

STATECRAFT AND CHINA'S INFLUENCE ON THE UNITED STATES

AISHA YAHYA GOYA

**DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY, BAZE
UNIVERSITY, ABUJA**

Abstract

This thesis examines the nature of the interactions between Chinese statecraft and the United States, highlighting the scope of their relationship historically, ideologically, and strategically. To fully grasp the evolution of the U.S and China relations which began with the Opium wars, and led to the harmonization of diplomatic relations in the early 90's, an historical background is essential. The paper explores how China's foreign policy was established from unresolved conflicts, like territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Philosophies emanating from Marxism and Confucianism, piloting its strategy to international relations and leadership, are the major influences to Chinese statecraft theoretically. Tactical approach which includes Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) analyzes China's objectives for economic governance and world dominance, while the present-day environment is riddled with strained relations, specifically in the aspects of human rights, technology, and trade. The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as increasing rivalry in the geopolitical sector are also discussed in this paper. on U.S.-China relations. overall, the thesis highlights the intricacies of Chinese statecraft including its implications for relating with the United States in furtherance, underscoring the necessity for thoroughly understanding the complexities and interactions in a fast-paced global landscape. The findings contribute to a broader discourse on international relations and the emerging multipolar world order.

Keywords: *Belt and Road initiative, U.S-China Relations, Foreign Policy; statecraft; diplomacy*

Introduction

The rise of China as a Global influence has restructured international relations tremendously, particularly in its interactions with the U.S. The continuous expansion of China's footprint throughout diverse spheres including economic, political, and military, has strengthened the nuances of the relationship between U.S and China, which is marked by collaboration as well as competition (Ye, 2024). To fully comprehend the present-day dynamics in global politics and forecasting paradigm shifts, it is imperative to Understand the interplays of China's political approach against the U.S is crucial. Lippert et al. (2020), claims that China's approach to governance is based on its robust foundation and cultural history, grounded on Confucians theoretical practices of old, that focuses on Unity, respect for people in power, and ethical governance. This theoretical background announces China's approach to governance and diplomacy, fostering a long-lasting perception which centralizes on constancy and steady progress over conflict. As China addresses the challenges of the contemporary geopolitical environment, its political strategies illustrate a complex collaboration of traditional beliefs and practical approach conceived to actualize its strategic goals. Major events which began from the Opium Wars of the 1800's, have been characterized by the harmonization of historical relations in the late 20th century between China and the U.S. Nonetheless, tensions have resurged due to current changes, resulting from complexities including imbalanced trade practices, conflicts of territories, and contradictory theories on politics. The interaction between China's diplomatic approach and the foreign policy of the U.S becomes more crucial as both economies struggle with the complexities of the evolving world governance by exploring its historical ideologies, strategic goals, and the ramifications for world governance. Through analyzing China's nuanced initiative—spanning economic initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to modernizing military and soft power diplomacy—the goal of this thesis is to provide perspectives on the issues and positive outcomes that emerged from the nuanced diplomatic ties.

Historical Relationship between China and the United States

China and the U.S are both intricately and dynamically interconnected, characterized by crucial circumstances that have molded the interrelations and ideologies of both economies. These interrelations as stated by Anaukwu & Anueyiagu (2024), back dates to the early 19th century when Western authorities began influencing China's political decisions. The Opium Wars, which took place in two phases (1839-1842 and 1856-1860), were pivotal in establishing a pattern of unequal treaties that favored foreign powers at the expense of Chinese sovereignty. The conflicts were largely instigated by British merchants seeking profit from the opium trade, which led to widespread addiction in China and significant social upheaval. The first Opium war came to an end after the Nankin treaty of 1842, resulting of the annexation of Hong Kong by Britain, while also granting foreign access to major ports in China, illustrating the beginning of a long-standing struggle over China's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Ali, 2022). Following the Opium Wars, China faced a series of internal conflicts that further weakened its central authority, leading to a decline in the Qing Dynasty's power. The Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), which resulted in millions of deaths, showcased the profound internal strife and dissatisfaction with Qing rule. The subsequent loss of authority and the inability to modernize effectively invited greater foreign intervention, culminating in the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. This anti-foreign and anti-Christian uprising led to violent conflicts, prompting the intervention of an Eight-Nation Alliance, which comprised Western powers and Japan. The aftermath saw China subjected to further humiliations

through the Boxer Protocol, which imposed harsh penalties and allowed foreign troops to be stationed in Beijing (Zhang, 2023).

In the early 20th century, the political landscape in China underwent significant changes with the Qing Dynasty's decline in 1911 and the creation of the Chinese federation. This period was characterized by fragmentation and the rise of nationalist sentiments, with warlords exerting control over various regions. The United States initially supported Sun Yat-sen's Nationalist regime which was then ceded to Chiang Kai-shek, viewing them as allies against communism. However, the Chinese Civil War, which erupted after World War II, culminated in the victory of the Communist Party led by Mao Zedong and the creation of China's confederation in 1949. The United States, having supported the Nationalists, did not identify with the new communist government and instead maintained relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan) (Liao et al., 2022).

The U.S reached a significant milestone in the Korean War which occurred from 1950 to 1953, as China intervened militarily on behalf of North Korea, directly confronting American forces. This conflict entrenched the division between the two countries and established a pattern of mutual suspicion that would last for decades. During the Cold War, China found itself increasingly isolated diplomatically, aligning itself more closely with the Soviet Union, although ideological differences eventually led to a Sino-Soviet split. Between 1967 and early 1973, a shift occurred as both nations sought to counterbalance Soviet power, resulting to the 1972 historic visit of President Richard Nixon. This visit opened a new chapter in U.S.-China relations and facilitated the normalization of diplomatic relations formed in 1979 (Ali, 2022).

The Normalization of Relations

The normalization of relations ushered in an era of increased economic engagement characterized by trade liberalization and investment. The 1978 economic reforms which was established by Deng Xiaoping in China, further facilitated this process as the country transitioned from a centralized to a more market-driven economy. The United States viewed China's exponential economic growth as a possibility for greater alliance, promoting the idea that economic engagement would lead to political liberalization (Morrison, 2019). In the early 1990s, after Soviet Union declined, U.S.-China relations evolved into a more multifaceted partnership. The U.S. embraced the idea of engaging China as a constructive partner in promoting global stability and economic growth. The 1990s saw significant growth in trade between the two nations, with the U.S. granting China Most Favored Nation status, further strengthening China's footprints in the world economy. The anticipation that economic engagement may lead to political transformation was a prevailing belief among American policymakers (Bros & Schechter, 2022). However, this optimism was soon tempered by events such as the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, which called for democratic reforms and were met with a brutal crackdown by the Chinese government. The U.S. response included economic sanctions and a temporary suspension of arms sales to China, leading to a chilling of relations. Nevertheless, in the following years, the U.S. and China continued to engage economically, and in the late 19th century, China became a member of the World Trade Organization, further solidifying its integration into the global economy (Zhang, 2023).

The Post-Cold War Era

The relations between U.S and China entered a new phase after the Cold War came to an end in 1991. The U.S. emerged as the sole superpower, while China began to assert its position on the

global stage. The Chinese government sought to reclaim its historical position as a dominant power in East Asia, leading to hostilities among neighboring economies and the United States. The South China Sea, a critical maritime trade route, became a flashpoint as China expanded its territorial claims and engaged in aggressive construction of artificial islands (Alessio & Renfro, 2022). In 2013, President Xi Jinping announced the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a monumental infrastructure and economic development project aimed at increasing collaboration throughout Asia, Europe, and Africa. The BRI serves as a pillar for China's foreign policy, promoting trade and investment while expanding its influence in regions traditionally dominated by Western powers. The initiative has been met with both enthusiasm and skepticism globally; while some countries welcome the investment, others express concerns about debt dependency and loss of sovereignty (Morris, 2023). The United States perceives the BRI as a strategy for China to assert its dominance in global affairs and create economic dependencies in participating countries. This perception has led to U.S. initiatives aimed at countering China's influence, including the Blue Dot Network, which seeks to foster valuable infrastructure investment in third world economies. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy also seeks to strengthen cooperation and alliances in the region to counterbalance China's growing assertiveness (Liu, 2020).

Contemporary Issues and Challenges

As of the late 2010s and early 2020s, U.S.-China relations have entered a period marked by heightened tensions and rivalry. The trade war initiated in 2018, characterized by tariffs and trade restrictions, exemplifies the economic competition between the two nations. The U.S. claimed that China conducted biased trade policies, theft of intellectual assets, and manipulated currencies, leading to a deterioration in relations (Choudary & Saleem, 2023). Furthermore, issues related to human rights have emerged as critical points of contention between the two countries. The maltreatment of Uighurs in Xinjiang has undergone global criticism, with claims of mass incarceration and slave labor. In the same vein, the suppression of freedom advocacy in Hong Kong, have constrained the relations at a greater level. The U.S. has responded by imposing sanctions and publicly condemning China's actions, leading to retaliatory measures from Beijing (Mitchell, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic added another layer of complexity to U.S.-China relations, with both nations engaging in a war of narratives over the origins of the virus and the handling of the crisis. This public health crisis has fueled anti-China sentiments in the U.S. and exacerbated existing tensions, leading to calls for a reevaluation of the bilateral relationship (Chernin, 2023). In this context, the struggle for global influence has intensified, with each nation seeking to shape the post-pandemic world order. The technological competition has also emerged as a crucial aspect of U.S.-China relations, particularly in fields such as artificial intelligence, telecommunications, and cybersecurity. The government of the United States have shown concerns over China's technological ambitions, viewing them as a potential threat to national security. Initiatives such as the "Clean Network" program aim to restrict Chinese technology companies' access to U.S. markets, reflecting a growing apprehension about technological espionage and data security (Nizza, 2023).

The Future of U.S.-China Relations

Looking to the future, the relations between U.S and China in the coming years is riddled with uncertainty. The historical context underscores the complexities of the bilateral relationship, marked by both cooperation and rivalry. As China continues to assert its influence on the world economic landscape, the U.S faces the challenge of balancing engagement and containment

strategies. The relations will most certainly be built on based on the integration of economic rivalry, contradictory ideologies, and dynamics in territorial security. The evolution of a non-hegemonic global governance, increases the complexities of the U.S and China interrelations as other economies strive to exercise their authority in a fast-paced geopolitical environment. Southeast Asian countries, Latin America, and Africa, may become entangled in the rivaling interests of both countries, resulting to newly establishment diplomatic ties and interaction (Guahnich, 2023). International institutions will also be instrumental for addressing constraints and fostering collaboration between both players.

Conclusion

The historical background of U.S and China interrelations reflects the complex Dynamics of interconnectedness as well as tensions, rooted in various interplays which have critically influenced the progression of both economies. Having a thorough grasp of this history is important for understanding the complexities of the present economic policies and the implications it has on United States and the world at large. As China constantly strengthen its impact on the global landscape, the historical insights play an instrumental role in addressing the issues and positive outcomes that looms in the interrelations between U.S and China. In this critical interplay, the two sides should influence each-other positively and engage in a healthy relations to avoid rivalry and confrontation.

References

Alessio, D., & Renfro, W. (2022). Building empires litorally in the South China Sea: Artificial islands and contesting definitions of imperialism. *International Politics*, 59(4), 687-706.

Ali, S. M. (2022). Triangular Dynamics in the Imperial Era. In *The US-China-Russia Triangle: An Evolving Historiography* (pp. 41-81). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Anaukwu, N. O., & Anueyiagu, U. B. (2024). Sino-US Relations: A Comparative Analysis of Socio-Economic Interdependence, 2017–2022. *American Research Journal of Contemporary Issues*, 2(1), 201-214.

Bros, E., & Schechter, C. (2022). The coherence challenge between policy makers and school leaders: Exploring a national pedagogical reform. *Journal of School Leadership*, 32(5), 488-513.

Chernin, K. (2023). Reimagining Western media portrayals of China: US and Ghanaian coverage of China's COVID-19 response. In *China, Media, and International Conflicts* (pp. 192-209). Routledge.

Choudary, E., & Saleem, Z. (2023). US-China Trade Rivalry: Ramifications on Global Economic Politics. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 4(3), 392-402.

Guahnich, J. S. (2023). A Comparative Analysis of Regional Institution Engagement and Development Trajectories in South America and Eastern Asia.

Liao, W. L., & Rola, A. C. C. (2022). Taiwanese perceptions of China, Taiwan, and US relations from 2016 to 2021. *Journal of Public Affairs and Development*, 9(1), 6.

Lippert, B., Perthes, V., & und Politik-SWP-Deutsches, S. W. (2020). Strategic rivalry between United States and China: Causes, trajectories, and implications for Europe.

Liu, F. (2020). The recalibration of Chinese assertiveness: China's responses to the Indo-Pacific challenge. *International Affairs*, 96(1), 9-27.

Mitchell, R. (2023). China's New Sanctions Regime and the Problem of Mimetic Unilateralism. Available at SSRN 4540653.

Morris, D. (2023). *New risks of interdependence in shifting world order—Developing a sustainable risk framework for the Belt and Road* [védés előtt] (Doctoral dissertation, Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem).

Morrison, W. M. (2019). China's economic rise: History, trends, challenges, and implications for the United States. *Current Politics and Economics of Northern and Western Asia*, 28(2/3), 189-242.

Nizza, V. C. (2023). *US technology policy in the age of the US-China tech war* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford).

Ye, M. (2024). Security in context (SiC): a novel theoretical and empirical approach to the US–China rivalry. *Review of Social Economy*, 1-27.

Zhang, X. J. (2023). *The Eight-Nation (Non-) Alliance: Emergence, Coordination, and Lasting Mark on the Chinese Imagination* (Doctoral dissertation, Vanderbilt University. Dept. of History).