



Cooperation and Disagreement in Sino-US Relations from 2006-2016 in the Light of Neo-realism and Liberal International Relations Theories

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Keywords:

American Foreign Policy; Chinese Foreign Policy; Neo-realism; Liberalism.

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Funding Information:

No funding information provided.

Manuscript History:

Received: January 2018
Accepted: February 2018

International Journal of Scientific Footprints 2018; 6(1): 1 - 8

Abstract

China and the U.S are great powers having highly complicated relations. This paper analyses Sino-American relations from 2006 to 2016 to explore the cooperation and disagreement in Sino-American relations from 2006 to 2016. The research holds the view that the United States foreign policy is primarily influenced by neo-realism as the US is not ready to accommodate China Rise. Obama's 'Asia-Pivot' policy is manifestation of American reservation of rising China's prowess. On the other hand, China's foreign policy towards the US cannot be explained from the realist assumptions. Therefore the current research suggests that liberalism is the suitable international relations theory that can explain Chinese foreign policy towards the US from 2006 to 2016 as China is not interested in power politics and Chinese strategy towards the US is based on cooperation and harmonization of interests.

Introduction

Theories of international relations claim to have explanatory power to narrate the global events through using their theoretical perspectives. The United States and China are the two most powerful and important countries in contemporary world. The US has been the most powerful country since World War 2 and has extensive global reach. China's Rise has become a reality as China has been experiencing unprecedented economic growth since Open Door Policy under Deng Xiaoping's rule in China. History bears witness that the relations between the great powers have been main drivers of global peace or conflict. Therefore, this paper

analyses the mutual relations between the US and China as Sino-American relation will design the structure of global politics in near future. This paper applies two mainstream international relations theories_ neo-realism and liberalism_ to analyze Sino-American relations from 2006 to 2016. The current research suggests that the US foreign policy towards China is driven by neo-realism; while Chinese foreign policy towards the US cannot be explained through neo-realism. Therefore liberal IR theory will be used to explain Chinese foreign policy towards the US from 2006 to 2016.

Neo-realism was considered as the dominant international relations theory during Cold War. Neo-realism suggests that the events at global level are not influenced by human nature, but the structure of international politics decides the outcomes of global events. States are the only actors in international relations as there is no power above the states, therefore self-help is the guiding principle of states' conduct. Paul Kennedy (1988) notes that the states that are successful in improving their economies, are bound to behave aggressively at global level. In other words, economic power of great powers transforms in aggressive behavior at regional as well as global level. History suggests that this neo-realist hypothesis is valid as the great powers of past like Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, France, Japan, Germany and the USSR all expended their territories once their economies were improved.

Through the logic of neo-realism, the US considers China as a big threat to its national interests as the great powers expand their interests at the expense of other states. Therefore, the US is not ready to accept China's Rise and wants to contain China, especially in South China Sea. President Obama presented "Asia-Pivot" policy to contain China through forming strategic alliances with the states that have reservation from China's rising power in South China Sea. On the contrary, China policy towards the U.S is peaceful as China is not interested in power politics. Furthermore, China is winning friends throughout world through skillful use of its *soft-power*, a concept presented by Joseph S. Nye.

China's foreign policy towards the US is driven by liberal international theory as China's Rise has been peaceful. Martin Jacques (2012) opines that China does not consider itself as an ordinary national state as Chinese identity is primarily driven from its 5000 years

old civilizational history. China considers aggression as the conduct of 'barbarians' who fall outside of 'civilization'. The rising power of China will not culminate in conflicts of China with other states, rather China is keen in transforming its growing power for the mutual benefits with other states. The projects like One Belt One Road (OBOR) are evidence that China's national interest is not following egoist and selfish goals. China does not consider the US a competitor rather China takes the US as a partner as China has colossal investment in the US. At first, this paper will briefly explain the theoretical background of the study. Neo-realism is used to explain the US foreign policy towards China from 2006 to 2016. Through liberalism, Chinese foreign policy towards the US is explained from 2006 to 2016. After the theoretical background, comparative analysis of the US and Chinese foreign policy towards each other from 2006 to 2016 is presented.

Theoretical Background

Neorealism as the Explanation of the US Foreign Policy towards China from 2006-2014

Neorealism provides the best explanation of the US foreign policy towards China from 2006 to 2016. Paul Kennedy opines in *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* that when a country is successful in utilizing its natural resources in such a way that its economy is improved, then this amelioration in economy transforms in improved military power, culminating in foreign aggressive behavior. Therefore, it is natural that economically developed countries always behave aggressively in international system (Kennedy, 1988). The aggressive foreign behavior of the UK in 18th century, Germany and Japan in 19th century and the US in 20th century proves that Kennedy's hypothesis is valid as these powerful states subjugated the poor

countries through their improved sources of production. Goldman Sachs suggested in 2007 that the United States will be replaced by China as the greatest economy in 2027. Furthermore, Chinese economy will be doubled to that of the US economy in 2050 (Jacques, 2012). Therefore, neo-realism suggests that the US should contain China as Chinese growing economic power is bound to be transformed in aggressive behavior at global level because this is the only normal conduct of great powers. Therefore, China in future will not be much different to Spain, the UK, France, Germany, Japan or the US (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Realism takes international relations as continuing tussle among states that are motivated by self-interest, therefore realism suggests that conflict is bound to occur at international level and there is little hope of improvement at global level (Walt, 1998). The origin of classical realism can be found in the works of Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes. Classical realism claims that the nature of man is still influenced by 'egoistic passions' (Burchill et al., 2013). Classical realism applies same selfish human nature at global level and suggests that the conflicts in international politics are influenced by egoist human nature. As there are no central authority above the states, therefore realism suggest that security dilemma is a natural result of anarchic nature of global politics (Holsti, 2004).

Neo-realism is much different to classical realism approach of 'inside-out' and proposes that human nature is not the main driver of global conflicts, but anarchical international structure is the root of international conflicts (Lawson, 2015). Thus, the US has reservations that according to prediction of neo-realism, China is bound to behave similar to the great powers of eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth

centuries. Neorealism suggests that states should make sure their survival according to the rule of self-help. The decade from 2006 to 2016 seems a decade in which the US is avowedly deploying its forces in the South China Sea and is entering in close partnership with countries like Japan, South Korea and Australia to contain China. William Engdahl (2012) notes that the President Obama came forward with a new security plan to contain China and for that purpose troops would be stationed in Australia.

Liberalism as Explanation of Chinese Foreign Policy towards the US from 2006-2016

Quite contrary to the US, foreign policy of China cannot be explained through the prism of realism, therefore the research suggests that liberal international theory is the most suitable theory that can be applied at Chinese foreign policy towards the US and the other countries.

Liberalism is an international relations theory which entails three primary principles:

1. Rejecting power politics as the only result of international relations.
2. Emphasizing mutual benefits and cooperation among states.
3. Giving greater consideration to international organizations and nongovernmental actors for shaping state preferences.

Liberalism suggests that interdependence, including economic and cultural exchanges, among the states can reduce conflict. Though anarchy exists in international politics, but this anarchy is not essential to a level that it can force the states to pursue selfish goals that can imperil the global peace, quite contrary to realism. Disputes can occur in international politics, but use of

hard power is not the best way to solve the crisis as use of violence further augments the problem. Joseph N. Nye presented concept of *soft-power* and opined that in contemporary politics, use of hard power may ruin the overall image of the countries that exercise hard power. The US had torpedoed her soft image that it earned since 1945 after using sheer military force in Iraq in 2003(Nye Jr, 2004). The invasion on Iraq could not achieve any goal rather it spread instability in Middle East in form of ISIS, therefore use of hard-power was utter disaster. Therefore, the best option to the developed countries is the skillful maneuvering of soft-power to achieve foreign policy goals.

China's defense budget is very modest as compared to that of the US. If we have in view the recent encirclement of China by the US in South-China Sea, it becomes evident that China is not concerned toward entering in blind competition of arms race with the U.S. China is winning friends in international politics through skillful use of diplomacy and soft-power. China's soft-power can be considered in terms of economic aid that China gives to developing countries that is without harsh terms contrary to IMF and World Bank. Growing trade, scholarships, cultural exchange programs, functioning of Confucius Institutes and Chinese language institutes in many countries of the world, increasing popularity of Chinese foods, movies and martial arts etc are some manifestations of Chinese soft-power. The fact is that many countries that were considered pro-America since WW2 are getting closer to China. These countries are attracted from the soft image of China and China is not getting these countries in its sphere of influence through coercion and enticing of money, unlikely to the US. Now China has cordial relations with countries of Asia, Africa, European Union and even in backyard of the US- countries from Latin America. Furthermore, the United States was

embarrassed in April when allies such as Australia, South Korea, the United Kingdom and Germany defied American pressure to stay out of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Jacques, 2012).

Martin Jacques (2011) in book *When China Rules the World* opines that future belongs to China and China will replace the US in near future; but China will not behave like the other great powers in recent past like the UK, Germany, Japan, Italy and the US. David Shambaugh in a book *China Goes Global* argues extensive economic power of China is providing China's global reach as China is extracting natural resources in Africa, South America and Middle East. China is also working in the currency markets in the West and East Asia (Shambaugh, 2013).

Cooperation and Conflict in the US and Chinese Foreign Policies from 2006 to 2016

Sino-American relations moved from strained impasse to a complex amalgamation of diplomacy, growing international rivalry and interweaving economies. Sino-American relations were highly tense when Chinese Communist Party took the reins of power in hand. China claimed to be a socialist country and championed the cause of socialism in other neighboring states (Brookings, 2005) because China and the USSR were seemed as the ideal socialist states or sometimes these two states were considered as 'mother socialist states' by the socialist living in other developing states. However, this tense atmosphere eased a little when the US President Richard Nixon visited China in February 1971 and held high profile meetings with the Chinese leaders. But, normalization of relations between countries made very slow progress. The relations between the two countries improved further after adoption of "One-China" policy by U.S. President Jimmy Carter, and shortly after Chinese vice Premier Deng Xiaoping visited the United States. The

ideological ferment of socialism was reduced with Open Door Policy of Deng Xiaoping in China. During Deng's era, China became more constructive with its relations with the neighbors as well as with other powers at global level. U.S-China Relations Act of 2000 was signed by U.S. President Bill Clinton that granted Beijing permanent normal trade relations with the United States and helped China to join the World Trade Organization in 2001. Sino-American trade increased from \$5 billion to \$231 billion between 1980 and 2004.

Currently, the United States and China have mutual political, economic, and security interests like to fight against terrorism and take measures against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, work together for betterment of environment. But, this relationship is not without formidable differences like value of Chinese currency, Sino-American differences in South China Sea and imminent future China's rise and its impact on American status-quo in world (BBC, 2009). However, China is the major foreign creditor of the United States, holding about 10% (\$1.8 trillion) of the U.S. total debt. Both the countries assured that they wanted to advance their relationship at the annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue in 2014. John Kerry, the U.S. Secretary of State, said that the United States did not seek to contain China, while Chinese president Xi Jinping opined that a conflict of words between the two countries would be a disaster (Jianmen, 2016). A report by the U.S State Department named U.S relations with China (2016) states that despite differences both the countries, China and the US are agreed that they should steer in positive direction and conflict should be avoided in future by the mutual coordination.

The trade between China and the US increased from \$33 billion in 1992 to over \$659 billion in 2013. Currently, China is the third largest market for US

goods and the US is China's largest export market. Foreign direct investment of the US in China was \$65.8 billion in 2014, up from \$54 billion in 2012. In 2016, both the countries announced that they would strengthen exchange rate reform, improve economic transparency, and will enhance global cooperation and international rules, and advance financial constancy and reform. Presidency of Barack Obama has advanced hopes for improved co-operation between the two countries and increased levels of friendship between the two nations. The Strategic Economic Dialogue started by then-US President Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao in 2006 and led by US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Chinese vice Premier Wu Yi, had been expanded by the Obama administration. It is now called the U.S–China Strategic and Economic Dialogue. The focus was the economic crisis, finding ways to assist to stem global warming and address issues like the proliferation of nuclear weapons and humanitarian crises. The US and China agreed in 2009 to hold usual high-level talks about economic issues and other joint concerns by establishing the Strategic Economic Dialogue, which meets biannually (Jianmen, 2016).

Monetary policy has been one of the significant problems surrounding Sino-American relations within the past decade. The central issue is the question of whether or not each country's currency should be at the proper value. The US blame that China's currency is undervalued. The domestic opposition pressurized Obama to impose 35 percent tariffs on Chinese imports until China suitably values its currency (Sheikh, 2016). The Chinese commerce minister accused the United States of a "grave act of trade protectionism". However, IMF and World Bank reported in 2015 that Yuan was no longer undervalued, thus refuting the US claims of Chinese currency manipulation.

However, the increased economic inter-dependence between the two countries is not easing conventional animosities between the countries. The main reason is that the US did not want to leave its status-quo and accept that its role in power-politics at international level is declining. *Since the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union, the US defense budget has been increasing for new weapons systems, amplified permanent military bases around the world and expanded NATO to countries of former Warsaw Pact on Russia's immediate neighborhood. It also enhanced NATO and US military existence deep into Asia in the peripheries of China through its conduct of the Afghan war and related campaigns.* China, owing to its dynamic economic growth, is becoming the US new “enemy image,” now substituting the earlier “enemy image” of Islam after September 2001 used by the Bush-Cheney Administration to justify their foreign ambitions, or that of Soviet Communism during the Cold War (Engdahl, 2012).

Obama decided to deploy least 2,500 elite US Marines in Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory. Similarly, in a series of parallel agreements, deliberations with Washington were in progress to fly long-range American surveillance drones from the distant Cocos Islands — an Australian territory in the Indian Ocean. In addition to this, the US will gain permission to use of Australian Air Force bases for American aircraft and more ship and submarine visits to the Indian Ocean through a naval base outside Perth. The new American strategy to contain China in China's home has ‘already begun’. The US has now active presence in Taiwan, Vietnam, Japan and Philippines throughout South China Sea (Engdahl, 2012). Salman Sheikh (2016) in an article named *The US double game to contain China*, published in ASIA TIMES, views that US is playing double game with China as the US is opening its markets for China but at

the same time, acting is aggressively to contain China especially through members of ASEAN to enter in agreements with the US to contain China. Furthermore, the writer is of the view that the US is not at all ready to enter in a world in which China is the dominant economic power.

The Obama administration's “Asia Pivot,” announced in late 2011, is apparently an endeavor to make sure that China should not control the military, economic and political development in the region. The United States has improved its relationship with Japan as part of this planning. It is described that Japanese ships will join U.S. naval vessels in conducting so-called liberty of navigation patrols. In addition to its own military involvement in the South China Sea, Japan has offered patrol ships to Vietnam. In late September, Tokyo decided to do the same for Malaysia. Japan also presented marine support to the Philippines, and Japan has developed diverse ties with Indonesia. The instinct to contain a fast-growing rival for global influence is a strategy that is remnant of Cold-War and power politic thinking, in which relations between main world powers were precisely reduced to a zero-sum game (Sheikh, 2016).

On the other hand, China is very skillfully handling the challenges posed by the US and its allies. One can hardly find aggression in Chinese foreign policy as there are no such signs that any country on periphery of China has felt threatened by china's rise rather China is investing billions of dollars in neighboring countries' infrastructure. More and more students and academics are attracted towards china's culture, education system, and her civilization. This is the prowess of soft-power (Nye Jr, 2008) of China. Surprisingly, China has good economic relations with the countries and regions that are considered anti-China in the US like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan,

Philippine and Vietnam. David Shambaugh opines that China is a unique country competent of being self-sustaining and self-adapting and which therefore has dealt with to keep its “dynamic stability” (Shambaugh, 2012). This is the success of peaceful Chinese diplomacy that has civilizational history of 5000 old. Chinese domestic and foreign policy is not guided by European philosopher like Machiavelli and Hobbes who suggest the countries to secure only their own survival, rather Chinese policy gets guidance from the golden principles of Confucius who promotes peace, harmony and co-existence (Jacques, 2012).

Conclusion

The US and Chinese foreign policies from 2006 to 2016 towards each other are much different. Therefore single international relations theory cannot explain American and Chinese foreign policies towards each other. This theory applies neo-realism at the US foreign policy towards China and liberal international relations theory at the Chinese foreign policy towards the US from 2006 to 2016. The US considers China’s rise as a grave threat for its national interests and the neo-realist scholars like John Mearsheimer suggest that China will expand its interests regionally and globally at the expense of the countries of East Asia and the US. The neo-realists are of the view that once China will replace the US as the number one economy, its unprecedented power is bound to be changed in aggression at regional and global level. Therefore, neo-realism suggests that the only option that the US has is to contain China in its region as well as at global level. Obama’s ‘Asia-Pivot’ policy is such an endeavor in which the US is trying to contain China in East Asia with the help of the US allies in East Asia. But, China does not consider the US as an enemy rather China takes the US as a potential partner and is of the view that through the use of

peaceful and skillful diplomacy, Sino-US differences will be resolved. China considers itself as a civilizational state and views power-politics as the behavior of the barbarians those who live outside of civilization. China is keen in using its immense reserves of soft-power to improve its relations with other countries. Currently China is investing tens of millions of dollars in improving infrastructure of the neighboring states under the auspices of its massive and ambitious One Belt One Road (OBOR). Therefore, the current research holds the view that neo-realism explains the US foreign policy towards China and liberalism offers the best explanation of the Chinese foreign policy towards the US from 2006 to 2016.

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