

The Trend of U.S.-China Relations: Is a Conflict Between the United States and China Inevitable?

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International relations theory can serve as a guide to understanding national behaviour, especially those that are strained by ideological misunderstandings. Realism basically believes that state behaviour reflects the state's pursuit of power. Constructivism believes that thought drives behaviour. Therefore, in order to better understand the behaviour between states, this essay suggests that constructivism and realism can interact rather than repel each other, because constructivism can play a complementary role in realism. This combination can promote behavioural understanding between countries without compromising the interests of countries, thereby reducing the possibility of conflict and war. Finally, the ups and downs of Sino-US relations reflect the participation of ideology. In other words, based on this method to analyse the current relationship between China and the United States, it can be predicted that the two countries can basically avoid the war between them.

Keywords: international relations, China, the United States, conflict

Introduction

In a world of countless potential threats, understanding how a country behaves in a certain way can help other governments determine whether a country poses a threat. When a government knows which actors intend to cause harm in the international system, it can adjust its limited resource to go against the plans of those who threaten them. Nevertheless, a government will either expose itself to a threatening actor or turn a well-intentioned actor into an enemy through unnecessary provocative gestures when making inaccurate assessments. It even caused conflicts and even wars between countries. Accordingly, by researching the literature, this study will define realism and constructivism. Second, this study stands a point that the ideology is vital among states in states' behaviour and foreign-policy, which can affect a state how to analyse and understand another state's intention and to eliminate the misunderstanding of another state's "threat". Thus, an approach fundamentally holds that ideology has always been crucial for foreign policy, and its constant influence on foreign policy decision-making cannot be ignored. Michael H. Hunt, a prominent representative of this approach, highlighted in ideology and U.S. foreign policy that ideology has always been critical for foreign policy decision-making. Therefore, to understand a country's foreign policy, it is important to step back and see how entrenched cultural values impact the way foreign policymakers make decisions. From the perspective of

Hunt (2009), to neglect the role of ideology means to omit a crucial step when understanding American foreign policymaking. Ideology is of huge importance because it sets the framework within which policymakers deal with specific issues. Accordingly, Hunt sought to interpret US foreign policy from a cultural perspective and to identify a relatively coherent set of ideas and values that are central to American ideology. His book suggested that three ideas are central to the making of American foreign policy and that since the early 20th century, collectively these have exerted a strong influence over American policymakers. These three core ideas are views of national greatness, racial hierarchy, and the dangers of revolution. Zhou Qi (2000) emphasized in ideology and foreign policy, a recent study of ideology and American foreign policy defines ideology as a set of commonly agreed with values and faith that inspires the political actions of the society. This book analyses the relationships between American foreign policy and different “isms” representing specific types of American values, e.g., liberalism, conservatism, idealism, pluralism, anti-communism, and American ideas on human rights. The author concludes that ideology is vital for the United States’ foreign-policy. A chapter in this book discusses the relationship between ideology and Sino-US policy. The author points out one pattern that characterized Sino-US relations: Whenever the role of ideology became so pronounced that it dominated the making of Sino-US policy, the relationship between the two countries became relatively strained. This verifies that understanding ideology for each other is of huge significance. In the meantime, it also can help answer the question of whether China and the United State will have a war or not between them.

According to this study, China’s foreign relations and the United States verify ideology’s intervening role. This study from human rights, economic and cultural aspects explains why Beijing and the United States chose to make their behaviour or made a pragmatic policy. In the meantime, for China, the United States’ ideology affects China’s adjustment of foreign-policy, which is employed to defend or create a story for the final rational decision. For the United States, good understanding of China’s ideology also affects the United States’ foreign behaviour in a positive way. Finally, this study will conclude that the theory of integration into constructivism based on realism will better explain the behaviour and intentions of the state. It also helps policymakers would be wise to avoid the misunderstanding of the ideology to irrational state’s behaviour and the resulting of miscalculated threat for another state. Therefore, it can be predicted that there will be no war between the United States and China.

Realism

This article will provide an overview of international relations theory rather than completely reviewing constructivist or realist thinking. Instead, it aims to make a comparative case that competition or cooperation will become a topic of discussion in the future Sino-US relations. Combining constructivism with realism would help governments better understand the different ideologies that determine strategic cooperation rather than wage war.

Realism, perhaps the dominant theory of international relations, holds the concept of anarchic international system. It is anarchic, because there is no internal rule to protect the state actors, so every country is in its interests. In this anarchic system, the relationship between actors is dominated by power, which is the key element of realism. As Morgenthau (1962) wrote, “In a multi-ethnic world, the balance of power is like the law of gravity”, said the scholar, often seen as the founder of political realism. Therefore, he thinks it’s rebuttable, but if it’s ignored, get out the window on the third floor, you’re in trouble. In other words, countries are constantly trying to gain power to promote their own interests. Realists will argue that attempts to attribute

value to state behaviour are naive and relatively dangerous. Realism adopts “ruthless pragmatism” in international affairs to seek the balance of power and an important method to solve problems. It is noteworthy that realism has two main branches: classicism and structuralism (also known as new realism). Classic variations on Morgenthau (1970) are described in detail in this section. As Kenneth Waltz (1979) and other scholars have argued that this structure variant retains many of the same assumptions of classical realism. For example, the balance of power. But it only emphasizes the importance of building international relations between countries and how it is affected. Due to its emphasis on the international system, structuralism pays less attention to national ideology and the original intention of foreign policy. As mentioned above, the realistic assumption of pragmatism means that the state is essentially a rational actor, which also indicates realism. According to realism scholar John Mearsheimer (2010, p. 140)’s research, he stressed: “Rational states can quickly recognize their external environment and make judgments, meanwhile, they should find a rational and intelligent way to maximize their survival prospects”. They assess the behaviour of other countries. Meanwhile, they also assess potential power to maximize strategic costs and efficiency and choose the most advantageous strategy. Therefore, another realist component is premised on the state as the core of the key role in the international system, because they are the highest authority in the anarchic international system. At the same time, rational decisions taken by countries seeking and maintaining a balance of power will create an illusion of order in the international system. Power can be broadly defined as the ability of the state to act in the interests of its own interests. Secondly, realism tends to quantify power with material things, especially in the military, which largely gives them the ability to force other countries to obey. This is often referred to as hard power. However, in addition to hard power, countries can also use each other’s mutual trust and deep understanding of culture to influence and change the behaviour of another country. This can be called soft power. This is the scholar Joseph Nye (2011). The concept advocated. Therefore, this does not mean that realism completely ignores all factors except power. This study focuses on the ideology mentioned by realism. Though there is no consensus, a large number of realists still have faith in political ideologies, communism, and democracy; they may ignore that ideology is equally important. Therefore, constructivism can improve this and make ideology less prominent in realism.

Constructivism

Constructivism believes that the fundamental driving force of the international system is ideology. However, it does not underestimate the importance of power and absolutely refuse to pursue its own interests. As the constructivist thinker Alexander Wendt (1999) argued, power and interests play an important and inseparable role in state behaviour, but these are the products of concepts and culture. More specifically, the idea defines how participants rationally determine and safeguard their interests. In international relations, Hopf (1998, p. 171) said: “The political environment surrounding a country depends on its social, political, cultural and historical background”. These backgrounds shape the basic idea of how a country views its national interests and promotes a good foreign policy. This is precisely what realism fails to fully address, namely, that all countries hold a mutually assumed concept of “interests” in the international system (Hopf, 1998). Constructivism complements a rational actor’s realist notion. In accordance with the above definition, rationality in the sense of constructivism is not so much an objective condition as a subjective condition. It is the most useful behavioural assessment in a given situation. It can also be said to be the values gained through independent thought and social activities. As Wendt (1999, p. 371) said, “national cognition depends on the

systematic culture of a country". The ideas making up a nation's culture determine how that nation views the world.

As noted above, constructivism holds that the key to creating international change is ideas, not power. Ideas sometimes subvert and replace state authority. For instance, religious extremism and nationalism are transnational forces that are not bound by specific national boundaries. The role of Islamic extremism in the Middle East proves it (Snyde, 2004). Another example is the Transnational Activities Group, which can have an impact on the conduct of countries with stronger military capabilities through the transformation of international norms or concepts. As a result, countries can make some remedies and direction changes in time before some diplomatic conflicts occur (Barnett & Duvall, 2005).

The Issue of Human Rights in Sino-US Relations

Today, Sino-US relations have been in a normal development since President Nixon's visit to China in 1972. Even in the past few decades, even if there are some small frictions, the relationship between the two countries is a normal development trend. For example, during the Cold War, Nixon and Chairman Mao were afraid of the Soviet Union. Have to try to strengthen the strategic position of the two countries. It is agreed that their friendly relationship will enhance their ability to fight the Soviet Union. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the basis of the relationship between the two countries must have been some subtle changes. However, with the help of the economic cooperation between the two countries, the relationship is still peaceful and regional development. Despite the setbacks such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square violence, their relationship is still solid. Since then, Sino-US relations have been relatively stable, especially compared with the early 20th century. To discuss the diplomatic response between the United States and China, however, some typical points of conflict need to be used. This case will outline some of the conflict points in the three aspects of Sino-US relations and explain how the two countries respond and what is the status quo. In the mid-1990s, two major events in Sino-US relations could be mentioned as typical examples of tensions that did not boil over into war and conflict. One is the case of tension about expanding the trade status between China's Most Favored Nation (MFN) and the United States (Oksenberg, 1991). The other is the Taiwan crisis in China (Bernkopf, 1998) that prompted the United States to intervene. Considering the Tiananmen incident and other violations of human rights in Beijing, Bill Clinton, former President of the United States, announced that he was interested in linking our economic relations with China's ability to protect human rights. China's MFN status has been evaluated and studied in Washington, and Clinton tried to use it as leverage against China, threatening that unless some measures were taken, MFN would not be renewed (Mann, 2000). The Chinese government is no longer willing to let the government meddle in domestic affairs, so it has responded indirectly. Instead of focusing entirely on its opposition to the Clinton administration, China has contacted American business leaders to encourage differences within the United States regarding Mrs. Clinton's policies. They also issued profitable contracts to Germany and France, portraying the Obama administration as an isolated economic and human rights relationship, and indicating that such policies are showing the United States contracts in China. Secretary of State Warren Christopher is visiting China to try to raise human rights issues. This led to the 1996 Taiwan crisis (Telegraph, 2009). After backing down on the MFN deal, Clinton acquiesced in an unprecedented domestic call by Taiwan President Lee Tenghui to visit the United States for fear of appearing "weak" on China (Mann, 2000). Therefore, Beijing conducted a series of military exercises and missile tests, including the

launch of missiles into the Taiwan Strait. The role is “both a deterrent and a stage”. China’s interest in wage war is not as serious as symbolic warnings or “threat theory” speculations. For example, missiles fired at Taiwan actually have no warheads. As the exercise continued, the US government deployed two aircraft carrier battle groups to Taiwan while conducting some psychological actions to ease tensions across the Taiwan Straits. The United States assured China it would continue to support the “one China” policy and called on Taipei to exercise restraint. Sino-US relations then returned to the status quo. Therefore, this part mainly explains the cases of human rights as a factor in the consideration of Sino-US relations. It can help this article to describe the relationship between the ideology of China and the United States and the behaviour of the state. Simultaneously, it can reflect an ideal result of combined with constructivism and realism.

Economic and Cultural Ties in Sino-US Relations

Their intimate strategic cooperation solidified the relationship between the two countries. In this comparatively friendly atmosphere, economic ties between the United States and China also gained strength. An example can illustrate that the links did not simply meet immediate economic needs, but also helped to strengthen strategic cooperation. One important decision taken by the Reagan administration was to liberalize export controls on China by transferring that country from category P (hostile communist) to category V (friendly, non-allied) (Haqqani, 2013). This relaxation primarily boosted the trade between the United States and China. According to the research (Wang, 2013), in 1979, the United States accounted for 8% of China’s total trade in bilateral trade between the two countries. It accounted for 11% in 1985 and 16% in 1989. In 1999, China purchased one-sixth of the United States of total fertilizer production and was the largest buyer of American wheat. By 1989, the United States annually exported approximately six billion dollars of goods to China (Paul, 2014). American foreign investment in China also increased rapidly. By the end of 1983, Americans had only invested around \$18 million in China. By the end of 1984, this figure had risen to \$280 million; by the end of 1986, it was almost \$1 billion; by the end of 1988, it had grown to \$1.5 billion. By the middle of 1986, it was estimated that some 250 American firms had established representative offices in China, and almost the same number of American investment projects were operating in China. When Reagan left the office, the United States was the largest investor in the Chinese economy.

The United States is more able to influence China’s core interests in terms of the situation before and now. However, China’s economic capabilities and international influence are growing rapidly, and its ability to influence the core interests of the United States is gradually increasing. However, tensions between the United States and China in 2010 were related to the economy. The United States accuses China of ignoring intellectual property rights and keeping its currency artificially low to make its exports more competitive. Huawei, for instance, accounts for a large proportion of sales in the United States and even the entire world, landing many developed countries in the so-called economic oppression or threat. Former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao explained in a statement succinctly why they could not meet the requirements of the United States. Because of this, there will be uneasiness and turmoil in the country. At the same time, on the basis of promoting the cooperation between China and the United States, the two sides should respect each other’s legitimate core interests. Therefore, the United States can help itself to a large extent by respecting China’s core interests. Because of this, it can promote a correct and peaceful response from China as its material power and international influence grow. For example, after the end of the Cold War, the United States gave priority to developing a non-proliferation treaty on weapons of mass destruction on the national security agenda and

exerting pressure on China on this issue. Recognizing the importance of this issue to the core interests of the United States and the entire international peace, Beijing has adjusted its foreign policy and practices to eliminate major differences arising from bilateral relations. Therefore, one of the main challenges facing the United States now is to change the inherent thinking and policy inertia of China's past image and improve the relationship with the rising China through rapid changes and following the pace of development of the times. As President Hu Jintao emphasized (American Institute of Peace, 2011):

China and the United States are different in national conditions. It is normal for us to have differences on some issues. What is important is to respect and accommodate each other's core interests and major concerns, properly handle sensitive issues and consolidate the foundation of mutual trust.

However, it cannot deny that the United States address China as an enemy through multiple sources including newspapers, journals, television programs, and policy documents which will induce a conflict between these two countries. But it has to emphasise again that China and the United States have different national conditions or cultural backgrounds. It is normal for us to have differences on certain issues. It is important to respect each other and consider each other's core interests and main concerns. In this way, states can properly handle sensitive issues and create a good atmosphere of mutual benefit. While pandering to the ultra-conservative wing of the Republican Party, Wen Jiabao has also helped to resolve the rocky Sino-US relationship at that time. On the other hand, the valuable and close strategic cooperation between the United States and China for nearly 40 years shows that the United States has actually adjusted its Taiwan policy. For the first time in history, the United States has expressed its willingness to facilitate a peaceful environment. At the same time, it is also inclined to help China solve the Taiwan issue. Furthermore, China has begun its own quest to promote the Chinese language and culture abroad by setting up non-profit institutions. It be counted that 103 Confucius Institutes placed in the United States. According to China's cultural behaviour, China's ideology will be well understanding rather than the misunderstanding. A growing number of government-to-government protocols with China are on educational and cultural cooperation. As Harding (2010) researched, in early 1988, for example, China and the United States agreed that the United States Peace Corps would send around one hundred more Americans to teach English in China, in addition to the four thousand American teachers who had already gone and taught in China since 1986. From the mid-1980s onward, the flow of Chinese and Americans from one society to the other grew continually. The number of new visas issued annually to Chinese students and scholars for study in the United States increased dramatically, from 4,300 in 1983 to nearly 14,000 in 1988. The total number of Chinese students studying in U.S. had reached 40,000 by 1988, making it the largest group of overseas students in American universities (Harding, 2010). The economy and culture are intertwined. Whether the economy is discussed in that aspect is very important for a country, not to mention the fact that according to the theory of realism, the economy has to mention one aspect. Further, culture, as an important manifestation of ideology, explains to a great extent that the understanding of ideology between the two countries is also a mutual communication and understanding between cultures. Therefore, the economic and cultural aspects reflect the feasibility and rationality of the combination of constructivism and realism in understanding the behaviour and diplomatic decision-making between state relations. At the same time, in Sino-US relations, it is also reasonable to conclude that Sino-US relations tend to coexist peacefully, which will avoid an incalculable dispute.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study finds that ideology, including human rights, economy and culture influences how today's Chinese and American governments determine their own interests, which make foreign policy. If countries usually want to cooperate with each other in the international system and each seeks their own interests, then it is important to understand how to explain the purpose of each country and why it is done in some countries. In the realist worldview, all actions, whether in Washington or Beijing, are both for self-interest. However, by applying the concept of constructivism to the realistic world view and measuring the role of ideology as an intervening variable, countries have gained a better understanding of why they make specific diplomatic decisions and avoid conflicts and wars. Therefore, this method is crucial for understanding the intentions of the two countries in bilateral relations and for predicting and clarifying the intentions after the rise of China and whether it will lead to the so-called "threat theory". However, Morgenthau (1951) believed that ideology played a role in the relationship between national interests and foreign policy behaviours; it cannot proclaim the future of Sino-American relations must be inevitably conflictual or not only based on the realism. Therefore, the constructivism would like to argue the cooperation between the United States and China will be more possible than the conflict. Its evolution is not just ideological; it is not just strategic. In different periods and political backgrounds, it is beneficial for us to fully understand the direction that ideology can lead the policies of the United States and China. The two countries can make major changes and adjustments to the policies in time to avoid conflicts and wars.

In the meantime, in terms of theory, although realism still dominates the discussion of the theory of international relations, some people criticize it. On the one hand, realism does admit that there is an ideological variable that may make some people incline to certain ideologies, but its study on this variable is far from enough. However, it usually does not ask important questions, such as: Through what social or cultural lens is the national interest formed? What constitutes interest? What ideas may lead to misunderstandings between countries due to their different cultural backgrounds? For policymakers, understanding ideology will better help understand the foreign policy that is seen as a hostile country. And it can shape the interests of its own country more specifically than the pursuit of actual interests (Morgenthau, 1951). It will also help explain why China's foreign policy has been conducted in this way, clarify the intentions behind such behavior, and ultimately reduce the chances of policymakers misjudging it. Realism assumes a generally accepted concept of "state interest" which is a problem with it. Although this theory recognizes the necessity and role of ideology, it is far from enough to explain the ideological factors that influence how a country views power and determines its interests. Constructivism, on the other hand, explains the behaviour of countries with ideological government. In that case, a more accurate threat assessment is important to identify intentions to better understand potential threats, which can help Sino-US avoid wars and pursue the cooperation through acquired in each of our cultural settings.

This study was limited in some discussion cases in which Sino-US relations were chosen. Due to the limitation of essay space, it only shows three factors in ideology which are human rights, economy, and culture. In terms of methodology, realism still dominates discussions in international relations theory; however, constructivism is still in the process of improvement and development. Compared with a relatively complete and mature realistic system, constructivism still needs to be combined with the basic methodological perspective to constantly improve.

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