

The Evolution of China-US Relations and the Game of Great Powers

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Abstract: With the development of globalization, more countries have begun to pay more attention to the international community. As two important countries that dominate global political and economic development, China and the United States have a great influence on the international community. Therefore, this study focuses on the current situation of Sino-U.S. relations and its outlook for the future. The study analyses the evolution of the relationship between China and the US and explores the economic and political factors, and ideologies that influence this evolution. As for the future strategies the two countries should take towards the international community, this article argues that the two sides could improve relations by resuming cooperation economically and strengthening consensus on global issues. In terms of international status, China could make up for the lack of discourse power by cultivating diplomatic talents, while the US could turn its attention to multilateral cooperation instead of sticking to America First.

Keywords: Sino-U.S. relations, international landscape, economy, ideologies

1. Introduction

China-U.S. relations are an important issue of sustained concern to the international community. Many researchers believe that whether a country wants to change international rules can reflect their satisfaction with the international status quo. Typically, when they mentioned the rules, the implied standard is whether the actors' behavior is consistent with the expectations of the US.

With the continuous growth of China's national power and the extension of international relations, China has been widely regarded as the biggest threat to the US' struggle for international hegemony.

Scholars have also analyzed the ideological motivations of the China and US to compete for international discourse. Different scholars have different views on whether the US will continue to exert pressure on China to maintain its hegemony. Some scholars use the difference between liberalism and idealism to illustrate that the US may have different attitudes in the international community, which will also affect the sharpness of international competition between China and the US. Liberal idealists believe that the spread of democracy is extremely important, and the establishment of multilateral institutions can keep the world peaceful and make democracy better spread. However, idiosyncratic realists are more concerned with the practical interests of the US, arguing that democracy is not an important source of American national power. They believe that interests are the only criterion by which the international community conducts its affairs, and therefore conflicts are more frequent for them [1]. The researchers also analyzed the direction of Sino-

U.S. relations by analyzing the political ideology of current US President Joe Biden, that they believe that Biden's understanding of Sino-US relations is basically the same as that of the Democratic establishment. They believe that China is indeed a strong enemy of the United States, but the focus of the US should not be on competition with China, but on how to solve its own domestic problems, so that the US can better deal with the Sino-US game. In this sense, the US would focus more on domestic politics and would not pursue a radical foreign policy [2].

From China's perspective, scholars argue that revisionism has a potential impact on China, making China more eager to compete for international discourse. Revisionist states generally want to reshape the world system and rules to suit their own developments. In the past, this concept was often interpreted in terms of certain characteristics of Nazi Germany's behavior in the international community. This part of the argument requires further dialectical discussion, and whether China is indeed influenced by revisionism is debatable [3].

Much of the current research on Sino-U.S. relations has focused on the impact of external factors in the two countries on their decision-making, such as the impact of China's rise on U.S. hegemony. Therefore, this paper will mainly study the influence of economic, ideological and political factors on the foreign policy of the two countries, and then do some analysis of what China and the US could do in the future.

This article argues that the best option for China and the US is to enter into a cooperative relationship, whether from an economic or global governance perspective. At the same time, in order to make the status of the two countries more balanced in the world, China could continue to cultivate diplomatic talents to enhance its participation in international organizations, and the US could abandon the "America First" theory and turn its attention to global trade cooperation.

2. The Evolution of China-U.S. Relations

Sino-US relations are in different states in different historical periods. Some scholars regard the Cold War as an important time point in the evolution of Sino-US relations, and further divide the evolution of Sino-US relations into two historical periods, including the founding of New China to the beginning of the Cold War and the end of the Cold War to the present [4]. Based on the stage division method referred to in this paper, this paper has made a basic time division of the evolution of Sino-U.S. strategic competition as Figure 1.

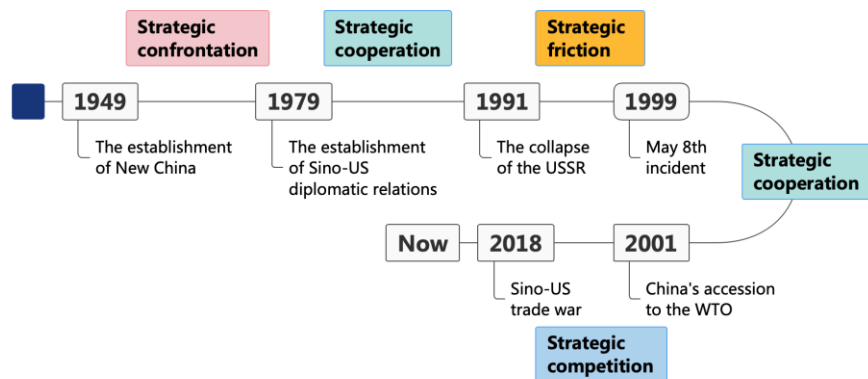


Figure 1: The evolution of China-U.S. relations.

When New China was first founded, the US and the Soviet Union were in the stage of Cold War confrontation. In order to strengthen ideology and ensure stable social development, China's "one-sided" foreign policy became China's choice, and they established a solid alliance with the Soviet

Union and other socialist countries, which led to a stage of strategic confrontation between China and the US for a long time.

In the 60s of the 20th century, relations between China and the Soviet Union became rigid, and China began to seek new international partners. At the same time, the US was struggling because of the Vietnam War, and they began to realize the important role of China. In 1979, China formally established diplomatic relations with the US, which promoted the relationship between China and the US.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, China and the US lost their common enemy and failed to build a new foundation for cooperation. China and the US have entered a stage of strategic friction, with issues such as human rights, Taiwan, and trade. After entering the 21st century, the US experienced the “911” incident, and terrorism caused an uproar in the US. In that case, they began to look for allies against terrorism around the world. At the same time, problems such as world security issues and conflicts between states are gradually emerging. China and the US have begun strategic cooperation on a number of security issues, such as the Iranian nuclear issue. They have also carried out good cooperation in global and regional international institutions such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Group of 20, and the United Nations Security Council.

However, after entering the Trump era, the US launched a trade war, and Sino-US relations deteriorated rapidly. The strategic competition became a fundamental feature of Sino-U.S. relations.

3. Factors Affecting the Sino-US Relationship

The international rules formulated by international organizations affect the definition of countries' own interests, the interpretation of the actions of other international participants, and the costs of their actions, so the international system affects the behavior of states and their interests [5]. Therefore, China and the US are constantly engaged in the international community, especially in the competition for the power in international institutions. Whichever country an international organization prefers, it gains more benefits. In this process, many representative events occurred, including the diplomatic struggle between China and the US in the process of China's return to the United Nations, and the US accusation of China's control of the World Health Organization. The strategic competition between China and the US is manifested in the competition of rules in international organizations, which mainly includes three aspects. First, both China and the US accuse each other of not abiding by or even breaking international rules. Second, both China and the US are constantly vying for a say in existing international rules. Third, China and the US compete for dominance in setting new rules [4].

3.1. Economic Factors

Conversely, whichever country is stronger, the greater their influence on international organizations, because they can expand their camp by building alliances and other means. China's rise has undermined America's absolute dominance in international organizations. First, the rapid development of China's economy is the most obvious feature of China's rise. After the failure of the planned economy system in China, China learned from its experience and carried out the economic reform in 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, and began to transform into a market economy system. There is no doubt that this reform was a major turning point in China's economic history, and since then China has embarked on a path of rapid development. As shown in Table 1, the industry was categorized according to ownership and counted its industrial output value, which eventually produced data in billions of yuan. It can be seen from the table that since the reform of the economic system in 1978, China's overall economic level has been greatly improved, and the economic volume has expanded dozens of times.

Showing the data in Table 1, it is clear that China has finally got rid of the troubles of the planned economic system, and is no longer just a state-owned economy. The GDP of the collective economy and the private sector is growing much faster than the growth rate of the state sector, and it accounts for an increasing share of the total output value, even surpassing that of the state-owned economy. That is to say, the types of production in China have become richer, which is a huge leap forward for China.

At the same time, the economic reform of 1978 also rapidly promoted the development of China's foreign trade. Deng Xiaoping encouraged domestic enterprises to increase their import and export efforts, set up a number of special economic zones, give preferential policies to export companies, actively introduce foreign capital to build factories in China, and also vigorously support foreign investment. At the beginning of reform and opening up, China's total foreign trade accounted for only 7% of national income, but by 1987, it had increased to 25% of GDP, and by 1998 it had increased to 37%. It can be seen that the policy of opening up to the outside world is extremely effective [6].

Table 1: Industrial Output Value (Proportion in %) by Ownership in 1996, 1985 and 1978.

	1978	1985	1996
State-Owned	328.9 (78%)	630.2 (65%)	2836.1 (28%)
Collective-Owned	94.8 (22%)	311.7 (32%)	3923.2 (39%)
Private-Owned		18 (2%)	1542 (16%)
Other Types		11.7 (1%)	1658.2 (17%)
Total	423.7 (100%)	971.6 (100%)	9959.5 (100%)

Source of data: China Statistical Yearbook 1997

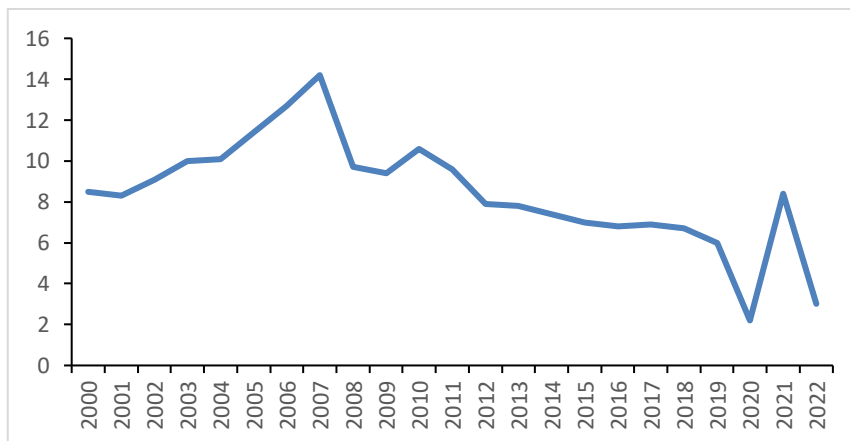


Figure 2: Chinese Annual Real GDP Growth Rate (%):1979-2018 (Source of data: CEI data).

As entering into the 21st century, China's economy continues to develop, which makes the US realize that China has begun to grow into a strong competitor. As can be seen from Figure 2, China's annual GDP growth percentage is very high, and if the average of the growth rate is calculated, the GDP will be doubled every eight years, which is an astonishing economic growth speed.

In purchasing power parity terms, China's share of global GDP rose from 2.3% in 1980 to 18.3% in 2017, while the US share of global GDP fell from 24.3% to an estimated 15.3% in purchasing power parity terms. However, in 1980, China's GDP was only one-tenth of that of the US in purchasing power parity terms, which shows that the speed and scale of China's economic development have reached a point where it cannot be ignored. According to the International

Monetary Fund, by 2024, the purchasing power level of the Chinese economy will be 56% higher than that of the US economy [7].

The rapid development of China's economy has challenged the economic hegemony of the US. International status and economic power are inextricably linked, so the competition between China and the US for their position in the international community has gradually become fierce.

3.2. Ideologies and Political Factors

In addition to economic factors, China's different ideologies with the US, as well as the changing domestic ideologies of the two countries, are important reasons for the confrontation between China and the US in the international community.

First, this study analyses U.S.-China relations from China's perspective. In the decades of normalization of Sino-US relations, China has pursued a peaceful foreign policy to create a stable international environment for socialist modernization. For China, which was relatively weak at the time, adopting a low-key style was more in line with strategic requirements, although it would make it difficult to protect some of China's interests. The core logic is that despite fears that the US will curb China's development, China's revival cannot be separated from the US, and the US is a partner that China must strive for [8]. Therefore, most of the rulers in the US at that time believed that the Chinese threat was controllable and did not threaten the hegemonic status of the US. However, since Xi Jinping came to power, China has begun to expand its sphere of influence outward, seeking to gain a greater voice and seek greater external interests in Asia and even the world.

In recent years China has laid a good foundation for international relations in the international community and has a more solid national strength. As a result, they also realize that China's dependence on the US can gradually decrease, and it is sufficient to bear the cost of friction with the US [8]. China's pursuit of a higher status in the international community is doomed to conflict and friction between China and the US, and the international pattern dominated by the US is bound to be challenged.

Next, the study will analyse Sino-US relations from the perspective of the US. In the 19th century, the US could imperialize its weaker neighbors, but it had to follow realism in Europe's global balance of power. Realism holds that the international community is in a state of anarchy, and there is no central authority to govern, and therefore the security of sovereign States cannot be guaranteed [1]. This provided the impetus for the expansion of the state, because its own security can only be guaranteed by ensuring that its power is strong enough, so expansionism is easily supported under the influence of this idea.

However, this does not mean that the national system is unstable. If all countries in the system believe that it is unprofitable to change the existing system, the system will remain in a stable state, but when some countries are in the system when the expected gains outweigh the expected losses, they will try to change the rules through economic, political expansion, etc., until they believe that the costs of continuing to change the system outweigh the benefits of maintaining the system, and finally a new equilibrium international system will be formed. In addition, Wilson's ideas profoundly influenced the American political system and foreign policy. He put forward American exceptionalism, the unique position of the US and Americans in the world, and advocated its mission of edification. This is actually the idea of establishing ideological hegemony around the world with American morality as the norm. Therefore, the US is very aggressive in the international community and pursues hegemony in the international community. Based on the establishment of the tributary system in Chinese history, some American scholars believe that China has a revisionist tendency, that is, it has a strong will to seize global hegemony [9]. Therefore, they believe that China's rise will undermine the existing hegemonic system of the US, which is why they see China as a strong enemy.

To a certain extent, China's socialist ideology has undermined the US' intention to establish a global democratic order. This fundamental ideological difference has made it difficult to maintain peaceful relations between China and the US. Trump has been heavily influenced by realism, but at the same time he has downplayed democracy as America's soft power and focused on America's narrow interests, which has brought Sino-US relations to an unprecedented stalemate. However, Wilson's thinking was idealistic, believing in the use of peaceful means rather than force to settle international disputes, hoping to create multilateral institutions and create a good international environment for the widespread establishment of democracy in the world, which paved the way for the establishment of the later liberal international order [1]. In this way, the diplomatic thinking of the US has given more consideration to allies and avoided absolute great power hegemonism, which means that Sino-US relations are not completely without room for maneuver.

4. Strategies for Building Friendly Relations

The sustainability of a country and its political structures depends on their ability to rationally dominate their economic and foreign policies to harness production, especially transnational production, to gain new wealth, status and economic dynamism [9]. This means that international trade plays an important role in a country's development. As a weaker country, China has a large trade surplus with the US, and China also has a large dependence on the US market. In turn, the US has a huge demand for China's huge market, and the economic resources flowing into China have been partially converted into China's military power, which will limit the actions of the US to some extent. Moreover, from the domestic perspective, this interdependence has led to the emergence of groups in China that do not support strong anti-American diplomacy, most of them the emerging middle class in Chinese cities, who also happen to be the backbone of China's economic development. Therefore, further conflict between China and the US is not a wise choice, both domestically and externally [9]. The economic ties between China and the US are very strong, and the trade war launched by Trump has caused great losses to both China and the US and international trade, and the global economic chain has been broken to varying degrees. Therefore, China and the US should stop losses in time and resume good economic cooperation to ensure the sustainable development of the global economy.

Major countries play an important role in global governance, which is mainly reflected in traditional and non-traditional security. Traditional security issues include national sovereignty, territory, regime, etc. Non-traditional problems refer to non-military disasters and global problems such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, climate and environment. In order to prevent regional problems from endangering their countries, avoid the growing harm of global problems, and at the same time highlight their international status, the enthusiasm of major countries to participate in international governance is generally relatively high [10].

Therefore, it will be more beneficial for both sides to develop cooperative relations. First of all, from China's point of view, its voice in the international community is still not strong enough, and the most obvious manifestation is that China's civilian staff in major international institutions is very small [11]. Therefore, China should cultivate diplomatic talents and gain a stronger voice in international organizations, which can contain the international hegemony of the US to a certain extent. At the same time, the US should also recognize that the "America First" strategy and unilateralist policy protect US interests while weakening its international leadership. Therefore, they should focus on multilateral diplomacy and participate more actively in international affairs, so as to restore their international leadership and prestige [4].

Constructivism believes that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between the world's political actors and structures, and the agents create the structure, and the structure also constructs the agent, so the interaction between the international system and international actors must start from

holism. China and the US should persist in developing cooperation in international affairs, such as confronting terrorism and curbing climate warming, and then enhance strategic mutual trust and establish good cooperative relations through benign interaction between the two sides, which will not only help jointly promote the reform of the global governance system, but also spiral the interests of the two countries.

5. Conclusion

China's rise in recent years has made the US feel that China has become a formidable enemy that cannot be ignored. The influence of "American exceptionalism" and realism on the US has made the US more vigilant against the threat to China, which has led to the deterioration of Sino-US relations in recent years. However, the development of multilateral relations and the responsibilities of major powers that exist in both Chinese and American thinking have given the two countries room for cooperation. This paper argues that the two countries should strive to promote cooperation, restore cooperative relations economically, and continuously reach consensus on global strategies. However, the two sides cannot ignore the threat of the other side to themselves, China must constantly make up for its lack of voice in the international community, and the US must learn to abandon the idea of "American exceptionalism" and develop more multilateral cooperation [4,11].

There are still a few shortcomings in this study. First, the research data is relatively lacking, and the latest data is not tracked in time. Secondly, the scope of research in this article is limited and it is impossible to list all the factors affecting Sino-US relations, such as culture and other issues, so there may be problems that some of the views in the article are one-sided.

In future studies, researchers should use time-sensitive data and policies when analyzing Sino-US relations, and pay attention to the influence of other countries and other factors on Sino-US relations, so as to draw a more comprehensive conclusion that is more consistent with the historical background.

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