This was a logical choice. In the 1920s and 1930s, Germany had already contributed more than any other nation to China's modernization. Moreover, German technology was, for large parts of the 20th century, the most advanced form of Western technology. America could achieve

its advantageous edge over German innovation only by means of force (Bower, 1987: 9). As another Western nation, Americans had a natural advantage when adapting German innovation compared to the Chinese. China needed to hurry. Beijing's access to Western innovation could soon end – as a result of the current Russo-Ukrainian War. Beijing benefited from the intra-Western conflict between America and Germany, putting China in a position to benefit from German inventions. If the conflict would end, likely with a German weakening, and if the West would present a united front under American leadership, no such technical access could exist in the future anymore. The current American-German conflict would very likely be the last conflict between different Western nations. Only time would show if Beijing would master command over modern technology well enough to compete successfully in the long-term with Western nations in a field those Western nations had basically invented.

Spengler had warned the West not to share its technological inventions with non-Western powers (Spengler, 1931: 87-88). Of course, Spengler, as a German patriot, believed in Prussia-Germany's ability to become the leading and unifying nation of the West (Spengler, 1919: 6). If that would have happened, sharing Western technology with China would have been to Germany's disadvantage. As America was about to win the intra-civilizational conflict, Germany could potentially benefit from an alliance with China. As part of this alliance, Germany could share its technology with Beijing. We will never know if Spengler would have agreed to a technology transfer under these circumstances. As someone who was concerned about his home country, we can probably assume that he would have approved of Berlin providing Beijing access to German technical innovations, insofar as Germany would have benefited from the exchange.

Spengler believed that China, as a very old and already petrified civilization, would hardly be capable of vibrant impulses. Engels (2018: 458) observed that the current Chinese culture is surprising vital. Engels offered an explanatory model: according to Engels, a second Buddhist-Chinese culture would have developed after the first Daoist-Confucian culture. An analogy would be the development of Western culture after the preceding Ancient Greek-Roman culture. If Engels (*ibid.*) is right, China would also be in the late civilizational stage (of another culture), but not yet in a petrified form. Engels's theory would deserve more consideration. Fully examining such a complex theory would by far exceed the scope of the current study. For reasons of completion, the theory was mentioned as it could help provide a better understanding of the current political and economic situation in China.

The 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War tremendously changed the position of Russia as a factor in Chinese-German relations. Beijing's intent was to project power across the Eurasian continent by using the overland power lines of its OBOR project to connect its East Asian cities with the strong economies of West and Central Europe, especially Germany (Ehret, 2019: 3). A successful economic and infrastructural embedment of Germany in the OBOR project and, by extension, most of Europe, would present a high chance of delivering world dominance to Beijing. Cutting America from controlling Europe would decisively affect the outcome of the power game between both trans-Pacific rivals. Only three countries separated China from Germany: Russia, Belarus, and Poland. Almost all the territories between China and Germany were under Moscow's control. Russia could therefore function as the connecting land bridge between both Eurasian powers and as the country for the planned OBOR railroad lines. German sanctions against Russia because of the current Russo-Ukrainian War would therefore effectively diminish the political-economic potential of China's OBOR project.

An infrastructural connection between both Eurasian powers could also be created via countries in the Middle East and Southeast Europe. But with an increasing number of nation states involved, in regions of the world known for notorious instability, it would be much more difficult to control the project.

Spengler reflected on the nature of Russia. It made Russia's role in the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War and Russia's meaning for Chinese-German relations better understandable. Spengler believed that Russia could be the coming ninth high culture (Bolton, 2016: 237). That the third millennium could be characterised by Fyodor Dostoyevsky's interpretation of Christianity. But currently, Russia would be in an early pre-cultural phase. Russians were non-Western, and their way of thinking could only be understood by accounting for their deeply rooted, Christian-Orthodox religious beliefs. While the West's prime symbol was the infinite space, the Russian prime symbol was the plain without limit, represented by the endless Eurasian land ocean. The Russian way of thinking lacked the Western ego and vanity (*ibid.*: 227-231). While the Germanic nations, both the Teutonic and the Anglo-Saxon branches, longed for their parental heritage site of Rome, the Russian longing was directed towards Jerusalem and Constantinople (*ibid.*: 239). The Russian way of thinking was, because of the young age of this culture, essentially different from the Western. In comparison, Westerners, including the Germans, and the Chinese were both already in the late civilizational phase, in which thinking in terms of money and materialistic values dominated (Spengler, 1918, 1922 / 1998: 70). The Chinese and the German mindsets were more compatible with each other than the Russian mindset was with either the Chinese or the German one.

The non-Westernized Russian peasant despised the machine culture of the West as devilish. While the modern machine was a tool, forced upon Russia by the West, that Russia needed to adopt if it wanted to be

able to compete, the Russians would abandon the machine as soon as the necessity for possessing this tool ceased (Bolton, 2016: 238). Russia could not accept an American lead, for it was not Western. Russians possessed their own form of messianism that they wanted to project onto a world that they wanted to be Russian. A culture that young would, according to Spengler, not count the dead, which would need to die for its ideas (*ibid.*: 240). As Ukrainian Kyiv was the historical birthplace of the Russian Empire, Putin seemingly wanted to collect the lands that he perceived to be Russian: by means of force and aggression. But a potential failure to complete his mission could perhaps lead to a stronger Ukrainianization of a post-war Ukraine. Once, in the 9th century the lands of the West were united in Charlemagne's Francia in the pre-cultural phase of the West – before distinctive Western nations were born. Now, Putin could, with his attempt to unite the East Slavic world under Russian dominance, achieve the opposite. He could aid in the birth of a strong Ukrainian identity, as independent from the Russian. Russia's partnership with China was the outcome of a perceived rejection from the West. Naturally, there would be many reasons against a Sino-Russian alliance. Russia was a very young culture, and China was a very old culture. Even when both countries were Communist, there had been armed conflicts between them (Ehret, 2017: 14). The alliance was born because both nations felt they were being antagonised by the West. The 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War had already divided Germany and Russia, and it could, by extension, deepen the division between Chinese and Germans. In turn, the war strengthened the ties between Beijing and Moscow on the one hand and between Washington and Berlin on the other.

The Heartland theory by British politician and geographer Halford Mackinder was another useful theoretical model explaining the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War and its impact on American-German

political relations, as well as on Chinese-German political relations. The Heartland theory was useful to embed findings resulting from applying Spengler's theory into a geopolitical context. According to Mackinder, Eurasia was, due to its size, the most important region on the planet. Especially Russia was in a central location and therefore the pivot area, the so-called heartland, but lack of development hindered it from emanating its power (Mackinder, 1919 / 1962: 93-99). To the west and to the east of the pivot area was the inner crescent, with Germany in the European part and China in the Asian part. If one or two of the inner crescent powers would conquer the Russian heartland, or be allied with it, dominance over Eurasia, and therefore world dominance, would be possible. America and Britain, as sea powers outside Eurasia, had naturally no business and little leverage in Eurasia. A Chinese-Russian collaboration was already a reality in the 2020s – and more so as a result of the current Russo-Ukrainian War (Mahlstein *et al.*, 2022). If Germany would join this alliance, and by extension, the EU with Germany, the United States would fail to be the dominant world power. Plus, America would lose control over Europe. But the impact of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War prevented this from happening. Former US national security advisor Zbigniew Brzeziński agreed in his work *The Grand Chessboard* (1997: 84) with Mackinder. Brzeziński (1997: 163-164) advised Washington to use Germany as a proxy for its own interests but to balance German with French power. Britain, according to him, was little useful due to its geographic position. Germany's best option for protecting its geopolitical interests would be an alliance with Russia, and by extension, with China. What US foreign policy in the 20th century essentially tried to achieve was keeping Germany and Russia apart from each other. The German Green Party, which became an essential part of a 2021 government coalition, already considered in 2021 abandoning the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which could re-establish German sovereignty

(*Clean Energy Wire*, 21st October 2021). As a result of Russian actions in the build-up to the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War in February 2022, the Nord Stream 2 project was halted (Reuters, 22nd February 2022). The German government appeared determined to remain in an alliance with the United States – at unbearable costs. Due to its gutted national identity, the German political establishment sacrificed vital German interests. According to Spengler's theory, it would appear likely that the American-German conflict would reach its conclusion within the 2020s or early 2030s, resulting in an essential weakening of Germany. Judging based on past events, the last phase of the conflict would either see an economic downturn in Germany due to its self-harming, ideologically motivated actions – or an economic confrontation which Germany would probably lose. If North America and the EU merge into a stronger economic unit, Washington could perhaps project power directly onto Europe without needing its German proxy anymore. To finally control Europe, America would also need to weaken France. Ironically, Germany and France would at this point in history share the same fate, as did Carthage and its Greek ally Corinth. If this would happen, America could maintain control over most of Europe (namely the Occidental part), except for the Russian-influenced east, and would probably remain the dominant world power. The United States would probably be unable to dominate either Russia or China.

The outcome of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian War would probably fix Germany's vassal status and dependence on the United States. Berlin would very likely act according to Washington's interests. The strategic partnership between China and Germany would probably end. Germany would then side with Washington against Beijing. As a result of the war, the partnership between America and Germany would very likely remain politically more important than the one between China and Germany.

## 6. Conclusion

Oswald Spengler's theory of Historical Cycles served as a valuable explanatory model to provide a better understanding of how the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 would affect Sino-German political relations. Binational relations were heavily affected by US-German relations. Tensions in the political relations between Washington and Berlin became openly noticeable during the time of the Trump administration and revealed a substantial conflict potential. By drawing parallels to Ancient Roman historical trends, the time span of the conflict was determined to be over 100 years. The United States and Germany competed for dominance over the Western world. The Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022 could likely contribute to bringing a conclusion to the conflict in the 2020s until the early 2030s. A substantial and permanent economic weakening of Germany was likely to occur. This result could be achieved during another Trump presidency. Berlin would be best able to protect its vital interests in an alliance with both Beijing and Moscow. But despite political alternatives and due to Germany's lack of national identity, German governments would probably align with the negative effects of the last intra-Western conflict on Germany. Germany would probably turn into a tightly controlled US vassal. Consequently, the Sino-German strategic partnership would be over. Even rising hostilities between both Eurasian powers would be probable. Beijing would lose its access to technical know-how from Germany. Russia would not serve as a connecting land bridge between the two Eurasian countries. China's ability to emanate economic power onto Europe by means of the OBOR project could be significantly diminished. Because of the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022, Germany would maintain closer political ties with Washington than with Beijing. America would probably control the West, including Europe, and large parts of the entire world. Washington would probably be incapable of controlling either Russia or China.

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