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The Future of Sino-American Relations in the Asia-Pacific Realm

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**ABSTRACT**

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the international community has been confronted with numerous challenges and power shifts. On the one hand, upheavals in the Middle East greatly challenge world peace. On the other hand, a rapidly developing Asia is gradually changing the international structure. Many scholars in the United States worry that America's liberty and security are challenged by all kinds of political, cultural, and strategic changes. Both domestic and foreign policies are facing hard choices of what should be done next.

This paper focuses on the question of what appropriate foreign policy the U.S. should pursue in the Asia-Pacific, particularly toward China—one of the major powers in East Asia. The main presupposition is that the two countries should firmly consider cooperation as the primary foreign policy goal because good Sino-American relations would not only bring about mutual benefits, but also facilitate the peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific area on a large scale. The paper will discuss the inevitable necessity of improving Sino-American relations and mutual understanding from different perspectives.

The Future of Sino-American Relations in the Asia-Pacific Realm

## **THE BACKGROUND OF SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS**

### **THEIR TRADITIONAL FOREIGN POLICY PRINCIPLES**

In *The Federalist*, no. 1, Alexander Hamilton wrote:

It has been frequently remarked, that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country to decide, by their conduct and example, the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force. If there be any truth in the remark, the crisis at which we are arrived may, with propriety, be regarded as the period when that decision is to be made; and a wrong election of the part we shall act, may, in this view, deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that any regime's foundation and development is not an easy process since it is mainly due to two factors which are deeply dependent on each other. The first one is external force, which may include environmental factors. The other one is internal force, especially in terms of the wisdom of leaders who can rationally see the external situation of the country and constantly make appropriate policies that best suit changing circumstances. Only in this way can the regime maintain stability and benefit its people. This paper focuses on the analysis of how the U.S. and Chinese governments should maintain sound relations toward each other in their new Administrations within the international environment. The presupposition is that improving Sino-American relations in the twenty-first century by increasing mutual trust and dealing with conflicting interests realistically benefit not only each other but also the international community.

Since World War II, the United States has been the leading power in world affairs with the strongest military and economy. In the meantime, China has stepped onto the international stage with its new image as a unified nation. After more than sixty years

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1. Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist No.1," The Library of Congress, [http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed\\_01.html](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_01.html) (accessed March 3, 2013).

since the founding of the People's Republic of China, China is still growing and developing with both policy achievements and failures. Domestically, the Chinese government has been constantly learning from its mistakes and trying new policies to make progress in building a harmonious society. In terms of foreign policy, China firmly adopted the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence proposed by Premier Zhou En-lai in 1954, including respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, noninterference in other countries' domestic affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

The founding principle of American foreign affairs was stated by President Washington in his 1796 *Farewell Address*. He exerted his leadership in framing a national government in which he achieved significant success in the field of foreign affairs by protecting the territorial integrity of the United States. In the *Farewell Address*, Washington asserts that

harmony, liberal intercourse with all nations, are recommended by policy, humanity, and interest. But even our commercial policy should hold an equal and impartial hand; neither seeking nor granting exclusive favors or preferences; consulting the natural course of things....There can be no greater error than to expect or calculate upon real favors from nation to nation. It is an illusion, which experience must cure, which a just pride ought to discard.<sup>2</sup>

This short remark shows that it was in the interests of the United States to steer clear of foreign entanglements.

Article Two in Chapter One of the UN Charter states: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with

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2. "Washington's Farewell Address 1796," Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/washing.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp), (accessed March 3, 2013).

the Purposes of the United Nations.”<sup>3</sup> Since “developing friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace”<sup>4</sup> are among the most basic principles of the UN, external interference in national disputes or disputed areas should be treated as unlawful. Both the United States and China acknowledge this in their foreign policy statements.

Today, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the conflicting interpretations of international security and international order between China and the United States based on different traditions and cultures continue to be a source of tension between them. Many scholars believe that the dramatic expansion of China’s economic and military power has been raising the question of mutual trust and true cooperation in Sino-American relations. The future is unforeseeable. However, their common interests are far greater than the disputes between the two countries.

### **THE CURRENT CONDITION OF SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS—WHAT SHOULD BE THE DETERMINING FACTOR?**

First of all, any analysis of Sino-American relations in the future decades requires familiarity with the current status or condition of these two countries’ relationship. Aaron L. Friedberg, a professor at Princeton University and former deputy assistant for national security of the United States, helps summarize the main determining factors of the two countries’ relations in his book *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*. Friedberg believes that there are seven distinct factors for

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3. “Charter of the United Nations,” <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter1.shtml> (accessed March 3, 2013).

4., Ibid.

understanding the development of Sino-American relations: the narrowing gap in national power, the continuing deep differences in their ideologies and domestic political structures, economic interdependence, the possible evolution of China toward democracy, China's ongoing integration into a web of international institutions, the presence of common threats, and the existence of nuclear weapons.<sup>5</sup> Among these factors, the first two are deeply entrenched factors which might cause most potentially dangerous effects. The benefits of trade and a common concern about nuclear weapons are moderating factors. China's involvement in international institutions and cooperation with The United States on mutual dangers such as terrorism and climate change do not help promote long-lasting friendship, because China and the United States have not achieved a consensus on the precise nature of the threat, and the real problem in Sino-American relations is the divergence of interests and the tensions and the mutual mistrust that make cooperation so difficult in the first place. According to Friedberg, only China's political evolution toward liberalization could bring a stable peace with America.<sup>6</sup> Throughout history, Sino-U.S. relations had never been so "mixed, complex, uncertain, and potentially unstable"<sup>7</sup> than in the twenty-first century.

Robert D. Kaplan, a journalist and Stratfor analyst who has been recognized as one of the world's top hundred global thinkers, wrote a remarkable book on geopolitics entitled *Monsoon*, in which he argues that the current decade is faced with a newly emerging international order that concentrates on the Indian Ocean and the western

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5. Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 37.

6. *Ibid.*, 38.

7. *Ibid.*, 2.

Pacific. Similarly to Friedberg, he also believes that the Pacific Asia is going to be the most disputed area in the twenty-first century. Kaplan points out that since China has been increasingly building its navy and improving economically, its potential to seek energy and enhance its national defense indicate that it will focus on developing its naval strategy in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Although China's maritime power is not yet competitive with that of the United States, and its internal problems may restrain its economic prosperity, other factors such as America's economic recession, Asia's naval development since WWII, and non-state factors, such as piracy, have ended America's unipolar moment on the world's oceans and have made China its primary competitor.<sup>8</sup> In order to retain its influence in Asia, Kaplan believes that it is not enough for America to maintain large quantity of its naval forces there because of other factors, such as "underlying trends, asymmetric capabilities, and the creative combination of naval, economic, and territorial power."<sup>9</sup> Friedberg similarly asserts that, despite Asia's political and social lag, the international system has been shifting ever since the second half of the twentieth century toward "a dramatic improvement in material conditions across virtually all of Asia" under its environment of "overall regional peace and stability, and the creation of an increasingly open global economy."<sup>10</sup> The fact is that multipolarity is creating balance of power in the Pacific. In spite of this reality, Friedberg's simple assumption is that "if China's power continues to grow, and if it continues to be ruled by a one-party authoritarian regime, its relations with the United States are going to become

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8. Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon* (New York: Random House, 2011), 279.

9. *Ibid.*, 281.

10. Friedberg, 22-23.

increasingly tense and competitive.”<sup>11</sup> The question is: What is China’s foreign policy? Will China seek Pacific hegemony?

Kaplan partly agrees with Friedberg’s point when he states that “it is China’s very geographical centrality to Asia, coupled with its growing navy and burgeoning economic might that may cause the U.S. to continue to lose influence there.”<sup>12</sup> The difference between Friedberg and Kaplan is that while Friedberg believes that a diminishing national power gap and conflicting ideologies are the fundamental roots of U.S. and China’s rivalry, Kaplan thinks that the determining force driving an edgy Sino-American relationship will be the interaction of their navies in the Indian Ocean and West Pacific.<sup>13</sup> Kaplan does not believe China intends a global hegemony. The deep reason for China’s expanding navy is her demand for energy to sustain dramatic economic growth. Statistics show that China will probably become the world’s most prolific shipbuilder, exceeding Japan and South Korea.<sup>14</sup> Kaplan compares China’s current position with America’s situation during the period of the Panama Canal construction when the U.S. attempted to develop strategic economic and military interests with the outside world. Today, China has the tendency to dominate the Malacca Strait in order to access to the Indian Ocean. Its purpose is to import oil via pipelines from Central Asia and Saudi Arabia as well as natural gas from Iran. In addition, Kaplan holds that China seeks to control the South China Sea to secure the First Island Chain, especially Taiwan, the Diao Yu (Senkaku)

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11. Ibid., 38.

12. Kaplan, *Monsoon*, 281.

13. Ibid., 280.

14. Kaplan, 282.

Islands, and the Nan Sha (Spratly) Islands. If China achieves the status of a two-ocean power, conflicts with both India and America are inevitable.

Despite the question whether the ultimate driving force of Sino-American relations lies in their ideological conflicts according to Friedberg or in their maritime territories in the Pacific Asia according to Kaplan, it is also important for policymakers to consider enduring factors that promote peace. For example, Kaplan believes that these geographical controversies can be handled realistically: “Strong American-Chinese bilateral relations going forward is not only plausible, but might be the best-case scenario for the global system in the twenty-first century, allowing for true world governance to take shape.”<sup>15</sup> The possibility of improving cooperation is also envisioned by Friedberg: “A deepening US.-China entente would bring with it increased possibilities for stable, sustained worldwide economic growth, the peaceful resolution of outstanding regional disputes, and the successful management of pressing global problems including terrorism, climate change, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.”<sup>16</sup> But both the United States and China face obstacles to reach this goal. The United States should consider how it should respond responsibly to a coming international system of multi-polarity<sup>17</sup> and realize the peaceful transition toward an American-Indian-Chinese condominium.<sup>18</sup> For China, the primary question might be associated with its domestic policy since “China’s

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15. Ibid., 280.

16. Friedberg, 36.

17. Kaplan, *Monsoon*, 291.

18. Ibid., 293.

internal system has vibrant and intense debates on policy and social direction, which will delay its movement toward great power status.”<sup>19</sup> This may delay peaceful cooperation.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHY IN UNDERSTANDING CHINA’S POLITICS**

Following the year in which *Monsoon* was published, Kaplan wrote another book called *Revenge of Geography*. He argues that, although geography is not the determining factor in studying world affairs, it is of primary significance. He quotes the great Dutch American strategist Nicholas J. Spykman’s observation: “Geography is the most fundamental factor in the foreign policy of states because it is the most permanent. Ministers come and go, even dictators die, but mountain ranges stand unperturbed.”<sup>20</sup> He also quotes English geographer Sir Halford John Mackinder, who is regarded as one of the founding fathers of geostrategy: “Geography bridges the gap between arts and science, connecting the study of history and culture with environmental factors, which specialists in humanities sometimes neglect.”<sup>21</sup> As a result, in order to comprehend both China’s and America’s domestic and foreign policies, one effective method is to understand how they have dealt with geography throughout history. Kaplan warns that

while no one state in Asia has any incentives to go to war, the risks of incidents at sea and fatal miscalculations about the balance of power—which everyone is

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19. Kaplan, *Monsoon*, 280.

20. Nicholas J. Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942), xv, 41, quoted in Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012), 29.

21. W. H. Parker, *Mackinder: Geography as an Aid to Statecraft* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 93, 130-131, quoted in Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 28.

seeking to constantly adjust—will have a tendency to increase with time and with the deepening complexity of the military standoff.<sup>22</sup>

“The U.S.-China relationship will not only be determined by such bilateral and global issues as trade, debt, climate change, and human rights, but more importantly by the specific geography of China’s potential sphere of influence in maritime Asia.”<sup>23</sup>

Kaplan points out that China’s geography highly reflects a “core-periphery” structure since its civilization originated in the rivers of the central plain. China absorbed barbarian ethnic groups and cultures through different stages in which the Han and Tang dynasties achieved their apex when China’s influence extended to the Pacific, Europe, and Africa. In addition, because China is mainly a continental power, threats to it over the millennia have come from the northern and northwestern uplands inhabited by Mongols, a Turkic people.<sup>24</sup> This exacerbated the centralization. Facing aggressive invaders and later territorial controversies with Russia and Japan, “China became a vast continent in and of itself by virtue of its continental backwards and forwards interactions with an Inner Asian steppe-land that stretched into Mackinder’s Heartland, and this is what drives the political reality of China today.”<sup>25</sup> Nowadays, China’s border issue is still very severe. Kaplan asserts that “Mongolia, the Russian Far East, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia are all natural zones of Chinese influence and expansion, even though no political borders will change.”<sup>26</sup>

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22. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 223.

23. *Ibid.*, 217.

24. *Ibid.*, 192.

25. *Ibid.*, 195.

26. *Ibid.*, 210.

In reference to the assumption that China's primary obstacle to cooperate with the United States is associated with its domestic instability, we must ask: where does this instability come from? Kaplan argues that: "what drives China beyond its official borders has to be with a core national interest—economic survival and growth."<sup>27</sup> However, he continues: "China's borders aren't the problem: the problem is Chinese society, which, as it becomes more prosperous, and, as China's economic growth rate slows, raises the specter of political upheaval of some sort. And serious upheaval could make China suddenly vulnerable on its ethnic peripheries."<sup>28</sup> So the implication is that China's internal instability largely comes from the pause of economic growth, and that China's outward expansion is not only due to the requirement of natural resources for protecting economic growth, but also represents strategy of national defense to prevent ethnic conflicts when the economy slows down.

### **AMERICA'S CONTEMPORARY POLICY DILEMMAS**

In the article "The Lost Decade," Angelo Codevilla assumes that the "War on Terror" beginning on September 11, 2001 has marked the decline of America as "the world's only superpower." By tracing the deep reason which caused this phenomenon, he suspects that the problem lies in the traditional bipartisan mainstream. Codevilla asserts that the ruling class has been failing to answer the question of what it has been pursuing. He asserts that war should empower a nation and its ruling class because "hard times force regimes, as they force individuals, to prove what they are made of."<sup>29</sup> However, the

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27. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 199.

28. *Ibid.*, 207.

29. Angelo M. Codevilla, "The Lost Decade," The Claremont Institute, [http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1878/article\\_detail.asp](http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1878/article_detail.asp) (accessed April 11, 2013).

current ruling leadership, including both the Republican and Democratic parties, has failed to address qualitative changes in domestic policies and foreign affairs or politics since the War on Terror. The reason is that “a decade of war brought a government ever bigger and more burdensome” and “the ruling class justified its ever-larger role in America’s domestic life by redefining war as a never-ending struggle against unspecified enemies for abstract objectives and by asserting expertise far above that of ordinary American.”<sup>30</sup> According to Codevilla,

U.S. policy has made things worse because the liberal internationalists, realists, and neoconservatives who make up America’s foreign policy Establishment have all assumed that Americans should undertake the impossible task of changing such basic facts, rather than confining themselves to the difficult but vital work of guarding U.S. interests against them. For the Establishment, 9/11 meant opportunities to press for doing more of what they had always tried to do.<sup>31</sup>

The basic facts to which he refers are challenges of peace in the Pacific, neo-Soviet Russia, Western Europe, and the Muslim world.

Specifically, Codevilla argues that the eagerness of the ruling class for victory against terrorism has transformed the American military mind. The attempt to build friendly nations has caused degrading of the U.S. military. As a result, both the structures and missions of the American land, sea, and air armed forces have been focused on War on Terror. This has “materially crippled America’s capacity for dealing with any other kind of war” by neglecting other major competitive powers.<sup>32</sup> He maintains that “the common denominator of the ruling class’ domestic and international strategy in the post-9/11 decade is the determination to double its bet on already failed politics. This self-

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30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

referential mindset is the root cause of America's decade of loss." He adds that "confronting terrorists is not what the U.S.'s 'security' people sign up for."<sup>33</sup>

In the article "The Geographical Containment of China," Francis P. Sempa maintains that China's development in aerospace and naval programs over the recent two decades is magnificent. With its "continental size, access to the ocean, a huge and productive population, a growing economy, a growing military capacity," China has the potential to challenge the global political system.<sup>34</sup> He emphasizes that the development of China's anti-ship ballistic missiles would particularly challenge America's regional strategic balance and other regional powers' security by controlling communications and strategic passages. He worries that Alfred Thayer Mahan's sea power theory might help account for China's current military doctrine. Even though he does not actually believe that China has a global expansionary ambition, and that China's economic ties with the U.S. would largely benefit both of them, China's regional ambitions and increasingly growing influence in the Pacific are "inconsistent with U.S. security interests and commitments in the region."<sup>35</sup> According to Sempa, "China's expansion and/or naval breakout will likely emerge from her lengthy coastline to the east. It is that direction that U.S.-Chinese interests clash."<sup>36</sup> He particularly mentions the geographical importance of Taiwan since "were Taiwan to fall under Chinese control, a central and crucial link in this series of island and peninsular barriers would be unhinged, crippling this containment

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33. Ibid.

34. Francis P. Sempa, "The Geographical Containment of China," The Mackinder Forum, <http://mackinderforum.org/commentaries/the-geopolitical-containment-of-china> (accessed April 11, 2013).

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

perimeter.”<sup>37</sup> He warns that the U.S. must retain its sea command to the approaches of the main chokepoints and renew strategic ties with Pacific allies.

Sempa’s standpoint is in accordance with Friedberg’s view that if China’s power continues to grow, its relations with the United States are going to become increasingly tense and competitive. He also shares the same view with Kaplan that Sino-American relationship in the Pacific-Asia is determined by their controls of chokepoints. However, the more crucial question is how to define America’s interest in the Pacific Asia as well as what it means by interest conflicts between America and China. It has already been noted that these two countries have different histories, traditions, and cultures when interpreting the principles of international security and international order. If the United States views the balance of power as the principle of international security, and China’s dramatic rise will violate this principle and threaten the interest of other nations in the Pacific Asia, China might view the principle of international order differently. In addition, both Sempa and Kaplan agree that China does not seek regional hegemony in the Pacific-Asia at first hand. If China and the United States continue to intensify their rivalry in the Pacific-Asia and enforce conflicting ideologies on each other, it may cause another unnecessary war, as criticized by Codevilla.

As a result, the ultimate driving force of Sino-American relations neither lies in their ideological conflicts, according to Friedberg, nor in their maritime territories in the Asia-Pacific, according to Kaplan, but lies in these two countries’ determination to increase mutual understanding, especially the common ground of a just international system in the Pacific-Asia.

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37. Ibid.

**CONFLICTING POLITICAL THEORIES APPLIED TO THE EAST ASIA**

The book *International Relations Theory and the Asian-Pacific* focuses on the future international relations of East Asia regarding the roles of the main powers in this area, particularly China and the United States. David Kang illustrates a general picture of East Asia from a historical perspective. He says that

Asian international relations have historically been hierarchic, more peaceful, and more stable than that of the west. From this perspective, until the intrusion of the western powers in the nineteenth century, Asian international relations were remarkably stable, punctuated only occasionally by conflict between countries....Consisting of China as the central state, and the peripheral states as lesser states or “vassals,” as long as hierarchy was observed there was little need for interstate war. This contrasts sharply with the western tradition of international relations that consisted of formal equality between nation-states, informal hierarchy, and almost constant interstate conflict.<sup>38</sup>

Kang maintains that, in order to pursue the stability in the East Asia, it is vital to comprehend the competing worldviews between the West and the East in terms of the reality of international relations, which is the root of enduring conflict. He believes that “the major difference between Europe and Asia was that conflicts between the states in the hierarchy were centuries apart, and tended to occur as order within the central power was breaking down.”<sup>39</sup> Another difference is that in Asia “the countries remained essentially the same after the war—there was no shifting and malleable boundaries that were redefined, and nations did not rise and disappear.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, Asia’s situation does not fit into the Western theory of balance of power.

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38. David Kang, “Hierarchy and Stability in Asian International Relations,” in *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific*, ed. G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 164.

39. Kang, 170.

40. *Ibid.*, 170.

Kang points out that realism has prevailed in the western thinking about international relations, which holds that only anarchy and hierarchy exist in the international system. The anarchy system emphasizes on “poles and alliance” to reach a state of equality, while the hierarchy consists of “either formal or informal empire.”<sup>41</sup> However, according to Kang, “hierarchy is not hegemony: hegemony is overarching and more intrusive. Hegemony also focuses the bulk of its attention to the largest power, while hierarchy is more concerned with the interaction of states up and down the hierarchy. Hierarchy also accords all states within the system a place and a means of interacting with each other.”<sup>42</sup> Asia has been historically entrenched in such a system. Kang maintains that in a stable hierarchy system, “there is one central state and many lesser, peripheral states.” By contrast, the western realism emphasizes the principle that “self-help forces nations to coalesce against the would-be dominant power.”<sup>43</sup> As a result, the main question was “whether all nations understand that the central state had no territorial or overweening ambitions, and whether there exists a method for resolving conflicts.”<sup>44</sup>

Specifically, Kang maintains that the reason why the hierarchy system provides stability is that it has a “combination of benefits and sanctions that the central power provides to the lesser powers,” as “good relations with the central state ensures survival and even prosperity by the lesser states, through a continual flow of good trade, and

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41. Ibid., 165.

42. Ibid., 166.

43. Ibid., 165.

44. Kang, 166.

technology.”<sup>45</sup> If the lesser states violate this principle, “the central state reserves the right to use force to restore order” by imposing the new order on the rest of the peripheral states.” As a result, the lesser states “realize that to challenge the hierarchy would be against their own interests.”<sup>46</sup> In addition, Kang emphasizes that “there is little interference by the central power in the affairs of the lesser states in hierarchy” because of the fact that “both the central and the lesser states explicitly recognize the central state’s dominant position,” and thus they develop “shared norms that allows for communication,” which can contribute to “mitigate the security dilemma.”<sup>47</sup> After this relationship is established, “the central state respects the autonomy and sovereignty of lesser states,” and “the lesser states retain full autonomy of domestic organization and foreign policy, and full authority to order their relations with each other”<sup>48</sup> without the central state’s concern.

According to Kang’s perspective, “while realists and liberals have tended to view modern Asia as potentially unstable, if the system is reverting to a pattern of hierarchy, the result may be increased stability.”<sup>49</sup> So, if the system of hierarchy can ultimately and realistically bring stability and prosperity in East Asia, how should the major powers which are located in or concerned with that area react? Kang asserts that a hierarchy view of Asia will have significant implications for American foreign policy. He believes that the situation will be problematic if the U.S. remains tightly involved in Asia and forms

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45. Ibid., 167.

46. Ibid., 167.

47. Ibid., 168.

48. Ibid., 168.

49. Ibid., 164.

East Asian balancing coalitions to contain China.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, if the U.S. withdraws significantly from East Asia, the region might not become as dangerous and unstable as the conventional wisdom expects.<sup>51</sup>

From China's standpoint, Kang asserts that China has a flexible worldview, and its view on international relations is subtle as it is "comfortable with a loose definition of nation."<sup>52</sup> This is why it holds "one nation, two systems," leaves its border with India never fully defined and resolved, and maintains a loose relation with Tibet.<sup>53</sup> In terms of the Taiwan issue, Kang believes that "in a hierarchy, the other Asian states recognize China's right to order its border. In addition, other nations see China-Taiwan relations as an internal affair."<sup>54</sup> From the Western balance of power perspective, it is natural for the scholars of international relations to keep being cautious about China's rising and making assumptions of its dominant ambition in East Asia. And it is easy for them to believe that Taiwan has a strategic position in China's expansions, as both Kaplan and Sempa have indicated.

Specifically, Kang believes that Taiwan has remained in an ambiguous relationship with China throughout history because Taiwan "historically was not a formal province of China, but it was also not a recognized independent state in the manner of Korea, Japan, and Vietnam." Official Chinese records regard Taiwan as a frontier area in

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50. Ibid., 164.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., 180.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

the eighteenth century.<sup>55</sup> Currently, Taiwan's continuing shift to democracy makes it more and more distinct from China, and most Western countries have started to see it as a nation-state. However, China will always treat Taiwan as an internal issue. Nations in Asia also react to the Taiwan issue differently from the Western world with a muted attitude regarding China's military intervention because they instinctively believe that Taiwan should be a "quasi-nation" which "enjoys the benefits of the international system."<sup>56</sup> As a result, Taiwan's status as a nation-state would provoke and extremely upset it.<sup>57</sup>

Friedberg and Kaplan in their books examine the general picture of today's Asia seriously, and both of them mention that East Asia is in a dramatic process of development. Friedberg maintains that the politics of Asia do not match its material conditions. Also, Kaplan emphasizes that miscalculations about the balance of power in Asia can have fatal consequences. Actually Kang's main thesis, however, is that "there is more security and stability in Asia than it is generally realized," but the stable hierarchy system which produces a secure and stable has been shadowed by the realist balance of power principle.<sup>58</sup> More importantly, he asserts that one distinctive feature of the hierarchy system is that it only functions efficiently during good times. Otherwise, "when the central state experiences trouble and the hierarchy breaks down, order is more easily upset."<sup>59</sup>

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55. Ibid., 178.

56. Ibid., 179.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., 164.

59. Ibid., 168.

So, the assumption here is that there is a chain effect: China's internally vibrant and unstable system, which is mentioned by Kaplan, could potentially cause the collapse of the hierarchy system in the Pacific Asia, which would then produce a general political and social lag in that area as suggested by Friedberg. This, in turn, makes China's dominant position more apparent, leading to the Western interference in this area for fear of the loss of balance of power. But even if this assumption works, David Kang argues, that although the hierarchy system historically provided stability in Asia, it is questionable whether it could still be applied today because "no modern state will seek investiture from China regarding its chief executive, nor will any country pay tribute to China."<sup>60</sup> As a result, communications and mutual understanding, either between China and its peripheral nations or between China and the United States, is of vital necessity in terms of how to maintain East Asia's political security and stability. Imposing conflicting worldviews on each other can never solve international problems, and only mutual understanding could bring about mutual trust and mutual benefit.

### **LACK OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING**

Dean Cheng, a Heritage Foundation scholar, in his "The Complicated History of U.S. Relations with China," depicts the complex relationship that has existed between these two countries since the beginning. The foreign policy of the U.S. toward China varies according to the changes of world conditions. In terms of today's situation, he points out that

the United States and the People's Republic of China are like the European great powers of a century ago. They trade with each other, but do not trust each other. They have the largest economics in the world, and they have a financial and

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60. Ibid., 174.

trading relationship that shapes the global economy. But at the same time, they have different, and opposing, views on many national security and foreign policy issues.<sup>61</sup>

He implies that the U.S. policy makers should be clear about the conflicting interests with China. Besides that, “the U.S. should work with China” when their interests coincide.<sup>62</sup> Actually, there are numerous perspectives on Sino-US mutual benefits and cooperation. The world is now in the space age. If the U.S. and China were able to improve cooperation, it would benefit the people on a large scale.

Yi Zhou, a distinguished Chinese scholar and member of the Center for Space Science and Applied Research, identifies both China and the United States as “major players in the human access to and exploration of space.” Both governments support space collaboration with foreign nations in this field,<sup>63</sup> but they have no official agreement with each other on space cooperation. Most of the authors mentioned above, and numerous other scholars, warn that China’s development in military and space will threaten the international balance of power. Yi Zhou also maintains that the possible reason why there is no official agreement yet is that “China is concerned with the implications of U.S. military space capabilities for its security interests, and the U.S. reciprocally is concerned with the potential build-up of Chinese capabilities to counter U.S. military space capabilities.”<sup>64</sup> But he emphasizes that cooperation in space will

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61. Dean Cheng, “The Complicated History of U.S. Relations with China,” The Heritage Foundation, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/10/the-complicated-history-of-us-relations-with-china> (accessed April 30, 2013).

62. Ibid.

63. Yi Zhou, “Perspectives on Sino-U.S. Cooperation in Civil Space Programs,” *Space Policy* 24, no. 3 (2008): 132.

64. Ibid., 133.

actually benefit both the countries. For example, “Chinese participation in U.S.-led space exploration would send a strong signal to the world of good U.S.-China relations, which would be good for U.S. international relations and would provide geopolitical benefits.”

<sup>65</sup> In addition, cooperation could enhance America’s understanding about China’s space development accurately, advance scientific studies, reduce the risk and cost of space exploration by a single nation, and benefit America’s space industry.<sup>66</sup> Yi Zhou indicates that the main obstacles to achieve formal cooperation lie in geopolitical and space policy problems because of the lack of mutual understanding.

If the United States and China increase mutual understanding, they could cooperate in other area besides space, such as promoting regional peace. Prince Hassan of Jordan holds that the East-West world power balance is significant which should be promoted by “an authentic Euro-Atlantic policy toward the west Asian region.”<sup>67</sup> The reason is that the development of nuclear weapons as well as conflicts over controlling chokepoints to the oil reserves in that area will be the main causes of regional instability in the next decade. He asserts that the United Nations (especially the five permanent members) and the European Union should launch more actions to suppress west Asia’s unstable factors as “the emergence of a free and stable region on the southern flank of Nato and astride east-west communication lines, for example, would be a powerful enhancement of human security and global sustainability—even more were it to create

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65. Ibid., 134.

66. Ibid., 134.

67. Prince Hassan, “Halford Mackinder’s New World,” Open Democracy, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/halford-mackinder-s-new-world> (accessed April 11, 2013).

regional, inner-directed ‘smart power.’”<sup>68</sup> He criticizes narrow nationalism and expects “the revival of a religious philanthropy of spirit” which would contribute to “undercut moral and economic deprivation.”<sup>69</sup> He argues for a transnational, supranational, and regional cooperation over “natural and human resources as well as environmental and human-security issues”<sup>70</sup> in the Middle East. Similarly, if the United States and China cooperate over natural and human resources and environmental and human-security issues in the Pacific-Asia, the security and stability in that area would be largely improved.

### THE FUTURE

Jianfei Liu, a Chinese professor at the Institute for International Strategic Studies of China published an article called “Sino-U.S. Relations and Building a Harmonious World,” in which he provides general perspectives on Sino-American future cooperation. He argues that from Chinese perspective,

while advocating a harmonious world, China is promoting the building of a harmonious society domestically. The harmonious society is characterized by not only prosperity but also democracy and rule by law, equity and justice, stability and order, and the harmonious coexistence of humans and nature. Both harmonious society and a harmonious world are from the same philosophy.<sup>71</sup> America’s advocacy of “freedom, democracy, peace, governing by law and prosperity” is in accordance with “the philosophy behind the concept of a harmonious world.”<sup>72</sup> He believes that despite the fact that different social systems would lead to confrontations,

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68. Hassan.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Jianfei Liu, “Sino-U.S. Relations and Building a Harmonious World,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 18, no. 60 (2009): 479.

72. Ibid., 479.

this traditional fate among major powers in the history can be avoided if “the long term interests and happiness of the countries’ citizens are to be considered.”<sup>73</sup>

However, according to Liu, even though China and the United States share a common goal of building a harmonious and safe world, their different ideologies lead to different interpretations of a harmonious world. For example, China believes “diversity of civilization is a basic characteristic of human society” while the United States tends to always “promote Western democracy around the world.”<sup>74</sup> Also, “China advocates a multilateral approach to resolving security issues” while the United States has been “integrating unilateralism with multilateralism” in terms of how to maintain international security.<sup>75</sup> In order to improve mutual understanding, he suggests that the two should “strengthen cooperation, build strategic mutual trust,” especially by understanding China’s choice of a peaceful rise.<sup>76</sup> According to Liu, “democracy is one of China’s objectives; the Chinese nation has been striving for it for a century. But China has also taken many detours and encountered many frustrations in its pursuit of democracy. China must develop a mode of democratic politics that tailors to its own unique situation.”<sup>77</sup>

It has been previously noted that a deepening US.-China entente would bring with it increased possibilities for stable, sustained worldwide economic growth, the peaceful resolution of outstanding regional disputes, and the successful management of pressing global problems including terrorism, climate change, and the proliferation of nuclear

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73. Ibid., 480.

74. Ibid., 482.

75. Ibid., 483.

76. Liu, “Sino-U.S. Relations and Building a Harmonious World,” 490.

77. Ibid., 489.

weapons. But both the United States and China face obstacles to reach this goal. The United States should consider how it should respond responsibly to a coming international system of multi-polarity and realize the peaceful transition toward an American-Indian-Chinese condominium. For China, the primary question might be associated with its domestic policy since China's internal system has vibrant and intense debates on policy and social direction. In the future, in order to increase mutual understanding and mutual trust in Sino-American relations, the United States should respect China's economic development in its unique situation, and China should develop more cooperative dialogues among the United States and other Pacific-Asian states in terms of mutual benefits.

### **CONCLUSION**

The ruling class of the United States in the current decade needs to examine its foreign policy and find out what the true goals it needs to pursue globally. This paper assumes that the U.S. in the future will facilitate more dialogues among the Asia-Pacific countries by the reality that there exist great opportunities for reciprocity. Asia needs America's respect to its traditional order to maintain stability, and the United States needs Asia's cooperation concerning mutual threats and mutual benefits. The best method for enhancing cooperation is through mutual understanding, in terms of different geopolitical reality and conflicting values.

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