

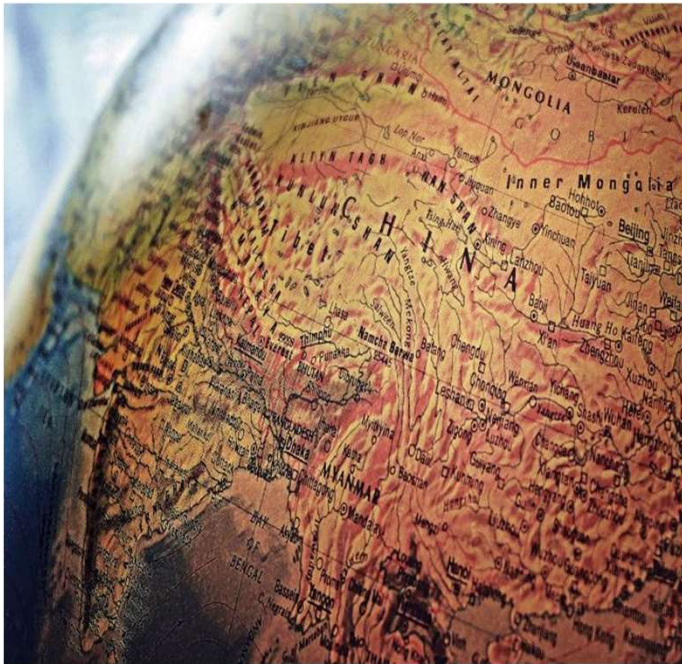


CHINESE PERSPECTIVES ON GERMANY

Study Presentation
Frankfurt, 11.12.2025

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Objectives



- + Making current Chinese perspectives on Germany and Sino-German relations accessible
- + Contributing to the deepening of German expertise on China
- + Providing an impetus for nuanced strategies in politics and economic affairs



Study design



- + Qualitative study based on 45 in-depth interviews in Beijing and Shanghai
- + Interviewees with a connection to Germany, from different areas of society, of different ages and genders, without dependence on GIZ, access via German intermediary organizations
- + Evaluation by means of coding, thematic grouping and consolidation without further interpretation



Limitations



- + The statements are not statistically representative of the entire population of China, but they are representative of the social milieu of the respondents
- + Results are reproduced as authentically as possible, without judgement or political contextualization
- + The documented statements do not represent the opinion of GIZ or the team of authors
- + The study does not want to convince anyone of anything, but to facilitate understanding and contextualization





Germany's image of China and China's self-image

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- + German reporting on China is perceived by interviewees as unfair, one-sidedly negative, moralizing, arrogant and politically instrumentalized
- + The "true China" with its diversity, achievements and challenges goes unseen
- + China's own development is sometimes seen critically, but reforms must come from within
- + China's external communication is still judged by respondents as being clumsy and ill suited for the intended audience





China's clouded view of Germany

China's clouded view of Germany

- + In the eyes of respondents, Germany is still highly regarded for technical competence, thoroughness and cultural depth, however:
- + Increasing doubts about reliability, excessive bureaucracy, declining innovative strength
- + Impression of stagnation, backwardness in digitalization, AI and electric mobility
- + In terms of foreign policy, Germany is seen as lacking in its leadership in Europe and inadequate in its mediation vis-à-vis China



A desk flag holder with two flags: the flag of the People's Republic of China on the left and the flag of Germany on the right. The flags are mounted on a silver-colored metal stand. The background is blurred, showing more flags and a white table.

Sino-German relations

Sino-German relations

- + Respondents cite increasing political alienation, dwindling trust in dialogue formats and disappointment when reflecting on the state of Sino-German relations
- + They see the term "systemic rival" as confrontational, ideologically charged, and damaging to trust
- + Germany appears to be heavily dependent on the US, "de-risking" prevents cooperation
- + Accusations of unfair competition seem largely inappropriate, China's competitive advantages: speed, efficiency, costs, customer orientation
- + Cooperation is seen as an economic opportunity, wherein Germany could profit from more boldness and adaptability





Global order in upheaval

Global order in upheaval

- + According to respondents, China's focus is on internal development, while pursuing the foreign policy goal of a peaceful multipolar world order instead of Western dominance
- + China's aspiration is to cooperate on an equality footing, rather than engage in confrontational power struggles
- + Europe is valued as a potential partner, if it were to become more independent of the US, China's main competitor
- + The relationship with Russia is characterized by geographical proximity and the need to defend against Western dominance



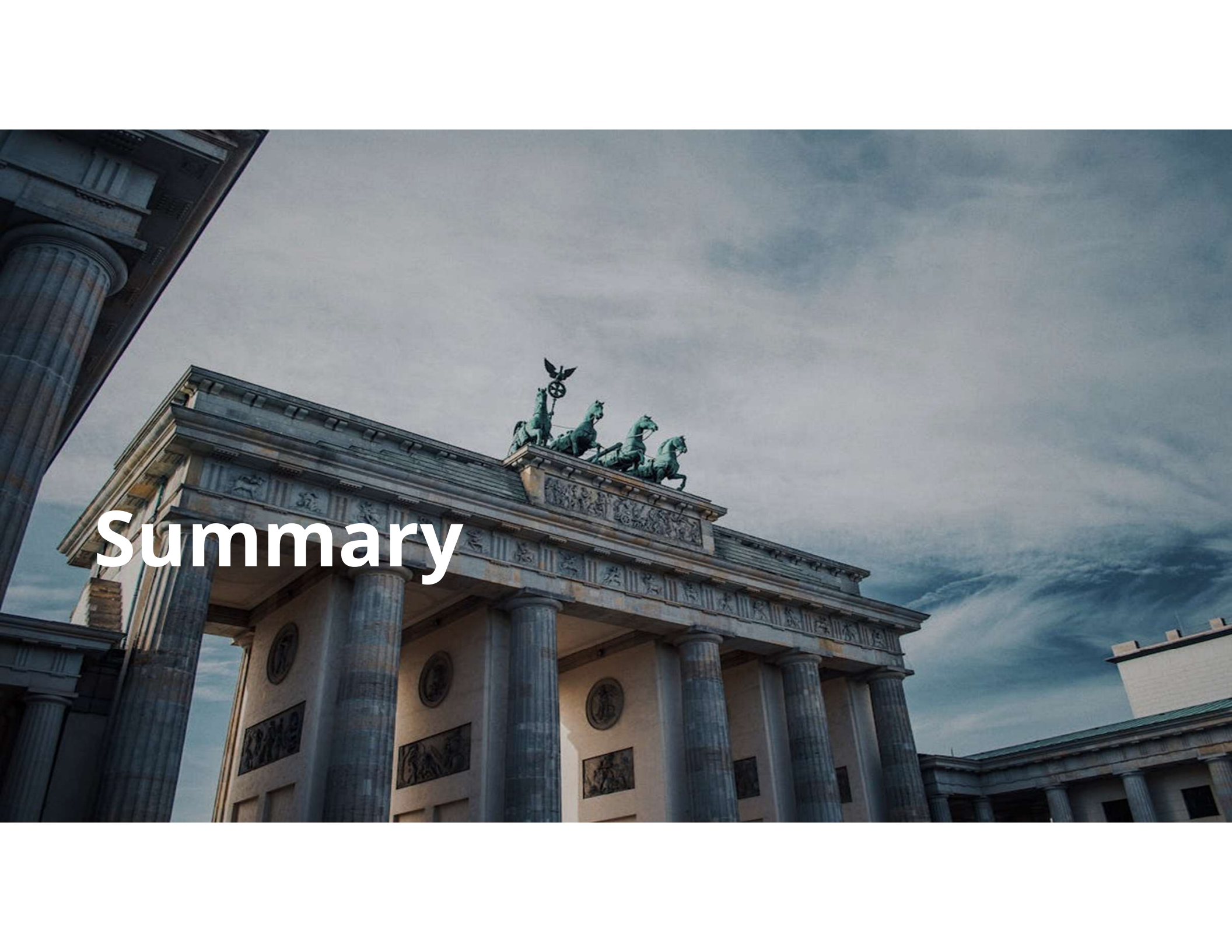
A photograph of a modern industrial factory floor. In the center, a large, white and black robotic arm is positioned over a blue and white machine. To the left and right, other robotic arms are visible, some with yellow and black safety stripes. The background shows a large, open industrial space with high ceilings and various pieces of machinery. The text "Plea for 'reasonable' cooperation" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

**Plea for "reasonable"
cooperation**

Plea for "reasonable" cooperation

- + Despite tensions, Germany is valued as a partner with complementary strengths and weaknesses
- + Cooperation, e.g. in environmental and climate protection, should always be pragmatic and solution-oriented
- + Education, research and mutual learning with Germany is highly valued
- + Desire for future strategic cooperation with Germany in global markets (e.g. green tech, life science)
- + Cultural exchange as an important bridge for building trust and understanding in difficult times





Summary

Key findings

- + Remarkable homogeneity of certain statements, especially on self-perception, peacefulness, striving for prosperity
- + Official narratives visible, but embedded in personal experiences, emotions and critical questions
- + Behind supposedly uniform answers, a variety of individual personalities emerged
- + Complexity beyond consensus/disagreement → tension between loyalty and deviation, between official patterns of interpretation and independent reflection



Emotional(ized) signals

- + Disappointment and incomprehension about Germany turning away from its role as a long-time teacher and friend
- + Sense of injury over media coverage perceived as unfair
- + Clear rejection of moral lecturing
- + Uncertainty about German identity and interests
- + Concern that focus on security prevents any cooperation
- + Hope for reconciliation and deepening of relations



Potential takeaways for future engagement

- + Specify interests and areas of cooperation, align them strategically and balance dependencies
- + Ensure respect and equal footing, avoid lecturing and condescension
- + Clarify the relationship between value-based and pragmatic approaches, as well as Germany's/Europe's role in the world
- + Promote mutual benefit and exchange on narratives and core beliefs



Key points for discussion



There is an insufficiently addressed discrepancy between the Western image of China and China's self-image



Looking at Germany from a Chinese perspective shows a country with declining attractiveness and an urgent need to catch up



The strong focus on European values represents a challenge for Sino-German relations



China's path in a changing world order seems clearly defined, while that of Germany and Europe raises unanswered questions



A pragmatic "contact" strategy could be geopolitically superior to a values-based "distance" strategy



An abstract graphic featuring two overlapping faces. The face on the left is teal and the face on the right is blue. Both faces have closed eyes and a slight smile. A circular arrow, composed of two curved lines, encircles the top of the faces. The background is light gray with soft, wavy purple shapes on the left and right sides.

**Thank you very much for your
attention!**