

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Evolution of the German-Chinese Strategic Partnership: A Case Study Approach

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Abstract: This paper examined current and future tendencies in the evolution of the German-Chinese strategic partnership. Because of current events, both countries acted increasingly aligned. The central research question is: will the strategic partnership between China and Germany supersede the American-German alliance regarding political importance? A literature review and a media content analysis in a German context, focusing on the years from 2013 until 2018, showed that German scholars and publishers evaluated the direction and potential of the binational relations as (mostly) positive. As their judgment came from a short-term observation, Oswald Spengler's culture-historical approach was applied, as it allowed embedding the evolution of the strategic partnership into a profound long-term perspective. Spengler's work had been criticized by older scholars because of its macroscopic ambitions and Spengler's political statements, but now experienced a renaissance because of its usefulness for explaining unexpected current developments. A survey, as a verification attempt, was conducted during the HES conference in Germany with attending scholars, which showed that many of them shared the criticism. The future foreign relations of Western powers, which were relevant in the context of this study, yielded higher than average approval rating. Spengler's work was carefully applied to the topic and helped to arrive at negative results concerning the status of Germany's and China's future relations. These findings were opposed to the earlier ones from the literature review and media content analysis. Despite some aspects that Spengler predicted wrongly, his model turned out to be useful overall. The findings stated that the process of deeper Western integration and unification under American leadership would prevent a German-Chinese strategic partnership from arriving at a level of significance, which could seriously rival the status of Germany's relations with America. This study demonstrated the importance of using a long-term prognostic model, as it could yield very different but more relevant results than a short-term observation. Spengler's model helped to arrive at findings of major significance for the future of the Western world and its relations to China.

Keywords: America, China, Germany, Spengler, strategic partnership, West

This paper examined the evolution of the strategic partnership between Germany and China, with a particular

focus on the period from 2013 until 2018 and a future development prediction, utilizing a case study approach and a media content analysis. Economic and political aspects (trade partnership, security politics, and knowledge transfer) were in the center of attention. It was significant to understand the relations between

both powers better, as Germany was currently the leading force of the European Union and China, the emerging superpower that could take over America's position as the world's economically leading nation already by 2020 (Rapoza, 2011). Within the current decade, relations between these two key powers in

Europe and Asia have improved significantly.

Although the German-Chinese strategic partnership has been to some extent examined before, many instruments of political prognosis have proven to be insufficient. Contemporaries and analysts often missed important political and economic events. Few people would have foreseen the downfall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 only half a year before. To stay closer to our time, few people could have predicted the success of Donald Trump in the U.S. Presidential Elections in 2016, which seemed to defy our understanding of history as a series of causal events, always leading to greater progress. Trump was only one example of the political reality of our 21st century that confronted us with tremendous, unexpected change. The latest occurrence worth mentioning would be Emmanuel Macron's call in 2018 for a European Army that may even provide protection from a potential American threat (Chazan & Brunsden, 2018).

This paper used an unusual mean of prognosis for long-term political trends: the work of historical philosopher Oswald Spengler and his development model for high cultures that created a prognostic pattern, comprising one millennium of development time for one specific of overall eight high cultures (Spengler, 1998). Using Spengler was not undisputed, as many scholars disliked his anti-liberal tendencies (identifying late Western societies as systems, in which money-backed interests would mainly create politics), his choice of words, and the macroscopic ambitions of his seminal work, *Decline of the West*. Nevertheless, unlike the works of many other scholars, Spengler's predictions seemed to stand out for possessing a high degree of verisimilitude despite being formulated nearly a century ago.

Nowadays, Spengler's work is being consulted again to explain events that appear, at first glance, unexplainable. There is even an Oswald Spengler Society for the study of world history founded in Belgium in 2017. Even sociologist Theodor Adorno (1955), himself critical towards Spengler, assumed decades ago that the forgotten thinker may take revenge by being right and that few of his critics were intellectually capable of rivaling him. Spengler was a source of influence for John Campbell, an American mythologist and advisor to George Lucas, as well as for Henry Kissinger, U.S. National Security Advisor from 1969 until 1973. This research employed Spengler's work as a mean of analysis, but not without trying

to verify its disputed usefulness in a contemporary context first.

The application of Spengler's development model for high cultures was especially useful to answer the following central question: will the strategic partnership between China and Germany supersede the one between the United States and Germany in terms of political importance? The answer to this question would be of major significance for the future of the Western world. Germany was the cornerstone of America's geopolitical strategy for Europe. Should Germany shift into a close alliance with China, turning away from its trans-Atlantic partner, it would result in a significant loss of both influence and power for the Western bloc, led by the United States.

Literature Review and Media Content Analysis

Literature Review: German-Chinese Relations

A literature review was conducted to examine the status of academic research focusing on the topic of the German-Chinese strategic partnership. A keyword search was carried out, using Google Scholar and the keywords "Deutsch" (the German word for "German", that is also a component of the noun "Deutschland", the German word for "Germany"), "China," and "partner" (this German word is also a component of the German noun "partnerschaft," which translates into "partnership"). The focus was on literature in the German language, as the topic would be stronger reflected in German than in the English literature because of its relevance for Germany. Chinese language literature was neglected, as Chinese scholars would, to a large extent, produce material that would be less independent from governmental, political guidelines and restrictions. The timeframe for the research was limited to the period between 2013 and 2018, as these six years represented a period of continuity in the binational partnership. Xi Jinping became China's President in 2013 and held this position until now, whereas Angela Merkel was in all these years also Chancellor of Germany.

The Google Scholar keyword search showed 13,000 results, ordered according to relevance. For this research paper, the 150 top-ranked results were examined. Among those, 11 were identified that were of special significance to indicate the status of the German-Chinese strategic partnership. Although

both Germany and China were—with regard to their culture, history, geographical location, size of the population, and development status—quite different, they also shared surprising similarities. Both countries had many neighbors—China has 14 and Germany has nine. Both countries are also in the middle or center of their respective continents. Both countries considered themselves as trade nations, profiting from a peaceful international environment that supported their export-oriented economies (Röhr, 2015). China primarily focused on economic instead of military development, similar to Germany (Staack, 2018). Both countries heavily invested in each other (Röhr, 2015). China regarded Germany as its most important partner within the European Union; for Germany, China was the most important trade partner since 2016, at the same time, the most important partner in Asia. In addition, China perceived Germany as the third most important partner on a global scale (Staack, 2018).

Even before Merkel's administration (2005–now), former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1998–2005) regarded China as important for economic reasons (Heiduk, 2014). Both governments declared the “Strategic Partnership in Global Responsibility” in 2004. Time would prove the solidity of these words, even if the beginning of Merkel's reign was problematic for the bilateral relations. When Merkel took office, she emphasized common Western values, ready to criticize China for perceived human rights violations. In 2007, a meeting between her and Tibet's religious leader, the Dalai Lama, took place (Heiduk, 2014). Obviously, Beijing did not like it.

Nevertheless, bilateral relations improved soon as a consequence of the financial crash of 2008 because both countries needed each other. In 2010, a strategic partnership between both countries was declared. In 2014, it was extended into a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.” Merkel visited China more often than the U.S.A. Both governments consulted each other on a regular basis, usually every second year (Staack, 2018). Trump's presidency (2017–now) and the perceived shift from a unipolar to a multipolar international order led Germany and China even closer. Both governments understood that they could benefit from this process of transformation if they would work together (Staack, 2018).

Although both countries headed the leadership of the G20 succeeding one another, they coordinated

their agendas on the subjects of climate protection, development support for Africa, and digitization. Both countries consulted each other on the conflicts in Syria, Ukraine, and South East Asia and were in collusion to find a diplomatic solution for the North Korea crisis. Soldiers of both armies served together in the UN mission MINUSMA to stabilize the West African country of Mali (Staack, 2018).

China was very interested in winning Germany's support for its mega infrastructure project and the estimated \$900 billion plan OBOR (One Belt, One Road) to create a land and sea transport corridor across Eurasia. After an initial reluctance from 2013 to 2015, the German government had become more willing to collaborate (Harnisch, 2017). It became clear that Germany and the United States pursued different interests with regard to China. The Americans wanted to contain China with Germany's help, but Germany's goal was to integrate China into the international system to pursue common interests (Szabo, 2015). Since the reign of the Trump administration, German and American interests followed different paths.

At the core of the binational strategic partnership was economic collaboration. In 2018, 5,000 German companies were active in China (Staack, 2018). However, Beijing had the power to limit German access to sensitive projects. Although German investors perceived this as an obstacle, they still regarded the Chinese market as rewarding (Hanemann & Huotari, 2017).

The Chinese have also begun to invest massively in Germany. In 2016, 1,300 Chinese companies were active in the German market. Investments went especially into the energy, automotive, agriculture, foods, real estate, and machine construction sectors (Reisach, 2016).

Until 2030, Chinese investments could triple, especially in the sectors of communications and IT. These investments were perceived as long-term and sustainable, helping the German market to grow. In addition, managers of IG Metall reported mostly good experiences with Chinese investors (Welfens, Reisach, Müller, & Bian, 2017). However, knowledge transfer posed a considerable downside. The know-how was transferred from Germany to China only, not the other way around (Welfens et al., 2017). It was perceived to help China become fit in the key sectors—IT, automation, robotics, space travel, and digitization—for the fulfillment of its initiative “Made in China

2025” (Reisach, 2016).

The bilateral economic collaboration took place on a macroscopic level. During the European sovereign debt crisis in 2009, Beijing supported the Euro massively by buying state bonds. China wanted to strengthen the Euro to support further European integration and to preserve Europe as a power, independent from the U.S.A. In this perspective, China viewed Germany as the key player within the E.U. (Staack, 2018). Because of its key role, the German government often represented the entire E.U. in the European-Chinese relations (Röhr, 2015). China wanted and wants to replace the U.S. dollar as a sole worldwide reserve currency with a mix of different currencies that would include both Euro and Renminbi (Staack, 2018). The potential and direction of the German-Chinese strategic partnership is largely regarded as positive by most scholars.

Media Content Analysis: German-Chinese Relations

A media content analysis was carried out by searching for the online presence of two important German publication formats. The first search was carried out on the website of the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, in one of four sections available. *Der Spiegel* had been picked as it was regarded as one of Germany’s leading weekly media outlets and very influential on the intellectual level and opinion-making.

The second search was done in the online presence of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), Germany’s largest non-tabloid daily newspaper. As *Der Spiegel* was seen as left-leaning in the time after Stefan Aust as Editor-in-Chief from 2008 on, the findings from the FAZ source, which was perceived as more conservative (“Überregionale Zeitungen,” 2018), complemented the previous ones from *Der Spiegel*. The keyword search for both publication formats used the same wording as for the literature review (Deutsch, China, and partner). One condition was set for the keyword search in both cases to indicate significance: the keywords had to relate to the German-Chinese relations. The research period covered in both cases are the years from 2013 until 2018. Results were then twice listed in reverse chronological order. Using both a weekly and a daily within a media content analysis was a mean of diversification.

The online search in the section *Der Spiegel* showed 568 results from 2005 until 2018 and 212 results in the

years from 2013 until 2018. Twenty-eight articles were identified as being of special significance with regard to the topic. Four articles of these had a positive tendency of reporting, 14 a negative tendency, and 10 a neutral tendency (contained positive and negative aspects of reporting on the binational relationship at the same time). Significant reporting declined slightly in the years of 2015 and 2016, but then slightly increased in frequency in 2017 and 2018, which seemed to reflect the Trump effect that forced both Germany and China into closer collaboration.

The same keyword search using the online portal of the FAZ showed only 87 results for the time from 2013 until 2018. What is surprising, as a daily publication, it should have more results due to its higher publication frequency. Twenty-five results were found to be of at least medium significance to provide details regarding the status of the German-Chinese partnership. Overall, nine articles had a positive tendency of reporting on the binational relationship, five a negative tendency, and 11 neutral articles. The articles of medium significance increased in frequency from 2013 until 2014, declined in 2015 and 2016, to increase again in 2017 and even more so in 2018, which again coincides with Trump’s presidency.

Negative mentions in *Der Spiegel* with reference to German-Chinese relations referred to Chinese hacker attacks, cyber espionage, economic plagiarism, Chinese competition to German companies, and problems for German companies doing business in China. A positive mention referred to opportunities of German-Chinese economic and trade cooperation. Positive mentions in the FAZ referred to the economic collaboration of both countries, even with regard to Chinese investments in Germany, which were, in some cases, seen as less critical than by the German government. Even political cooperation (Syria conflict) was positively mentioned. Positively outstanding in the overall context of reporting tendency was also the remark that Germany should not follow the United States in trying to contain China, as this would not be in Germany’s best interest.

When comparing the results in numbers, it was apparent that the results for the weekly *Der Spiegel* were much higher than for the daily FAZ, even if a weekly would naturally have fewer publications in the investigated time period. This could be explained by two circumstances. First, stories about the partnership did not hit the news daily, but only occasionally after

some time had passed. Second, articles in *Der Spiegel* were usually much longer, containing more in-depth analysis, and a much higher level of detail. This increased the possibility of referring to the German-Chinese partnership in *Der Spiegel* to a degree, where it was mentioned more often than in the FAZ. Apart from this aspect, another divergence met the eye. Although the coverage in *Der Spiegel* was negative, the coverage in the FAZ was more positive. How could this be explained?

Der Spiegel was known for a critical basic orientation in terms of reporting. A critical perspective was being invited when plenty of stories with in-depth analysis were being provided regularly, which is what *Der Spiegel* usually did. On the other hand, FAZ was more conservative (“Überregionale zeitungen,” 2018) and less critical in its coverage of government activities. The German government, as we have understood in the previous literature review, regarded the opportunity to collaborate with Beijing as positive. The coverage of the FAZ also represented the current trend in German media (for both broadcast and print) to cover news increasingly in line with governmental views (Bosetti, 2016). A conservative daily was naturally more affected by this trend than a left-leaning weekly.

That also meant that the findings in the FAZ would be more in line with the results of the conducted literature review than the findings in *Der Spiegel*. When comparing the divergent results from *Der Spiegel* with the findings from the literature review, it was worth mentioning that the latter had covered a longer time period in a more systematic way of academic analysis than the journalists from *Der Spiegel*. They were, therefore, endemically more trustworthy, also for making observations from a larger temporal distance.

Literature Review: Oswald Spengler

The work of historical philosopher Oswald Spengler has been consulted as a methodological prognosis tool to be applied at the findings of both the previous literature review and the media content analysis. To remain within the scope of this research, Spengler was essentially used to answer the central research question: Will the partnership between China and Germany supersede the one between the United States and Germany in terms of political importance?

To proceed further, Spengler’s work was analyzed to assess its usefulness. Spengler (1998) developed in

his seminal work, *Decline of the West*, a model that would explain the entire world history by identifying and outlining the development stages of eight high cultures over many millennia. He emphasized that all of these cultures would have the same degree of value in comparison to each other, giving up on the common contemporary belief that entire world history would progress linearly. He also rejected the Eurocentric approach at a time when Europe still seemed to be the center of the world (Spengler, 1998).

Instead, and according to Spengler, the only linear development would happen within one high culture between the points of its beginnings and the achievement of the final stage, within a time period of approximately 1,000 years. All of the eight high cultures possessed a relatively self-contained development, independent from other high cultures. Beginning and ends of their respective developments were chronologically set apart from the ones of other high cultures; the cultures were distanced from each other in time, with some high cultures temporally overlapping. One high culture (like the Western one) could at a later point of its history be manifested in the forms of different nations (like France, England, Germany, and America), with each nation playing a different contributing role for the development of the overall high culture (Spengler, 1998). This aspect would be important for this research because America was regarded as the most important foreign political factor of influence, affecting the German-Chinese relationship.

Although there were elements that high cultures had in common, there were also aspects that set them apart from each other. Each high culture had a different initial prime symbol that made it unique. The Western one was the infinite space, represented, for example, in the Western culture by the desire to understand what kept the world together in its innermost and to extend its own will into the infinite and inventing, developing, and applying highly sophisticated machines as the ultimate tools to exercise power over its environment. In comparison, the prime symbol of the Chinese culture was the way referred to as *tao*, represented by the belief that your path in life and through nature was already pre-destined, even if not in the same strict way as in the Egyptian high culture, which also believed in the way as a prime symbol. All politics, economics, arts, and sciences that a high culture developed were specific expressions derived from the initial prime symbol

(Spengler, 1998).

However, the development stages were the same. Although we knew the entire development stages of the Oriental, Indian, Chinese, and Egyptian cultures (to name just some) because their final development stages were reached a long time ago, the Western culture was still evolving, now being in its final civilizational phase. The phases could be predicted (by means of comparison to older cultures, which went through these phases already), but its specific circumstances were unique to each high culture, as each had an own prime symbol (Spengler, 1998).

Because the development of the Chinese high culture had already been concluded and, according to Spengler, it remained since then in a so-called “petrified” final form (like some other high cultures), its future development could not be predicted anymore, at least not by using Spengler’s model. However, future development of the Western high culture could be forecasted to a large extent. This creates a political prognosis for both Western nations America and Germany, whose relation would tremendously impact the German-Chinese strategic partnership. To draw from lessons of the past, the Greek-Roman ancient high culture (also called classical high culture) would be especially worthy to be compared to the Western one. Of all non-Western high cultures, it has probably been researched and studied best in the West. There is opportunity to use knowledge about the Greek-Roman ancient high culture for comparison with the Western high culture.

Spengler regarded the classical high culture as distinctively different from the West, possessing a distinctive prime symbol—the bodily form. This prime symbol was apparent in the arts in the form of the Greek statue and in how the city-states on the Peloponnese peninsula were organized. It was represented by the fact that the Greeks could not imagine mathematical numbers to be broken (like in Western mathematics that explored all principles into the infinite), as this would have hurt their body’s entirety (Spengler, 1998). By seeing the classical culture as an own culture different from the Western culture (even if related by heritage patterns), Spengler again challenged traditional perceptions of history.

Spengler’s (1998) *Decline of the West* was one of the most successfully sold books in the time period between both World Wars, and also one of the most critically disputed. Many contemporaries disliked the

title, blaming Spengler for predicted a catastrophic end of the West, whereby Spengler just described a process of completion of the West, taking place over centuries still to come. Others, like the Austrian philosopher Karl Popper, rejected Spengler’s book because of its deterministic views (Kiesewetter, 2003). Others, like the Marxist literary scholar Georg Lukács, disliked Spengler’s anti-liberal tendencies (Ludz, 1967), for example, identifying late Western societies as systems in which politics would be mainly created by money-backed interests. Left-leaning scholars rejected Spengler because he did not share the belief that elevating the social status of the working class would end societal problems. On the other hand, right-leaning scholars rejected Spengler because he rejected the concept of racial biology (and by this, became one of the first intellectual critics of the upcoming Nazi movement and Adolf Hitler).

Thomas Mann (1924) initially praised Spengler highly, but later became more critical because of Spengler’s fatalist views. Sociologist Theodor Adorno (1955), himself critical towards Spengler, acknowledged the enormous potential of Spengler’s work as a mean of prognostic analysis, attesting that “Spengler’s insights were often more profound than those of his more liberal contemporaries, and his predictions more far-reaching” (p. 59). He assumed that Spengler might take revenge by being right and thought that few of his critics were intellectually really capable of rivaling him or even coming close to the depth of his level of understanding (Adorno, 1955). As already mentioned, Spengler was also a source of influence for John Campbell, an American mythologist and advisor to film producer and director George Lucas (“Star Wars”), as well as for Henry Kissinger, U.S. National Security Advisor from 1969 until 1973 (Oswald Spengler Society, 2018).

By some scholars, Spengler’s work was perceived as equally useful to study history and politics, as Albert Einstein’s theories of relativity were regarded to be useful for the study of physics. He was seen as useful in a variety of ways, as his work could be applied to all aspects of current and future Western culture: politics, economics, arts, science, and military. British historian Arnold J. Toynbee and his 12-volume seminal work, *A Study of History*, was deeply influenced by Spengler (Kaupp, 1967). In comparison, Toynbee’s work did not show the same degree of structure, systematism, and inner coherence as Spengler’s work (Schmitt, 1991).

The American political scholar Samuel Huntington (1997) referred strongly to Spengler to build the base of his *The Clash of Civilization*, but on a level of much lesser scope and less well-founded, especially when it came to his division of the world in different cultural zones.

Spengler was largely forgotten during the time of the Cold War between America and the Soviet Union in the second half of the 20th century. This conflict seemed to be merely the result of simple ideological frictions and, therefore, contradict his culture-related theories. Spengler also had predicted a decline of democratic tendencies in the West and a rise of authoritarian characteristics and leaders. With reference to the classical high culture and the history of ancient Rome, he called this period “Cesarism.” The victory of democratic America in World War II seemed to contradict him, but many contemporaries forgot to take Spengler’s temporal horizon into account that prognosticated events not for years, but for centuries to come.

Donald Trump’s election success in 2016 and the style of Trump’s presidency again seemed to confirm Spengler to some extent. Few contemporaries could have predicted Trump’s success. In addition, Trump was only one example of the political reality of our 21st century that confronted us already with tremendous, unexpected change. Although many contemporaries lacked temporal distance and systematic understanding to grasp current and upcoming future events properly, Spengler from his temporal distance delivered. At least to a much larger extent. His macroscopic, larger temporal perspective allowed the interpretation of current events very differently from how contemporaries would do it.

The words of Spengler’s critic Adorno, highlighting his prognostic capacities that would know few rivals, rang in the heads of contemporary scholars and publishers. Suddenly, Spengler has been rediscovered and discussed in a variety of international publications. Currently, it would probably be hard to find a better framework for understanding our modern world to such a far-reaching extent. Applying Spengler’s theories would not only allow the interpretation of findings as part of a bigger picture but also arrive at very different or totally opposing results, compared to the limited application possibilities of other models.

Even the German weekly *Der Spiegel* dedicated Spengler a longer article. As a left-leaning publication

format and based on its general reporting tendency, the article was, to some extent, ideologically biased and critical towards Spengler, but acknowledged his profound capacities for political and cultural prognosis, affirming Spengler’s potential to some extent (Kurbjuweit, 2018). Another contemporary, Belgian historian and cultural critic David Engels (2013), perceived the analytical potential of Spengler’s work as much more positive for comparing the crisis of the current European Union to the one of the late Roman Republic. Engels was one of the co-founders of the Belgium-based Oswald Spengler Society that was established in 2017 for the study of world history. It awarded the first Oswald Spengler Prize this year to French writer Michel Houellebecq (Oswald Spengler Society, 2018).

For the research on the future of German-Chinese relations, to determine the exact status of the partnership between Germany and China in relation to Germany’s alliance to the United States, no study had yet been conducted, employing the huge prognostic potential of Spengler’s work. This created a research gap, as being able to determine whether Germany’s alliance with China would, in terms of importance, supersede its existing post-World War II alliance with the United States, which would be of tremendous significance in the fields of politics, economy, and even culture for all Western countries and China. The answer to this research question would hold far-reaching implications for the future of the entire world.

Germany functioned as the cornerstone of America’s geopolitical strategy for Europe. Should Germany shift into a close alliance with China, turning away from its trans-Atlantic partner, it would result in a significant loss of both influence and power for the Western bloc, led by the United States, in consequence benefitting China. That such an inner-Western division between Germany and America would become possible has turned out to be more than thinkable. France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, called just recently for a European Army that, according to him, may even provide protection from a potential American threat (Chazan & Brunsden, 2018).

This study assumed that the central research question could be answered using Spengler’s work as a prognostic tool. As Spengler was regarded as a highly controversial thinker, this attempt to apply his ideas was not without problems. Due to earlier mentioned criticism, the usefulness of applying Spengler’s model

had to be verified first. Oswald Spengler was perceived as politically incorrect, as he challenged many of the principles on which current Western democracy was built upon. In addition, his wording did not seem to fit our time and needed to be read within the contemporary context of its creation. Correction of some of his views and an adaptation to our time would perhaps be needed. At the same time, it was assumed that his overall usefulness would probably appear evident.

Furthermore, the debate about Germany's orientation and its current and future political-economic role within the Western treaty and alliance system was a very sensitive one with respect to Germany's negatively connoted role in World War II. Not surprisingly, its discussion in Germany often leads to an utterance of idealistic and even ideological positions that were, for a long time, considered as never challenged constants of post-war German identity. In our current world, where things seemed to be out of control, many of these coordinates have been challenged fundamentally. Also, for that reason, an attempt at verifying Spengler's methodology had been made before it was applied to the research question.

Methodology (Oswald Spengler's Model)

Verification of Methodology

In the next step, the usefulness of Spengler's model was assessed. Tools of assessment were a questionnaire for conducting a survey and unstructured expert interviews as a mean of confirmation. As the in-depth knowledge on Spengler was in the academic community of our time is very rare, a way had to be found to deliver necessary knowledge as a prerequisite for conducting the survey and the expert interviews in the first place.

The venue that was selected was the 2nd Hermann Ehlers Symposium (HES) that took place from October 25th to 28th, 2018, in the German town of Aachen. The HES conference was organized by the Ferdinand Friedensburg Foundation, which especially focused on providing political education (Bede, 2018). The topic of the conference was "Trump, Putin, Xi. A world in radical change. And Europe in between." The topic of the conference was a good fit for the research subject, as attendants were, to a large extent, made aware of the seriousness of upcoming economic and political change, the so-called Trump effect and America's, China's, and Germany's involvement in the changing

world order.

A peculiarity of this conference was that it was attended not only by established academic scholars but also by university students. Additionally, all attendants possessed, to a large extent, political knowledge and political background education, even if they were holding or trying to obtain degrees in different academic disciplines. That made them suitable for research involving the work of Oswald Spengler. That the conference took place in Germany and that attendants were mostly German or Austrian was another advantage for addressing a topic involving a German philosopher who was consulted to comment on Germany's situation.

The conference organizers allowed me to set up a workshop to lecture attendants on Oswald Spengler, as a prerequisite to conducting the survey and carry out unstructured expert interviews. This special condition of allowing the workshop made the obtained results more useful than what could probably have been gathered from most other academic conferences because in-depth knowledge on Oswald Spengler is very rare, even in an academic environment. Although the conference had also been selected for its permission (allowing to set up the workshop), it fit the study in terms of its political focus, with regard to the quality of its attendants (and their political knowledge), and the parameters necessary for conducting both survey and unstructured expert interviews. The conference and the foundation behind it understood themselves as being politically neutral. However, the political orientation of attendants and organizers could, on average, be described as center-right—what could have posed a very slight bias, supporting a positive perception of Spengler's work. In general, it could be said that the conference attendants and organizers (mostly) still represented the German academic mainstream. In comparison to the Ferdinand-Friedensburg Foundation, the Oswald Spengler Society has been more suitable when it came to pre-existing background knowledge on Spengler. However, it would not have been a useful choice to assess limitations of Spengler's work in the contemporary context, as the attendants would have been strongly biased pro-Spengler and would therefore not have represented the academic mainstream.

Topics with regard to the changing international order and the political consequences for the aforementioned national powers had already been presented and discussed before the workshop began. Discussions

were, in general, on a high level of academic quality, and general participation during the conference was good. The workshop was titled “Oswald Spengler. Prognostic model for the future of the West?” was scheduled at the end of the conference, and attendance happened voluntarily. Eighteen participants attended the workshop. This number was not very high, but normal for a conference of approximately 70 attendants and taking into account that other competing activities happened at the same time. In a Powerpoint presentation session lasting approximately 60 minutes, the attendants were intensively trained in the basics of Spengler’s work. Afterward, a lively discussion about the advantages and shortcomings of his model took place for about 30 minutes. Open questions were answered. Then, the attendants were supplied with the survey questionnaire.

They were asked to provide information about their age, gender, highest educational degree, and the academic discipline in the first section of the survey. The second section asked them to assess their knowledge about Spengler prior to and after attending the workshop. A 5-point Likert-scale was employed, in which attendants could provide their answer within a range of five options. This range of options, for example, for assessing knowledge before the workshop, went from one extreme like “not familiar at all” to another extreme like “very familiar.”

The third section was also the main section of the survey with overall 11 questions, all of them using a 5-point Likert scale, in which the five answer options ranged from the extreme “not relevant at all” to “very relevant.” Participants had to assess how relevant Spengler’s work was as a mean of prognosis for the near and the far future, for economic and for political developments, for the West and the Islamic world overall, and for countries like America, Germany, China, and India in particular. The focus was on political prognosis.

The last and fourth sections assessed limitations. The participants were provided with multiple choices for topics to whose understanding Spengler’s work should be used only to a limited extent or not at all. These topics were “Era of National Socialism,” “Democracy studies,” “Study of populism (left- and right-wing),” “Studies of the financial crisis (since 2007/08),” and “Studies of the European debt crisis (since 2010).” It was also possible to mention a topic or to choose the option “no limitation.” There was more

than one answer possibility; all options that applied could be chosen.

Verification of Methodology: Results

All 18-workshop attendants participated in the study. The youngest participant was 20 years of age, and the oldest one was 80. The average age was 40. All attendants were male. The lowest educational degree was the general education for university entrance (in Germany called “Abitur,” in Austria “Matura”). The highest academic degree was a Ph.D. Seven attendants had a background in social studies, 11 in natural sciences. Both backgrounds held academic degrees from lowest to highest educational degree. At least 11 attendants (61.11%) held an educational degree equivalent or higher than the Bachelor (71.42% of the seven attendants with a background in social studies held such a degree and 54.55% of the 11 attendants with a background in natural sciences held such a degree). At least eight attendants (44.44%) held an educational degree higher than the Bachelor (57.14% of the seven attendants with a background in social studies and 36.36% of the 11 attendants with a background in natural sciences).

The results showed that for section I, most participants had limited knowledge to Spengler (average score of 1.67 on a Likert-scale from 1 to 5), but that the workshop extended their knowledge (average score of 3.61 on a Likert-scale from 1 to 5). This confirmed, indirectly, that the choice of the HES conference was correct (for allowing the opportunity to organize the workshop), even if the conference itself and its attendants posed other limitations.

The results for section II showed that the participants approved only to some extent of Spengler’s model as a mean of prognostic analysis. On a Likert-scale from 1 to 5 (ranging from “not relevant at all” to “very relevant”), the average score was 2.49. The lowest score was only 2.11 points yielded by question 6, which asked how useful Spengler’s work would be as a mean of economic prognosis. The highest score was achieved by question 7 with 3.33 points, which asked how useful the philosopher’s writings would be to prognosticate the political future of the West (Europe and North America). Also, question 9 (addressing the political future of the USA) and question 10 (addressing the political future of Germany) had a score of 3.22 (question 9) and 2.94 (question 10) in absolute numbers—not very outstanding but received a better

rating than many other questions and both ranked above average. Ironically, question 3 (how well Spengler can be used to prognosticate the near future until 2040) with 2.83 points ranked better than question 4 (how well Spengler can be used to prognosticate the far future until 2100) with 2.56 points, even if Spengler's work would naturally be perceived as a better mean for long-term than for short-term observations.

In section IV, the strongest recommendation to use Spengler only to a limited extent was given for both the studies of the "financial crisis" and the "European debt crisis" (yielding a score of 44.44% and 38.89% respectively). For the same two topics, 33.33% (financial crisis) and 27.78% (European debt crisis) of the participants recommended not to use him at all. In reverse, 50% of all attendants saw no reason why restrict the application of Spengler's work on any of the mentioned topics at all. For the topics of "Democracy studies" and "Study of populism (left- and right-wing)," 27.78% recommended to use him only under limitations. For the topic of "National Socialism," the score went even up to 33.33%. Two participants made use of the option to mention their own restrictions for areas of research. One attendant wanted to limit Spengler's application in the field of "Philosophy: on the problem of ideology," and another participant wanted to limit Spengler's use for "any other" fields of research.

It was noticeable that Spengler's work polarized the attendants in the workshop discussions. Some tended towards approval of him or his work, but more tended towards disapproval, at least to a considerable extent. Some cases among the survey questionnaires were observed, in which Spengler was either clearly approved or rejected.

In the unstructured expert interviews, a scholar who rejected Spengler argued from a party ideological position as justification. Other scholars who approved of Spengler also argued from a party ideological context and found him especially useful to be consulted on the current crisis of the European Union, the refugee crisis, and the rise of authoritarianism in the West. Some interviewed experts showed interest in gaining further knowledge on Spengler.

Questions 7, 8, and 10 (in section II), which in terms of results ranked comparatively better than many others, were at the same time questions that were of special significance in the context of this research, as they related to the political future of the

entire West, and of Germany and America in particular. The degree of approval for Spengler, based on these three questions, was slightly higher than the degree of disapproval. In general, the average score for the most relevant main section II was almost exactly between approval and disapproval.

Even considering the only very slightly evident pro-Spengler bias (because of the assumed political center-right orientation of most participants), these results would probably represent the German academic mainstream on this topic. This observation matched the (to some considerable extent) higher disapproval of Spengler's work in the aforementioned article of the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, which as a publication format, was perceived as left-leaning and could politically be described as center-left. Approval or disapproval of Spengler's work seemed to happen along ideological default lines. What presented another irony is that Spengler strongly disapproved of ideologies but seemed to have ended up at the center of an ideologically motivated discussion.

Despite the relatively low number of participants, the results seemed to be representative of the academic mainstream, as already pointed out. Although the results were not especially encouraging to use Spengler and limitations (especially as assessed in section IV) had to be taken into account, there were positive aspects. As mentioned, the approval rates for questions 7, 8, and 10 were comparatively higher than the average score (approval was for these questions stronger than disapproval). These were also exactly the questions that dealt with the research topic, focused on prognosticating the future status of the German-American relations, its meaning for the development of the Western world, and in final consequence, its impact on the German-Chinese strategic partnership. In addition, the topics in which some of the participants saw Spengler's work to be applicable to a limited extent (section IV) does not matter much in the context of this research: apart from the study of rising authoritarianism, as this aspect would be linked to the studies of both democracy and populism. Nevertheless, even in this context, it has to be remembered that only a minority (27.78%) advocated a limited use of Spengler's work.

Furthermore, Spengler's model could be applied to prognosticate future political developments in the West even if it was not approved entirely. In addition, some renowned scholars found Spengler's model very

useful because of its high degree of predictability for macro trends in the Western world (examples: the rise of authoritarian leaders, the status of art in the 21st century). Many other academics who did not share their opinion did not make it necessarily less valid. It even offered the opportunity to produce original work based on Spengler now before the academic mainstream would perhaps once do so. Therefore, the use of Spengler's work was for this research paper continued but considered the assessed limitations.

Analytical Application of Methodology and Findings

Spengler's methodology was applied to the central research question: Will the strategic partnership between China and Germany supersede the one between the United States and Germany in terms of political importance? According to one strongly left-leaning source, the German *Linke Zeitung* (literally "Leftist Paper"), this situation already existed since, at least, 2017. The *Linke Zeitung* mentioned in an article that German-Chinese collaboration would not only already exist in the fields of politics, business, and culture, but that it would also increasingly intensify and already represent Germany's closest relations to any nation outside of the EU, which meant that these relations would be closer than the German-American ones (Stern, 2017).

Furthermore, Stern (2017) mentioned that the German-Chinese alliance (this term was explicitly used) would be more and more openly directed against the United States. Taking the ideological bias of the source into account (which was already evident in the newspaper's title), it would be understandable why some authors of this publication format would exaggerate the status of Germany's links to the world's most powerful communist country. But were these observations right? This research used Spengler's approach to answer this question.

According to Spengler (1998), all high cultures underwent a process of unification in their late civilizational phase. The entire cultural circle was then united under one central power. This was a long process, lasting over centuries. In the beginning, two powers competing for this leading position were fighting for dominance. After one power won, the integration process between all the states of the cultural circle in political and economic terms became deeper

and more advanced, until one could finally consider them all as basically one state or realm (Spengler, 1998).

The classical Greek-Roman Ancient high culture had been picked for a comparatist study with the West, as it had already been well explored by Western historians. In the classical culture, this process of deeper integration lasted despite some temporary backlashes from the three Punic Wars (264–146 BC) over the downfall of the Roman Republic (indicated through many events, one of them being Cesar emerging victorious from the Roman Civil War in 45 BC) until the beginning of the official reign of the first Roman emperor in 27 BC (Demandt & Calder, 1990). A milestone event within the integration process was also the Social War (91 to 88 BC) in which Rome fought against former allies on the Italian Peninsula that wanted Roman citizenship: legal equalization with Romans and an elevation of their status. This war was also called the "War of the Allies." Despite a Roman victory, the Romans granted their "allies" the desired status (Durant, 1944).

What analogy to the West would be worth comparing? In the Punic Wars, Rome competed with another power for dominance, Carthage. Only after Carthage suffered a decisive defeat at the end of the Second Punic War (201 BC) could Rome extend its power largely. New trade links across the Mediterranean Sea boosted its economy then (Demandt & Calder, 1990). America had a similar experience after World War II when it established strong trade and political links between both sides of the Atlantic that allowed its own market a tremendous growth lasting for decades.

As Rome fought the Punic Wars, the United States fought the "German Wars" with World War I and II. Germany was in terms of its industrial potential and its leading position in modern sciences, the only other Western power that could have seriously challenged America's position to become the leading force of the West (Watson, 2010). Spengler (1919) even believed that Germany, and more precisely Prussia, would be in the role of a modern Rome, destined to unify the entire Western world.

In this, Spengler obviously erred, but his error was understandable from his temporal perspective. He died in 1936 before World War II began and did not witness the German defeat. His model should be pursued further, but the role that Spengler had foreseen

for Germany fell to America. Although he erred about the specific question of which country would be the unifying force, the use of his overall model still made sense. This process of deeper integration under American leadership would, for structural reasons, prevent a German-Chinese alliance from becoming stronger than the links between Germany and the United States.

In this context, it would be important to remember the temporal scope. From the end of the Second Punic War in 201 B.C. until Cesar's victory in the Roman Civil War in 45 B.C., 156 years have passed. Equating this time perspective with potential future Western history, we could count 156 years from the end of World War II in 1945 onwards. Then, an event of similar important magnitude as the victory of Cesar, namely, the rise of an American leader who would finally destroy the order of the American Republic, could take place around approximately 2100. It is obviously not possible to scientifically determine a specific year, but this comparatist perspective was fruitful enough as it allowed understanding the enormous temporal scope of this process. When contemporary scholars and publishers reflected on the rise of "Cesarism" in the West, it links this phenomenon also to Trump (Luyendijk, 2017). They should better take into account how long-lasting and complex this process would be.

Another analogy apart from America being in the role of Rome deserved attention: the Social War that legally equated Rome with culturally and geographically very close allies in its environment, putting them on a similar status. A Western analogy could be the creation of an Anglosphere, the emergence of a close political and economic union between the Anglo-Saxon nations. This would be a milestone step towards the deeper integration of the entire Western world. At the core of such an Anglosphere would need to be a close union between the two most important Anglo-Saxon nations, the United States and the United Kingdom. It was assumed that when this would be happening, Canada would join due to its close relations with both countries. If Canada would enter, Australia would also later become a part. This idea of an Anglosphere was much older than one might think. In a different context, it was discussed already in the late 19th century (Bell, 2017). An article from the late 1990s in *Forbes Magazine* was stating the advantages: an additional \$2.4 trillion of gross domestic product

and another 111 million people would be added to America's power (Johnson, 1999).

If this was the only way for America to stay on eye level with its rising Chinese rival, would it let this opportunity go? Gelernter (2016) advocated Britain's entry into the USA using Churchill for its argument. The reason: Brexit. According to Gelernter (2016), the United States could offer the United Kingdom better opportunities than the European Union. Current news seemed to give Anglosphere supporters new hope: experts on both sides of the Atlantic worked already on creating an Anglo-American trade deal, which could rival the EU (Griffiths & Jones, 2018).

Employing the comparatist approach one more time, 113 years passed from the end of the 2nd Punic War in 201 B.C. until the end of the Social War in 88 B.C. Equating this with the history of the West and counting from 1945 onwards again, the final year of World War II, one could temporally locate a decisive emergence of an Anglo-Saxon mega union in the 2050s, being aware of the aforementioned limitations of this inexact approach. The Anglosphere creation could be a milestone step towards deeper integration of the entire West, including nations like Germany and France. The unification of the West in consequence then could finally determine the status of the German-Chinese strategic partnership.

To underline that the unification and integration of an entire high culture did not only happen in the Greek-Roman Ancient world, China's history could be used as an analogy. In the time of the seven Warring States (475–221 B.C.), two main forces competed for dominance—the Northwestern state Qin and the Eastern state Chu. Qin was finally winning this series of conflicts and conquered all of the other six states, including Chu, to establish the Qin dynasty. It became the first dynasty of the Chinese Empire (Spengler, 1998).

Although it would deserve serious acknowledgment that this Western unification process could take place, would it be in Germany and China's best interest? It would definitely not be in China's best interest. China was aware of the unavoidability of a confrontation with the United States, even if this may not necessarily be a military one. In addition, China faced problematic relations with many countries in its neighborhood.

Relations with Japan were still overshadowed by the lasting impressions of Japanese cruelties in

World War II and the Japanese refusal of properly acknowledging them. India has an existing territorial dispute about the region of Kashmir (Ehret, 2017a). Russia and China cooperated because both countries regarded America as a common threat, but this was of tactical nature only. The Russians perceived the huge Chinese population near its Far Eastern border as a potential menace, and the Chinese did not forget that the Russians occupied lands that not only belonged to China once but also contained valuable resources (Ehret, 2017b). Tensions between China and parts of the Muslim world existed because of the way Beijing treated its own Muslim minorities (Ehret, 2017a).

No substantial tensions existed between China and Europe or between China and Europe's leading power, Germany. Close collaboration with Europe would not only be in China's interest but also revive a tradition from the interwar period in the 1920s and 1930s when the collaboration with Germany was regarded as the most important international project to modernize its own country (Martin, 1981). A Western unification, pulling Germany stronger into America's orbit, would therefore definitely not be in China's interest, which would need Germany as its own ally. Taking into account how much Germany could benefit from a collaboration with China to create a stable international order and to boost its own trade and export (Staack, 2018), this Western integration process would perhaps not even be in Germany's best interest. The surprisingly many common interests of both nations could almost suggest this conclusion.

Are not current developments contradicting a trend of deeper Western integration? Despite the NATO linking America and Germany across the Atlantic, could the alienation between North America and Europe not deepen even more? Many of the actions undertaken by the current U.S. President Donald Trump seemed to suggest this. In addition, Macron's call for a European Army, mentioning America as a potential threat to Europe, seemed to point in this direction (Chazan & Brunson, 2018). Furthermore, current events like Brexit or Catalonia's attempt in 2017 to split off from Spain would support this reading.

In this context, it would be important to remember the time horizon. The Western unification process would last for the entire 21st century. Temporary reversal trends that seemed to be contradictive are normal. They happened before. In the 1990s, the Balkan region in Europe saw the sudden emergence

of some new, small states on the territory of former Yugoslavia. Few would have imagined that only a few decades later, some of these countries would be members of the European Union and others trying to aspire membership status.

In the interwar period between both World Wars, the United States followed a policy of isolationism. From a long-term perspective, this would only be a temporary exception from its interventionist politics, which began with its entry into World War I in 1917 and in 1941 with its entry into World War II, until now. Current contradictive trends must therefore not be representative of the long-term development outcome of the Western integration process, whose completion seemed to be located around the year 2100 (according to the comparatist approach).

The application of Spengler's model took only the inner-Western factors (related to the nation-states of America, Germany, and the entire Anglosphere) into account. However, what if outer-Western forces would intervene and hinder the deeper integration and unification process? The one factor, in this context, having the most likely potential to do so would be China. Taking a closer look at China, it acted in the last decades and in the global international environment relatively peacefully, compared to the United States. Also, in terms of a military budget, China was clearly outspent by America (Branigan, 2014). Its empire, in territorial size, has remained for centuries more stable than the expanding territory of the United States.

Here it would be important to remember some cultural factors. When ascribing an especially high degree of aggressiveness to the Chinese, Westerners often projected their own attributes onto a non-Western culture. Western media are not as objective or neutral in terms of reporting on Chinese matters, as often believed (Ehret, 2017a). With Spengler's words, did the Chinese man adapted to its natural environment, following a perceived pre-destined way (*tao*)? The Western man, in comparison, transformed the world according to his will, projecting his power into the infinite distance (Spengler, 1998).

Considering available data, it seemed unlikely that China could interfere with the long-term project of Western integration in a way that could prevent its completion. In addition, America could potentially mobilize the political and economic potential of its Anglo-Saxon allies in order to contain China. Thus, a close German-Chinese alliance and strategic

partnership will probably remain a dream in comparison to a closer American-German relations will be a reality.

The last remark from Spengler felt topical. He warned Western nations not to share their technology with non-Western peoples, as this would turn out to be a long-term disadvantage for the West. When he wrote this, he may have thought more of Japan, but his remark would apparently apply to the German-Chinese relations too (Spengler, 1931), even if aforementioned scholars (in the Literature Review) did not share the same degree of pessimism.

Limitations and Conclusion

This study encountered several limitations. Literature review and media content analysis were conducted in a German context only. For future studies, it may be useful to take also literature and media content from China into account, even if it may, to some extent, be subject to bias. The current increasing tendency of unbalanced and government-supportive reporting in Germany would also suggest consulting English-language literature and media content on this research topic to ensure a higher degree of objectivity.

Only two German publication formats had been picked for the media content analysis, the weekly *Der Spiegel* and the daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which provided contradictive results. Although the outcome of this analysis could be explained with the nature of the publication formats and their ideological tendency of reporting, it would make sense to consider additional German publication formats. Moreover, the six years observed time from 2013 until 2018 is limited. Future studies could expand it by covering the years before and the years to come. Only three keywords were used within the keyword searches. Using more keywords may provide more search results. Still, the outcome of literature review and media content analysis concluded with a (mostly) positive perception of direction and potential of the current and future German-Chinese relations, especially from the perspective of German scholars.

Spengler's work, which was used as a prognostic tool, had a lot of criticisms because of its macroscopic ambitions, the language used, and political statements. However, even critics acknowledged its usefulness in some aspects, although there were, in comparison, not many people approving his work in all regards. Despite the criticisms, the far-reaching scope of his

culture-historical model and the profoundness of his predictions made Spengler still useful, even if his applicability was limited. It required data collection for academic verification through contemporary scholars in the first place before Spengler's work could be applied.

This data collection during the HES conference workshop had only 18 attendants at disposal. A larger number of participants would have helped to increase the database. In addition, should similar workshops be conducted on future conferences, attendants should hold not only higher educational degrees but also degrees in relevant academic disciplines like History or Political Studies. The HES conference had also been selected for practical reasons, but only met basic requirements.

The data analysis showed that the attendants agreed on the criticism of Spengler's usefulness, in line with older scholars, but they acknowledged a higher than average approval for the aspects that were relevant to be used in the context of this study. Only 27.78% of the participants wanted to restrict the use of Spengler's methodology for studies on democracy or populism. However, these topics would be relevant for exploring the rise of Western "Cesarism." Ironically, even the critically, left-leaning *Der Spiegel* acknowledged the potential of Spengler's work to be used on the topic of "Cesarism" (Kurbjuweit, 2018). The limited, general academic in-depth knowledge on Spengler posed another limitation.

Spengler's model was carefully applied with the determined limitations in mind. Despite this model being wrong in some aspects (like the future role of Germany in the Western world), this application proved to be overall still very useful. It was concluded that the trend of deeper integration and unification of the Western world under American leadership and in the 21st century would for structural reasons prevent a German-Chinese strategic partnership from arriving at a degree of significance that could seriously rival the status of the German-American relations: even if this was perhaps not in the best interest of Germany and definitely not in the best interest of China. A close German-Chinese alliance will remain a dream, and the German-American relations a reality.

The study focused on America as the most important foreign political influence factor on the binational relations between the two Eurasian nations of Germany and China. However, it did not take many other aspects

into account, as this would have expanded the scope of this study beyond feasibility. Future studies would need to focus on other aspects of the German-Chinese strategic partnership, especially on factors directly related to China.

Overall, did the study still arrived at conclusive findings that enabled the creation of a coherent picture with regard to the research topic? Literature review and media content analysis from their short-term observation were positive in judging the potential of the German-Chinese relations. In one case, the *Linke Zeitung* (whose ideological bias was already evident in the newspaper's name) mentioned that the binational partnership would not only be more important than Germany's relations to America but even more and more openly be directed against the United States(!).

The application of Spengler's model helped to arrive at opposing results that judged the potential of Germany's relations to China negatively. By doing so, it did not just arrive at very different findings, but demonstrated the enormous potential of long-term studies and helped to address the research gap adequately. Spengler's work should be considered as a powerful tool for Political Studies and for studies on the rise of authoritarianism.

Despite shortcomings and manifold limitations, the findings of this study were considered valid. They should serve as a basis for future studies on this subject, which could allow further verification. A final empirical validation for the development of the German-Chinese strategic partnership will only be provided by time itself.

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Declaration of ownership

This report is my original work.

Conflict of interest

None.

Ethical clearance

With special regard to academic honesty, accuracy, fairness and recognition of intellectual property, this paper is considered as ethically cleared. The paper is approved by Stamford International University.

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