China and the United States: An Awkward Era, its Consequences and Future Implications

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Introduction

The years 1945-1964 have become a hot bed of study and debate in the international affairs theorist community. In many ways, the relationship between the United States and China during this era is open to varying interpretations and conceptualizations. The advantage of hindsight has led to detailed evaluations of foreign policy during said era, as theorists continue to debate the preferable framework through which one can view the actions, policies and rhetoric of states and international actors during these years. Were the forces of real politik at play in an era that witnessed such polarized hegemony? Or did the relationship between the United States and China develop along ideological lines, shaped and forged by domestic political concerns? Could a kinship between the United States and China in this era have even been fostered at all?

It is through the fog of this debate and study that a central and elemental question arises: Why did the United States of America fail to establish normal/official diplomatic relations with the Peoples Republic of China (Communist China) in the years 1945-1964? The reality and validity of the factual statement presented in this question is undeniable. History tells us that there was indeed an “official break,” often referred to as “a period of non-recognition” between the United States government and the PRC from 1954-1970. At the same time, however, there were as many as 136 “ambassadorial” meetings held between the PRC and United States, reflecting a desire to communicate and coordinate. 1 Historical contradictions such as this beg the question: why?

As touched on earlier, varying perspectives exist on this matter. Rosemary Foot, for one, argues that the Korean War (June 1950) was at fault for the deterioration of relations between United States and CCP (Chinese Communist Party). 2 Foot also notes that the continued conflict between Taiwan and Indo-China “served to ensure that the United States and China continued to confront each other in subsequent years, and that [as a result] the US presence in Asia continued to deepen.” 3 This, she argues, provided justification and context for the expansion of

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3 Ibid., 259.
American presence in Asia, fueling the “seemingly perpetual hostility between the two states.”

Others such as Jie Chen take a more ideological and state oriented approach, arguing that the unease and awkwardness between the United States and China during this era can be attributed to the prevailing dichotomous worldview of the post WW2 period. In light of such a popular and prevailing black and white perspective, Chen argues that from the eyes of US foreign policy “[the] PRC was definitely an enemy, because it not only claimed to be socialist but also was formally associated with the Communist bloc, and, together with the Soviets, threatened the “free world” led by the United States.”

Many others such as Edward Weisband would attribute the US-Chinese relationship as having fallen victim to U.S. policy makers, who had fallen victim to the belief that “[all] communism was the intellectual property of demons in the Kremlin.”

Could it be that US policy makers, with their pro-American, anti-communist bravado, fell victim to “a firm belief in the inherent morality of their group”? Or was the group-think phenomenon not exclusive to policy makers but expansive, dominating US public opinion (as presented by Kusnitz, hence rendering any political support for official diplomatic relations between the PRC and US dead on sight)? Was the Post World War Two consensus strong enough, despite its volatility, to affect US Foreign Policy with respect to China?

Perhaps both viewpoints, that of the system level realist and that of state level analysis, are valid and hold equal importance. However a system level approach is alone not sufficient to explain the oddities of American foreign policy during this era. The years 1945-1964 did witness a significant amount of opportunities for the United States and Communist China to form an official diplomatic bond. In fact, upon further investigation, we will uncover that each of the three subsequent eras not only possessed opportunities for such diplomatic collaboration, but serious impetus for them as well. Such diplomatic collaboration would, if it were come to pass, need to be accompanied by official recognition on both sides, allowing for communiqué via official diplomatic channels. But as we shall see, American domestic politics would prove to be too strong a force, inhibiting the development of any official diplomatic relationship. The contradictions and hypocrisy inherent in recognizing the CCP over the “democratic/ pro-US” KMT, and their effect on American domestic politics were far too great a force to be overcome. The byproduct of this would be the contradictory qualities of American “China” Policy from

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4 Ibid., 259.
1945-1964, the results of which would have delayed consequences that would not be felt for some time.
FDR’s 4th Policeman...where oh where hath ye wandered off to?

**The only thing we have to fear is fear itself...besides a weakened Communist China?**

The Yalta agreement (February 1945) is often associated with the culmination of Roosevelt’s China policy. In many ways, it is the last objective metric history lends to us for examining Roosevelt’s worldview. “It has been widely acknowledged that in the immediate post-war era, the United States was the hegemonic power in the state system.” FDR knew this, and was relentlessly dedicated to use his newfound ability to play chess on the world stage as an opportunity to construct a forum for nations; what we would later refer to as the United Nations. In many ways however, FDR was also a realist. “He recognized that communism was not monolithic and that Soviet interests could be distinct from, and even pitted against, those of the Chinese Communists.” Roosevelt was acutely aware of the USSR’s expansionist tendencies (particularly with respect to geographical expansion ideologically supported by the Cominterm), Stalin’s political agenda and the Red Army’s firm grasp on Eastern Europe. It is thus apparent that FDR saw China as an opportunity to check the aggressiveness and expansionism of the Soviet Union in Asia.

At first glance, a realist argument based on balancing behavior in this case would seem fallacious. “The proposition that states will join alliances in order to avoid domination by stronger powers lies at the heart of traditional balance of power theory.” But why would the United States, the aforementioned newly emerging hegemonic power, feel the need to snuggle up to a politically and emotionally decimated underdeveloped nation? The United States GNP had more than doubled over the course of the war, it controlled more than 70 percent of the world’s gold reserves, possessed an unrivaled merchant fleet, and the world’s most sophisticated navy and air force. Not to mention of course America’s monopoly on atomic weaponry (lasting from 1945 to 1949).

Conventional wisdom, such as that put forth by Walt, tells us that major world powers don’t move to balance; they are often balanced against. Perhaps the answer to this puzzling phenomenon lays not in America’s immediate power but in its perception of hard power (with

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respect to an available standing army, degree of military mobilization, and military responsiveness) and impression of its influence in the region. The Soviet Union’s vast conventional army (most of which had not been demobilized), its geographical location, and soft power resource of transitional ideology did indeed generate the perception among Western politicians in the early cold war era that there existed a tepid balance of power, not American hegemony.¹⁴ Thus we uncover that “it is often impossible to explain the crucial decisions and policies without reference to the decision-maker’s beliefs about the world and their images of others.”¹⁵ Furthermore, it becomes apparent that rather than allying in a response to power alone; states may ally against the most threatening power; or, the power that seems most threatening-- leading to a Waltian conclusion that “states may balance by allying with other strong states if a weaker power is more dangerous for other reasons.”¹⁶

FDR’s Yalta goals thus emerge at least in part as an attempt to construct a complex form of containment- a check on Soviet power (whether real or imagined). “Roosevelt was seeking to use the Soviets to contain the Chinese Communists by securing Moscow’s support of the Chiang’s regime, while at the same time he sought to use Nationalist China as a check against the Soviets.”¹⁷ A *sine qua non* of this strategy would of course be a united and independent China, one that was able to govern with sovereignty and act as a plug to fill the regional power vacuum left by a defeated Japan. China would need to be reorganized, built up and supported “so it could become a major power entitled to equal rank with the three big Western allies, Russia, Britain, and the United States.”¹⁸ Furthermore, another necessary condition for the success of Roosevelt’s envisioned system would be the existence of clear and legitimate diplomatic channels through which the United States could communicate with the sovereign ruler of Mainland China.

Yet the clear cut lines of inter-state balance and settling titanic power (with respect to Asia) would continue to blur at an increasing rate as American foreign policy entered the post World War Two period. “The accelerating erosion of the Nationalist position and the growing power of the Communists [in China] after 1944 (due both in part to the organizational ineptitude of the KMT and increasing popularity of the CCP) created a basic dilemma for the U.S. government.”¹⁹ From a realist perspective, it was in the best interest of America to keep China from falling into

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civil conflict, conflict that could destabilize the entire region and threaten American interests (which ranged from a weak and unstable occupied Japan to American business interests on the Asian continent). At the same time, however, a unified Communist China was widely viewed as unacceptable, as it would inevitably widen the global communist bloc. The ensuing result of this foreign policy dilemma was nothing short of a convoluted fiasco riddled with schizophrenic diplomatic behavior.

General Marshall’s mission in 1947 to play the role of peace broker between the two sides and form a unified Chinese government was as unrealistic as it was unsuccessful. After this failed attempt and President Truman’s annunciation of the Truman Doctrine to Congress on February 27, 1947, the United States was left in a rather neutered position. The Truman Administration would continue its policy of half-hearted support of the Nationalists, serving only to ignite the ferocity of Mao’s rhetoric while at the same time fail to adequately support the forces of Chiang Kai-Shek. The resulting consequence is of course a matter of history, with Mao asserting official control of the mainland and officially establishing his government in October of 1949. Meanwhile, “Truman dealt with these issues by apparently divorcing the United States from the outcome of events in China.”

But why such a decrepit stance? Was Truman not surrounded by the best and brightest policy makers and generals who had just won the greatest war ever fought in the history of mankind? And how could Washingtonian policy fall so limp in an age of power polarization and in light of its apparent global hegemony?

The answer to this anomaly can be generally found in the multitude of political constraints facing Washington at the time. These constraints, served not only as barriers to effective policy (i.e. any policy which would have resulted in a unified China with open diplomatic relations allowing for coordination, diplomatic recognition and possibly even collaboration) but also eroded any chance for a cohesive American policy in the pre-Korean War era as well.

A significant amount of study has been preformed on the effect of public opinion and foreign policy. Studies such as Miller and Stokes’ work on public-legislator relationships seek to strengthen the conventional wisdom of a weak public-opinion foreign policy link. In addition, Holsti notes that “the weight of evidence cast significant doubt on the public’s impact on policy.” Lippman, however, disagrees, coming to the conclusion that public opinion “has shown itself to be a dangerous master of decision when the stakes are life and death.”

It is Almond however who strikes the nearest to the prevailing Post World War Two consensus. Almond writes, “When the crisis becomes sharpened, American responses become more

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22 Ibid., 37.
specific.” Almond continues to argue the validity of mood-simplification theorem and its effect on American foreign policy, noting, “there can be little doubt that the process of foreign policy making is strongly influenced by this common-sense, improvisational tendency.” In an area of increasing fear and ambiguity on the world stage (such as that of the post WW2 consensus and Truman Administration), foreign affairs topics in public discourse had indeed taken on the guise of perpetually existing in a state of crisis. “A greater realism about overseas affairs now complemented a growing awareness of other peoples and lands.” The Soviet threat was as real as ever, and public hostility that Americans displayed towards the communist Chinese was likely a spillover from the distrust and fear they held for the Soviet regime. One poll in this era even found a five-to-one majority agreeing with the statement that Chinese rebels “take their orders from Moscow.”

In fact, a continued linkage between the USSR and CCP was both a consequence of and more importantly, support for, the Truman Doctrine. The Truman Administration at this point in time was proverbially knee deep in what appeared to be the political disintegration of the Democratic Party. Truman’s endorsement of a major civil rights program had resulted in a southern backlash, as anti-civil rights southern Democrats prepared to leave the party. Furthermore, “Henry Wallace [had] announced his intention to run for President as an independent candidate, describing the Democrats as the party of war and depression, and the Republicans as hopeless.” After fifteen years of Democratic political hegemony, the general political scene in America was crumbling. What Truman needed was political order and a rallying cry, brought via the public and Congressional acceptance of the Truman Doctrine, which in turn required “the portrayal of a monolithic communist menace [in China].” This menace had just declared victory and the intent to “lean” towards the Soviets- this was a problem- and 1948 was an election year for Truman. Truman’s popularity in public opinion pools had been

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28 FRUIS, 1950, 6:386.
sinking, and with a three way split in the Democratic party, candidate Tom Dewey seemed unbeatable.32

The declaration of CCP sovereignty over the mainland presented a political dilemma for the incumbent Truman Administration. The aforementioned aversion towards an amicable relationship would seem to preclude support for any attempt towards normalization of relations with the Communist Chinese, however this is not entirely true. In fact, policy makers had pushed ahead plans to officially recognize the PRC even after the 1948-1949 Angus Ward incident in Mukden (in which American Consul Angus Ward and his staff were held under house arrest by Mao’s police force).33 Furthermore, prominent news outlets such as the Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor and Wall Street Journal all carried views, reflective of certain aspects of American public discourse, which in aggregate form could be defined as “supportive” of this “realistic” course of action.34 “The United States (or certain aspects of American society) still seemed willing to work out a modus vivendi with the Chinese Communists.”35

One of the main reasons for continued support for US recognition of the PRC, as touched on earlier, had to do with American business interests in the region. The issue of recognition of the PRC and the importance of Taiwan were tied to concerns over American business interests in China and economic competition with the British.36 “The blockade of northern Chinese sports set up by Nationalists on Taiwan in June 1949 to prevent foreign access to Communist-controlled areas posed problems for international business interests in China.”37 Continued hostility towards the PRC combined with an increasing drift towards total non-recognition prevented American merchant ships from legally operating in their respective areas of business and endangered American investment assets on the mainland.

However, once again, 1948 was an election year. Pursuant to the modus operandi of any rationally acting politicians in an election year [as promulgated by Quandt] “the guidelines for the fourth year (which can in this case be translated into the last year before a reelection bid, since Truman was technically not in his fourth year) with respect to potentially controversial foreign policy issues are fairly simple. Try to avoid taking a position. Steer clear of new initiatives. Stick with safe themes and patriotic rhetoric.” Now was clearly not the time for

Truman to engage in a diplomatic experiment or course of action that would directly contradict the doctrine that bore his name. Furthermore, general American public opinion and Congress continued to hold an aversion towards any kind of tacit endorsement of the PRC (in 1950 a petition was sent to the White house signed by seventy-one members of Congress, expressing a great deal of concern over the fact that several American and British companies had continued to do business with the supporters of aggressors such as North Korea [i.e. China]).

Thus the vague and uncertain stance taken by the United States, despite the potential benefits that could have been derived from a realistic and official stance with the PRC (“for the CCP, the United States could have played a role in the improvement of the war torn Chinese economy; for the United States, recognition of the new government would have allowed American economic interests to protect their investments in China”), is retrospectively not much of a surprise. The development of a coherent and functional policy, which could have recognized the ruling government of Mainland China while in the same stroke effectively protected American assets and interests, was effectively retarded; falling victim to the constraints of politics in a democratic environment. What emerged instead was Washingtonian political blabber, such as that put forth by Secretary of States Achenson in late 1949. Achenson’s declared conditions for official recognition were as follows: the regime should 1) effectively control the area it claims to govern (in this case being mainland China), 2) recognize its international obligations, and 3) govern with the consent of the people. These conditions amounted to a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts, as the first condition seems to be in retrospect highly hypocritical (it was the CCP not KMT who effectively controlled the majority of China in 1949), the second impossible for the CCP to accomplish on its own as treaties signed during the war were signed by the KMT, and finally the third being almost purely subjective and impossible to quantify.

Korea, the Game Changer

“I can’t say to you today whether Titoism is going to spread in Europe, but I am almost certain that it is going to spread in Asia.” –State Department Policy planning Staff Director George F. Kennan

The ambiguous stance taken by the United States towards the PRC (now the ruling government of Mainland China) would be clarified brilliantly by the ensuing conflict on the Korea peninsula. On April 14, 1950, the United States National Security Council issued the infamous NSC-68 document, reflecting essentially a culmination and official radical endorsement of containment policy. The North Korean invasion of South Korea on the 25th of June that same year, followed by the subsequent secret ratification by President Truman of NSC-68 on September 30th, serve as a series of events that would eventually lead to a hardened U.S. stance on the PRC. This

38 Ibid., 121.
39 Ibid., 124.
stance is revealed most clearly through American actions to block mainland China from the United States Security Council, deciding instead to recognize the Nationalist Chinese government (currently impotently situated on the tiny island of Taiwan) as the official liaison of the Chinese people. But why would the United States continue to ignore the obvious—that being that the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai Shek could in no way reasonably represent mainland China? And furthermore, why did the United States hold such a divergent position from two of its main allies on the matter—Great Britain and India? As early as 1949 Great Britain and India had both shown signs of interests in de jure recognition of the PRC.41

Both in terms of politics and ideology, Chinese intervention in the Korean War shifted the paradigm. “The outbreak of hostilities in Korea had [originally] caused the United States government to act to prevent the seating of PRC representatives.”42 With the later direct involvement of PRC forces against UN and US forces on the Korean peninsula, most reservations held by those in support of precluding the recognition of the PRC via the United Nations evaporated. Janis argues that “the more amiability and esprit de corps among the policy making in-group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink, which is likely to result in irrational and dehumanizing actions directed at out-groups.”43 While American United Nations policy would struggle to be defined as dehumanizing, it was in many ways irrational. Chinese involvement in the Korean War against US troops clearly lent fuel to American policy maker’s esprit de corps, making it very difficult for those who would argue a more rational path towards recognition of the PRC. Further exacerbating this prevailing subjectively based ideological tendency was the infamous Senator McCarthy, whose rhetoric and accusations caught fire in February 1950. Any politician or policy maker at this time choosing to reveal sympathetic tendencies towards the communist PRC was, in effect, committing career suicide. A 1950 Gallop poll found that fifty percent of Americans had a favorable opinion of the Senator (and by extension his anti-communist crusade), while only twenty nine percent had an unfavorable opinion of him.44 Thus a strong argument can be made, and has been made (by Purifoy for example), that the Truman Administration acted against its better judgment in pursuing an antagonistic policy towards Communist China due largely in part to McCarthyite pressure.45

The consequence of these occurrences unfortunately lead to policies that ignored what had to this point become even more apparent [in retrospect] with the military intervention by the PRC in the Korean War; that being that Mao’s government was indeed and without equivocation the sovereign ruler of Mainland China. It also ignored moderate ideological stances of the time, such as one taken by Harry S. Truman himself, as he stated: “Joe Stalin says that the people of North China will never be Communists and he’s right, at that.” Such an irrational stance also detracted from the legitimacy of the United Nations, by “demonstrating the amount of control the United States enjoyed over the organization at the time.”

Furthermore, America’s successful attempt at blocking PRC recognition by the United Nations Security Council “prevented effective work on other matters from taking place, further contributing to cold war tensions.”

The hardening US stance towards the PRC can alternatively be viewed from a system level perspective. From this view, the United Nation’s raison d’être was little more than to serve as a sounding board for U.S. Cold War rhetoric, and a proxy for U.S. military involvement on the world stage. China was becoming a problem, and Chiang Kai-shek’s ineptitude had made it painfully clear that Nationalist China was unlikely to play the ambitious role Roosevelt had assigned to it.” The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance in February of 1950 represented not only a shift in received balance of power in Asia (a shift towards assumed Communist dominance), but threatened American deterrence strategy by pitting American presence and regional influence against a now unified Sino-Soviet bloc. “For the United States, the voluntary movement by the Chinese Communists into the Soviet-controlled bloc, at a time when its relationship with Moscow tended to be viewed in zero-sum terms, represented an adverse shift in the balance against the threat posed by the Communist block to the vulnerable, East Asian theatre.”

The effects of this newfound relationship would reverberate throughout American foreign policy- a policy that was arguably already soaked and laden with neo-realist perspectives. The reasoning for this occurrence can best be explained by the transfer of hard power made possible by the Sino-Soviet pact. “During the course of the Korean conflict, the Soviet Union transferred a vast amount of military equipment to the Chinese.” Waltz argues that the parts of a hierarchic system are related to one another in ways that determined by both their functional differentiation and by the extent of their capabilities.”

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47 Ibid., 163.
50 Ibid., 121.
technologies, and power from Soviet to Sino hands represented a drastic shift in capabilities, leading to a shift in the hierarchic system.

This shift in capabilities, or at least perceived capabilities, carried with it a legitimate threat to American deterrence posture in the region. As defined by Janice Stein, “Extended deterrence is an attempt to prevent a military attack against an ally by threatening [some form of] retaliation.”52 While the U.S. clearly still held overall military dominance over the Chinese (including the perpetually looming threat of nuclear retaliation), the playing field in the region had become slightly more level. America, despite its activities on the Korean Peninsula, was concluding a massive demobilization process while at the same time attempting to check the increasing Soviet threat/hostilities in Eastern Europe. As for America’s intentions in China, Zhang points out that “here we have not an aggressor and a defender, but two defenders. Both China and the United States perceived the other as the aggressor state attempting to overturn the status quo, always ready to expand its sphere of influence at the expense of its opposite number.”53 With said transfer of power and rapid evolution of capability, China was now in the eyes of America a more potent aggressor, and America a weaker defender. As Foot notes, “combat between US and Chinese troops in Korea inevitably and powerfully shaped the US assessment of China’s military capabilities and of Beijing’s potential.”54 From Washington’s perspective, never since the Second World War had an alliance been so ominous, nor the need to weaken the position of the Communist Chinese government been so apparent.

The combination of these concerns leaves little doubt that an amiable relationship with the PRC at this juncture would have been difficult if not impossible to foster. Furthermore, it could be argued that de jure recognition of the CCP during this era would have strengthened Communist control in Peking and legitimized Mao’s rule both domestically and internationally. Yet with solidified CCP control over nearly the entire mainland by 1949 (with the exception of several small benign pockets of resistance in the South), an argument based on this logic would have become increasingly futile as time marched on. Mao’s grip on Mainland China was a reality (the CCP controlled Peking along with most major cities, the majority of Chinese soldiers, all major rail lines, airfields, and ports, and perhaps most importantly- wielded the support of agrarian farmers and nationalistic Chinese), whether US foreign policy recognized this reality or not.

Furthermore, such an argument does not prove that an official diplomatic relationship between the two nations would have been impossible or unfavorable to the United States. As mentioned earlier, the inability of Mainland China’s ruling government to participate in the United Nations weakened the legitimacy of the institution (which would have been contrary to the best interest of the US). Other logistical concerns come to light as a result of Washington’s inability

to coordinate any sort of official diplomatic policy with Beijing. Non-existent diplomatic channels between Beijing and Washington during these years complicated the conclusion of the Korean War- a war that to this day has still not officially ended. PRC involvement in the conflict placed Washington at an awkward impasse and raised an unanswerable question; how does one legally end an international conflict between warring states if one or more of said states are not officially recognized as states?

The Era of Oxymoronic Policy: Official Non-Recognition, Despite Clear Recognition

Forces of good and evil are massed and armed and opposed as rarely before in history. Freedom is pitted against slavery, lightness against dark. - Dwight D. Eisenhower, January 1953

The subsequent repercussions of the aforementioned were rather damning for US-Chinese relations. Interestingly enough however, while they resulted in perhaps the clearest stance America took towards China in the years 1945-1964 (that being total diplomatic non-recognition), they also resulted in a sub-shift in the dependent variable at study.

During and shortly after the Korean War, America’s predominant opinion on the PRC was one of sharp opposition and hostility. This of course marks a distinct change from that of earlier years, whereas the American public and many in Washington hoped that China’s flirtations with communism would not be long lasting. Communism in China had become an issue of particular public interest, and “in February 1953 newly elected President Dwight D. Eisenhower made an announcement labeled “unleashing Chiang”; which was widely interpreted as freeing the KMT for its projected return to the mainland.” Such a sharp policy was a divergence from the neutered approach that the Truman Administration had taken towards recognition of the PRC, and did not bode well for the establishment of formal diplomatic relations with the Peking.

Quandt notes that Presidents often start their first year in office with little or no foreign policy experience- this of course was not a problem that Eisenhower faced. As Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during the Second World War, Eisenhower had ingrained in his mind already an orthodox perspective of global politics. Eisenhower often promulgated during his campaign for the Presidency that “Soviet tyranny is attempting to make all humankind its chattel.” China of course was now inexorably linked to this danger, and American policy would have to reflect the inappropriate nature of a communist Beijing.

From the state level perspective, another interesting reality to note during this period is the fact that as mentioned by Dr. Tsou, the Nationalists’ had significant influence in American politics, where Chiang Kai-shek already had many admirers, particularly in the Republican Party.\(^{59}\) This was at least in part a result of American wartime propaganda, which had for years built up Chiang’s image as “Free China’s leader.”\(^{60}\) It is no wonder therefore that early polls taken in Eisenhower’s first term reflected strong public support for the arming of Chiang’s forces for an attack on the mainland.\(^ {61}\) In another poll, the public felt by an eighty three to fourteen percent margin that all allied trade with the PRC should be halted.\(^ {62}\)

These sentiments, along with a general distain and disapproval of the PRC, prevailed as the \emph{esprit de corps} of the day.\(^ {63}\) “After the election of Eisenhower and the appointment of Dulles as his Secretary of State, Washington further hardened its military posture toward Beijing. In his State of the Union Message to Congress on February 2, 1953, Eisenhower announced a modification of Truman’s instructions to the 7th Fleet in Formosa.”\(^ {64}\) Despite the unlikely possibility that Nationalists would attack Mainland China, the fleet would no longer prevent it.\(^ {65}\) Such a tacit endorsement of Nationalist aggression was in line with public opinion of the era. US opinion had hardened. US perception had increasingly fallen in line with the belief that, as Eisenhower once put it, “Communists respect only force and hold fidelity to the pledged world in contempt.”\(^ {66}\)

Retrospectively, this period is referred to as a “period of non-recognition.” From roughly 1953-1970, the United States held an official stance of non-recognition towards the Mao’s PRC government. By 1954 the two countries had broken off virtually all normal diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations.\(^ {67}\) Doak Barnett frames this nicely, stating:

“In one sense, the two countries had no relations during these two decades. There were no formal diplomatic ties, no trade, no legal travel back and forth, and virtually no mutual contact between ordinary citizens of the two countries (there were a few exceptions, but very few).

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 114.
\(^{65}\) Ibid., 44.
Probably never in the modern period have two major societies been so isolated from each other for so long in peacetime-if the cold war could be considered peace…. China and the United States confronted each other, at a distance, as implacable adversaries.”

This period witnessed a watershed moment, the height of anti-Communist ideology with respect to China. China was seen as a pariah, and was treated by Washington as such.

However notwithstanding the enmity and acrimony existent between the two nations in this period, despite ongoing and seemingly perpetual crises in the straight of Taiwan, the years 1955-1970 witnessed diplomatic relations (albeit “unofficial) between Peking and the United States. Despite American aversion to recognizing the PRC, and Mr. Dulles’ continued stance throughout the 1950s that “there is “nothing automatic” about official recognition (citing it as an instrument of national policy), a significant amount of coordination and low level collaboration between Peking and Washington occurred in this period.

The first of a series of ambassorial level meetings between the PRC and United States occurred in Geneva in 1954. In this instance, the U.S. government negotiated directly with the PRC on the repatriation of American personnel (including foreign nationals detained in each country) and agreed to hold consular-level talks on the question of Americans held in China. Meetings held in Geneva in 1955 at the request of Premier Zhou Enlai carried a similar tone. Naturally, each side held its respective interests during the meetings. It was in Peking’s best interest both domestically and internationally to attempt to derive some sort of recognition out of Washington (either de facto or actual). The United States on the other hand, had its own need to coordinate- from easing tensions in the Taiwanese straight that could, if mismanaged, destabilize the entire region, to negotiations on the visitation rights (at this point non-existent) of American journalists. Another issue emerging in US foreign policy in 1954 and 1955 was the escalating civil war (or revolution depending on your perspective) in Vietnam. The PRC had direct influence with the Viet Minh, and while the Sino-Soviet split would reduce said influence, the PRC continued to be a factor as America’s direct involvement in the region grew in the 1960s.

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This miniature détente between the United States and the PRC was indeed an interesting phenomenon. Even more interesting however is the fact that these types of meetings continued. It is true they were not always successful; in fact the meetings were more often than not concluded with irreconcilable differences. Nevertheless however, there were 136 of them—ranging from early talks in Geneva to continued Ambassadorial meetings in Warsaw. This of course begs the question, how were they politically possible and why did they occur?

Several variables were at work which increasingly allowed for such meetings to be politically acceptable. With respect to the PRC, “by the time of the Geneva Conference, the People’s Republic of China had reached a new stage in its evolution—one that allowed it to [with full confidence] take a more flexible stance vis-à-vis the “imperialist” nations.” 74 With respect to the United States’ political constraints, Great Britain’s eventual official recognition of the PRC provided Washington with impetus and political cover to hold such conferences. The main question however, is why? Why, in spite of ferocious differences did the PRC and United States both feel the need to maintain some sort of communiqué? Several possibilities exist, all of which serving as further proof that there were indeed legitimate benefits to be derived from an official diplomatic relationship consisting of dialogue and diplomatic coordination (if not collaboration).

Perhaps both nations held a shared interest of aversion. Stein argues that “solutions to the dilemma of common aversions arise when actors with contingent strategies do not most prefer the some outcome but do agree that there is at least one outcome that all would like to avoid.” 75 Perhaps the state of the world during this period of non-recognition allowed the United States and PRC to have divergent interests and yet share a common aversion. In this example (using Stein’s game theory set up), Actor A (The United States) prefers A1B2, while Actor B (PRC) prefers A2B1. Hypothetically, US preference (equilibrium A1B2) could be defined as a completely free and democratic world in which United States hegemony guarantees the safety of American business and fluidity of international trade. The PRC in this instance would hold a divergent preference, for A2B1—now hypnotically defined as a world governed by international communism, organized proletarian communes, and a hegemonic, secure and sovereign China checking the aggressive intent of imperialist capitalism. Stein further argues that when actors confront mutual aversions but diverge in their assessments of equilibria, a coordination regime can arise to establish rules of behavior that allow actor expectations to converge whenever the dilemma arises. 76 Said unofficial meetings could have, through Stein’s framework, represented the fruition of a coordination regime.

But what could this common aversion have been? Perhaps it was the Soviet Union. Secret ideological disagreements had festered between the PRC and Moscow since 1956. The

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76 Ibid., 311.
disagreements were at first rather petty- spats over differing interpretations of Marxism. However over time (seemingly unbeknownst to American policy makers), the rift had grown. In 1961, it reached a precipice with the Chinese Communists formally denouncing “The Revisionist Traitor Group of the Soviet Leadership.” The disagreements would only grow worse into the mid-1960s, reaching critical levels of rhetoric, resulting in the cessation of military cooperation and all but negating the Sino-Soviet “alliance.” Perhaps the common aversion in this instance was Soviet hegemony and power, a concept China and the US possessed equal aversion towards.

Another possibility is the proliferation of nuclear weapons into China. “China’s explosion of its atomic device in October 1964 added new complexities to the Sino-American relationship and to their respective broader foreign-policy agendas.” China’s acquisition of nuclear weapons would, in an archaic world under a Waltzian framework, constitute yet another shift in Sino capability. Stein would view this as the emerge of a dilemma of common interests, “where the Pareto-optimal outcome that actors mutually desire is not an equilibrium outcome.”

Stein makes the case that such situations require formalization and collaboration, such as the [later] US-Soviet SALT agreements. In the world of Cold War American-Sino relations, in an era of official non-recognition, a sine qua non for any such framework would have to be some sort of communication. Perhaps the “under the table” and “non-official” collaboration and coordination between the United States and the PRC during this era was a reaction to such a desire. Perhaps realist pressures served as a beguiling incentive for clear and unequivocal recognition, despite official non-recognition.

The trend is clear. As the world moved further into the Cold War era, it had become increasingly necessary for the United States to, at the very least, coordinate on some level with the PRC (albeit a small and unofficial one). Such informal government communiqué and under the table negotiation represented de facto recognition by the United States government of the PRC as the ruling sovereign entity of Mainland China. The question then remains, why was the US unable to formalize this relationship?

In retrospect, the domestic pressures acting on US foreign policy were just too strong. For instance, a Gallup poll done in July of 1953 found that the majority of Americans saw the recognition of the PRC by the UN to be a “moral issue” to which there could be no backing.

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78 Ibid., 167.
81 Ibid., 312.
down (by the unbelievable margin of seventy eight to seven percent).\footnote{George H. Gallup, \textit{The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971}. (New York: Abbey Publishing, 1972), 838.} This general trend of public support for a surly stance towards the PRC would continue through the end of the Eisenhower administration, despite the change in policy maintained by Fairbank, as well as many others (including a young ambitious senator from Massachusetts, who commented in 1957 that America’s policy toward Peking was “probably too rigid”).\footnote{Leonard A. Kusnitz, \textit{Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: America’s China Policy 1949-1979} (Connecticut: Greenwood Press), 77.}

The election of this young ambitious senator to the Presidency several years later would (to the surprise of many) do little to change US policy towards Peking. “Contrary to expectations, the president was in no mood for any ‘spectacular’ initiatives directed at China. Public opinion shaped in the crucible of the Korean War, and hardened into place in the Eisenhower-Dulles years, would not ‘allow’ such gestures so early in Kennedy’s term. The president, if he was interested in these actions, would have to spend time preparing the public to accept them.”\footnote{Ibid., 96.}

Such a move would have been contrary to the current (as of the late 1950s and early 1960s) American strategic stance towards red China as well as the antithesis of the political realities that supported said stance. Throughout the Kennedy years, policy would continue to be guided by the harsh rational apparent in Kennedy’s first year in office, as opinion would continue to preclude any real changes in US policy. Even the aforementioned Sino-Soviet rift was portrayed to the American public as the result of moderation emerging from the Kremlin, not Peking.\footnote{Ibid., 106.}

The harsh rhetoric by the Democrats in the early 1960s and subsequent Johnson Administration reflected this (initially set off by public outcry against Peking’s UN membership bid in 1961), and would eventually lead to a popular view of China even more negative in nature than that existent in the late 1950s.

\textbf{The Conclusion of an Awkward Era}

The years 1945-1964 offer a telling and illustrative tale of American foreign policy with respect to China. In many ways it is a convoluted tale, one chocked full of inherent contradictions, schizophrenic approaches, hypocritical policies and ambiguous stances.

From 1945 to the Korean War, American foreign policy traveled along a zigzagged course, often as unsure of itself as it was confused by the variables that affected it. It was inherently torn, between the realist concerns of balance, deterrence, and capability, coordination, and rationality; and the domestic political dilemma inherent in recognizing and accepting the obvious (that being the victory and legitimacy of the CCP).

The Korean War and the PRC’s aggressive involvement therein bequeathed American policy a sense of stability and unity. While indecisiveness and radical rhetoric still plagued the American
approach, this may be due to the structure of America’s system of governance more so than to active external or internal pressures. America once again felt the unifying power war can bring, and reacted accordingly. However, despite the hardened stance towards the PRC, there still existed rational arguments for the official recognition of the CCP in Peking. Hostility, whether physical or rhetorical, has throughout history been consistently coexisted with official recognition and diplomatic relations (i.e. US-USSR relations 1945-1989). The fact that China had taken, in the eyes of Washington, a nefarious stance towards America and American interests is not a sufficient condition for total non-recognition.

The oddity of the American position during this era comes to a head in the post-Korean War era. This, perhaps the most revealing of the three areas of study, confers to us a vista through which we can attempt to conceptualize the underlying relationship between perceived real world pressures, lingering (and in some cases antiquated) sentiment acting on a domestic level, and their convoluted byproduct. American sentiment, ideological belief, and domestic discourse retained Cold War-like qualities in this era, precluding any attempt to officially recognize the PRC as the legitimate sovereign ruler of China. At the same time however, the very real variables that were emerging and evolving on the system level were [increasingly] forcing Washington to collaborate and coordinate with the PRC, despite its official stance. It would be some time though before such forces were strong enough to overcome the American domestic political aversion towards the PRC. In the end, the product of these pressures acting on each other gave birth to a foreign policy approach that precluded any opportunity for a normal, official, and amiable PRC-US relationship from 1945-1964.

Rapprochement

The effects of the aforementioned era would be shrouded for some time. In fact, the next four decades of the relationship between the PRC and United States could arguably be described as the antithesis of the former area of study. Starting in the mid 1960s, a diplomatic and political détente would begin to emerge, eventually evolving into the relationship that we witness today.

The United States and PRC had for a decade sent out diplomatic feelers, such as low-level ambassadorial meetings in Warsaw. In 1966 these efforts began to gain momentum, with the founding of pro rapprochement institutions such as the National Committee on United States-China relations. Sino-Soviet border classes in 1969 provided further impetus for PRC leadership in Beijing to move towards a more amiable diplomatic relationship with the United States, and certain policy makers in Washington (supported by academics such as Fairbank), promulgated with increasing assertiveness that a more realistic policy towards Beijing was needed. The desire to move towards a more cooperative relationship in an attempt to balance an existential threat was not exclusive to either country. “The intensification of the Sino-Soviet conflict from a

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polemical dispute to a military confrontation encouraged Peking to improve its security through a tactic strategic alignment with Washington. Likewise, the United States, weakened by its protracted conflict in Vietnam, sought a diplomatic breakthrough with China as to gain greater leverage of both North Vietnam and the Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{87} Furthermore with respect to the United States, business interests during this era (lured by the prospect of an untouched one billion person consumer market) finally began to erode orthodox ideology and gain a foothold in Washingtonian policy. In 1969 the United States relaxed several trade restrictions along with other logistical restrictions on bilateral contact. The year of 1971 witnessed the famous Ping Pong Diplomacy event, notwithstanding tension created by US military maneuvers (1969) in Indochina.

With the help of a secret trip by Secretary of State Kissinger in 1971, President Nixon would later announce his acceptance of an offer to officially visit the PRC. Applauded by European and U.S. allies (most of which had already officially recognized the PRC), Nixon’s famous trip and the resulting Shanghai Communiqué would pave the road for an official US-PRC relationship. The ensuing thawing of relations would be aided by the need to coordinate and collaborate on economic issues, reflecting yet again an eagerness by both nations to expand trade ties. On June 9, 1972, Richard H. Solomon of the National Security Council Staff would write Kissinger listing the possible next steps in the developing PRC-US relationship. On matters of economics and trade, he stated:

“ We have received a number of CAS and State reports which indicate that PRC officials are concerned about several legal and financial barriers to the development of trade with the US, and that they would like to purchase a range of American products (particularly those embodying advanced technology). Thus we might take a number of concrete steps to facilitate the expansion of trade.

1) \textit{Propose the establishment of a Joint US–PRC Trade Commission (perhaps based in Peking).} Such a Commission would be devoted to the resolution of bilateral trade problems and the promotion of Sino–American trade in the spirit of the Shanghai Communiqué. This would follow the precedent of the binational trade commissions recently established with the USSR and Poland. As well, such a Commission—if based in Peking—would provide continuous US representation in the Chinese capital. While unilateral “official” US representation almost certainly remains unacceptable to Peking, the time may be ripe for detailed exploration of alternative forms of representation which would enable us to deal with impediments to Sino–American trade such as private claims against the PRC and the related frozen assets problem, the issue of MFN status and tariff barriers, and additional regulatory constraints.”\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} Harry Harding and Yuan Ming, \emph{Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955: A Joint Reassessment of a Critical Decade} (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1989), 323.

The pledge to normalize diplomatic relations (as stated in the communiqué) would bequeath tangible results in 1973 with the establishment of the United States Liaison Office in Beijing (and its PRC counterpart in Washington). Continuing on this theme, 1979 would witness a visit from Vice Premier Xiaoping, formally established embassies in Washington and Beijing, and a formal bilateral trade agreement. Despite threats to the emerging collaboration between the two nations, such as PRC objection to a US-Taiwan arms sale in 1981 and the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, the stage had been set diplomatically, politically, and legally for the development of the largest trading relationship the world has ever seen.

**China’s Emergence and The Discovery of America’s “New” Best Friend**

“The rise of China, if it continues, may be the most important trend in the world for the next century... China is the fastest growing economy in the world, with what may be the fastest growing military budget. It has nuclear weapons, border disputes with most of its neighbors, and a rapidly improving army that may within a decade or so be able to resolve old quarrels in its own favor. The United States has possessed the world’s largest economy for more than a century, but at present trajectories China may displace it in the first half of next century and become the number one economy in the world.”—Nicholas D. Kristof, 1993

The economic reforms that were introduced by Deng Xiaoping in the late seventies have transformed the Chinese economy and produced a period of spectacular growth. The PRC over the last several decades has been lifted from the gutter of Mao’s Cultural Revolution into a new era of prosperity. China’s success story need not be reiterated here, and stands as an undisputable economic miracle. China’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at an average rate of 9.3 percent between 1979-1993 (in comparison to a global average growth rate of 2.6 percent in said period). China’s GDP quadrupled over a period of fifteen years, as China rose as a [ranked] trading nation from number thirty seven to number eleven by 1997. 89

It is also important to note that the majority of this growth has occurred via the direct involvement of the United States economy. US-China ties have expanded substantially over the past three decades. Total US-China trade has risen from $5 billion in 1980 to $409 billion in 2008. 90 In 2008, China was the second largest US trading partner, its third largest export market, and its biggest source of imports. About 12% of the total US global trade is now with China (notwithstanding the fact that more than one forth of global GDP is American). According to US data, US firms have invested around $28 billion in China (through 2007). The US trade

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deficit as of 2005 sat at $200 billion. In 2009, it was more than $226 billion.\(^9\) Most figures place total US foreign direct investment (FDI) in China over the $50 billion dollar mark as of 2010. Furthermore, China has recently (September 2008) overtaken Japan as the world’s largest holder of US government debt, holding what most analysts agree, debt worth over $800 billion dollars.\(^9\)

These numbers are startling, and it is no wonder that the last thirty years have witnessed the development of a close political relationship between the United States and China (arguably piggy backing off of the massive economic relationship between the two nations). In light of such close knit economic ties and aligned interests, many have declared that the relationship between the US and China is truly “too big to fail.”\(^9\) They argue that the shared interests between the two nations are so great, that the inevitable transition from a world of US hegemony to a world of Sino-US dominance must be a peaceful one. Following this logic, many others say that the baton of hegemony will be passed peacefully, much as it was from a Pax-Britannica world to a Pax-Americana world.

Several factors underlie this logic. First is the liberal view of interconnectivity, such as that espoused by Thomas Friedman. Friedman’s Dell Theory of Conflict prevention states that “no two countries that are both part of a major global supply chain will ever fight a war against each other as long as they are both part of the same global supply chain.”\(^9\) Friedman goes on in excruciating detail (even using China and Taiwan as examples) to explain how the costs associated with disrupting and leaving the global system can act as a constraint on the ever-present human inclination to assert dominance. G. John Ikenberry makes a similar yet more neo-liberal argument in *Foreign Affairs*, nothing that today’s US backed Western order is far easier to join than to overturn- a fact which Ikenberry argues will most likely preclude any attempt by a rising power such as China to follow in the footsteps of other rising powers such as 20\(^{th}\) century Germany and Japan.\(^9\)


Others make an argument based on domestic politics in Beijing. In a recent article in Times Magazine Jeffery Wasserstrom writes that “Beijing’s determination to keep its growth rate high and its military up to date limits its ability to alienate other world powers. Trade and investment with the US is crucial for the maintenance of [Chinese] economic health.”

This argument is a popular one, bolstered by what Friedman refers to as GDPism (that being the CCP’s eternal quest for legitimacy through economic growth and increased Chinese standards of living).

These arguments are sound and do well to reflect the unparalleled contemporary interdependency between the United States and China. They do however conveniently ignore both the history between the United States and PRC, as well as historical president. What happens when the aforementioned relationship of mutual convenience turns out to be just that- one based on pure temporary economic mutual convenience? Will the scarred past of Sino-US relations become apparent when the guise of economic prosperity between the two nations is mitigated and or outright eliminated? And if so, might this affect the international system? Is there such thing as a “new” best friend? These questions are the topic of the preceding sections.

Chinese Capitalism & High-Tech Production

"U.S. manufacturers are facing a threat to its "longstanding leadership in technological innovation" from China. -Manufacturers Alliance/MAPI report, 2006

To reiterate, those who argue for peace through integration are, for the time being, accurate. “For now, the forces of [global economic] integration have triumphed. The Chinese-American economic relationship is one of mutual dependence. China needs the American market to sell its goods; the United States needs China to finance its debt- it’s globalization’s equivalent of the nuclear age’s Mutual Assured Destruction.”

But this relationship may not always be, and two recently developing trends may be signaling an impending shift away from this stable system.

The first of these trends is the increasing assertiveness of the CCP with respect to macroeconomic policy. Beijing has become increasingly aggressive in the manner in which it moves to secure markets and resources abroad. The CCP has continued to block UN Security Council sanctions against Iran for its defiance of the international community; which in the eyes of policy makers in Washington pegs its insatiable need for oil ahead of Middle Eastern security, stability and peace. Furthermore, the CCP has worked in a unilateral fashion to secure close ties with weak yet resource rich African nations such as Sudan (much to the dismay of western


human rights activists), Tanzania and Zimbabwe.\textsuperscript{98} While these efforts abroad are arguably the same if not far more benign than efforts made by Great Britain in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century and the United States in the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, Chinese neo-mercantilism serves as a quintessential threat to free-market corporate capitalism (a system currently endorsed by the United States).

Chinese neo-mercantilism has also given way to greater forms of protectionism. “China’s mercantilism goes beyond IP theft to include tariff and non-tariff barriers to imports, subsidies to promote exports, forced technology transfers and tax policies, like border-adjustable value-added taxes, that subsidize exports. And of course, their most effective mercantilist tool is to keep their currency, the yaun, significantly undervalued.”\textsuperscript{99}

Complementing the CCP’s assertive pro-Chinese business \textit{modus operandi} is a deliberate and government sponsored push into high-tech manufacturing. Despite the illusion that China has made a total one-hundred-and eighty-degree turn to full-blown free market capitalism, Beijing’s tentacles continue to be wrapped around nearly every major sector of the economy. “The central government is either a monopolist or dominant player in the most important [economic sectors] including financial services, banking, telecommunications, energy, steel, automobiles, natural resources, and transportation.”\textsuperscript{100} Recently, the CCP has turned its attention towards high-tech manufacturing, giving Chinese companies a competitive advantage over firms operating without government subsidy. “The government is backing this drive with a two-pronged approach: using incentives to encourage companies to innovate, but also moving to discourage low-end manufacturers from operating in southern China.”\textsuperscript{101} Recently, President Hu Jintao reiterated this desire to no longer be the world’s sweatshop. Hu hinted at China’s vaulting ambitions during a meeting of China’s scientific elite last June at the Chinese Academy


of Sciences, where he called on scientists to challenge other countries in high technology. “We are ready for a fight,” he said, “to control the scientific high ground and earn a seat on the world’s high technology board. We will make some serious efforts to strengthen our nation’s competence.”

Hu’s rhetoric is not empty. Chinese firms are increasingly buying or vertically integrating into industries such as high tech software, biotechnology, supercomputers and medical devices. “This year, a government-backed corporation even introduced its first commercial passenger jet, a move Beijing hopes will allow it to someday compete with Boeing and Airbus.” China has also made significant leaps into what most analysts agree will be the world’s next great industry-alternative energy.

If these trends continue, the aforementioned era of mutual economic co-dependence may evolve (quicker than most think) into an era of US-Sino economic competition. The Chinese will not be producers of napkins but of patents, tech gadgets, jets, electric cars and nano-solar cells. Such a world would represent a significant global shift both economically, and perhaps more importantly, politically.

Festering Hostilities in a New Sino-Centric World

“At this point, no one can say China and the United States are friends.... "I don’t think we like America or have the same political values or ideology. But we have to do business. We have no other choice. ... It doesn't mean I want to do it; it means I have to." - Yan Xuetong, director of Tsinghua University's Institute of International Studies, 2009

We know well what a tepid diplomatic relationship looks like between two nations that exist under the umbrella of a $300 billion dollar trade relationship. But what would said relationship look like in 2040, under the umbrella of a $123,000,000,000,000 high-tech and diversified Chinese economy (Or one could take the low-end estimate done by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, which puts the Chinese economy at 20 percent larger than that of the United States by 2050)?


103 Ibid.

Without a strong intertwined inexorable economic relationship of co-dependence, issues and buried diplomatic and political tensions may finally emerge in a more hostile manner. In such a world, three main variables would be acting on the relationship between the United States and China— all of which have direct ties back to our original era of study (1945-1964) as well as the potential to undermine a peaceful transition of relative power. They are as follows: A rocky and mutually distrustful diplomatic relationship between policy makers in Beijing and Washington (aided by serious cultural differences, historical grievances, and misunderstandings between Americans and Chinese citizenry), Chinese hyper-nationalism and the Taiwan/Tibet issue, and finally the American international system (with respect to collective action).

The years 1945-1964 represent not only a missed opportunity to develop a close relationship with a young new China, but also represent a significant amount of political collateral damage caused by the Cold War. As mentioned earlier, American policy during this era was severely restrained due to domestic and ideological concerns, precluding any early tendencies towards official diplomatic recognition from coming to fruition. But why, one would ask, is official diplomatic recognition such a big deal?

By 1948, most world governments were unequivocally convinced that the PRC was indeed running Mainland China; recognized or unrecognized. Most recognition by the “First World Powers” started as de facto in nature, mostly due to the stance of the United States. Official de jure recognition by the United States (and a shocked Japan) would follow much later; in fact significantly later than nations such as Great Britain and India. The time that had elapsed heretofore was politically insulting. For years Washington, through Presidential actions, Congressional policies, and conservative Secretaries of State (such as Secretary of State Acheson and Secretary of State Dulles), used recognition as an instrument of foreign policy. Mr. Dulles’ continued stance throughout the 1950s that “there is nothing automatic” about official recognition, continues to this today to serve as the ultimate diplomatic insult.105 While the respective heads of state in the United States and China continue to display a civil and friendly relationship (with regular visits and communiqué), policy makers off the camera and behind the scenes feel unease. US policy makers and the western media outlets often depict China (even today) as a growing communist menace— the anthesis of American ideas, freedoms and liberties. Indeed, “China’s leaders believe that the key to human progress lies not in the form of political structures, but in economic growth.”106

This paranoia and sentiment is not exclusive to the United States. CCP party leaders often, when angered, release anti-American rhetoric calling the United States imperialist or accosting the US for its lack of political, cultural, and economic sensitivity. A phenomenal recent example of this is revealed via a leaked Chinese government document from the recent Copenhagen

Climate conference. “In their [China’s] evaluation of the outcome, the official’s top point is that ‘the overall interests of developing countries have been defended by resisting a rich nation ‘conspiracy’ to abandon the Kyoto protocol, and with it the legal distinction between rich nations that must cut carbon emissions and developing nations for whom action is not compulsory.” While it is true that the inability to foster a close political and respectable relationship with the PRC is not the only variable at play here, the lack of trust and diplomatic fealty is continuously evident in the ongoing saga between Washington and Beijing. Unfortunately, in a world in which Beijing can strut on the international stage (politically speaking) with power, pride and prestige, such mistrust will likely be amplified rather than dissipate.

Further amplifying this effect will be cultural differences that have existed for centuries. While China has gone a great way to adopt US culture, from baseball to McDonalds, serious cultural differences continue to exist between American and Chinese societies. Chinese culture values relationships and humility as a virtue. US culture could not be any different “valuing strong messianic principles and holding humility as a weakness.” A Far Eastern Economic Review editorial recently complained: “Too often China’s actions appear founded on the assumption that its neighbor are, if not enemies, at least obstacles...In short China needs to learn what it means to be a good neighbor.” “Larry M. Wortzel writes that “Beijing seems to be locked in pre-Cold War, almost turn-of-the-century mode of quasi-imperial competition for regional hegemony. In sum, many critics accuse the Chinese government of hostility towards the modern values that are thought to produce peace and prosperity. A powerful China with the same anachronistic agenda could only undermine the pillars of regional stability.” Furthermore, a US government, attune to a hegemonic America and the messianic principles it promulgates throughout the cosmos; combined with a soured, bitter, and assertive China could undermine the pillars of global stability.

But how? How in a world of such global cooperation, relative peace and co-dependence would a hegemonic China ever pose a threat to global stability? What factors could spark such a destabilizing conflict? The answers to these questions can be found in the past.

The world before World War One was in many ways a relative equivalent to the world we live in today. International trade, travel, and sport were pervasive throughout the globe. An era of peace had followed the Napoleonic Era, and many declared the end of all global conflict due to the interconnectivity of man. They were wrong. The Concert of Europe had flaws, and lingering hostilities between nations, combined with rising industrial powers and increasing nationalism eventually destroyed the tepid balance of peace. Similar issues exist today between the United States and China, and they owe their genesis to the post World War Two world.

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107 Adapted from "Bridging US-China" Cross-Cultural Differences Using Internet and Groupware Technologies", Zhouying Jin, Robert M. Mason, and Peter P. Yum
The United States and China continue to exist in the unwieldy world in which China recognizes Taiwan as part of China, and the United States allows de facto recognition to Taiwan as a sovereign entity. The US continued to support the KMT as the legitimate ruler of China well into the Cold War, and this support has dragged on into the modern era (albeit without the fiery rhetoric of past decades).

While the fiery rhetoric and war drum beating between the two nations over Taiwan may be a thing of the past, China’s ire continues to be provoked by US military arms sales to Taipei. This issue surfaces almost cyclically, and came to a head once more on February 2010. China, in light of a $6.4 billion deal that includes 60 Black Hawk Helicopters, 114 Patriot air defense missiles, and two Osprey mine-hunting ships, verbally accosted the US-threatening to slap sanctions on US companies participating in the deal. China summoned US ambassador John Huntsman to voice its disapproval of the deal, and “Chinese media lambasted the United States for the deal with the government run China Daily, saying ‘it exposes [US] usage of double standards and hypocrisy on major issues related to China’s core interests.” The People’s Daily, another Chinese syndicate, referred to the deal “as rude and unreasonable Cold War thinking.”

The issue of Taiwan, and that of Chinese sovereignty, is further coupled with the lingering issue of Tibet and the Dali Lama. This too recently resurfaced in February 2010, during the Dali Lama’s trip to the White House to visit President Obama. “China was quick to denounce the meeting. Wang Baodong, spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Washington urged the Obama administration to scrap the meeting ‘so as to avoid further native impact[s] on bilateral relations.’”

These issues, those of Taiwanese independence and Tibetan autonomy, invoke strong and dichotomous emotions from both the US electorate and Chinese public. Human rights activists and non-profit NGOs are continuously lobbying the US government to take a stand against Chinese human rights violations, with particular respect to Tibet. Taiwan is a slightly more complicated issue in the US, with the pro-business lobby pushing for US policy that does not ‘rock the boat,’ while hard liners, neo-conservatives, and pro-democracy advocates continue their unwavering support for a free and independent Taiwan.

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110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

The most dangerous and unsettling public sentiment on the aforementioned issues exists however in China, where these issues are not a side note in public discourse, but a main theme. The Chinese view continued American support of Taiwan and tacit recognition of the Dali Lama's political stature as an insulting infringement on the “Westphalian sovereignty” of their nation. Exacerbating the effect of these seemingly never-ending contentions are two quickly emerging sub-variables: Chinese ultranationalism and an aggressive Chinese military build-up.

Nationalism, Enlightenment’s deadly successor, is nothing new in global affairs. Yet China’s economic miracle has, over the last several decades, conferred a sense of pride and national unity to Chinese citizenry (this sentiment of course, is heavily supported by the Communist Party of China) whereas the rest of the world has witnessed decreased levels of nationalistic rhetoric. “China has a high degree of ethnic unity (in comparison to other rising nations like India)” 113 Such unity, combined with a long and prestigious history, confer to China a sense of national pride. “Chinese nationalists today find pride in stories about the superiority of China’s ‘5000 years’ of Glorious civilization. This yearning for lost glory is accompanied by the story of victimization in the past (per the Opium War, Boxer Rebellion, and Japanese incursions/atrocities in the WW2 era), a narrative central to what being Chinese today means.”114 Pride and unity such as this elicit an emotional response to issues such as Taiwan, Tibet and Japan- transforming and elevating them from issues of mere diplomacy and international law to national issues of sovereignty, self-defense, and cultural pride. An environment such as this is not conducive for rational thought nor does it serve as a fertile ground for the development of objective logic.

The danger herein, is that said growing ultranationalism in China is now being accompanied by an aggressive military build-up and modernization. An analysis of PRC budget data and International Monetary Fund (IMF) GDP data for the period of 1996 to 2006 shows average annual PRC defense budget growth of 11.8 percent (inflation adjusted), compared with average annual GDP growth of 9.2 percent (inflation adjusted).115 “In March 2008 a proposal was submitted from China’s State Council to a National People’s Congress session to consider the approval of 417.8 billion yuan (about $57.22 billion US) in defense spending. On March 4, 2009, in light of a global rescission and a decrease in China’s GDP growth rate, a 15 percent increase in military spending was announced.”116 These trends are troubling, as evidenced by US Pacific Command Admiral Willard’s recent comment that “China’s powerful economic engine is also funding a military modernization program that has raised concerns in the region- a concern also shared by the US Pacific Command.” The admiral would go on to note that “China’s interest in

113 Judith K. Kornberg and John R. Faust, China in World Politics (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 257.


116 Ibid.
supporting a peaceful and stable political environment to support Beijing’s overall development is difficult to reconcile with new military capabilities that appear designed to challenge US freedom of action in the region and, if necessary, enforce China’s influence over its neighbors— including our regional allies and partners.”¹¹⁷ Naturally, the regional allies and partners the Admiral refers to include Taiwan and Japan.

Trends such as this raise the momentous question, how will the newly empowered economic superpower and nationalistic military hegemon conduct itself on the world stage in the 21st Century? And furthermore, how will its behavior shape US-China relations moving forward into the century? A quote from former Prime Minister Qian Qichen is telling. In 1992 he stated:

“...At present, all nations, developed or developing, share the view that a country’s national strength, especially in the economic sense, will decide its status in the 21st century. Therefore, they are generally turning their attention to domestic affairs, attaching great importance to economic construction and cooperation. All nations are becoming more interdependent, harmonious, complementary and mutually restricted.”

Indeed, this Kantian view is a desired one, and would bode well for the future of humanity. However heretofore in the 21st Century, Chinese actions on the international stage seem to be pitted against the aforementioned statement. China has increasingly become assertive in its national goals, even going so far as to subvert efforts at international collective action. The issue of Iran and China’s actions on the UN Security Council serve as a good example of this, however an ever better example comes from the recent Climate Summit in Copenhagen.

While there are of course many perspectives on every event, the growing western consensus is that China sabotaged the recent Copenhagen Summit, preventing the international consensus to curb carbon emissions from being put into international law/treaty. The Chinese premier, Wen Jinbao, did not even deign to attend the meeting personally, sending instead a second-tier official from the country’s foreign ministry to sit opposite President Obama. It was noted that “several times during the session, the world’s most powerful heads of state were forced to wait around as the Chinese delegate went off to make phone calls to his ‘superiors.’”¹¹⁸ Such behavior is the epitome of a diplomatic insult, and combined with China’s obstinacy (seemingly


on behalf of all developing nations), the conference would ultimately be deemed a failure—resulting in no significant concrete agreements.

At issue here is not so much China’s belief that global warming is a scam, or that moving past a carbon economy is unnecessary. China has taken aggressive actions domestically to clean up its environment and protect infantile alternative energy industries. At issue here its China’s trepidation that if Copenhagen were to be a success, the international climate regime would be so strong and empowered that in several years time, China would once again be called on to further reduce carbon emissions (perhaps in a more aggressive manner). This would be a serious problem, as China’s ruling government has established its legitimacy based on the tenants of GDPism, and a *sine qua non* for continued double digit GDP growth given China’s infrastructure is cheap coal. This point is summed up beautifully by Mark Lynas of the Guardian UK, who states:

“Copenhagen was much worse than just another bad deal, because it illustrated a profound shift in global geopolitics. This is fast becoming China’s century, yet its leadership has displayed that multilateral environmental governance is not only not a priority, but is viewed as a hindrance to the new superpower’s freedom of action.”

China and the US are in many ways moving in different directions. As China continues to increase its assertiveness in the international system, issues such as climate change, human rights, nuclear proliferation, and self-determination will no longer be as clear cut as they were in the 20th Century. Collective action will be difficult, and will become increasingly onerous as China’s power grows. “As a weaker power, China’s dependence on the favor of its neighbors has been comparatively high; as a great power China will behave boldly, more inclined to force its will upon others than to consult with them.”

**Conclusion**

Perhaps the worst quality of human nature is our uncanny ability to carry grievances across generations. The reverberating residual effects left by an awkward era in Chinese-US relations has complicated and in many ways exacerbated issues facing US-Chinese relations today. China is growing, and notwithstanding the global move towards interdependence, China is likely to achieve global economic hegemony over the next several decades. Following such hegemony will be increased and modernized military capabilities, pitting the interests of China directly against those of the United States.

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119 Ibid.

The contemporary relationship between the US and China is one of current mutual economic necessity. The system that has emerged over the last several decades currently works to continuously squash any sparks which could potentially ignite US-Chinese tensions - relegating said tensions to empty rhetoric. Such a sequestration however, will likely not last. “If China fulfills its expected potential, it will soon be a power in the class of 19th century Britain, the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, Pacific War Japan, and 20 century America. Each of those countries used its superior power to establish some form of hegemony to protect and promote its interests. There is no convincing reason to think that China as a great power will depart from this pattern.”

Nothing is certain of course, and the future of US-Chinese relations is unpredictable. Such power, if attained by China would not necessarily result in physical conquest or the occupation of foreign nations. Yet if history serves as precedent, we may very well be living in the calm before the proverbial storm. Let us hope for the sake of humanity and global prosperity that we are not.

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References


