



The End of Thucydides Trap: Sino-US Relations in the New Era from the Perspective of Risk Management and Control

Yipin Lyu^(✉)

School of Economics, Henan University, Kaifeng 475004, China
1329850368@qq.com

Abstract. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, China-US relations have gone through stages of “strategic confrontation” and “strategic cooperation”, and now China-US relations will enter the stage of “strategic competition”. For more than 70 years, the two countries, either enemies, friends, or rivals, have gone through countless storms and worked together to resolve countless crises. Now that both China and the United States have entered a new era, the competition and confrontation between the two countries will become more intense. This article will look back at the development of Sino-US relations, and explain why Sino-US relations will inevitably break through Thucydides’ trap from the perspectives of the general trend of the world, China’s peaceful rise, and the common interests of the two countries. It also analyzes the four major factors that affect Sino-US relations in the new era, including cognitive differences, and finally gives opinions on the stable development of Sino-US relations under a scientific framework from the perspective of building an internal and external risk management and control system.

Keywords: Thucydides Trap · Sino-US Relations · Risk Control

1 Introduction

“Thucydides Trap” was proposed by American scholar Graham Allison, which came from a sentence of Thucydides in “History of the Peloponnesian War”, the reason why the war between Athens and Sparta was Eventually become inevitable because of the growth of Athens’ power and the fear that this growth caused in Sparta [1]. That is, the rising country will inevitably fall into the quagmire of war with the defending country. Sino-US relations are different from Athens and Sparta. It is inaccurate to simply apply Thucydides’ trap to Sino-US relations. At present, the academic community has reached a consensus, but it does not mean that China and the United States will never fall into the Thucydides trap, there are still gaps in research in the field of demonstrating why China and the United States can get out of the Thucydides trap and how to avoid the two countries from falling into the Thucydides trap. Sino-US relations are faced with intricate risk factors such as cognitive differences, ideological differences, economic and trade frictions, and the Taiwan issue. In addition, hawks confuse the public and hype the China

threat theory. Sino-US relations in the new era are beset with crises. This paper will try to prove that China-US relations will definitely break through the Thucydides trap and use a systematic and comprehensive risk management system to deal with potential risks in the future, so that China and the US can overcome the Thucydides trap and achieve peaceful and stable development.

2 A Look Back and Forward on China-US Relations

2.1 The “Confrontation” Phase: 1949–1971

From 1949, Sino-US relations first went through the period of “confrontation” from 1949 to 1971. China and the United States were hostile to each other. At the time, the US had implemented a policy of total blockade and isolation against China, making cooperation and exchanges between the two countries rare.

2.2 The “Cooperation” Phase: 1971–1989

From 1971–1979, China-US relations entered a “moderate” phase before cooperation, both countries began an attempted contact, when US President Richard Nixon visited China, the two sides signed the China-US Joint communique, and China-US relations are starting to improve, but due to the unswerving US-China strategy and China’s adherence to its core interests, there is no substantive agreement; From 1979–1989, China-US relations have officially turned into the “cooperation” phase, in 1979, China and the United States announced the establishment of diplomatic ties, the United States abandoned its blockade policy on China, both countries have made certain concessions on their core interests, agreed on the Taiwan issue, it is when China’s reform and opening up, American capital and technology have entered the Chinese market, the two countries are deeply integrated economically, China and the United States carried out all-round strategic cooperation.

2.3 The “Adjustment” Phase: 1989–2018

From 1989–2018, China-US relations are in the “adjustment” stage, with the upheaval of East Europe, the collapse of the soviet union, China’s balance with the Soviet Union weakened, and China-US relations gradually lost the basis of geopolitical cooperation. In addition, Chinese domestic political turmoil caused an adverse international environment, China-US relations gradually backward. In 1995, Lee Teng-hui visited the United States, During the 1996 Taiwan Strait military exercise, the US Seventh Fleet entered the nearby area. China-US relations faced a complete breakdown. However, the United States also clearly recognizes China’s sensitivity to territorial integrity and the one-China principle and bottom line. Subsequently, in 1997, Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited the United States, and in 1998, US President Bill Clinton visited China. Both sides made efforts to repair bilateral relations. In 1999, China and the United States signed an agreement on China’s accession to the World Trade Organization, and China-US relations showed good momentum. After President Bush took office, continued the

Clinton administration's "hegemony strategy" has positioned China as a "strategic competitor", but the outbreak of "911" events make the United States quickly adjust the positioning of China-US relations, the two countries constantly strengthen international anti-terrorism cooperation, the United States put forward "stakeholders" concept, and China's "peaceful development" concept, the interests of the two countries have been highly integrated. With the slogan of "change", the Obama administration formulated the "Asia-Pacific rebalancing" strategy to counterbalance China's rapid rise. While maintaining cooperation with China in certain areas, it actively drew over Allies and China's neighboring countries and built a multi-partner containment system, aiming to achieve "low-cost hegemony."

2.4 The "Competition" Phase: 2018-Future

After the Trump administration took office, it overturned the policy of the Obama administration, focused its energy on domestic development, tried to get rid of the burden of being a "world leader", no longer attached importance to global governance, and reduced cooperation with China in global governance. The "America First" strategy examines the world, believes that China will challenge the interests of the United States, and identifies China as a "strategic competitor", and the "honeymoon period" between China and the United States is gradually breaking down. On October 18, 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out in the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China that "socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era" [2]. At the same time, on December 18, 2017, the White House website of the United States published a report entitled "National Security Strategy for a New Era", and the United States also announced that it had entered a "new era" [3]. In the face of great changes unseen in a century, China and the United States will definitely re-examine each other, and the relationship between the two countries will also form a new form and enter a new era. There are essentially different "strategic competition stages". With the trade war launched by the United States in 2018, the contradiction between China and the United States is unprecedentedly sharp, but in general, the two countries only have a certain limit of direct conflicts in certain areas, and the overall risk is controllable. Now that the Biden administration has come to power, it has inherited the Trump administration's strategy of containing China, returned to hegemonic logic, attached great importance to global governance and the alliance system, tried to strengthen the alliance system, strengthened the deployment of military power in the Asian-Pacific region, and comprehensively used competition, confrontation, and cooperation. Through strategic competition with China, the United States will enhance its strength and recast its global leadership.

3 The Inevitability of China and the US Breaking Through the Thucydides Trap

China and the United States are not Athens and Sparta, Britain and the Netherlands, Japan and Russia, Germany and the United Kingdom. China is peace-loving and has not been an "aggressive" country since ancient times, pursuing a defensive national policy. The current world situation is complex and changeable. The cost of China and the

United States going to war is unbearable for both countries. Moreover, China and the United States have formed a “competitive and cooperative” relationship. The relationship between the two countries is a unity that includes competition and cooperation. This chapter will demonstrate the inevitability of China and the United States breaking through the Thucydides trap from the world situation, the perspective of China, and the perspective of China and the United States.

3.1 The General World Trend

“Thucydides Trap” deviates from the trend of “peaceful development” in today’s world. The three trends of economic globalization, regional economic integration and financial and economic internationalization have given new connotations to today’s international relations. Countries around the world have formed a community of shared interests in political, economic, cultural, environmental and security areas. No country can be immune. In the face of climate change, terrorism and financial crisis, countries need to work together to overcome difficulties together. Second, with the awakening of global politics, small countries will not be easily manipulated and dominated by big powers. Thucydides Trap only considers the antagonism of the two countries, but does not analyze the unity of the two countries. War is not the only narrow way out between the two countries. Today, multilateralism and win-win cooperations are the way out and future for handling state-to-state relations. Only mutual benefit and symbiosis between China and the United States can ensure long-term stability and peaceful development.

3.2 The Inevitable Result of China’s Peaceful Rise

Throughout history, the situations that have fallen into Thucydides’ trap are all “rising countries” who are dissatisfied with the old international order and challenge the “conservative countries”, two world wars, the Russo-Japanese War, the Franco-Prussian War, and the Crimean War, the Anglo-Dutch Wars, the Ancient Athenian and Spartan Wars, China has pursued a national policy of defense since ancient times, and the “Pax Sinica” existed for a long time in history, forming an East Asian order system with China as the core. Even though China is the absolute leader, it has not arbitrarily invaded other countries. Today, China pursues an independent foreign policy of peace and has no plans to subvert the existing international order or challenge the “conservative state”. The Chinese Dream is inseparable from a peaceful international environment and a stable international order.” China has always been a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a defender of the international order” [4]. The speed of China’s rise is astonishing, but a rising China will not invade and expand against other countries. Chinese people love peace and unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development. China is willing to work with the United States to promote the steady recovery of the world economy and maintain world peace.

3.3 Common Demands of the Interests of China and the United States

At present, China and the United States have formed a “competitive and cooperative” relationship. China and the United States have both competition and cooperation. Just

because of competition in certain fields, the cooperation between the two countries cannot be completely denied and the new Cold War crisis is exaggerated. Many practical factors bind China and the United States together, and the two sides have room for in-depth cooperation in the fields of public health, nuclear non-proliferation, climate change, financial crisis, and arms control. “Unlike the isolationism of the Trump administration, the Biden administration has made it clear that it does not want to fall into a ‘new cold war’ with China” [5], stressing efforts to promote the recovery of the world economy. Issues such as promoting world economic development, global governance, and the supply of public goods must be negotiated by China and the United States. With economic globalization, the economies of China and the United States are deeply complementary, and the interdependence relationship is deepening. The value gap is not enough to affect the normal cooperation between China and the United States. In addition, trade confrontation or even military confrontation will not realize the US strategy of enhancing its own strength. The economic “decoupling” policy pursued by the “hawks” of the United States is not in line with the fundamental interests of the two countries. On the contrary, in the context of the trend of multi-polarization in the world, if the two major powers go into confrontation, they will only be destroyed, leaving the door open for others to catch up.

4 Risk Factors for the Development of China-US Relations in the New Era

In the more than 40 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, there have been crises such as the “U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia”, “airplane collision in the South China Sea” and “the South China Sea arbitration case.” With great efforts, major diplomatic crises have been resolved by both countries. In the face of great changes unseen in a century, factors such as cognitive differences, the Taiwan issue, ideological differences, and economic and trade frictions will be the risk points for the outbreak of conflict and confrontation between China and the United States. As long as these four risk factors are properly and rationally handled, Sino-US relations will not be derailed.

4.1 Cognitive Differences

The cognitive difference between China and the United States is the biggest factor affecting the direction of Sino-US relations. Due to differences in ideology and social system, there are huge differences between the two countries, and narrow nationalists have fanned the flames. From “Clash of Civilizations Theory”, “China Threat Theory”, “China Collapse Theory”, “Chinese Arrogance Theory”, “Deadly China Theory” [6], to “American Imperialism”, “American Hegemonism”, the public opinion of the two countries is full of emotional and radical remarks, and there are a lot of claims that demonize each other. The U.S. is worried that China, the “rising star”, is a “bad newcomer”, and afraid that it will threaten U.S. national interests, shred the U.S.-led international order, and “pick off” the boss of the old order. China is also worried that the United States hinders China’s economic development and national rejuvenation, conducts peaceful evolution of China,

interferes in China's relations with neighboring countries, and draws allies to build an impregnable wall to contain China, which will harm China's national interests. If a sober judgment is lost in the atmosphere of fanatical and extreme public opinion, this cognitive difference between the two countries will turn into a serious strategic misjudgment, a crisis of confidence, and even fall into the "Thucydides Trap". In addition, there are three other important factors that will influence the direction of China-US relations in the new era.

4.2 The Taiwan Issue

After the establishment of diplomatic ties in the United States did not strictly abide by the joint communique requirements, sell F-16 fighter weapons and equipment to Taiwan, and allow Lee Teng-hui to visit the United States in 1995. This behavior seriously violated the one-China principle, underestimated the confidence of the Chinese people in safeguarding the unity and territorial integrity of the motherland, worsened the situation in the Taiwan Strait, and almost broke out into a military conflict. The United States realized the sensitivity of the Taiwan issue after experiencing the turmoil in the Taiwan Strait. For a certain period, the Taiwan region will still be the support point for the United States to intervene in the Asia-Pacific situation and exert its influence. It will be a potential flashpoint for Sino-US relations in the future.

4.3 Ideological Differences

The differences in system, culture and values between China and the United States are also one of the reasons for major differences. Both sides instinctively measure each other with traditional national values. The United States pays attention to the global promotion of its ideology, and is committed to promoting American-style liberal democracy to the world. It is accustomed to the role of "world police," making decisions and acting with world leaders and world order defenders as its starting point. The history of humiliation in modern times has made the Chinese people hate aggression, expansion, hegemony and bullying, pursue an independent foreign policy of peace, adhere to peaceful development and win-win cooperation, and are extremely sensitive and hateful to attempts to split the country and hegemonic bullying.

4.4 Economic and Trade Friction

In the past few decades, the two countries and the United States are highly complementary production cooperation. The two countries have also formed a long "win-win" stage. With China's national strength and the rapid development of the manufacturing industry, the trade friction between China and the United States has been quietly brewing. "The United States has conducted Section 301 investigations against China many times, and the two sides have clashed five times in 1991, 1994, 1996, and 2010 on intellectual property rights, market access, and clean energy, and they all ended in negotiation and negotiation" [7]. During the Trump administration, China was defined as a "revisionist country" and a "strategic competitor" of the United States. On March 22, 2018, the

USTR released the “Section 301 Investigation Report on China”. From the perspective of protecting national interests, the United States issued Intensive trade sanctions against China have unilaterally provoked a trade war. At the same time, the US has imposed sanctions on China’s high-tech industries such as Huawei and ZTE to delay and prevent them from breaking through technical barriers in areas such as chips.

5 Risk Management and Control Path Design

On September 22, 2015, president Xi said at a local welcome banquet in Washington State: “There is no ‘Thucydides trap’ in the world, but with repeated strategic misjudgment between major powers, we may create a “Thucydides trap” for ourselves” [8]. The key to risk management between China and the United States is to eliminate the trust deficit, which originates between the two countries. To eliminate the trust deficit, it is necessary to strengthen internal construction. On this basis, the two countries strengthen external construction with a more moderate attitude and build a practical and effective bilateral relationship. Through dialogue and consultation, we can prevent strategic misjudgment caused by cognitive differences, and build a comprehensive risk management and control system from both inside and outside, so that Sino-US relations can develop steadily under a scientific and sound system framework.

5.1 Internal Control

5.1.1 Clear and Rational Decision-Making

In the face of the increasingly extreme atmosphere of public opinion in the two countries, leaders must maintain a clear and pragmatic mind, and must have sufficient determination, so as not to let excessive public sentiment and fanatical nationalism affect foreign policy. In the future, the number of frictions and collisions between China and the United States may increase, and crisis events such as the “airplane collision in the South China Sea” may occur again. Facing public pressure, leaders must make moderate and rational decisions to avoid escalation of the situation and the risk of war.

5.1.2 Respect Each Other’s Interests and Status

First to respect each other’s national interests, “national sovereignty, national security should always in the first” [9]. Sovereignty, security and other core interests of a country must be safeguarded, of course, but while pursuing national interests, it is also necessary to consider issues from the perspective of a community with a shared future for mankind, based on the common interests of mankind, and try to avoid harming the interests of other countries, so as not to fall into the “Thucydides Trap”. Secondly, we must respect each other’s national status. China has no idea of replacing the international status of the United States. China “will never seek hegemony”, and the United States cannot view China’s rise from an objective perspective. And the United States must eliminate prejudice against China and respect the reasonable needs of the Chinese people for economic development to achieve national rejuvenation. China must also respect the prestige of the United States as a leader in science and technology and a world leader for a certain period in the future.

5.2 External Control

5.2.1 Establish a Complete, Clear and Effective Dialogue Mechanism

China and the United States need to enhance strategic mutual trust through the strategic dialogue mechanism. In the new era, China and the United States should strengthen exchanges, dialogue and dialogue in various fields, improve the consultation mechanism, maintain regular high-level meetings between China and the United States, understand each other's interests and demands, establish and improve news media and direct dialogue mechanism between diplomatic institutions, the restoration of a functional dialogue mechanism between China and the United States, the establishment of a risk assessment mechanism, and the management and control of differences. Cognitive differences between China and the United States are unavoidable, but through a clear and effective bilateral communication mechanism, their impact can be minimized and the transition from competition to confrontation can be avoided.

5.2.2 Manage Economic and Trade Differences and Seek Common Interests

“In the face of Sino-US economic and trade frictions, trade between the two countries has become more frequent. Since the US imposed tariffs on China in July 2018, the Sino-US trade volume has been on the rise in other years except for the year-on-year decline in 2019. Since the outbreak of the pneumonia epidemic, it has become more obvious. In 2020, the trade volume between China and the United States increased by 8.3% year-on-year, and it will increase significantly again in 2021. In recent years, the growth of China's exports to the United States has continued to exceed its imports” [10]. Even with frequent economic and trade frictions, Sino-US economic exchanges are still close, and the prospects for Sino-US economic cooperation are still promising. The space for trade will be reduced, competition will be launched in more fields, and the risk of economic and trade frictions will increase. Economic interests are the cornerstone of friendly exchanges between the two countries and the glue of Sino-US relations. Differences in interests will exist for a long time. The two countries should reach consensus as soon as possible, sign a reasonable and effective trade agreement, abandon mutually destructive means such as a trade war, avoid the economic conflict from evolving into a full-field conflict, and resolve their differences in the global governance system.

5.2.3 Strengthen Global Governance Cooperation

Under the current international situation, China should carefully evaluate its voice and risks and challenges in global governance. China's goal is not to replace the United States as the leader of global governance, and the ability of the United States to provide public goods is irreplaceable. While developing, it contributes “Chinese wisdom” to global governance, and realizes innovation based on inheriting the existing global governance system. Today, the conflicts between China and the United States in the global governance system are increasing day by day. However, for China and the United States to maintain their strategic sobriety, China and the United States need to cooperate in many areas. In the new era, China and the United States should take the well-being of all mankind as their goal, maintain the current platforms of the United Nations, the International Monetary

Fund, the International Trade Organization, and regional cooperation organizations, and explore the construction of new platforms for coordinating the distribution of interests. The two countries should strengthen in-depth cooperation in the fields of climate, human rights and anti-terrorism, and become the defenders of world peace and stability and the promoters of global economic prosperity.

6 Conclusion

According to Graham Allison's "Thucydides Trap" theory, war broke out between 16 pairs of rising powers and 12 pairs of established powers in history. There are hidden risks represented by cognitive differences between China and the United States. There is a strategic misjudgment between the two countries, and the probability of war is quite high. Going to war will cause a devastating blow to the interests of the two countries and the common interests of mankind. Therefore, it is urgent to establish a risk management and control system integrating internal and external, and build a firewall to prevent Sino-US relations from falling into Thucydides' trap. At the same time, the changes in the global landscape, China's peaceful rise and the interweaving of our interests have made it more possible for China and the US to overcome the Thucydides trap and build a new model of peaceful and stable major-country relations. In this paper, there are still deficiencies in research methods and risk management and control path design. In the future, quantitative analysis methods will be used to establish accurate risk management and control models based on key data collection, making the theory more scientific, accurate and feasible.

References

1. Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War: On [M]*. Xie Defeng, translated. Beijing: Commercial Press, 2004: 21.
2. Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era (a glorious course). People's Daily Online reference date 2021-05-27
3. Liu Jianfei. The Development Trend of Sino-US Relations in the New Era [J]. *American Studies*, 2021, 35(04): 9-23+5.
4. Xi Jinping. Complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way and win the great victory of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era - a report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2017.
5. "US Relations with China: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "Department of State, May 12, 2021, (<https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-china/>)
6. Hu Jian. Confusion in the growth of great powers: "Thucydides Trap" or "Du Mu Trap"? [J]. *Social Sciences*, 2021, (02): 3-17.
7. Zhang Meng. Sino-US economic and trade friction: process, motivation and countermeasures and suggestions [J]. *Contemporary World*, 2019, (03): 75-78.
8. Xi Jinping's speech during his state visit to the United States [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House
9. Deng Xiaoping: *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol. 3, p. 348
10. Yu Jiabin, Wang Yahong. Sino-US trade volume hit a record high, highlighting that win-win cooperation is the general trend [N]. *Xinhua Daily Telegraph*, 2022-01-20(007).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

