Made in China Reloaded?

Cultural Study of Perceptions of ‚Made in China 2025‘ and ‚Made in China 2049‘ by non-Chinese B2B players

Abstract

The important role of Country of Origin (COO) as a Brand in front of rising exports in national economies leads to the question of perception of the proclaimed 2015 strategy ‚Made in China 2025‘ as a part of a long-term strategy ‚Made in China 2049‘ by potential business partners of China in Europe and other countries. Acting as a competitors in the ten key industries which are named in ‚Made in China 2025‘, foreign B2B actors react differently on the goals and first steps of realization of ‚Made in China 2025‘. This paper examines the effect of the cultural background of the non-Chinese B2B actors and their business experience in cooperation and/or competition with Chinese partners. In light of the emotional turn, the irrational component of B2B decision-making might depend on the cultural background of B2B actors, whereas Uncertainty Avoidance determines their perception of Chinese strategy in the general evaluation scale varied between fear (pole „Risk“) and delight (pole „Chance“), and masculinity operates as a variable factor in the proposed reaction on it ranging between competition and cooperation. International experience and deducted cosmopolitanism plays an inferior role in their proposed reaction on the Chinese strategy to compete with established industrial nations by 2025 and with successful COO’s by 2049.

Keywords: B2B Marketing, Country of origin, Cosmopolitanism, Cultural dimensions, Ethnocentrism, ‚Made in China‘.

1. Introduction

On the 10th May 2015, the newspaper China daily wrote: ‚Made in China 2025‘ is the first 10-year action plan designed to transform China from a manufacturing giant into a world manufacturing power. The 10-year plan will be followed by another two plans in order to transform China into a leading manufacturing power by the year 2049, which will be the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China“ (ChinaDaily 2015).

The echo in Europe varied from delight, e.g. in the Report of UK Trade and Invest: „And what China lacks in this process, the UK can, in many cases, provide“ (CBBC 2015), via some sort of appeasement, e.g. reduction of the strategy to copy the German ‚Industry 4.0‘ (cf. Li 2018) up to ignoring the proclaimed strategy as „propaganda“ or satirizing it, e.g. assuming the lack of automatization, the so-called Industry 3.0, makes such plans unrealistic (Müller / Voigt 2018).

Ironically, the meta goal of the Chinese government to turn the value of ‚Made in China‘ into a positive brand comparable with ‚Made in Germany‘ within about 25 years, was rejected by German business media (e.g. GTAI 2018), whereat the „Made in Germany“ had not started as a positive brand. On the Contrary: The ‚British Merchandise Marks Act‘, which took effect on August 23, 1887, set out to ascribe, with the label ‚Made in Germany’, poor quality, especially for steel products. Within few decades after World War II, it turned from a negative to a positive brand (Deutsche Welle 2017). There are also some signs?, indicating that the zenith of the positive image of ‚Made in Germany‘ is a phenomenon of the past: the German federal organization, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) published in 2015 the survey ‚Germany in the Eyes of the World‘, which - after conducting open-ended, qualitative interviews with 179 B2B actors from 26 countries - found that albeit ‚Made in Germany‘ is named as a label of trust, endurance, functionality and high quality, some interview partners sent warning signs: “Interviewees felt German businesses urgently needed to actively face up to competition and to continue to invest in marketing” (GIZ, 2015). A study by Irina Slot in 2019 shows that some B2B actors criticize ‚Made in Germany‘ products as over-designed and ‚Made in Germany‘ services as not flexible and not sufficiently customer-oriented (Slot, 2020: 17).

Understanding Country of Origin as a stable but alterable construct, we will explore in this paper the reasons of various reactions to the strategies ‚Made in China 2025‘ and ‚Made in China /2049’ in Europe, focusing on perceptions of B2B actors who have to find their strategy in the context of competition with Chinese companies. Will the Chinese strategy of 2015 affect everyday business life of European industry, or does it already? What is the proper response to ‚Made in China‘ strategies: competition, collaboration, a mix of both? Which factors influence the approach of dealing with „Chinese dragons“?

In the first step, we will examine, what is known in the field of B2B marketing regarding the influence of Country of Origin (COO) as a brand. The literature review outlines the internal and external view on COO in general, focusing on ‚Made in China‘, particularly. The latter perspective will be elaborated for cognitive and non-cognitive components, albeit such distinguishing is criticized in the current literature and also problematic in the everyday business life. In the following subchapter of literature review, the perception of ‚Made in China‘ (MiC) will be narrowed down to the feasible factors which might influence it. The indicated research gap will lead to a research question and corresponding hypotheses, which will be tested in the following study, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The results will be concluded and reflected regarding the limitations of the study. In conclusion, the contribution of the study to the science and its potential practical significance will be discussed.

2. Conceptual Background

Country of Origin as a Brand

The following consideration of COO as a brand is based on Kotler's definition of a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from competitors" (Kotler / Keller 2008). In light of this definition, ‚Made in China' or ‚Made in Germany' can be understood as a brand, similar to ‚Made by Huawei' or ‚Made by Siemens', especially due to the role of the brand as a factor of differentiation in the international competition (cf. ibid.). In the B2B context, it seems to be even more appropriately analog to classical so-called 'roof brands,' which are, according to Baumgarth (2004), preferred in industrial marketing.

Country of Origin (COO) was established by the ‚Merchandise Marks Act' in 1887 to protect the products from Great Britain from "me-too-products" (e.g. from Germany). Since 1891, labeling the country of origin became mandatory (Aichner, 2014).

We have to point out the general - almost literal - constructive vagueness of COO. In the nowadays complex supply chains, the labeling with COO cannot guarantee that the product branded with, e.g. ‚Made in Germany', was completely produced in that specific country (Bienenfeld, 2016). The legal rules of such labeling are rather „flexible" (cf. Moens / Leon 2012). On the other hand, understanding the limitations of such labeling, stakeholders - both external (e.g., consumers) and internal (e.g., employees) nevertheless, link the specific COO to the attributes promised by the image of that country and consequently to the corresponding value of COO as a brand (cf. Ravens, 2014).

In the history of ‚Made in Germany', what started as the labeling for poor-quality steel, is now associated with generally high quality and trust (GIZ, 2015). Nowadays, Chinese companies and the Chinese government aim to turn ‚Made in China' into the label comparable with ‚Made in Germany' and ‚Made in Japan' (Slot 2020). Ironically, ‚Made in China' as the (potential) strong competitor for ‚Made in Germany', leads by the example, created as a precedent by ‚Made in Germany' itself. This „role model" can encourage the Chinese site to be optimistic that such a radical turn from negative to positive image is generally possible and can be achieved even faster under centrally-organized conditions. In contrast, the turn for ‚Made in Germany', was not the result of any comparable governmental program, albeit the mechanism behind such a turn seems to be not have been studied yet. There are some indications that it happened in the 60s of the XXth century in connec-

tion with the establishment and growth of specific positive brands from Germany, resulting eventually in the positive ‚roof' brand ‚Made in Germany' (DW 2017) and rooted in the graduate change in the country's image, itself a few decades after the second world war (Slot 2020).

The influence of the positive image country image (so called *macro-level* of COO according to Ozretic-Dosen et al. 2017) is elaborated in the study of Magnusson, Krishnan, Standford, and Srdan, albeit not as a driver of the turn from negative to positive COO, but rather as a given secure mechanism, preventing the spill-over effects from one specific and prototypical brand towards others from the same „country-group" in case of failure of specific brands (Magnusson et al. 2014). This study was published before the so-called diesel gate, assaulting the positive image of reliability and sustainability of VW (Economist 2015), explicitly naming this brand as an example of prototypical German brand, quoting their advertising ‚Das Auto' or ‚The Power of German Engineering' (Magnusson et al. 2014). It seems to be too early to evaluate the impact of diesel gate onto the brand ‚Made in Germany' (Livmanis 2019), albeit not only VW, but several car brands, associated with the German economy (Audi, Mercedes) might confront the image of „Made in Germany" as the brand of quality and reliability.

The division of two levels of COO - image of the country (macro-level) and images of specific products or brands (micro-level) - is broadly discussed in the literature (s. ‚Made in China' Internal View)
Seeking a better understanding of who in Europe reacts to the current programs of industrial development ‚Made in China 2025' as a part of long-term strategy ‚Made in China 2049' and how. Aiming to turn ‚Made in China' into a positive COO by 2049, we will first briefly describe the first program, focusing on its connection to the long-term strategy aiming to turn currently a rather negative ‚Made in China' image towards a positive one, in the eyes of the world.

The strategy ‚Made in China 2025', published and enacted in May 2015, consists of nine tasks: „improving manufacturing innovation, integrating information technology and industry, strengthening the industrial base, fostering Chinese brands, enforcing green manufacturing, advancing restructuring of the manufacturing sector, promoting service-oriented manufacturing and manufacturing-related service industries-internationalizing manufacturing promoting breakthroughs in 10 key sectors" (China Daily 2015), which are:

Agricultural equipment
Rail equipment
High-end numerical control machinery and automation
New materials
Maritime engineering equipment and high-tech vessel manufacturing

Aerospace and aviation equipment

Electrical equipment

Energy-saving vehicles

Information technology

Biomedicine and high-performance medical apparatus (ibid.)

The task of fostering Chinese brands is directly linked to the long term goal, to turn ‚Made in China' into a positive brand by 2049, becoming public at the same time?. So this task is not surprising in light of international marketing studies (e.g. Magnusson et al. 2014), postulating the clear interrelation of positive specific brands (so called *micro-level*, s. above) and positive roof-brand of the connected COO.

The upgrading of industrial production heading by other tasks of the strategy ‚Made in China 2025', such as strengthening the industrial base or improving manufacturing innovation (ChinaDaily 2015) can also support the desired turn from ‚Made in China', associated with low quality mass production and bluff coping and cheapness, towards ‚Created in China' (Lin 2014).

The findings of Tim Ambler on the correlation between brand value and innovation can be understood as a „warning" for Chinese producers following the task Improving manufacturing innovation, by the way listed in SMC on the first place: ‚The crux is the quality of innovation, not the quantity. Indeed, many large firms today suffer form an excess of innovation, or initiative overload' (Ambler, 2001). The innovation is focused on ten sectors of SMC (s. above), which seems to be chosen in light of strategic goal of becoming an industrial leader rather in the sense of strengthening the strength, albeit the external view on the COO is rooted in the general reputation of the country (macro-level of COO s. above) as well as on the „fit" of the specific attribute of the country image and evaluation on specific brand (micro-level of COO) (Andehn et al. 2015). This study compared 12 COO's and 23 different brands in their inter-relationship from the point of view of (Swedish) students. For example, for the category 'wine', the COO „Made in France" was more supportive than for the category 'car' (ibid.).

It would not be surprising if the complementary picture for wines and cars were shown labeled with ‚Made in Germany'. But what would happen, if the bottle of the ‚Made in France' wine came from Saarland or some compounds of the ‚Made in France' car came from Germany? These examples illustrate how vague the COO labeling is (cf. Moens and Leon 2012 and (Bienenfeld 2016), but also how important it is in perceiving the desired attributes of the products conglomerated under COO as a roof-brand (cf. Ravens 2014).

And exactly an implicit meaning of COO as a package of perceptions rather than a mechanical or physical meaning of COO explains the irrational part of the anticipation the „own“ COO. For instance, Chinese responders in our previous study on ‚Made in Germany’ shows a much higher evaluation on „Made in China“ in connection with their evaluation of ‚Made in Germany‘ as outmoded. The internet research of Chinese business social media quotes many Chinese producers who are deeply surprised by negative reactions to the label ‚Made in China‘ from their potential business partners abroad or pointing excellent quality with reasonable price for a lot of products ‚Made in China‘ (Lin 2014: 122).

Difference between ‚Made in China’ internal and external views

In an external view on the brand, its image does not necessarily mirror the brand identity, formulated by the company, even in the frame of the current so-called Marketing 4.0, aiming to align the image of the brand towards its DNA (Kotler et al. 2016).

It is not clear, whether the goal of the Chinese government is to make ‚Made in China’ comparable with ‚Made in Germany’ or ‚Made in Japan’, heading the internal or only external view on this brand. It seems that the Chinese B2B actors are sharing already a positive perception of „Made in China“. For instance, the Chinese participants of the study, evaluating the image of ‚Made in Germany‘ from an external point of view and validating the appropriate price ad-on in comparison to ‚Made in China’ of the same specification for B2B actors from different countries, showed that they are quite confident in the value of ‚Made in China‘ (Slot 2020). On the other hand, the dissonance between internal and external views on the COO is neither a phenomena of the COO as a brand in general (Kotler/Keller 2008), nor unique for the COO ‚Made in China‘ (Slot 2020, Roth et al. 2015). For instance, few responders in the study, aiming to understand the external view on ‚Made in Germany‘ and heading the employees of non-German companies but with German roots, shared very positive perceptions on COO of Germany and differed from the mostly positive perception on ‚Made in Germany‘ by the non-German responders (cf. Slot 2020)

Such a gap between internal and external view on COO as a brand can be explained by:

1) Broader experience with products and services from the country of origin of the responders,
2) General inertness of brands and consequently the COO’s (e.g. Sliburyte and Giedre 2017) and/or
3) Ethnocentric mechanism (e.g., Ciompi 2005, Gürhan-Canli 2000, Roth et al. 2015).

In the case of ‚Made in China’, there are also various rational reasons for a negative evaluation of the products ‚Made in China‘ as well as the country image, being part of COO as a brand (macro-level, s. above), playing a role in constructing or at least freezing the negative image of ‚Made in

China‘ as a brand. The poor reputation of „Made in China“ leads to faking labeling like ‚Made in *another country‘* or ‚Made by *Company Name‘* (Lin 2014).

The dissonance between internal and external view on the COO is neither unique for ‚Made in China‘ (Slot 2020, Roth et al. 2015), nor is it a phenomena of the COO in general (Kotler/Keller 2008). Furthermore, ‚Made in China-external‘ suffers from the earlier studies of COO of emerging economies, which construct the connected COOs as a chip thread from the perspective of the economies (and scholars) from developed countries (Usunier 2006). The literature review study published in 2017 shows that „China is the most often researched country“ among 25 emerging economies, following by an immense gap by ‚Made in India‘ (Ozretic-Dosen et al. 2017).

Cultural impact to external view on COO

The influence of culture on market participants has been a theme in numerous studies. Usunier and Lee (2009) distinguish two contrasting approaches to research: emic and etic: “The emic approach holds that attitudinal or behavioural phenomena are expressed in a unique way in each culture. The etic approach, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with identifying universals. The difference arises from linguistics, where phonetics is universal and depicts universal sounds that are common to several languages, and phonemics stresses unique sound patterns in languages” (Usunier, 2009).

One of the methods to substantiate the *emic* approach in marketing is to correlate the behaviour of business actors and the cultural background, „measured“ or at least compared to each other by cultural dimensions. One of the systems of cultural dimension was established by Geert Hofstede (e.g., Hofstede et al. 2010). It allows for comparisons of different - two or more numerous - cultural backgrounds as independent variables in order to understand their correlation to various business phenomena, e.g., different decision-making in their irrational part as a dependent variables (Slot 2020).

Examining the validity of general marketing “laws” (comparable to the *etic* concept, s. above) in different cultural contexts (comparable to the *emic* concept, s. above) was the aim of a study by Verhage, Yavas, and Green in 1990. The correlation between perceived risk and brand loyalty, as it was formulated for the U.S. market, had been tested in the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, and Turkey. To distillate the cultural impact, the researches used the samples of similar socio-economical groups: “Data were collected from homogeneous subgroups of consumers within each country in order to minimize smacking variation. Upper-middle income married women residing in major urban centers were targeted as respondents” (Verhage et al. 1990). The results of the study supports the general relevance of the cultural background for the decision-making process .

The authors didn't use Hofstede's cultural dimensions or any specific cultural categories, nevertheless the results perfectly fit Hofstede's category of Uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede et al. 2010). For instance, the study indicates that Turkish culture is especially sensitive to perceive risks. This is a reason for marketers to consider emphasising word-of-mouth in the marketing plan for Turkish consumers (Verhage et al. 1990), which are characterised with the highest measurement of Uncertainty Avoidance (Hofstede's the fourth cultural dimension, s. below) among five cultures in sampling of this study.

Hereinafter, we will demonstrate some examples of the later studies, relevant for the topic of our study and explicitly integrated into one or two of the six cultural dimensions from Geert Hofstede: Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism versus Collectivism (IND), Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Long term Orientation versus Short term orientation (LTO) and Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR) (Hofstede et al. 2010).

Usunier and Lee explored the phenomenon of loyalty and found a positive correlation between the loyalty of consumers towards familiar brands and products and two of Hofstede's cultural dimensions: *Uncertainty Avoidance* and *Collectivism* (Usunier, 2009). However, Usunier and Lee only explored "Western" and "Eastern" cultures, without explaining such categorisations and/or elaborating the specific national cultures. This is in spite of the fact that so-called "Western cultures" (e.g. France or Germany) can also have high levels of UAI according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions: "65" for France, and "86" for Germany (Hofstede, 2017). On the contrary, the "Eastern culture" of China does not fall within such a high range, having a measured uncertainty avoidance of "30" (Hofstede, 2017).

The moderating effect of measuring *Uncertainty Avoidance* and *Collectivism* together is grounded in the increase of total credibility impacts. This effect was stronger for participants interested in purchasing a personal computer than for juice, which the researches expected because a PC is a more complex product, therefore demanding higher involvement of the buyer (Tülin 2006).

The difference in Uncertainty Avoidance for the U.S. and Kuwait ("45" and "68", respectively, in 2010 according to Hofstede, 2017) leads Al-Wuagayn and Suprenant to conclude that "members of a nation that tend to exhibit high uncertainty avoidance (Kuwait) generally prefer familiar brands with a known level of attribute quality over unfamiliar brands than would a nation with low uncertainty" (2006). The authors point out that these two countries have relatively similar standards of living and comparable marketing and retail industry structure, which is a strong indication of UAI-effect on the purchasing behaviours of their inhabitants. The quantitative study showed no significant difference between preference for a well-known brand over a generic brand (Al-Wugayan,

2006). “One possible explanation for this lack of association lies with the level at which an uncertainty-avoidance tendency may be operating. Anxiety generated from a high level of uncertainty is not manifested in individual level behaviours such as those related to consumption, but might be evidenced in other forms of social behaviours.” (Al-Wugayan, 2006).

Another explanation is the non-crucial difference between UAI for these two cultures. Despite the fact that the two UAI’s (“45” and “68”) lie on different sides of 50—meaning “non-avoidance” versus “avoidance” of uncertainty - the effective difference of about 20 might not be significant enough to show different behaviours between consumers. The authors call it “subtle differences,” which supports our possible interpretation of the study’s results above.

Focusing on international Relationship Marketing (RM), Samaha, Beck, and Palmatier warn that only accounting for individualism ignores the significant moderation effect of the Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance dimensions: “Despite a recent surge in international research on relationship marketing (RM), it is unclear whether or how RM should be adapted across cultures” (Samaha et al. 2014). The authors operate with Hofstede’s dimensions of culture to conduct a comprehensive, multivariate, meta-regression analysis of “47,864” relationships across 170 studies, 36 countries, and six continents. To guide their theory, they proposed four tenets that parsimoniously capture the essence of cultures‘ effects on Relationship Marketing. Study 1 affirms these tenets and emphasises the importance of taking a fine-grained perspective to understand the role of culture in RM because of the high degree of heterogeneity across different cultural dimensions and RM linkages. For example, the magnitude of the *Individualism*’s effect is “71% greater on RM than other cultural dimensions, whereas *Masculinity* has almost no effect. To guide managers, Study 2 adopts a country-level approach and reveals that RM is much more effective outside the United States such that relationships are “55%” more effective, on average, for increasing business performance in Brazil, Russia, India, and China“ (Samaha et al. 2014).

For *Uncertainty Avoidance,* they discovered that the interaction of advertising intensity and communication on customer relationships is dis-synergistic (cf. Samaha et al. 2014). On the other hand, the leverage of Relationship Marketing itself might be bigger in cultures with higher *Uncertainty Avoidance:*

> “Because risk management has a central role in high *uncertainty avoidance* cultures, we anticipate that RM strategies linked to uncertainty reductions are more effective at building and maintaining relationships in high *uncertainty avoidance* cultures and less effective in low *uncertainty avoidance* cultures […]. The two relational constructs related to uncertainty reduction in our framework that may be moderated by *uncertainty avoidance* are seller expertise and relationship duration […]. Customers in high *uncertainty avoidance*

cultures are motivated to reduce risk, and they extract more value from sellers with expertise, which seemingly can generate more predictable outcomes. Thus, customers have greater motivation to build and maintain strong relational bonds with expert sellers when *uncertainty avoidance* increases.“ (Samaha et al. 2014).

A few simple examples can be found in Hofstede‘s works, eg., advertisements in high *Uncertainty Avoidance* cultures often depict physicians dressed in white lab coats to increase perceived expertise and take advantage of customer preferences for *Uncertainty Avoidance* (cf. Hofstede et al. 2010).

The marginal influence by the fourth cultural dimension of Geert Hofstede, Masculinity, on Relationship Marketing (ibid.), stays in line with the barely elaborated role of this cultural dimension in marketing in general, with the exception of differentiation in the purchased goods categories: they are supposed to be clearer in masculine cultures and rather diffuse in feminine cultures (cf. Hofstede et al. 2010). Geert Hofstede defined this cultural dimension as following: „Masculinity is the extent to which the use of force in endorsed socially“ (Hofstede / Hofstede 2013). He and his followers elaborated the role of this cultural dimension in the management style („decisive and aggressive“ versus „intuition and consensus“) as well as differentiation in the key branches of „competitive manufacturing and bulk chemistry“ versus “competitive agriculture and service industries“ - for masculine and feminine cultures, respectively (cf. Hofstede et al. 2010). To understand the role of Masculinity as a cultural prism in the evaluation of competitive COOs was the aim of Lena Gerberding’s study, which showed the tendency to combat the foreign COO in rather masculine cultures like Chinese and German ones (cf. Gerberding 2019). The indexes for Masculinity for both cultures are interestingly on the same, rather high level of 66, but much lower than, e.g. Japanese culture (95) (cf. Hofstede / Hofstede 2013).

B2B actors conglomerate different roles and functions. Being part of the supply chain, they make purchase decisions, more or less influenced by their anticipation of the COO of their potential business partners. On the other hand, (and often situated in another department of bigger organizations), they compete with foreign COO’s offering comparable products and services under their national COO as brand or their „independent“ brand (e.g, „Made by Siemens“ instead of ‚Made in Germany‘). The sampling of the study by Gerberding (s. above) came from Siemens, one of the biggest industrial companies based in Germany and counted to the micro-level of ‚Made in Germany‘ (cf. Gerberding 2019). It can be assumed that all of them were B2B actors due to the outsourcing of any B2C Siemens products to BSH. This study has not elaborated the role of the responders in different functions, for instance, whether they came from sales and probably benefit from the growing Chinese market for some industrial goods that could „compensate“ or balance the direct competition for other industrial goods and services. In case the responders came from

purchasing products and services Made in China offered them additional options, but maybe making the purchase decisions more complex. In the latter case, the influence of COO could vary for the different roles in the buying center (negotiator, internal user, compliance manager). The possible variations in the influence of the COO for different functional roles as a factor for their probably different „voices“ in the collective decision making process has not been studied yet - as far as our literature search can overview the current studies in this field.

Coming back to the purchase side of the industry, the third cultural dimension, Masculinity, shows low effect in anticipating the value of COO by the business actors as a customers (Samaha et al. 2014), it can affect their response on COO of countries as producers of the products and services, being a part of another COO or competed under their own, COO-free brand (s. above).

Cultural variations of the external view on country of origin was examined by Zeynep Gürhan-Canli, who focused on the question “to which extent cultural background influences evaluation of the products labeled with different countries of origin - the home country vs. another, „foreign“ one” (Gürhan-Canli 2000). The grave differences in the positive evaluation of mountain bikes ‚Made in Japan‘ and ‚Made in USA‘ by Japanese and US-American respondents, respectively, i.e. positive evaluation by Japanese respondents of Japan’s products regardless of objective superiority of some US-American products and positive evaluation by US-American respondents of the American products, mostly in case the product was indeed superior to ‚Made in Japan‘ - is interpreted by the author through higher Collectivism of the Japanese culture in contrast to US-American culture (cf. Gürhan-Canli Z. 2000).

On the another hand, the results of the Gurhan-Canli study, comparing different irrational evaluation of American and Japanese customers, can be explained through the cultural dimension of Uncertainty avoidance, where these two cultures differ even greatly: „46“ and „92“, respectively (Hofstede /Hofstede 2013). The measurement of the cultural dimension *Individualism vs. Collectivism,* which is not explicitly mentioned by Gürhan-Canli but indirectly meant in his study (Gürhan-Canli Z. 2000), shows the support for such an explanation and the moderating role of the cultural dimension Individualism vs. Collectivism on decision in a B2C context: „91“ for US-American and „46“ for Japanese culture (Hofstede / Hofstede 2013). In the case of comparison of US-American and Japanese cultures, the interesting opposing of the measurement of *Uncertainty Avoidance* and *Individualism vs. Collectivism* can be noted: 91, 46 and 46 and 92, respectively (Hofstede / Hofstede 2013).

All the studies elaborated above focus on products, but taking into consideration the growing impact of services generally and on the international stage (Slot 2020), there is one study of special

interest, connecting the anticipation of the services ‚Made in a certain country' and the culture of the potential consumers of this service. According to this study, the immaterial and intangible character of services leads to a higher leverage of brand as a promise of predicted level of quality (Meffert / Bruhn 2009). The influence of positive brands on B2C purchasing decisions of services (e.g. healthcare) is stronger for customers from cultures with higher Uncertainty Avoidance such as Russia, Kazakhstan, and Arab countries (Slot 2013).

To dilate the view on the role of the cultural norms and values of the customers on their perception of the brands, the following study, combining the *emic* and *etic* approaches, is of specific interest. Aaker, Benet-Martínez, and Fabra examined in their 2001 study "how cultural meaning is represented in the minds of individuals." The "universal" message of a brand personality which portrays a specific culture as an icon or symbol (for instance, the "Marlboro Man" cowboy"), is generally understood by consumers from different cultures (in this study, American, Spanish, and Japanese participants), but is valued in different ways depending on the network of their cultural values (Aaker et al. 2001). The results of the study can be interpreted as support of the thesis of the prevalence of irrational aspects over rational aspects in the decision-making processes, as it will be elaborated in the subchapter „B2B versus B2C decision making", below.

Before that, the next subchapter will deal with another irrational factor, which might influence the perception of the COO: The openness towards the foreign world and „foreign" products, labeled with ‚Made in foreign country'. The results of the „cultural" study on the different behavior of Japanese and US-American consumers in their perception of Japanese and US-American products (s. Gürhan-Canli Z. 2000 above) can also be seen through this prism.

The concept of consumer mindset between cosmopolitanism and ethnocentrism

Consumer cosmopolitanism is based on the idea of a cosmopolitan person as a „citizen of the world" (Roth et al. 2015). The person, who might not identify himself or herself with one specific nation or ethnic group, does not evaluate„foreign" products and services negatively or even tend to consume them over the „home"-products, due to curiosity towards new and unusual products (ibid.)

On another site of the scale for openness towards foreign products (COO of foreign countries), the authors define consumer ethnocentrism, postulating nevertheless the mix of irrational and rational reasons for the purchase decisions of this group, for the latter „such as protection of the home economy and avoiding the unemployment" (ibid.) in her or his country. These results towards party rational decisions, made by ethnocentric consumers, dissent the findings by Cleveland, Laroche and Papadopoulos, who tried to understand post-material decision-making by consumers in Canada, Mexico, Chile, Sweden, Greece, Hungary, India and South Korea and found out that the so-

called CET (Ethnocentric consumer) „will even make economic sacrifices by choosing a local brand“ (Cleveland et al. 2009). Cultural aspects, e.g. „ethnic or national symbols, are objects of attachment and pride, whereas those of others may be held with contempt“ (ibid.)

The study of different emotional responses towards globalization, by Dominic Moïsi, can help to understand such post-material phenomenon on the psychological level. The author defined three emotional „continents“, which are not necessarily linked to the geographical continents: Hope, Fear and Humiliation (Moïsi 2009). On the continent of Fear, globalization can increase the tendency towards an ethnocentric mind-set, because growing complexity drives people back to their old borders and supposed security and certainty (ibid). In this rather sociological than economic study, he nevertheless links the general emotional response towards globalization to the economic power of the national economies: the more you achieved, the bigger is your fear to lose due to globalization and increasing competition between nations (ibid) connected to different COO as symbols of such increasing competition (s. above). The question is, whether the general „sound“ of the emotional continent business actors act on, pulls them towards an ethnocentric mind-set (on the continent of fear, e.g. USA, Japan, Germany) or towards a cosmopolitan mind-set (on the continent of hope, e.g. China, India)?

In this context the results of the above-mentioned study on customer evaluation of mountain bikes ‚Made in Japan‘ and ‚Made in USA‘ by Japanese and US-American respondents (Gürhan-Canli 2000) can be interpreted as the phenomena of customer cultural chauvinism or reluctance to buy goods from any other countries (e.g. opponents to globalization), and not only a specific country (e.g. embargoes for political or ideological reasons). If so, the next question arises: Is such irrationally driven decision-making process relevant only for consumers or also for professional customers, albeit with the shorter leverage of effect in B2B marketing in comparison to B2C marketing? (Czinkota / Ronkainen 2003; Al Ganideh / Elahee 2012).

B2B versus B2C decision-making

The purely rational decision-making by professional actors is the base of the above-mentioned study by Lin (2014), drawing to conclusion that „importers are less interested in suppliers’ better design and brand’s recognition […]. For the organizational buyers, their main concerns are in products’ cost and quality, unlike most of individual consumers that are emotionally attached to some particular brands“ (Lin 2014).

Such a distinguishing between emotionally driven consumers and rationally driven professional buyers seems to be obsolete in light of the findings of Daniel Kahnemann, Nobel prize laureate in economics in 2002. In numerous experiments, his fellows and he showed that irrational decision-

making is not the privilege of non-experts (cf. Kahnemann 2012). With the research of decision-making processes by business actors, psychologists brought the critics of the rational notion (shared e.g. by Max Weber, s. Slot 2020) - the higher the education, the higher rational reasoning - into the economic scientific world. By that times, the division between rational and emotional aspects in general was upset in cognitive science. For instance, in the book „Descartes' Error", marked the so-called emotional turn in science (Schwarz-Friesel 2007): the author of „Descartes' Error", Antonio Damasio, elaborated the „relation between emotion and reason" (Damasio 2007) and validated the hypothesis, that

> „emotion is in the loop of reason, and that emotion could assist the reasoning process rather than necessarily disturb bit, as was commonly assumed" (ibid.)

The first scratches on the idea of purely rational professionals can be dated even decades earlier: For instance, two decades before Damasio and Kahnemann, Madnl and Huber found out, that professional actors use information rather to explain or disclaim irrationally met decisions than to use this information in the rational decision process, which might be expected from them as professionals (cf. Mandl / Huber 1983).

The concept of pure ratio of professional actors, shared by professional actors themselves and also scholars with the pre-emotional-turn mind-set, can be the deeper reason for the above-mentioned interpretation of the results of the study on B2B effect (Lin 2014) and not the reason for the results themselves. Moreover, another irrational factor could explain the findings,
that information of COO showed a weak effect, namely cultural background (i.e. irrational factor) of the participants of Lin's study: since the UAI for British culture is relatively low (35 according to Hofstede / Hofstede 2013), the cultural background of professional actors and not their „professionalism" can imply less importance of securing „guarantees" given by COO. Still, for responders who did not import from China, the main reason was perception of inferior quality and the responders who did import, pointed out price advantage in the combination with advanced quality (s. Lin 2014).

Cultural background as a variable of business behavior was elaborated in another study, published in the same year: Christina Ravens aimed to understand the role of the cultural socialization of the "internal customer" as the factor of brand validity in her study "Internal Brand Management in an International Context". Ravens wrote: "defining a brand identity within a multinational context will suggest different interpretations of the brand by each employee depending on their cultural background, because the brand identity elements themselves either explicitly or implicitly trigger a culture-specific decoding and interpretation of information" (Ravens 2014). Using Harry Triandis' definition of culture as "comparable to an individual's memory in that it represents the collective memory of a society" (Triandis 1995), she examined the organizational commitment of the em-

ployees of 30 DAX Companies—German Companies leading the German Stock Exchange Market in Frankfurt. Focusing on the cultural dimension of *Individualism vs. Collectivism*, evaluated not only by Geert Hofstede, but also by Shalom Schwartz and Harry Triandis, Ravens found a negative correlation between *Individualism*, brand commitment and, consequently, the value of the brand for international employees of the German company (cf. Ravens 2014). These results are interesting for our study, due to an external, receiving view on the brand. Unfortunately, the influence of *uncertainty avoidance* on brand anticipation is not discussed in this paper, although the system of cultural dimensions of Shalom Schwartz would allow it by analyzing the linked cultural dimension of *Conservatism* as

> "cultural emphasis on maintenance of the status quo, propriety, and restraint of actions or inclinations that might disrupt the solitary group or the traditional order (social order, respect for tradition, family security, wisdom)" (Schwartz 1999).

The possible correlation between *conservatism* and brand loyalty has not been sufficiently studied yet, probably due to the descriptive nature of Schwartz's cultural dimensions and the general agreement of his findings with Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions, which remains the most popular among academicians and practitioners in international management (cf. Ravens 2014).

There is nevertheless the essential difference between purchase decisions in B2C and B2B markets: commercial decisions are mostly made by several employees of the company, often institutionally organized in a so-called "buying center", and the B2C decisions are normally made by one single person (rather in cultures with higher Individualism, cf. Hofstede et al. 2010). Not only the number of decision makers is higher, the dynamics of B2B decision-making are more complex. With regard to decisions for big projects, the weight of the opinion of technical leaders is much higher in comparison to commercial leaders which could explain the acceptance of the relative high prices matched with expectations of high quality and low costs for maintenance from the long-term-perspective (Backhaus / Voeth 2010). The different roles and approaches, or even "vocational cultures," of the participants of the B2B purchase decision are minor in comparison to the imprint of the culture in which they grew up and also of the imprint of the organizational culture to which they all belong (Hofstede et al. 2010 and Slot 2016).

Kale and Barnes found out that national character ("culture," in the definition of Triandis, s. above), organizational culture, and individual personality influence the B2B purchasing process, but at the same time influence each other. Without focusing on one of them, or prioritizing one over the other, they demonstrated that the harmony between buyer and seller, grounded in the similarity on at least one of three levels, leads to more probable contracts due to "overall compatibility in their communication" (Kale / Barnes 1991). At that time, the role of *uncertainty avoidance* as one of only four of Hofstede's cultural dimensions was a special factor contributing to a strong resistance to

changing partners in negotiations by buyers who come from cultures with a higher index of *uncertainty avoidance*.

The key difference between B2C and B2B marketing as estimated and proved by Lodish, Morgan, and Kallianpur, is targeting the needs of the second-grade customer of the purchasing company as a direct customer: “If the potential customer perceives that his business will be more profitable if your product or service is used, then they will likely buy it. The key word here is “perceives”. If the customer understands and believes that your product can make the production, service, or delivery process more efficient or more valuable to the customer’s customers, then the entrepreneur can make a nice sale.” (Lodish et al. 2001).

Although the brands in B2B Business are not as broadly known as those in B2C Business, their role is no less important. Industrial goods often generate great insecurity on the part of the customer. The quality of the industrial products and services are often only realized after purchasing, or sometimes even not directly or consciously. This purchase-insecurity can be reduced by a brand. Aside from this function, brands also support the B2B buyers in their orientation and subsequently simplify rather complex purchase decisions (s. above). Strong (2016) explains: “…the majority of scholars researching B2B branding [have] claimed that there is no room for emotional factors such as trust in B2B branding.” However, emotional experience is identified as the third component of the inquiry-sided brand, and added value is reflected in positive values, experiences, settings and feelings of the customer (Backhaus / Voeth 2010). The case study on B2B customers of Panasonic supports this: “In the B2B context, a combination of both functional and emotional factors is important for a B2B customer” (Strong 2016).

There are few indications that *uncertainty avoidance* plays a significant role in such “irrational” purchasing processes—there is not the same anticipation of new products by B2B buyers (Ansah 2015). Furthermore, higher *uncertainty avoidance* leads to market-oriented long-term strategic alliances (Lee / Kim 2014). Research on the anticipation of national culture by different social groups within one culture concludes that the predictive power of *uncertainty avoidance* is stronger for older respondents rather than younger, stronger for men rather than women, and stronger for those with more years of education rather than fewer years (Taras, 2010). These results additionally support the relevance of this cultural dimension for the B2B purchasing processes.

Herbst and Merz sought to discover if brand categories and elements of B2C business work in B2B environments and examine the Brand Personality Scale (BPS) of Aaker (1997) on its relevance for the industrial buyer (especially buying centers) and concluded that not all five dimensions (*sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication,* and *ruggedness)* are equally relevant for B2B business (Herbst / März 2011). Thus, they postulated the three categories for B2B Branding: *Performance,*

Credibility and Sensation (ibid.). This was in addition to pointing out the general possibility of using BPS for B2B brands: “The results of two qualitative and three quantitative studies indicate that brand personality constitutes a valuable instrument for industrial brand management” (ibid.). The *Performance* dimension fulfills the informational function, and the *Credibility* dimension helps B2B brands fulfill a risk reduction function (ibid.). The effect of the *Sensation* dimension measured low in the article, and is rather irrelevant for the focus of this work on ‚Made in Germany‘. Surprisingly enough, the dimension of *Credibility* as emotional differentiation from the competition plays an important role in establishing a positive brand personality in an industrial environment despite the assumption of strictly rational B2B business (Strong 2016). “As such, the *Credibility* dimension helps B2B brands fulfill a risk-reduction function” (Herbst / März 2011). The longer the business relationship, the more transactions connect two businesses. Therefore, credibility is of higher importance than the focus on performing (ibid.).

Generally, the authors affirm that BPS can be used with adapted dimensions to improve a brand for B2B business. Furthermore, they propose a cultural adjustment of the special BPS’s for industrial brands analogous to the BPS for B2C brands (Aaker et al. 2001). Focusing on corporate industrial brands instead of the product- or service-level brand seems to be useful for industrial marketing due to the uniqueness of products, services, and technical solutions in current B2B business (Herbst / März 2011). Similar to the B2C brands, the commercial value of B2B brands is based on subjectively postulated ideas. The irrational component of brand value is displaced by the technical-objective elements, but not completely replaced by them. Therefore, the price-premium of the industrial brand allows a business to charge higher prices for a branded version of the same, unbranded product (Backhaus / Voeth 2010).

To summarize, alongside rational aspects (cf. „Performance“ above), there are some irrational aspects which influence the decision-making process of - both non-professional and professional - actors, such as a culturally driven „need“ for security (cf. „Credibility“ above), supposedly given by positive COO as well as their reaction to globalization, conceptualized in a cosmopolitan or ethnocentric mindset.

The literature review above shows the research gap exactly in the field of irrational components of the decision-making process in a B2B environment. A relatively broadly elaborated correlation between purchases decision and the cultural background of decision makers, measured by Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, focus on private buyers and consumers. The ethnocentric motives in the mind of business actors have not been studied so far.

In this light, we formulate the following research questions:

RQ1: Is there a correlation between emotional reaction on the Chinese strategies ‚Made in China 2025‘ and ‚Made in China 2049‘ and the cultural socialization (especially Uncertainty avoidance value) in the cultural background of the business actors from other countries (not China, i.e. external view on ‚Made in China‘)?
RQ 2: Is there a correlation between the proposed strategy with which the companies and society might respond to the ‚Made in China‘ strategies and the cultural socialization (especially Masculinity) the business actors belong to?
RQ 3: Is there a correlation between professional and personal international experience of business actors and their open-mind-set (conceptualized as cosmopolitanism) and openness to collaboration with Chinese companies in spite of COO-competition with ‚Made in China‘?

3. Hypotheses and Research Model

In light of a deductive approach, we elaborated the existing theories, concluded the research gap and formulated three research questions (s. Chapter 2). In the following, the concrete hypotheses must be examined by analyzing the data, collected in an adequate way to draw conclusions as to whether the hypotheses are confirmed or refuted, which might develop further theories.

Based on the elaborated theories and previous studies, the following hypotheses seem to be appropriate:
Hypothesis 1 (H1): The higher the UAI index for the culture of origin of the business actor, the higher is the probability of his or her negative reaction on ‚Made in China‘ strategies.
Hypothesis 2 (H2): The higher the MAS index for the culture of origin of the business actor, the more intense is the competitive notion in the proposed strategies to combat ‚Made in China‘ strategies.
Hypothesis 3 (H3): International professional and private experience is positively correlated to openness to collaborate with Chinese companies.
Hypothesis 4 (H4): Cooperation with Chinese people and companies reduces negative reactions on ‚Made in China‘ („contact hypotheses“).

The complex character of reaction and response-strategies, interwoven from cognitive and affective aspects (s. Schwarz-Friesel 2007) and possible influence on the answers in the latter component (Kahnemann 2012) led us to the decision to collect data in live sessions under similar conditions. First, the moderator presented a short overview of the facts regarding ‚Made in China 2025‘ and ‚Made in China 2049‘, as well as a brief history of ‚Made in Germany‘, started at about 100 years ago as „brand“ of low quality.

After that, the participants were invited to mark their association with ‚Made in China‘, categorized by five positive and five negative attributes:

Innovation	Imitation
Technology	Boring
Quality	Low Quality
Digitalization	Boring
Future	Unfair

In the following analysis not the specific answers were crucial but rather proportional between positive and negative aspects connected towards ‚Made in China‘, aimed to understand the general perception of the responders towards this „brand“.

After the first question aiming to understand perception of the current meaning of ‚Made in China‘ to the responders, the next question aimed to understand the opinion of the responders, whether or not
China will succeed in the ambition to tum „Made in China“ into a positive label by 2049?

Such a „digital“ formulation was chosen in the main study after 95% of the participants of the pilot study „ignored“ the options of:

strongly agree _ agree _ neither agree nor disagree _ disagree _ strongly disagree,

marking only „agree“ or „disagree“, maybe following the categoric character of the original formulation - the position of the Chinese government towards the corresponding strategy ‚Made in China 2049‘. 5% of the responders of the pilot study who were not specific in their position, marked „neither agree nor disagree“, but this option had to be removed to enable responders to identify clearly their position, also in light of the digital character of affective categorization in line with cognitive sciences: positive or negative without a „neutral“ position (cf. Schwarz-Friesel 2007).

The following question aimed to understand not only emotional reaction of the responders on ‚Made in China‘ and current ‚Made in China‘-strategy but also to understand their notion of an adequate reaction to their companies and countries:

How must your company, organization or country react to ‚Made in China‘?

The answers to this multi-line free text question were later analyzed with linguistic methods based on the frame theory (Schwarz-Friesel 2008), heading verification of the second and, partly, the first hypothesis.

Next, two questions aimed to understand whether the responders had a chance to personal and/or professional contacts with Chinese people:

Does the company or organization, you are working for, have any experience in working with Chinese partners?

Have you ever been to China?

To avoid potential priming (Kahnemann 2012) the most personal questions finalized the questionary:

In which country did you grow up?

In which countries have you been working and/or studying?

The answer of the last question might help to understand international experience heading the verification of H3 and the answer of the previous question would be important to verify the independent variable in the formulas of the first and second hypotheses.

The survey was executed in the form of five live sessions with young professionals from different European countries, who spent their time in Germany for an educational semester. Altogether, 89 people took part, in the study, 88 survey sheets? were received back, 55 participants followed the invitation to share their proposals for companies, organizations and countries outside of China to react to the strategies ‚Made in China', albeit only 52 of them were readable. Three participants came from Germany and other European countries as their places of work, but were originally from China , so this subsampling had to be sorted out due to the focus of the study on the external view on ‚Made in China'.

4. Results

The quantitative analyses regarding hypothesis 1 shows a clear tendency, corresponding to the assumption, that the higher the UAI index for the culture of origin of the business actor is, the higher is the probability of r a negative reaction to ‚Made in China' strategies.

The answers of actors from cultures with lower UAI, e.g., Denmark (23), UK (35), Norway (50) and Netherlands (53), had not coded any fear or anxious reactions, but chances and opportunities without exceptions and with a clear correlation: the lower the UAI, the lower the negative reaction to ‚Made in China' strategies, e.g.,

„See it as an opportunity, react to the changes (sample Nr. 54)

The answers of the actors with higher UAI, e.g., German (65), France (86), Spain (86) or Russia (95), verify hypothesis 1 for the most part but differ nevertheless in some cases (at about 25%). The deeper analysis of these „dissenting" samples shows that all of them have something in common: namely, very little or no international experience at all. The answers to the question, 'whether or not China will succeed in their goal' correspond to the pattern of the whole sampling.

The linguistic analysis of the free text answers from the higher end of UAI makes this picture even more complex: some of the answers reflect not only one's own fears towards growing Chinese competition but also the fear that their countries and companies underestimate the Chinese danger and the fear, they would not be able to react properly, e.g.:

„It will be difficult to change our mentality. I think in France we believe a product „made in china“ means bad quality, it does not work. In this way, it could be a weakness for the change in the french society“ (sample Nr. 42)

The verifying of the Hypothesis 2 - the higher the MAS index for the culture of origin of the business actor, the more intense the competitive notion in the proposed strategies to combat ‚Made in China‘ strategies is - shows a similar picture: in the field of lower MAS, e.g. in Norwegian (8), Dutch (14) or Lithuanian (19) cultures, all the actors propose, with no exception, a collaborative approach.

Interestingly, two participants form different countries with similar, rather lower, measuring for Masculinity - Bulgarian (40) and Russian (36) - cultures - propose very similar strategies for their countries and local industry:

„I hope my country (Bulgaria) would take the example form China in improving the image of the products it produces and implementing more innovative approaches“ (sample Nr. 25)

The picture becomes more diverse, starting with the MAS index of France (43): about half of the answers shows a combative approach, about half - a cooperative approach. This variation can be interpreted as supportive towards hypothesis 2, since the number 43 can be seen as a middle field between the poles of Masculinity and Femininity. Another sample from this middle field - Canada (MAS = 52) - shows an observing, neither combative nor cooperative, approach and proposes to sit back and see how the growing labor costs in China will make Chinese products less competitive (cf. sample Nr. 29). The only participant with Brazilian roots (MAS = 49), recommends „embracing it and riding the wave“.

The higher numbers of Masculine mindsets, e.g. for German culture (66), are correlated to a rather combative approach, as hypothesis 2 proposes, e.g.

„Invest into technology, innovation and digitalization. do not rest on the good name of „Made in Germany“ (sample Nr. 16) or

„Better technology is the only way to compete with China in the future“ (Sample Nr. 30).

Nevertheless, there are deviations from the tendency along the MAS-scale, e.g.

„To support high-end products (like Huawei) and recognize the quality [,] not to support bad labour companies (low wage, no safety) [and] don’t talk it down, but take it seriously“ (Sample Nr. 14, German culture MAS = 66)

„Allies with of the USA - South America“ (Sample Nr. 37, Spanish culture MAS = 42)

These two examples of hybrid reaction are nevertheless not the exception to a clear tendency: in the first case, the proposed cooperation with progressive companies like Huawei, goes together with the fight against the bulk of „bad“ Chinese companies; the second example shows a collaborative approach towards America against the continent, as a weapon in the fight against ‚Made in China‘.
To summarize the results of the analyses, hypothesis 2 is partly verified. The divergence from the linear tendency can be explained through the personal experience of the participants, .Thus, to onto the assumption of the hypothesis 3: international professional and private experience is positively correlated to openness to collaborate with Chinese companies.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the dependent variable (openness to collaborate with Chinese companies) in relation to the independent variables of professional experiences of working with Chinese companies or general international experience, clearly deny the assumption of their correlation. Whether the participants of the study used to work with Chinese partners or not, whether they have personal and professional international experience or not, no clear correlation to examples of openness towards collaboration was found. For instance:

The response from Danish participants (low MAS, low UAI) with some international experience and no personal experience with Chinese partners tends, nevertheless, to ethnocentric views:

> „See it as an opportunity, react to the changes. But , but use danish producers, A much stronger brand and signal value. The Danes want products produced in Denmark. And , and they are willing to pay for it“ (Sample Nr. 54).

Another example of the free-text answer, which indicates an ethnocentric mind-set or at least proposes home market protection:

> „Protective measures, higher taxes for Chinese products, law for quotes“ (Sample Nr. 4)

It is interesting that these two responders evaluate ‚Made in China‘ itself in the a similar way: both marked only negative attributes connected to ‚Made in China‘ and neither believe China will succeed with the goal to create a positive image of ‚Made in China‘, being part of the minority, since about 80% of the non-Chinese participants in the study believes that the strategy ‚Made in China 2049‘ will lead to a positive brand of ‚Made in China‘ in the future.

Participants from Germany with expected combative responses (MAS = 66), differed in their proposed answer towards ‚Made in China‘ but with no link to their personal and professional international experience:

> „China is trying to change & improve and that effort should be supported“ (Sample Nr. 31, no professional international experience, various private international expe riences, also in China);

„Invest in technology, innovation and digitalization [and] do not rest on the good name of “Made in Germany“ (Sample Nr. 16, neither private nor professional in ternational experience);

„Invest, cooperate, support Chinese companies now in order to secure business in the future as China will probably take over the international market“ (Sample Nr. 4, international professional experience outside China).

So, perhaps specific professional and/or private experience in cooperation with Chinese people and companies reduces negative reactions towards ‚Made in China‘ (hypothesis 4 (H4) or the so-called „contact hypothesis“)? The analysis shows a clear tendency towards the validation of this hypothesis. To assure there is no falsification of results due to cases of absence of a reluctant mind-set prior to professional experience, only the samples where professional experience with Chinese partners combined with no travel experience to China, were taken into consideration. There are three examples from French responders:

„Maybe through alliances or joint ventures to benefit from the Chinese progress“ (Nr. 23)

„Protective measures (taxes and laws such as quotes OR quotas?) [;] investment in IT [and] investment in modern industry“ (Nr. 3)

„Create partnerships with China to help them grow [and] help them to be modern and [increase?] PNB per inhabitants (Nr. 38, in contrast to two previous, working experiences in Singapore).

The most interesting outcome of this analysis is no linguistic analysis at all: 70% of the people who ticked „professional experience with Chinese companies and organizations“ did not deliver any free-text answers.

5. Limitations and Further Research Directions

The survey questionnaire was provided to different groups, always conducted live. That could cause some „atmospheric“ differences and different group dynamics. The potential differences in the answers by different groups due to current economic news must also be taken into consideration, albeit not playing a significant role in the study.

This study also wanted to understand the general perception of ‚Made in China‘, so the first question (multiple choice) with five positive and five negative attributes of COO ‚Made in China‘, formulated in advance, could probably influence, to some extent, the following answers (cf. „priming“ by Kahneman, 2012). On the other hand, there were no significant differences in the valuation of

‚Made in China' in different five sub-samples of the study, based on the same categories: positive attributes prevailed in all the groups.

A further limitation is the size of the sample (about 100 participants) and the ratio of filled questionnaire sheets (90%), the ratio of free-text answers (70%), albeit three of them were not legible. Two participants came originally from China and due to the research goals of the study, which focused on an outside-perspective, had to be rejected from the analyses.

The low quantity of answers went hand in hand with the insufficient depth of the qualitative study. So, for further studies in this field - both - computer based questionnaires for bigger samples and open-end qualitative interviews for smaller sampling - can be proposed. A qualitative study with in-depth interviews will be needed to understand the mechanism behind the correlation between positive evaluations of ‚Made in China' and personal and professional experiences with Chinese partners: to which extent affinity towards China brought people to work in China and/or Chinese people and to which extent cooperation and individual experience caused positive attitudes towards Chinese people, China and ‚Made in China' strategies (the so-called contact-hypothesis or hypothesis Nr. 4).

In this study, the importance of Country of Origin (COO) for B2B purchase decisions was assumed based on not very many studies (s. literature review). In the marketing science, some voices doubt the importance of COO, rather belittling the importance of COO, due to increasing globalization and unclear supply chains (e.g., Usunier, 2011). To clarify this dynamic, one middle-term study would be needed, which would compare the importance of COO as a leverage in the B2B purchase decisions with time intervals of, e.g. five years. A long-term study would be needed to understand, how the process initiated by the ‚Made in China 2049' strategy impacts the perception of foreign B2B actors towards ‚Made in China' as a brand.

6. Conclusion and outlook

Although ‚Made in' is a label of country-of-origin and not a patented brand, Kotler's approach (Kotler / Keller 2008) considers ‚Made in country' and its function in the decision-making process as a brand symbol. In the context of brand equity, described by Tim Ambler as „what people have between their ears about the brand" (Ambler 2001), it seems to be a combination of conscious and unconscious attributes, triggered by the „sound" of the label.

The perception of the country as an inert part of the image of COO (macro-level of ‚Made in') seemed to be negative in the case of ‚Made in China', at first sight. The concept of repressive society and underdeveloped economy is rather dominant in Europe. On the other hand, the first steps for the implementation of the long-term strategy ‚Made in China 2049' and its first sub-strategy ‚Made in China 2025' are taken seriously by business actors: a significant majority of the responders in this study believes that China will succeed in its objective to turn ‚Made in China' into a positive COO by 2049.
The influence of another program, *One Belt One Road,* was not evaluated in this study but can also indirectly influence the image of ‚Made in China', since there are few countries in Europe, which are directly involved in the implementation of this program, e.g., Greece, Italy or Bulgaria.

One of the responders, who revealed that the ‚Made in China 2049' strategy must become a lead for their home countries, came from Bulgaria. Whether coincidence or intended result from the Chinese perspective, hence the cultural exchange, personal cooperation or peaceful coexistence for better business were named as a secondary goals of China's *One Belt One Road* strategy (Henke 2018). In either case, such pattern of thinking was indicated before the strategy ‚Made in China 2049' was published: according to a study published in 2014, some developing countries view China as „a role model to follow" (Lin 2014).

The reaction on the published and already partly realized strategies ‚Made in China', differ among business actors in Europe. The underestimating of irrational components in decision-making by business actors, indicated in the literature review (e.g., Lodish 2001), led us to focus on such leverages like openness of mindset between ethnocentrism and cosmopolitanism and people's cultural background. The latter one was narrowed down to two cultural dimensions from Geert Hofstede: *Uncertainty Avoidance* and *Masculinity.* The assumptions, that the *Uncertainty Avoidance* Index can be used as an independent variable for different emotional reactions varying between fear (pole „Risk") and delight (pole „Chance"), and *Masculinity* - for the different proposed pattern between competition and cooperation, were validated, for the most part.

Regarding ethnocentrism, the results of the study show a more complex picture. The answers, which can be clearly associated to this pattern of thinking, came from the responders from Denmark and France, who left their country, even if for a limited period of time, to work in Germany. This contradicts most of the sources evaluated in this paper by Moïsi (2009), postulating that open-mindedness is not necessarily connected to international and cross-cultural experience. Another explanation of this phenomenon could be the concept of ethnocentrism, based not only on a specific nation but in Europe as a new „home, sweet home" or even „my European home is my castle", in stormy times of eugenic globalization.

Following this European path and taking into consideration the slogan and the homonymous study by David Stark „The sense of dissonance“, we can propose that the slogan of the European Union „United in Diversity“ (EU 2020) can be applied to the finding of a common effective and innovative European strategy in response to ‚Made in China 2049‘. The different cultural backgrounds of the European actors, causing tensions or even conflicts in political dispute and economic cooperation, can be used - in light of the results of this study - as a source of productive tension, leading to the best solution based on different anticipations of „Chinese Threat“ (ie. Uncertainty Avoidance spreading from 23 for Danish culture to 112 for Greek culture (Hofstede / Hofstede 2013)) and different philosophies regarding proper reaction and proposed action as a balancing act between competition and cooperation (ie. from the *Masculinity* of Spanish Culture of 86 to the *Femininity* of Latvian Culture of 9 (Hofstede /Hofstede 2013)). Then, the slogan „United in Diversity“ can be refilled with a new, tangible meaning and the multiculturalism of the European Union as a significant and measurable advantage for global competition.

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