
Introduction to the book

*Andrew T.H. Tan**

The evident, and growing, strategic rivalry between China and the United States is arguably the most important issue in international relations today due to its implications not just for the dominant position of the United States but also the stability of the evolving post-Cold War international system. The dramatic economic rise of China has been without precedent historically, and in 2014 it passed a historic milestone in becoming the world's largest economy measured in purchasing power terms, surpassing the United States for the first time.

The problem, however, is best summed up by Hillary Clinton when she stated in 2012 that 'we are now trying to find ... a new answer to the ancient question of what happens when an established power and a rising power meet'.¹ This is a reference to Organski's well-known observation that historically, where a rising power is confronted by a dominant power, war almost inevitably results, since the dominant power is not likely to easily yield its position to the challenger.²

China's rise and the challenge this poses to US dominance is the international relations problem that has led to this volume on US-China relations. The relationship between the world's two largest economies (as well as major conventional military and nuclear powers) is pivotal for global peace and stability. At stake here is the very stability and equilibrium of the evolving post-Cold War international system. As Kerry Brown in the concluding chapter of this book observes, the relationship between the two impacts on almost every other country, sometimes forcing them to take sides. This is because both countries see themselves as global powers, through the United States' promotion of its perceived universally valid political and social values, and China's enormous global economic reach.

The US-China relationship has thus been very aptly described as 'the most consequential bilateral relationship of our time'.³ The problem is that the relationship has become more contentious and complex, and this has made its management ever more challenging. As Kerry Brown observes, the simple framework of strategic partners working for mutual benefit that had characterized US-China relations since Nixon's seminal

visit to China in 1972 now needs serious updating. Today, many in the United States see China as a growing threat, while in China many perceive US actions as designed to contain China and prevent it from taking its rightful place as a regional and global power. Thus, with China's rise, the US–China relationship has become more competitive although they continue to cooperate in a number of areas. However, the fact remains that there is today deep economic interdependence between the two. This has resulted in an increasingly complicated relationship with elements of both competition and cooperation.

This volume is designed to address key questions in the US–China relationship. What are the historical and contemporary contexts that underpin this complex relationship? How has the strategic rivalry between the two evolved? What are the key flashpoints in their relationship? What are the key security issues between the two powers? The result is a volume that contains a broad set of contributions that focus on the US–China relationship in a number of spheres, including historical, political, economic, military, international and regional. In addition to the involvement of an international team of scholars, some with strong policy credentials, this volume will have a wide appeal for students and informed readers in both higher education and the policy-making world. This volume will enable them to gain an excellent point of entry into many, if not most, of the key debates regarding the rise of China and the US–China relationship. The mix of US, Chinese and other scholars is also designed to provide a balanced analysis of US–China relations.

CO-EVOLUTION

The volume contains 25 chapters and is divided into six parts. The first part contains an introductory chapter that is broad based and focuses on how to theorize US–China relations as well as outlining the key challenges to the relationship.

Andrew T.H. Tan's Chapter 1 argues, citing Henry Kissinger, that the relationship is 'less partnership than co-evolution'.⁴ It is this 'co-evolution' that provides the balanced frame of reference for this volume. Tan also asserts that should the two succeed in coming to an understanding, war will be avoided and a new regional and global equilibrium will be the result. However, it remains to be seen if an *entente cordiale* could be achieved before growing mutual mistrust and misperception lead to open conflict.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

The second part provides the historical and contemporary contexts of the US–China relationship. In Chapter 2, Mark Beeson provides an overview of the United States in Asia. He argues that it is simply not possible to understand the development of this region and the remarkable economic and strategic changes and events that have occurred there without taking account of the role played by the United States. Beeson concludes by considering how a new US strategy based on the ‘Indo-Pacific’ region is likely to influence the future role of the United States in the region, however it may be defined.

Chapters 3 and 4, written by Andrea Benvenuti, examine the bilateral relationship during and after the Cold War. Chapter 3 is divided into two key sections. The first explains why, during the early Cold War, relations between Washington and Beijing remained largely antagonistic notwithstanding some behind-the-scenes efforts to reduce conflict. The second section covers Nixon’s ‘opening to China’ and Washington’s subsequent rapprochement with Beijing. In so doing, it shows how Beijing and Washington managed to overcome their mutual suspicions and establish a mutually satisfactory political and economic relationship.

Chapter 4 analyses the consequences of the end of the Cold War for US–China relations and shows how both Washington and Beijing found it difficult to adjust their bilateral relationship to the changed dynamics of the post–Cold War world. Although they broadly shared the view that effective cooperation was still very much in their mutual interest, such cooperation appeared at times elusive, often giving way to competition and conflict.

Chapters 5 to 8 deal with US perspectives on China, human rights in US–China relations, Chinese perceptions of the United States and US–China economic relations. Chapter 5, written by Jeffrey Reeves, focuses on US perspectives on China. It reviews relevant public opinion polls and surveys, conducts a review of media reporting on China within the United States’ most influential media sources, examines academic writing from the United States’ most prominent Sinologists, and researches key speeches on China by top US leadership to determine dominant US perspectives on China. Reeves concludes that US perspective on China, in a very general sense, is largely negative. This has profound implications for US–China relations given that, historically, antagonism between states and peoples have led to conflict. Reeves therefore argues that both the United States and China should take steps to positively influence US perceptions toward China.

Chapter 6, written by Ming Wan, focuses on human rights in US–China relations. Applying the theoretical framework of ‘events-transformed structures’, namely examining how some events transform the structures that affect state behaviour, Ming Wan observes that the singular event of Tiananmen in June 1989 transformed the structure of US–China relations, creating a new normal. While other key events in US–China relations helped mould the shape of US–China relationship, the human rights subset has remained stable, which also constrains the overall bilateral relationship.

Chapter 7, written by Shiming Fan, focuses on Chinese public perceptions of the United States. Fan discusses psychological, socio-political and international factors in explaining the phenomenon of conspiracy theories in China regarding the actions of the United States. Fan points out that the exaggeration of the influence and effects of conspiracy theories could seriously affect US–China relations, as they reinforce the enemy image, alienate the American and Chinese people, and contribute to a detrimental atmosphere for governmental relations.

Chapter 8, written by Dong Wang, focuses on US–China economic relations, specifically, the governance of US–China economic relations in historical and contemporary terms. As the largest global trader, export-oriented manufacturer, and foreign exchange reserves holder, China should be encouraged to do more for its Asian neighbours, the international economy, and in the provision of public goods. The United States would do no worse than share power and responsibility with not only China but also other countries around the world. Dong Wang also argues that the United States and China should see each other in a more relaxed way.

THE US–CHINA STRATEGIC RIVALRY

The third part of the volume contains four chapters that examine the US–China strategic rivalry. Chapter 9, on the US–China strategic rivalry, is co-authored by Angela Ming Yan Poh and Mingjiang Li. The co-authors argue that the US–China strategic rivalry at the global level will be more manageable, given that China appears to be more interested in reforming some elements of the existing international system, rather than in establishing a fundamentally different global order. The more problematic aspect will be the security contentions between China and the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, where the United States has been a dominant power over the past few decades, and where a rising China has increasing political and economic interests. In particular, countries in the region will need to play constructive roles by seeking to

incorporate both the United States and China into new and existing economic and security institutions, instead of forming ‘alliances’ that could lead to further conflict and divisions in the region.

Chapter 10, on China’s global challenge to the United States, is written by Andrew T.H. Tan. China’s dramatic economic rise, its emerging global economic power, and its expanding military capabilities have led to predictions that it will soon supplant the United States as the dominant global power. However, Tan argues that it is not in fact on a trajectory to do so. China does not have the desire or capacity for global leadership, its armed forces are not organized for deployment and intervention in the far corners of the globe, and it suffers from a significant deficit in soft power that would make it appeal to others and confer it with global influence. Thus, while China’s global influence will increase as it becomes a global economic actor, it will in fact not replace the United States as the dominant global power any time soon.

Chapter 11, on the US rebalance to Asia and its implications for US–China relations, is written by Paul J. Smith. According to Smith, the US ‘rebalance to Asia’ policy announced in 2012 reflects a steady deterioration in US–China relations and the growing reality of a ‘security dilemma’ dynamic between Washington and Beijing. Smith characterizes the current phase in the relationship (since 1990) as featuring warm and robust social and economic relations juxtaposed with cold and hostile security relations. However, this contains evident danger as the two countries’ cooperative social and economic relations obscure the deterioration of the two countries’ security relationship, which could become the source of major conflict. Smith argues that in order to avoid any major bilateral rupture, the United States and China must find ways to build strategic trust and to focus on long-term security challenges in which both countries share common interests.

Chapter 12, on China’s ‘new model of major power relations’, is written by Richard Weixing Hu. Hu observes that President Xi Jinping’s response to the US rebalancing strategy has been non-confrontational but also non-compromising in defending China’s national interests in the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, Xi Jinping has proposed the building of a ‘new model of major power relations’ with the United States in order to reset the strained bilateral relationship. However, profound strategic distrust has led to a lukewarm response from Washington. Hu warns that unless Beijing and Washington can find ways to reduce mutual distrust and manage competition, it is unlikely that they could build an enduring, stable and cooperative relationship.

FLASHPOINTS

The fourth part of the volume contains four chapters that examine the various flashpoints in US–China relations. Chapter 13, written by Andrew L. Oros, focuses on Japan in the US–China relationship. Oros observes that Japan plays an integral role in the US–China relationship as a major trading partner of both and as the third-largest economy in the world. Both the United States and China have deep ties with Japan, and both states have used their relationship with Japan to seek to advance their interests with regard to the other. The US–China and Japan–China relationships are therefore in many ways a triangular US–Japan–China relationship, with the added challenges that a three-way relationship entails. Thus, according to Oros, when considering the challenges of the US–China relationship moving forward, careful attention should be paid to the impact of Japan on the evolving US–China dynamic.

Chapter 14, written by Terence Roehrig, examines Korea in US–China relations. Roehrig concludes that North Korea will remain a serious flashpoint for conflict in the region and a major point of contact for US–China relations. In the years ahead, South Korea could also be facing a strategic dilemma as China’s rise has been a huge economic opportunity for South Korea. Should US–China relations worsen, South Korea would face a difficult challenge in balancing these two relationships. Roehrig concludes that North and South Korean roles in US–China relations are multifaceted, part challenge and part opportunity, and closely tied to the uncertainty that characterizes the Asia-Pacific.

Chapter 15, written by Andrew T.H. Tan, focuses on Taiwan in US–China relations. Tan argues that Taiwan has been a key issue in US–China relations since the end of World War II and, as the Taiwan Strait crisis in 1995–96 demonstrated, it could yet lead to open conflict between the two great powers. For China, resolving the Taiwan issue through reunification with the Mainland is a primary political objective on account of the strong and emotive nationalist sentiments surrounding the issue in China. However, Taiwan has been the benefactor of fortuitous strategic developments in Asia, which has led the United States to continue to protect it from China. While Taiwan is ultimately expendable should strategic circumstances change, for the time being it remains a key issue in US–China relations and the challenge is maintaining the status quo and thus peace.

Chapter 16, written by Chien-peng Chung, focuses on the United States and China’s maritime territorial disputes. In particular, it examines the roles played by the United States in the claims over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and the various outcrops in the

South China Sea such as the Spratly and the Paracel Islands. While the United States has no territorial claims over these islands, it has been involved in issues related to them since the end of World War II, and continues to do so due to its security presence in the region. US involvement has also been actively sought by countries contesting China's claims to these territories, such as Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam, and those that are not parties to the disputes, but are nonetheless concerned about China asserting its influence in East and Southeast Asia through the construction of military facilities on these outcrops. The chapter concludes with possible steps that both China and the United States can take to reduce tension caused by these disputes.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE

The fifth part contains seven chapters examining the security and defence issues in the US–China relationship. Chapter 17, entitled 'Assessing the US–China power balance', is written by Yee-Kuang Heng. In this chapter, Heng asks how China and the United States assess each other's power capabilities. Heng concludes that Cold War concepts of net assessment and AirLand Battle continue to exert an influence on the way the United States considers China's military power capabilities. Interestingly, Heng also finds that China stresses the notion of 'comprehensive power', which also highlights the importance of 'soft power' far more than the US side does.

Chapter 18, by Yves-Heng Lim, evaluates China's military capabilities. In this chapter, Lim examines the progress made by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the context of a potential clash between Beijing and Washington, which, in all likelihood, would mainly be fought over the 'commons' – the sea, the air, space and cyberspace. Lim argues that China has substantially enhanced its capacity to deny control of the commons, while it has, at the same time, been striving to build a limited capacity to control the commons for its own purposes.

Chapter 19, entitled 'Facing the dragon: debating the US military response to China', is written by Benjamin Schreer. Schreer focuses on the scholarly debate about the 'best' US military strategy with regard to China. Schreer finds that while the academic debate about US military options against the China challenge is far from conclusive, the Pentagon is proceeding with a strategy that seeks to retain full-spectrum dominance against the PLA, including through deep strikes against conventional targets on the Mainland. As a consequence, Schreer concludes that the United States is likely to retain its forward presence in the Asia-Pacific in

order to push back against the possibility of a more assertive Chinese strategic posture in the Western Pacific.

Chapter 20, which focuses on China's A2/AD (Anti-Access, Area Denial) strategy, is written by Jingdong Yuan. In this chapter, Yuan reviews and discusses developments in China's A2/AD strategy, the US AirSea Battle Concept (ASBC) and alternative responses to the A2/AD challenges, and explains the potential risks of miscalculation and escalation. Yuan argues for greater US–China military dialogue and the introduction of crisis management mechanisms in order to prevent major escalation and open confrontation between the region's two great powers.

Chapter 21, on the PLA Navy and the US Navy in the Asia-Pacific, is written by Richard A. Bitzinger. Bitzinger observes in this chapter that US and Chinese competition in the Western Pacific is increasingly taking on a military dimension. Bitzinger points to the concern that China and the United States are increasingly prone to resorting to force in the East and South China Seas in order to achieve their geopolitical goals, which in turn raises fears that such a competition could lead to an armed clash, one that could inadvertently escalate geographically and in intensity.

Chapter 22, on the cyberwar between China and the United States, is written by Nir Kshetri. Allegations and counter-allegations have been persistent themes in dialogues and discourses in the US–China relationships involving cybercrime and cybersecurity. There are some signs that the United States has entered into direct confrontation regarding China-originated cyberattacks. China is also responding to the Western allegations by striking back with strong denials and counter-allegations that US government agencies lack interest in fighting cybercrimes and do not cooperate with their Chinese counterparts. This chapter sheds light into this cyber cold war by examining Western and Chinese allegations and counter-allegations related to cyberattacks and cyberwarfare.

Chapter 23, the last chapter in this part, is entitled 'Future war: China and the United States', and is written by Malcolm Davis. In this chapter, Davis examines where conflicts might occur, the basic aspects of China's military strategy, and how it is influencing PLA modernization, with particular focus on naval, air and missile forces, as well as Chinese information warfare capabilities for waging warfare in space, and across the electromagnetic spectrum, including in cyberspace. Davis argues that Chinese strategic interests will ultimately demand that China pursue a greater capability for power projection operations into the Indian Ocean, and that the current focus of the PLA on East Asia will be overtaken by a growing operational focus on Chinese interests and activities in the Indian Ocean. This will lead to new developments for Chinese military strategy and modernization.

OUTLOOK AND IMPLICATIONS

The final, concluding part of the volume consists of two chapters by eminent scholars on US–China relations. Chapter 24 is written by Robert Sutter, and examines the outlook for the relationship. Sutter examines the context of US–China relations since the Cold War to offer an assessment on whether or not the impact of President Xi Jinping is leading to a widely anticipated power shift where a rising China is superseding a declining United States in the intensifying rivalry for influence in the Asia-Pacific region. According to Sutter, substantial constraints dissuade the Xi government from confronting the United States. These include serious domestic Chinese problems, strong and growing US–Chinese interdependence, and power realities in Asia that illustrate China’s surprisingly mediocre record in expanding influence in this critically important region where the United States registers stronger not declining influence. Sutter concludes that while assertiveness and the periodic bluster of Xi’s foreign policy will probably continue, they are married with pragmatic management of serious disputes, thereby reducing the likelihood of confrontation that is not in the interests of either power.

Chapter 25 is written by Kerry Brown, and explains why the relationship matters to the rest of the world. As Brown explains, the relationship between the United States and China has been called the most crucial of the twenty-first century, as the bilateral relationship impacts on almost every other country, sometimes forcing them to take sides, or creates problems in their allegiances. Brown’s chapter examines the ways they relate to each other inevitably impacts on the rest of the world, in which ways this manifests itself, and attempts to provide a holistic framework to understand this. Brown concludes that the relationship has become more complicated. For the rest of the world, factoring this complexity into their diplomatic thinking and scenario planning will become increasingly necessary.

NOTES

- * The author is grateful to all the contributors of this volume for having supplied the abstracts that have made possible this introduction.
1. Transcript of Hillary Clinton’s speech to the US Institute of Peace China Conference commemorating the 40th anniversary of President Nixon’s visit to China, 7 March 2012, accessed 17 July 2014 at <http://australianpolitics.com/2012/03/07/hillary-clinton-on-china.html>.
 2. Organski, A.F.K. (1968), *World Politics*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 376.

3. Steinberg, J. and M.E. O’Hanlon (2014), *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve: U.S.–China Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, p. 1.
4. Kissinger, H. (2011), *On China*, London: Allen Lane, p. 527.