

Poised to Eat Our Lunch? : China's Rise and America's Perceptions under the Obama
Administration, 2009-2011

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Abstract

In his seminal book, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Views of China and India*, Harold Isaacs observes that U.S. perceptions of China have swung between two extremes over the historical course of U.S.-Sino relations. U.S. perceptions have been positive when China is weak, accommodating or ideologically aligned with the U.S.—as it was during the Kuomintang (KMT) Republican Era—and generally negative when China becomes combative or aggressive, as it was during the Korean and Vietnam wars, as well as the various Taiwan Strait Crises. This paper argues that U.S. perceptions of China have taken a precipitous downturn in the last two years under the Obama administration. This deterioration reaffirms Isaacs' theoretical framework given that in the last few years China's rise has been widely perceived as a threat to America's global interests. To examine this trend, this paper analyzes the discourse and rhetoric emerging from academia, policymaking circles, think tanks, the print media, Congress, and popular forms of entertainment such as television and movies, as well as the results of public opinion polls.

Introduction

Despite being published more than fifty years ago, Harold Isaacs' seminal book, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India*, is still extremely topical when discussing the way in which images and perceptions are formed and how these perceptions can influence American attitudes and policy toward China. According to Isaacs, relations between the U.S. and China have always been shaped by image and perception because "images, feelings, prejudices, and personality factors [...] get somehow cranked into the process of policy making."¹ Put another way, images and perceptions relate to U.S.-China relations in that they can set the broad context for policymaking. Isaacs, moreover, was the first to provide a systematic examination of the cyclical nature of American attitudes toward China, observing that U.S. perceptions of China have swung, often abruptly, between two extremes over the historical course of U.S.-Sino relations from threat/enemy to opportunity/partner.²

In total, U.S. perceptions of China can be thought of as having shifted through five major periods. Early U.S. perceptions were marked by ignorance, fascination and romanticization—largely the result of the little contact Americans had with China and Chinese people. In a telling letter written from the early days of the American republic, George Washington expresses astonishment at learning that the Chinese are not "white."³ The perception of a "mysterious East" however, soon gave way to the view that China was weak and backwards, a result of the Qing Dynasty's collapse, China's defeat in the Opium Wars, and the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842. Although China was considered a backwards nation during this time, there was an

¹ Harold R. Isaacs. *Scratches on Our Minds* (New York: John Day Co., 1958): xxviii

² Ibid, 71.

³ Warren I. Cohen, "American Perceptions of China, 1789-1911," In *China in the American Political Imagination*, Edited by Carola McGiffert, 25-30, Washington, DC: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2003.

element of sympathy in Americans' perceptions of China as the country endured the imperialism of multiple countries. By the early 20th century this sympathy would strengthen into more positive sentiments as China passed through its Republican Era, a period of time which saw the country embrace modernization and westernization. Positive U.S. perceptions were only augmented by the U.S.-China alliance during World War II. A sharp deterioration of U.S. perceptions would occur following the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) ascent to power, and these negative perceptions would be sustained throughout the Cold War and China's involvement in the Korean and Vietnam wars, as well as the various Taiwan Strait Crises. The final major turning point in U.S. perceptions would come with the normalization of relations between China and the U.S. in 1979, an event that would mark an upswing in U.S. sentiments towards China.

While these five periods mark the tidal shifts in U.S. views of China, since normalization there have been three smaller, less drastic changes in American perceptions: a downturn was initiated as a result of the Chinese government's brutal suppression of the 1989 popular student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square; perceptions subsequently improved during the latter days of the Clinton administration, a recovery that would continue into George W. Bush's presidency as underscored by then Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's urging of China to become a "responsible stakeholder;" and finally, under the current Obama administration, U.S. perceptions have once again deteriorated, a result of a confluence of different factors, including China's recent belligerence over its South and East China Sea dispute claims, its worsening human rights record, and growing economic clout. Using Isaacs' observation of a cyclical pattern in American perceptions of China as an overarching theoretical framework, this paper intends to examine the current downturn in U.S. perceptions of China, paying particular attention to how the perception

of a “China threat” has come to dominate many avenues of American society. This paper will analyze this trend in the discourse and rhetoric emerging from academia, policymaking circles, think tanks, the print media, Congress, and popular forms of entertainment such as television and movies, as well as the results of public opinion polls. However, it should be noted that while negative and threat perceptions of China have recently become prominent, there remain vocal camps casting China in a much more positive light, a reflection of how different groups and organizations have competing interests regarding the complex Sino-American relationship.

These sharp undulations in U.S. perceptions are attributable to few different factors. On one level, they reflect Americans’ simultaneous possession of contradictory perceptions towards China—on the one hand they romanticize the country as a faraway land of exoticism and mystery, while on the other they debase and fear monger it because of its stark differences from the U.S. Such paradoxical perceptions arguably stem from and are fueled by an emotional and superficial understanding of China, further complicated by a complex, multifaceted relationship between the U.S. and China. Additionally though, and perhaps more importantly, these cycles are driven by the status of China, both domestically and internationally. When China is weak, accommodating, or ideologically aligned with the U.S.—as it was during the Kuomintang (KMT) Republican Era—perceptions are generally favorable. Alternatively, a combative, aggressive China that is perceived to be on the rise engenders, without fail, a broad negative sentiment across American society.

Since the aftermath of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, China’s rise has restructured the international political landscape. The emergence of China as a major player on the international stage has meant that its tentacles of influence have begun to hold sway in innumerable aspects of the global order. As a result, China’s rise has had profound implications

on the U.S.-Sino relationship, transforming it into one of global importance as it now touches on a wide spectrum of issues ranging from economics to the environment to global security issues. Therefore, the U.S.-China relationship has great potential to tackle some of the world's most complex issues. However, inhibiting the progress of reaching such solutions are the deep mutual suspicions that exist between the countries, rooted in a long historical precedent. The persistence of these suspicions, particularly on the U.S. side, has become especially evident recently with the development of—as one commentator put it—“bubbling anti-China sentiment.”⁴

Before delving into a discussion of these perceptions however, this paper will first assess the historical arc of U.S. views of China, paying close attention to the cyclical nature of U.S. perceptions. This section considers not only the views of the “foreign policy elite,”—foreign policy officials, Congress, and non-officials such as foreign affairs specialists at research organizations, and academics—but also attempts to take into account the public's general sentiment towards China and how China was perceived in the media. Following this historical contextualization, this paper will then turn to current perceptions of China, chiefly focusing on developments and discourse from the last two years. Finally, it will conclude by hypothesizing on the future of U.S. perceptions towards China.

A Brief History: U.S. Perceptions of China

Early America to the End of the Chinese Civil War

Early American perceptions of China were largely influenced by medieval tales of the “mysterious East,” as propagated by Marco Polo and the writings of European philosophers of the Enlightenment. Writers such as Francois-Marie Voltaire praised China as the “wisest and

⁴ John Pomfret and Jon Cohen, “Poll shows concern about American influence waning as China's grows.” *New York Times*, February 25, 2011, accessed April 6, 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article /2010/02/24/AR2010022405168_pf.html

best policed nation of the world.”⁵ As such, many of the founders of the United States looked upon China with great regard, Benjamin Franklin even going so far as hoping that America would one day come to resemble China.⁶ It was during these early days of the republic that American merchants made their first commercial voyage to China, initiating Sino-American relations. These merchants were subsequently followed by missionaries, a constituency whose numbers rapidly grew over the coming years.⁷ It was these missionaries, in fact, that would come to heavily mold and influence the perceptions most Americans had of both China and the Chinese people beginning and extending into the 1800s. Through books, reports, and articles, these missionaries generally portrayed the Chinese as heathens, heavily associated with the concepts of cruelty, barbarism, inhumanity, dishonesty, and sexual perversion.⁸

In the 1800s these missionary influenced conceptions of China merged with other budding trends and American interests. The Qing Dynasty’s defeat by the British Empire in the Opium Wars, the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, and the Taiping Rebellion from 1850-1864, all played a role in giving credence to the missionaries’ view of China as a backwards and weak country. China’s unwillingness to receive western intercourse and ideals only exacerbated these increasing feelings of American contempt for China. Under the aegis of “Manifest Destiny,” an idea focused on American exceptionalism that gained popularity during the 1840s, America saw China as an uncivilized, wild nation that desperately needed change and development.⁹ Consequently, American sought to enter China under the banner of a divine

⁵ Harold R. Isaacs. *Scratches on Our Minds* (New York: John Day Co., 1958), 67.

⁶ Paul H. Clyde and Burton F. Beers. *The Far East: A History of the Western Impact and the Eastern Response, 1930-1970*. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hill, 1971),74.

⁷ Felix Greene *A Curtain of Ignorance*. (Norwich, Great Britain: Fletcher & Son, 1965), 4

⁸ Jonathan Goldstein. *America Views China: American Images of China: Then and Now*. (London: Associate University Presses, 1991) ,67-77.

⁹ Kenneth S. Latorette. *The History of Early Relations Between the United States and China*. (New York: Kraus, 1967), 124

mission. Additionally, the U.S. feared the Treaty of Nanjing, which granted the British access to five Chinese ports, would jeopardize American trade interests in China. As a result, some American officials saw the unrest, turmoil, and difficulties beleaguering the Qing Dynasty as the perfect context in which to extend the U.S. presence in China. As Peter Parker, the U.S. charge d'affaires to China from 1850-1853, wrote in a 1851 letter to Daniel Webster, then U.S. Secretary of State, the Tai Ping rebellion has “given the Western nations a good opportunity to extend their treaty privileges” in China.¹⁰

The turn of the century saw America become much more involved in East Asia. The 1890s saw the Industrial Revolution hit the United States and transform it into the world's leading manufacturing power. With this rapid economic development though, came an excess of products and capital, a problem that was only made worse by the Panic of 1893. New outlets for these products needed to be found, and China seemed to be an ideal destination. However, U.S. economic interests in the country were challenged by Germany, Russia, and France following the Sino-Japanese War of 1894. China's loss in this war not only saw China's weakness and backwardness reinforced in the minds of Americans, but it also resulted in the acquisition of German, French and Russian spheres of influence in China, a development the U.S. feared would push it out of China. The results of the Spanish-American War however, and specifically the United States' acquisition of the Philippines, enabled it to reassert itself in China to some degree. As President William McKinley stated before the twelfth Republican National Convention, “on the possession of the Philippines rests that admirable diplomacy which warned all nations that

¹⁰ Te-Kong Tong. *United States Diplomacy in China, 1840-60*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 115-6

American trade was not to be shut of China.”¹¹ Consequently, America was able to put forth its Open Door Policy, which attempted to gain declarations from all foreign powers in China that they would uphold China’s territorial and administrative integrity, as well as not interfere with the free use of treaty ports within their spheres of influence. America’s pursuit of this policy was in an effort to not only continue trade with China unabated, but also prevent the breaking-up of China due to foreign imperial ambitions, a development that would have also harmed U.S. interests in China.¹² To an extent, America began to view itself as China’s protector as a result of the Open Door Policy, with many Americans beginning to look sympathetically upon the Chinese as a frail people facing the unreasonably harsh demands of the major powers of the world.

The emergence of these sentiments towards China marked an upswing in U.S. perceptions of the country, a trend that would persist throughout the earlier half of the 20th century. The crumbling of the Qing Dynasty, weakened by foreign pressures and internal discontent, opened the country to Western ideas, and signaled the beginnings of a modernization and westernization process.¹³ Dr. Sun-Yatsen’s Republican Revolution in 1911 merely confirmed these perceptions. Sun, a baptized Christian, seemed to America to be just the man to lead China into a prosperous collaboration with the U.S. While Sun’s death in 1925 left the country in a power struggle, Chiang Kai-shek was ultimately able to unify much of China under the KMT. U.S. perceptions of Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist government were similarly positive, and as a result, the United States formally recognized the Nationalist government in

¹¹ LI Xiaodong, "American Policy on China, 1949-1971: A Study of Correlation between America's Perception of China and Its China Policy" (PhD diss., University of Hong Kong, 1998), 34, Proquest Research Library, accessed March 2, 2011.

¹² Goldstein. *America Views China*, 116-7

¹³ Ibid. 118

Nanjing in 1928. The 1930s, however, saw America's Open Door Policy face challenges, specifically from Japan's swift assault and expansion into Northeast China. While Japan's aggression in China worried the U.S. because of its potential impact on American economic interests in China as well as the international balance of power as a whole, the U.S. opted to initially pursue a "hands-off" strategy towards China.

By the late 1930s and early 1940s though, Japan's pushes deeper into China was significant cause for concern to America. As analyzed by Henry Morgenthau, Jr., the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury in 1937, "in the long run, a Japanese victory [in China] would greatly increase the chance of general world war, if only by encouraging other Fascist nations to aggression..."¹⁴ While official thinking was beginning to shift on the crisis in China, American opinion was also heavily aroused given the intense coverage of the Sino-Japanese War by media outlets; day after day the war was spread across the pages of U.S. newspapers, and movie clips revealed footage to millions of moviegoers of Chinese towns being bombed by Japanese forces. Furthermore, Japan's brutal conquest of Nanjing in December 1937 which resulted in the slaughter of thousands of Chinese revolted Americans. Because of the circumstances, during this time, more and more Americans not only believed that U.S. interests in China were in danger because of Japanese aggression, but also that the Chinese people, under Chiang Kai-Shek's leadership, were bravely and fearlessly combating the cruel and bloodthirsty Japanese. Resultantly, a deep sympathy and admiration for the Chinese people emerged in American society as illustrated by the selection of Chiang Kai-shek and his wife Song Mei-ling as the *Time* magazine "Man and Woman of the Year" for 1937.¹⁵

¹⁴ Xiaodong, "American Policy on China, 1949-1971," 46

¹⁵ "Man and Wife of the Year," *Time*, January 3, 1938, accessed March 2, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,847922-1,00.html>.

These perceptions, coupled with the creation of the Axis alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan in 1940, pushed President Franklin Roosevelt to extend Lend-Lease war materials to China.¹⁶ America's entry into World War II following the Pearl Harbor attack formally marked China's alliance with the United States, and with it America's admiration and support of China continued to grow through various measures attempting to raise the status of the Nationalist government. These efforts were based on the conviction that the Chinese, with the assistance of the U.S., might be able to hold back Japanese aggression in the East. Additionally, America hoped that a strong, powerful China would eventually help to guarantee both a peaceful world order in the future and an expansion of U.S. trade and commerce through the whole Pacific basin.¹⁷

In the latter stages of World War II however, and extending into the end of the 1940s, the perceptions of China and Chiang Kai-Shek, began to shift, particularly at the higher levels of government policy making. This shift however, was complicated by the increasingly popular and effective Chinese Communist Party, as well as by the onset of the Cold War, developments that constricted how the U.S. could alter its China policy.¹⁸ It became clear by 1943-1944 that the Nationalists would not play as active of a role in the war as expected. America's involvement in the Pacific War resulted in a number of American civil and military officials arriving in the Chinese theater. Expecting to find an organized Nationalist front, instead, these officials found a country in vast disarray and disunity. They found themselves dealing with greedy, corrupt, and inept civil and military officials, and discovered that Chiang was more concerned with maintaining his position than with fighting the Japanese. As a result, Chiang used much of the

¹⁶ Xiaodong, "American Policy on China, 1949-1971," 49

¹⁷ Ibid, 51

¹⁸ Greene, *A Curtain of Ignorance*, 17

equipment the Nationalists received through Lend-Lease not to fight the Japanese, but to protect his government against insurrection and deposition, notably from the CCP led by Mao Zedong.¹⁹ While such reports found their way back to Washington, and even influenced some officials to take a stand against America's continued assistance to the Nationalists, overall the effect was marginal on influencing the United States' China policy. Despite the regime's corruption and ineffectiveness, most American policy makers thought that the U.S. policy of supporting and cooperating with the KMT was essential for America's wartime interests and long term interests in the Far East.²⁰ Support for and positive perceptions of the KMT were further consolidated by the creation and influence of the China Lobby in the United States, a coalition of Nationalist officials in the U.S. and right-wing, politically influential Americans such as Henry Morgenthau, Henry Luce, the publisher of *Time* and *Life* magazines, Harry Hopkins, a close adviser of President Roosevelt, and various Congressman.²¹ This coalition was a major factor in securing American support and sympathy for Chiang's regime, from its inception in the 1940s well into the 1960s.

Furthermore, with Japan's defeat and the conclusion of World War II, America's attention quickly shifted to countering the strength of the Soviet Union and its expansionist endeavors. U.S. President Harry S. Truman on March 12th, 1947 articulated what would later become known as the Truman Doctrine, stating that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Xiaodong, "American Policy on China, 1949-1971," 57.

pressure.”²² While this speech was specifically for the purposes of supporting Greece and Turkey with economic and military aid to prevent their falling into the Soviet sphere, in a broad sense it marked America’s realization that Soviet expansion was a threat worldwide to America’s national security interests. These circumstances further entrenched the U.S. policy of supporting Chiang and the Nationalists, especially in the context of the Chinese Civil War which resumed in full force after the end of World War II. Neither the majority of American policy makers nor the America public were willing to accept a China led by the CCP, for China under communist leadership was seen as a victory of Soviet expansion.²³ That being said however, there were a few voices from within the government, notably George Kennan, head of the Policy Planning Staff, and George Marshall, Secretary of State under President Truman, who believed the U.S. should reevaluate its China policy given the KMTs rapidly deteriorating position in the country, and the inevitable CCP victory in the civil war.²⁴ These individuals believed that America should take a more flexible approach towards China and particularly the CCP. However, these sentiments were largely in the minority, with attitudes toward China and the CCP more often aligning with the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which warned that the Chinese communists were “Moscow inspired and motivated by the same basic totalitarian and antidemocratic policies as are the Communist Parties in other countries of the world. Accordingly, they should be regarded as tools of the Soviet policy.”²⁵ With this perception of

²² Harry S. Truman, "Special Message to Congress on Greece and Turkey: The Truman Doctrine " (Speech to a Joint Session of Congress, United States Congress, United States Congress Building, Washington D.C., March 12, 1947), Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, accessed March 2, 2011, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=2189&st=&st1=>.

²³ Nancy S. Simon, "From the Chinese Civil War to the Shanghai Communique: Changing U.S. Perceptions of China as a Security Threat" (PhD diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1982), 101-2, Proquest Research Library, accessed March 2, 2011.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Xiaodong, "American Policy on China, 1949-1971," 66

Chinese communists dominating American thought, the stage was set for a new chapter of U.S.-Sino relations following the Communist Party victory on the mainland in 1949.

U.S. Perceptions in the 1950s

In the immediate aftermath of the Chinese Civil War, there was a hope among some American policy makers that the Chinese communists could follow in a similar path to the communists in Yugoslavia, as led by Tito in 1948, by breaking away from Soviet control. These policy makers asserted that like the Yugoslavian Communist Party, the CCP was indigenous politically, organizationally, and ideologically and as a result would eventually come to desire its autonomy from Moscow. President Truman's Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, came to be arguably the biggest proponent of this view as he believed that the CCP was a patriotic group who were, "Chinese first, Communist second."²⁶ Because Acheson believed that Mao had the potential to be the next Tito, he urged for a more accommodating U.S. policy towards the mainland. Additionally supported by George Kennan and his Policy Planning Staff, this view acquired some traction in government circles, even gaining the tacit accession of President Truman who agreed that the people of China would "never be communists" because the ideology ran antithetical to Chinese society and would eventually alienate the Chinese people.²⁷

These somewhat conciliatory attitudes however, came under great scrutiny and criticism—particularly from the conservative camp—after a number of events in the early 1950s effectively portrayed the Chinese as agents of the Soviet Union. Consequently, any momentum for potential change in America's China policy was abruptly stalled. In China, Mao made his famous "lean-to-one-side" speech in June 1949, essentially declaring that China would align

²⁶Ibid, 107-8

²⁷ Ibid

itself with the Soviet Union.²⁸ Furthermore, the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 and China's military involvement in the war only furthered the belief that China was a mere puppet of Moscow. As it was understood by most policy makers and Americans it was the Soviets who ordered the attacks on South Korea, an order carried about by communist China, the spearhead of Soviet international expansion in Asia. The Korean War in fact, raised Beijing's international prestige, as it was seen to have been able to frustrate the mighty U.S.²⁹ Moreover, Mao was able to use the war to help modernize China's army and rehabilitate the country's economy. The intervention of Chinese troops in Korea appeared to have benefited the CCP regime, a development that led U.S. policy makers to once again recalibrate their perceptions of Beijing.

In a major departure from the belief many officials held in 1949-1950 that Chinese nationalism and Beijing's desire for autonomy would ultimately clash with Soviet ambitions, the prevailing conviction in the wake of the Korean War was that China was the Kremlin's only voluntary and genuine ally and that there was little prospect for Titoism in China. In fact, by the end of 1953, the NSC concluded that China's strength and its relatively independent status reinforced the bonds between the two communist powers and precluded a split between the countries, at least for the time being.³⁰ Most Americans therefore—both inside and outside of government—had come to believe that the CCP was the major threat to American security interests in Asia and the Pacific. The Chinese had become the “Yellow Peril,” paralleling the Soviet Union's “Red Scare.”

This perception of China was at play in the American interpretations of the developing crisis in Vietnam, as well as the two Taiwan Strait Crises of 1954-1955 and 1958. In regards to

²⁸ Ibid, 109.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid, 116-7.

Vietnam, U.S. policy makers saw the threat of communist influence and coercion in Vietnam as the first phase of the communist agenda to seize all of Southeast Asia. Essentially, Vietnam was the first domino that would cause all the other dominoes in Southeast Asia to fall to communism, a belief articulated by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The Eisenhower administration, moreover, linked the loss of any single state in Southeast Asia to the stability of the U.S., believing that communist domination of any one of these countries would not only jeopardize U.S. security interests but also have critical psychological and political consequences.³¹ As a result, America was determined to deny any possible victory or advantage to China in Southeast Asia, a goal it pursued by escalating its presence in the Vietnam conflict. Similar attitudes persisted during the two Taiwan Strait Crises of the 1950s. In both crises American interpretations of the events were guided by the domino theory, and the need to maintain the security of Taiwan for the sake of American prestige and U.S. strategic positioning in Asia.

Additional developments on the international front led to the further vilification of China by the end of the 1950s. By 1956 the illusion of the monolithic communist partnership between China and the Soviet Union began to crack with Nikita Khrushchev's denouncement of Stalinism, acceptance of different roads to socialism, and pledge—aimed at the U.S.—that the Soviet Union would “peacefully co-exist” with capitalist countries. China's CCP rejected these ideas of de-stalinization, opting to staunchly stand by the tenets of revolutionary Marxism.³² While American leaders interpreted the new Soviet line as a positive development for U.S.-Soviet relations, they took the Chinese refusal to dissociate from Stalin as a major threat to America. John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State under President Eisenhower, went as far as calling the

³¹ Ibid, 119-120.

³² Gordon H. Chang. *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1949-72* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 1990), 160

Chinese, “the most dedicated imitators of Stalin,” and continued by asserting that “that the risk [from communist China] was greater than from Soviet Russia.”³³

Exacerbating these negative perceptions of China were also domestic developments, notably the rise of McCarthyism and the strengthening China Lobby. McCarthyite Republicans worked together with the China Lobby, and other pro-KMT players, in using China as an issue to ride into power in the 1952 presidential election, attacking the Truman administration for being too soft on communism and tapping into the domestic fears of communist subversion.³⁴ McCarthyism’s influence, furthermore, resulted in the dismissal of many China specialists in government who were condemned for being pro-Communist because they had written factual reports about the growing strength of the CCP during the KMT regime on the mainland or were critical of Chiang Kai-shek. By the late 1950s, almost none of the China-trained experts remained in positions where they could use their knowledge and experience to modify U.S. policy.³⁵

U.S. Perceptions in the 1960s and Early 1970s

For much of the earlier part of the 1960s, there was no significant divergence in the United States’ negative perceptions of China, in fact, several events and developments arguably vilified China even further. China, in continuing with its support for communist forces in Southeast Asia, ramped up its commitments to both the Communist Pathet Lao in the Laotian Civil War, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in North Vietnam during the Vietnam War.³⁶ President John F. Kennedy came to understand this Chinese behavior in very much the same light as his predecessor, Dwight D. Eisenhower, saw China’s increasing presence in

³³ Ibid

³⁴ John K. Fairbank. *Chinabound: A Fifty-year Memoir*. (New York: Harper & Row Publisher, 1982.), 350-1.

³⁵ Greene, *A Curtain of Ignorance*, 62

³⁶ Xiaodong, “American Policy on China, 1949-1971,” 186.

Southeast Asia. Kennedy, as Eisenhower did, believed that if Vietnam or any other country in region were to fall to communism so would the rest of Southeast Asia, thereby undermining American influence abroad. To combat the pressure of communism therefore, Kennedy pledged that the U.S. would “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty.”³⁷

Further damaging U.S. perceptions of China was the growing schism between the Soviets and the Chinese. By the end of the 1950s and into the early 1960s, it became clear to the U.S. that the split had become irreparable, and that China, at least for the time being, had become the more aggressive and bellicose of the two communist nations. China’s hard-line strategy aimed at the U.S.—and capitalism in general—was undermined by the Soviet-American summit of 1959, which resulted in what was known as the “Spirit of Camp David,” an accession by both parties that settling differences through negotiations was preferred.³⁸ In the same year the Soviet Union terminated its 1957 agreement with China that pledged the Soviet Union to help China produce its own nuclear weapons. From this point until the mid-1960s, the Soviets recalled all of their technicians and advisers from China, and abruptly reduced or canceled economic and technical aid to the CCP. As a result, China began to openly criticize the Soviet Union, asserting that the Soviet Union was cowering before U.S. imperialism. Mao lambasted Khrushchev as being too appeasing to the West, criticizing him for his “revisionism” of Marxism, and attacking him for his “peaceful co-existence” doctrine, which directly conflicted with Mao’s “lean-to-one-side” foreign policy.³⁹ At a deeper level, China was concerned that this mild thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations was indicative of the two super-powers’ desire to dominate the world at the expense of

³⁷ John F. Kennedy, *Inaugural Address*, (January 20, 1961).

³⁸ Xiaodong, “American Policy on China, 1949-1971,” 188-9

³⁹ Ibid. 190

China and other socialist and nationalist nations. These suspicions were confirmed when in July 1963, the Soviet Union, U.S. and Britain, signed the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, prohibiting all test detonations of nuclear weapons except underground. The Chinese vehemently condemned the treaty viewing it as an attempt to impede China's possession of nuclear warheads and maintain the nuclear hegemony of the imperialist countries.⁴⁰ As a result, the Chinese energetically worked to obtain the nuclear bomb, ultimately succeeding in 1964 to the horror and dismay of U.S. policy makers and the American public.

Kennedy's assassination in 1963 and the subsequent swearing in of Lyndon B. Johnson as his successor had little impact on America's China policy, as many of the perceptions of China that featured prominently during the Kennedy administration were similarly held under Johnson's presidency. However, by the mid 1960s significant changes had begun to occur on the international stage signaling that Beijing's global influence and status was steadily improving despite U.S. efforts to isolate the CCP regime. In January 1964, France infuriated Washington by breaking off formal relations with the Republic of China, headed by the KMT on Taiwan and formally recognizing the CCP's People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland. Trade between China and a number of countries, including Britain, Canada and Japan increased dramatically over the 1960s, despite the objections of the U.S. Even more notable was Beijing's diplomatic success in Africa. Premier Zhou Enlai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi conducted a tour of Africa in early 1964, confirming friendly ties with a number of African nations. Soon afterwards, fourteen African nations recognized Beijing and ended their formal relations with the KMT on Taiwan. To most in the Johnson administration, however, these developments, coupled with China's acquisition of the nuclear bomb, its advocacy of the Maoist strategy of protracted

⁴⁰ Ibid.

guerrilla warfare in developing countries, and the deteriorating situation in Vietnam, merely reaffirmed the perception that China was a growing threat.

While there was a high level of continuity throughout the 1950s and 1960s of the negative U.S. perceptions of China and the resultant U.S. policies meant to isolate and oppose the CCP, the end of the decade saw the emergence of trends that would eventually lead to the reversal of these unfavorable perceptions and the formal rapprochement between the two countries in 1972. By the mid-to-late 1960s, with the U.S. war effort in Vietnam rapidly souring and the anti-war movement in America gaining significant momentum, cries for a recalibration of the United States' China policy began to gather momentum due to China's role in the conflict. Furthermore, by the 1960s it became apparent to many policy makers and Americans that communist China was not a passing phase but rather an important player in international relations that could no longer be ignored. As a result, a number of Congressmen, generally Democrats, began to speak out against the rigid, anti-China policies of the U.S. Most notable was Senator J. William Fulbright, a Democrat from Arkansas, who declared that it would be useful if the U.S. "could introduce an element of flexibility, or, more precisely, of the capacity to be flexible, into our relations with Communist China."⁴¹ Similarly, Richard Nixon, who was formerly the staunch anti-China Vice President during Eisenhower's administration, wrote an article for *Foreign Affairs* in 1967 entitled "Asia after Vietnam," in which he warned that the U.S. could "not afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations," and recommended that the U.S. pursue a policy "designed to persuade Peking that its interests can be served only by accepting the basic rules of international civility."⁴²

⁴¹ Xiaodong, "American Policy on China, 1949-1971," 212.

⁴² Richard M. Nixon "Asia After Viet Nam" *Foreign Affairs*, (October 1967). Accessed March 2, 2011. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/23927/richard-m-nixon/asia-after-viet-nam>

Even outside of government circles, however, attitudes toward China were beginning to change as the American mood seemed to desire more contact with the Chinese mainland. For example, in the fall of 1965 a group of students and faculty members at Yale University began a nation-wide campaign calling for a new United States policy towards China. The group published a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* that called for a “nation-wide reappraisal” of American policy in the Far East, and urged that the PRC should be admitted to the United Nations.⁴³ The most enthusiastic supporters of a new U.S. approach for China however, came from academia. Individuals such as John K. Fairbank, Donald Zagoria, and Hans Morgenthau all urged that the U.S. recognize communist China as a great power, accept a reasonable amount of Chinese influence in Asia, and establish formal relations with Beijing.⁴⁴

Such sentiments would carry over and coalesce with other important factors developing during the Nixon administration. By the early 1970s it was apparent that America’s position of global dominance had begun to wane. The American-Soviet balance in terms of military capabilities had largely been asymmetrical in the favor of the U.S. for the better part of the Cold War. By 1970 however, it seemed that the Soviets had reached parity with the U.S. At the same time, it appeared that the Soviet Union, under the Brezhnev Doctrine, which promulgated that the Soviet Union had the right to define and enforce the proper “road to socialism,” had once again become aggressive. In Vietnam, the U.S. continued its fight to prevent South Vietnam’s defeat, but with each passing year victory seemed less likely, and the war effort only grew increasingly unfavorable among the domestic populous. At home, moreover, the country was moving towards recession as the high cost of financing the Vietnam War was severely straining the nation’s economy. It was under these conditions that Nixon significantly recalibrated the

⁴³ Xiaodong, "American Policy on China, 1949-1971," 217.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 217-8

United States' policy towards China. Nixon accepted and understood that America's power was limited as its global position declined, and that the Soviet Union threat was growing.⁴⁵ Therefore, America had to concentrate its limited strength on Europe, counterbalancing the Soviet threat there, as it was long considered the vital region in the Cold War. To this end, America had to reduce its commitments in Asia and specifically end the American presence in the Vietnam War, which Nixon completed in 1973. Furthermore, the ending of the American presence in Vietnam allowed Nixon to improve America's relations with China, a goal he sought to achieve in pursuit of his strategy of "triangular diplomacy." Nixon hoped that through a subtle triangle of relations between Washington, Beijing and Moscow, the U.S. could exploit the Sino-Soviet rift in order to improve the possibility of accommodations with both countries.⁴⁶ As a result, in February 1972 Nixon made his famous official visit to China, signaling a major breakthrough in and rapprochement of Sino-American relations. Nixon's trip and the thawing of relations with the PRC—which were largely welcomed by both policy makers and those outside of government as there had already been mounting pressure for the U.S. to alter its policy towards China—paved the way for the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué in 1979, transferring U.S. diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing.

From the Shanghai Communiqué to the Obama Administration

During the better part of the 1970s and 1980s, China became a rival of the Soviet Union and a foe of North Vietnam in the wake of North Vietnam's 1978 invasion of Cambodia, which ended the reign of the PRC-backed Khmer Rouge. Moreover, the U.S. no longer viewed China as an active threat to South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and Southeast Asia. Instead, Washington

⁴⁵ Ibid, 230

⁴⁶ Ibid, 231

began to view Beijing as a cooperative partner and counterweight to growing Soviet power.⁴⁷

The emergence of this strategic understanding with China based on a common opposition to Soviet power and North Vietnam resulted in an uptick in U.S. perceptions of the PRC. This was facilitated further in the latter part of this period, by China's opening-up policies which produced an image of Beijing as a pro-market, reform-oriented regime with increasingly liberal economic goals. Many in the U.S. believed that the unleashing of market forces in the country would move China towards a more open political system.⁴⁸ This perception additionally helped fuel the mainstream view that Americans should not criticize China's form of government or espouse democracy for China, because the Chinese were said to have different values and a different culture.⁴⁹ China's opening-up and reforms were also seen as providing an avenue for U.S. business opportunities and for the integration of China into the larger U.S.-led international system.⁵⁰ China's strategic significance to the United States combined with the image of China as a liberalizing state, together resulted in a significant increase in U.S. defense-related assistance to China during this time. Such resources were justified within most U.S. defense circles given China's backward, largely ground-based military power with a primarily reactive and defensive military doctrine.⁵¹ As such, there was little concern that China presented a threat to U.S. power in the Asia Pacific region.

The end of the post-Cold War era however, had a marked effect on U.S. perceptions of China with several new developments leading to a striking shift of views. The collapse of the

⁴⁷ Michael D. Swaine, "Perceptions of the American National Security Elite," In *China in the American Political Imagination*. Edited by Carola McGiffert., 71. Washington, DC: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2003.

⁴⁸ James Mann, "Left, Right, Mainstream, and Goldilocks," In *China in the American Political Imagination*. Edited by Carola McGiffert., 41. Washington, DC: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2003.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Swaine, "Perceptions of the American National Security Elite," 72

⁵¹ Ibid.

Soviet Union removed the most important adhesive element to the previous U.S.-China strategic cooperative. Additionally, the events of Tiananmen Square in June 1989—which saw Beijing brutally suppress popular student demonstrations—contrasted by the emergence of a pluralistic, democratic political process in Taiwan during the late 1980s and early 1990s, led many in the U.S., including the general public and those apart of the “foreign policy elite,” to conclude that the Chinese government remained fundamentally hostile to American values and no longer offered a strategic rationale for cooperative relations.⁵² These perceptions were further exacerbated by accelerating levels of Chinese economic growth which led some to begin viewing China as a growing strategic threat to the United States.⁵³ In response to this downturn in perceptions the U.S. dropped its defense assistance to China and imposed various types of economic and technological sanctions on Beijing. Resultantly, some politicians, officials, and scholars, as well as many conservative zealots in the defense community, began to adopt an image of the PRC as an evil, strong, repressive, expansionist regime that needed to be contained in a similar fashion as the former Soviet Union was during the Cold War.⁵⁴ These groups argued for more effective limits on U.S. contact with China and greater efforts to pressure Beijing on issues such as human rights through the use of economic and political pressures.

Bill Clinton was able to take advantage of these sentiments during the 1992 Presidential campaign, riding into office in part by blasting then President George H.W. Bush for his handling of China. Clinton accused Bush of “coddling” the “butchers of Beijing” for not reacting strongly enough against the CCP’s use of deadly force to break up the peaceful protests in

⁵² Ibid, 73

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Mann, “Left, Right, Mainstream, and Goldilocks,” 42-3

Tiananmen Square.⁵⁵ To Clinton, and many Americans, the president had been wrong to downplay human rights in the United States' policy toward China. Clinton promised that he would be firmer. Despite the rhetoric of his campaign however, during Clinton's first two years in office his administration decided China was stronger and more powerful within Asia than it had originally thought, both economically and strategically.⁵⁶ As a result, the administration reversed course, abandoning its initial firm stance towards China, and taking on a "principled pragmatic approach," reflecting the Clinton administration's new belief that China was too important and too economically vital to try to isolate and that engagement through diplomacy and trade were the best ways to influence the country's behavior.⁵⁷ Therefore, Clinton opted to continue the precedent of granting China Most Favored Nation (MFN) status, despite denouncing Bush's decision to do so after the Tiananmen incident, and ultimately delinked annual MFN renewal for China and the country's human rights record in 1994. Additionally, Clinton put forth his "three no's" policy, also indicative of the administration's new-found pragmatism, which included: no recognizing two Chinas, i.e. one China and one Taiwan; no supporting independence for Taiwan; and no backing Taiwan to join international organizations that required sovereignty and statehood for membership.

Moreover, by the mid-1990s there was the growing belief of many, both inside and outside of policymaking circles, that China had become a potentially serious threat to U.S. interests.⁵⁸ This change came largely as a result of several specific events that occurred during this time, including: the 1995-6 Taiwan Strait Crisis, during which the PRC tested missiles in the

⁵⁵ Peter Baker. "Bush, Clinton and China," *Washington Post*, April 8, 2008, accessed April 6, 2011, http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/04/08/bush_clinton_and_china.html

⁵⁶ Mann, "Left, Right, Mainstream, and Goldilocks," 43

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Suisheng Zhao, "The Transformation of U.S.-China Relations," In *China and the United States: Cooperation and Competition in Northeast Asia*, edited by Suisheng Zhao., 9-31. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

waters surrounding Taiwan, intending to send a strong signal to the Taiwanese government who was perceived as moving its foreign policy away from the One-China policy; the increasing focus in Chinese strategic writings on the United States as both Beijing's primary adversary in the Asia Pacific region and a likely supporter of Taiwanese independence; and China's huge defense spending increases which saw the country acquire and develop significant power projection forces as well as modernize and enhance the organization, procedures, and training of its military, efforts focused chiefly on the task of coercing or conquering Taiwan.⁵⁹ This perception, while forcing a tepid response late in the Clinton administration, really developed significant momentum during the subsequent administration of George W. Bush.

George W. Bush called China a strategic competitor rather than a strategic partner during his presidential election campaign in an attempt to distinguish his Republican administration from the previous Clinton administration.⁶⁰ At the outset of his administration Bush reversed many of the Clinton administration's China policies and took a tougher position against China on some sensitive issues during his first year. On the most sensitive issue—Taiwan—the Bush administration avoided mentioning Clinton's "three no's" policy. Instead, the administration vehemently reiterated America's obligation to defend Taiwan as outlined by the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979, which was subsequently updated and strengthened by the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act of 2000. Additionally, in April 2001 Bush approved the largest package of arms sales to Taiwan since his father, George H.W. Bush, did nearly a decade before. Eschewing Clinton's strategic ambiguity involving Taiwan, Bush clearly stated in a television interview in 2001, that his administration would take whatever actions necessary if the PRC were

⁵⁹ Swaine, "Perceptions of the American National Security Elite," 73

⁶⁰ Suisheng Zhao, "The Transformation of U.S.-China Relations," 9-31.

to attack Taiwan.⁶¹ Furthermore, a midair collision of a Chinese jetfighter with a U.S. Navy reconnaissance plane over the South China Sea in 2001 touched off a tense crisis between the countries that resulted in a sharp mutual souring of feelings and perceptions.

The September 11th terrorist attacks however, marked a turning point in the Bush administration's position regarding China. It became clear in the post 9/11 landscape that the U.S. would need to work with Beijing in order to build a global coalition against terrorism. Bush's realization of this was illustrated by his proposal of a "constructive, cooperative, and candid" relationship with China, as well as Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's urging of China to become a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system.⁶² China responded favorably even beyond the realm of terrorism, cooperating with the Bush administration on a number of strategically important issues, including: sustaining progress in the Six-Party Talks regard North Korea's nuclear weapons program; combating weapons of mass destruction proliferation; and responding to the growing nontraditional threats to international security such as poverty and disease.⁶³ However, there were still a number of issues that were severe sticking points in some Americans' perceptions of China during the Bush administration, particularly in the defense community, Congress, parts of the Department of State, and some special interest groups. These included: the link between the Chinese government and the human rights abuses in Sudan; the growing imbalance in the U.S.-Sino economic relationship and China's perceived currency manipulation; the perceived threat of Chinese cyber-espionage; China's rapidly growing military spending; China's growing global reach into Latin American and Middle Eastern countries;

⁶¹ Suisheng Zhao, "The Transformation of U.S.-China Relations," 18-9

⁶² Ibid. 19

⁶³ Ibid. 19

China's 2007 anti-satellite weapons test; and the anti-Chinese riots in Tibet in early 2008.⁶⁴ That being said though, by 2008 the primary focus of most Americans was the upcoming presidential election. The American economy, teetering on the brink of recession with mounting unemployment and inflation, as well the continuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were upmost in people's minds. China was not a major issue, reflecting a relatively stable overall U.S. perception of China that would carry over into the beginnings of the Obama administration.

The Obama administration was fortunate enough to inherit what some believed to be a Sino-American relationship that was the best it had been since the events of Tiananmen Square in 1989.⁶⁵ As such, it quickly reached out to Beijing in attempt to push the relationship forward. Signaling that the U.S. wanted to pursue a cooperative and comprehensive partnership, Presidents Obama and Hu Jintao had their first face-to-face meeting on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit in London in 2009; Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Beijing in February of 2009; and military-to-military exchanges between the countries were put back on track under Obama. Additionally, the chronic problem of Taiwan, which had long been a sticking point in the U.S.-Sino relationship, had reached low ebb by the outset of the Obama administration, largely the result of Taiwan president Ma Ying-jeou's efforts to promote greater cross-Strait engagement. Consequently, some issues, most notably human rights, had seemed to be marginalized in the pursuit of strategic interests; during Hillary Clinton's 2009 visit to China many believed that comments she made effectively placed human rights on the backburner of the

⁶⁴ Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response To China*, 5th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 273.

⁶⁵ David Shambaugh, "Early Prospects of the Obama Administration's Strategic Agenda with China," Brookings, accessed April 6, 2011, last modified April 2009, http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2009/04_china_shambaugh.aspx.

U.S.-China relationship.⁶⁶ However, the feelings of cooperation and partnership have severely deteriorated in the last two years of the Obama administration, a trend that has been mirrored by perceptions in public opinion, academia, congress, think tanks, the print media, and popular entertainment.

Current Perceptions

In a 1999 *Foreign Affairs* article Gerald Segal posed the question: “does China matter?” Although he responded that, “at best, China is a second-rank middle power that has mastered the art of diplomatic theater,” it has become clear in the intervening years that China’s dramatic rise has far exceeded even the most optimistic of pundits.⁶⁷ As one observer asserted in 2006 on China’s rise, “Czarist Russia’s emergence in the 18th-century European system and the respective rise of Germany and Japan at the end of the 19th century were comparatively of far less magnitude.”⁶⁸ The controversial questions that have emerged in lieu of Segal’s query are: will China use its rising global clout to challenge the current international system, and if so, what will this mean for the U.S., the system’s architect and leader?

Despite theoretical claims of equality⁶⁹ and anarchy⁷⁰ in the modern nation-state system, it is acknowledged by national leaders that a clear hierarchical power structure exists. While this hierarchy is in constant fluctuation because of variations in relative power driven by the growth rates of different nation-states and the vacillating movements of capital and resources across borders, a hegemonic state generally sits atop it. This hegemon commands the dominant position

⁶⁶ Richard Spencer, "<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/4735087/Hillary-Clinton-Chinese-human-rights-secondary-to-economic-survival.html>," *The Telegraph*, February 20, 2009, accessed April 20, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/4735087/Hillary-Clinton-Chinese-human-rights-secondary-to-economic-survival.html>.

⁶⁷ Gerald Segal, “Does China Matter?” *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 5 (September-October 1999): 24

⁶⁸ David Gosset, “A New World with Chinese Characteristics,” *Asia Times Online*, April 7, 2006

⁶⁹ As articulated by the Charter of the United Nations.

⁷⁰ According to the realist school of thinking in international relations.

over other states, a rank that rests on its robust economic base and superior military capabilities, and is often augmented by its soft normative power. Given the hegemonic power's favorable position in the international community it has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo of the established international system as its values, norms, and interests are universalized and thus come to define the system's institutions and values. That being said however, in all of history there has never been a hegemonic state able to maintain its power indefinitely. Rising powers often begin to demand and force change in the hierarchical power structure as their capabilities and global influence begin to approach parity with those of the hegemonic power.⁷¹ This is because rising powers have historically been unsatisfied with the status quo system created according to the dominant state's values and interests, and want to reconstruct the rules and institutions of the system to adhere to their own interests and values.⁷² These diametrically opposed positions of maintaining the status-quo and restructuring the entire system have often created rivalries between hegemons and rising powers fraught with tension and potential for conflict.

Indeed, history is littered with examples of power competition between rising powers and their hegemonic counterparts. Whether or not a systemic power transition actually took place, these rivalries still often caused disruptive conflicts and even large-scale wars. During the 20th century, barring the competition between the U.S. and United Kingdom, which resulted in a relatively peaceful power transition from British to American hegemony, all other great power competitions were violent and tumultuous. For instance, the rivalry between Germany and the United Kingdom during the early part of the century was one of the causes that fueled World

⁷¹ Suisheng Zhao, "The Transformation of U.S.-China Relations," in *China and the United States: Cooperation and Competition in Northeast Asia*, ed. Suisheng Zhao (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 11-12

⁷² Ibid.

War I; the challenge that rising Germany and Japan and their aggressive behavior presented in the 1930s led directly to World War II; and the competition between the Soviet Union and the U.S. resulted in the prolonged Cold War.

In today's world the U.S. remains the dominant power of the international structure, a position it acquired following the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, U.S. preeminence is being called into question by China's rise. The remarkable economic growth China has experienced in recent decades has been unprecedented. Since the start of its economic reforms in 1978, the PRC's economy has been able to maintain an annual average growth rate of 10% over the last thirty years, a feat that has propelled it to its current position as the world's second largest economy, its fastest-growing major economy, and largest exporter.⁷³ Particularly remarkable about the Chinese economy is not only the speed and consistency with which it has been able to grow, even through the global financial crisis, but its enormous potential. Given the sheer size of its population and the rising productivity of its workers, China will one day regain its position as the world's largest economy, a title it held for centuries until the early 19th century. Although such projections are generally laden with uncertainties, some experts claim that China's economy could overtake that of the United States by 2027.⁷⁴

China's economic fortunes have in turn brought significant developments on various other fronts. As was true of the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, China is using its rapidly growing economy to develop and expand its military and naval capabilities. A fast growing GDP has made it comparatively easy for the CCP to sustain a large and expanding military modernization effort, and as a result, in recent years China's spending on arms and

⁷³ *CIA-The World Factbook*, s.v. "China," by Central Intelligence Agency, accessed March 20, 2011, last modified March 8, 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>.

⁷⁴ Kevin Hamlin and Yanping Li, "China Overtakes Japan as World's Second-Biggest Economy," *Bloomberg News*, August 16, 2010

military equipment has grown at an impressive pace, a trend that will only continue, and is in fact due to increase.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, China has taken advantage of its rising economic power to assert its influence throughout Asia and expand to other regions of the world. As a rising economic, political, and military power, China's diplomatic activity has extended into Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. While China has not yet reached a level of global power commensurate with that of the U.S., its rapid rise has profoundly transformed the Sino-U.S. relationship making it increasingly strategic, globally significant, and multifaceted. Consequently, a vociferous debate has emerged among scholars and policymakers on the implications of China's rise for U.S.-China relations, the theoretical positions of which are expertly discussed in Aaron Friedberg's 2005 article "The Future of U.S.-China Relations" in *International Security*.⁷⁶

As previously noted, this paper intends to prove that U.S. perceptions of China have once again taken a precipitous downturn in the last two years, enabling the perception of a "China threat" to become dominant in many avenues of American society. It is evident, particularly in academic and think tank literature, as well policymaking circles, that these negative perceptions are heavily rooted in the theoretical framework that Friedberg terms "pessimistic realism," or otherwise known as "alarmist realism,"—however, as will be discussed, by no means does "pessimistic realism" shade all negative or threat perceptions in these avenues.⁷⁷ These alarmists and pessimists look at world politics as a zero-sum game and assert that there will be no win-win situation accompanying the rise of China because an expansion of China's power status and

⁷⁵ Peter Foster, "China to increase defence spending by 12.7 per cent in 2011," *The Telegraph*, March 4, 2011

⁷⁶ Aaron L. Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?" *International Security* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2005):7-45

⁷⁷ Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?": 16-24; Zhao, "The Transformation of U.S.-China Relations": 13-4

political power will in turn cause the decline of other states' power status and political power.⁷⁸

For these realists, China's rapid economic growth could transform not only the country's economy into one that is modern and developed, but also its foreign policy as it seeks to alter the status quo of the international system. According to them, a rising China will want to define its interests more expansively and seek a greater degree of influence in the zero-sum environment of international politics.⁷⁹ By this logic, a rising China is likely to engage in an intense competition with the United States over security issues, economics, and resources, in an attempt to maximize its share of world power. Inevitably, this will lead to a battle over the leadership of the international system, in turn upsetting the system's current balance of power and sparking realignments across the world as states are forced to choose between China and the United States in a new round of power competition.

In the last few years, these alarmists have pointed to a number of events and actions as evidence of an unsatisfied China, suggesting that China's rise will be replete with tension and conflict with the United States. Some recent happenings to reaffirm this belief have been: the harassment of the unarmed U.S. naval ship, the *Impeccable*, in international waters off the coast of China by Chinese naval ships in 2009; Chinese officials' condemnation of the naval exercises in international waters near China conducted by the U.S. and South Korea in 2010; the warning issued by Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi at the ASEAN Regional Forum in July 2010 that Southeast Asian states should not attempt to coordinate with outside powers (a veiled reference to the United States and the South China Sea disputes) in managing territorial disputes with Beijing; China's embargo on rare-earth metals to Japan; the links between China and anti-American governments such as those in Venezuela and Iran; and Beijing's increasing

⁷⁸ Zhao: 14

⁷⁹ Friedberg: 18-22

involvement in Latin America, Central America, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific which has resulted in its ability to secure energy and mineral supplies and markets from these countries.⁸⁰

These negative and threat perceptions of China however, are not isolated to the academic, policymaking, and think tank spheres of American society. They are also very much prevalent in other avenues, such as the print media, popular forms of entertainment such as television shows and Hollywood movies, and public opinion. While the perceptions of those in the “foreign policy elite,” realm heavily feature the image of China as a bellicose, aggressive and threatening rising power, the perceptions from these other channels highlight a wider gamut of issues and concerns. These include, for example: the overwhelming perception of China as an economic threat by the American public; the loss of U.S. manufacturing jobs to China, a subject that was focused on extensively in television campaign ads leading up to the United States’ 2010 midterm elections; China’s poor human rights record, maintained by the imprisonment of Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo, and the efforts by PRC authorities to pressure some foreign governments not to send representatives to the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony; and China’s recent success in an international assessment of educational standards, which resulted in one *New York Times* columnist claiming that these latest test results should be the United States’ 21st-century Sputnik moment.⁸¹

What follows in the subsequent sections is a look at some of the specific sources that have helped give rise to the recent downturn in perceptions of China, specifically focusing on academic and think tank literature, the literature and remarks from policymaking circles, print

⁸⁰ Thomas J. Christensen, "The Advantages of an Assertive China," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (April-May 2011): 54-67, accessed April 20, 2011, Business Source Premier.

⁸¹ Nicholas D. Kristof, "China's Winning Schools?" *New York Times*, January 15, 2011.

media sources, congressional campaign ads, movies and television shows, and public opinion polls.

Academia/Polymaking Circles/Think Tanks

As suggested above, in the last two years many of the negative and threat perceptions of China in academia, policymaking circles, and think tanks have been grounded in a realist perspective that considers China's rise to be occurring in a global context that is zero-sum in nature. According to this outlook, China's growing clout is threatening to the United States' international power status, as well as the global system, because it will directly induce a decline in U.S. influence abroad, and also result in a more aggressive, outward-looking Chinese foreign policy. What follows is a look at some of the voices emanating from the academic, policymaking, and think tank spheres that articulate such arguments. An overwhelming number of the publications and commentaries focus on similar concerns, namely issues related to China's military modernization and quickly expanding range of force projection capabilities, as well as its growing economic might. However, as was mentioned previously, these fears do not encompass all of the negative perceptions that have recently emerged among the "foreign policy elite." After analyzing the more strategic and hard power focused discourse, this section will then turn its attention to a number of other issues that have contributed to the souring of perceptions within the "foreign policy elite," specifically those concerning human rights and the growing competition between the U.S. and China over innovation.

A natural entry point into this review is the U.S. Department of Defense's 2010 *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*. Issued to the U.S. Congress in August 2010, the Pentagon's report helps to fuel suspicions of China's strategic intentions. While the report mentions that China's rapid military

development has brought about positive contributions such as assisting in international peacekeeping efforts, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and counterpiracy operations, it also makes clear that many uncertainties remain regarding how China will use its expanding military capabilities. Continuing, the report notes that “the limited transparency in China’s military and security affairs enhances uncertainty and increases the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation” vis-à-vis the United States.⁸² Particularly concerning to the report are: China’s continued military build-up opposite Taiwan, a trend that is shifting the balance of cross-Strait military forces “in the mainland’s favor;” the investments that have allowed the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to pursue anti-access and area-denial strategies, which would deny a hostile navy access to areas adjacent to its coastline; improvements in its extended-range power projection; and the implications that these improved capabilities have on the resurfacing South China Sea disputes, an issue that China has recently been willing to flex its muscles on.⁸³ In regards to the South China Sea, the report notes that were China to increase PLA presence in the sea, a trend that has already begun to emerge as illustrated by the recent completion of a new PLA Navy base on Hainan Island, regional balances could be altered, “disrupting the delicate status quo.”⁸⁴ In similar fashion, the U.S. Department of Defense’s *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2010*, details that “China is developing and fielding large numbers of advanced medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles, new attack submarines equipped with advanced weapons, increasingly capable long-range air defense systems, electronic warfare and computer network attack capabilities, advanced fighter aircraft, and

⁸² Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2010*, I, accessed April 20, 2011, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010_CMPR_Final.pdf.

⁸³ Ibid, 1-47.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 48.

counter-space systems.”⁸⁵ The report continues by raising the point that “lack of transparency and the nature of China’s military development and decision-making processes raise legitimate questions about its future conduct and intentions within Asia and beyond.”⁸⁶

These sentiments moreover, have been reaffirmed on numerous occasions by officials from within the Obama administration. In 2009 Robert Gates, U.S. Secretary of Defense, warned in a testimony delivered to the Senate Armed Services Committee that China’s military modernization and specifically its investments in cyber and anti-satellite warfare, anti-air and anti-ship weaponry, submarines, and ballistic missiles, “could threaten America’s primary means of projecting power and helping allies in the Pacific: our bases, air and sea assets, and the networks that support them.”⁸⁷ Similarly, Admiral Robert Willard, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, told reporters in October 2009 that, “in the past decade or so, China has exceeded most of our intelligence estimates of their military capability,” implying that maybe the “alarmists” are onto something.⁸⁸ But perhaps the most telling of statements came from James Clapper, U.S. Director of National Intelligence. In March 2011, before a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on worldwide threats to the U.S., Clapper said, in response to the question of which country posed the greatest threat to the U.S. that China “is growing in its military capabilities. It has a full array of, whether conventional or strategic forces, that they are building. So they too do pose, potentially from a capabilities standpoint, a threat to us [the United States]

⁸⁵ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2010*, 54, accessed April 20, 2011, http://www.defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR_as_of_12Feb10_1000.pdf.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁸⁷ Drew Thompson, "Think Again: China's Military," *Foreign Policy*, no. 178 (March-April 2010): 2, accessed April 20, 2011, Business Source Premier.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

as a mortal threat.”⁸⁹ While some may consider Clapper’s statement as a political faux pas that should not be given much thought, others may see the statement as reflective of a fear already evident in government circles, albeit often articulated in a much more diplomatic and less incendiary manner.

Both the academic and think tank literature feature a substantial number of examples that express similar fears to those represented in the policymaking sphere. In his 2009 article, “Chinese-U.S. Strategic Affairs: Dangerous Dynamism,” Christopher Twomey, a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School, picks up on a thread that is less focused on in the policymaking discourse. Twomey chooses to look at China’s expanding nuclear weapons capabilities and what this could mean for the strategic balance between China and the U.S. as China remains the only permanent member of the U.N. Security Council that is expanding its nuclear arsenal. He contends that while the two countries are not yet in a strategic nuclear weapons arm race, there is potential for one, claiming that each side’s “modernization and sizing decisions increasingly are framed with the other in mind. Nuclear weapons are at the core of this interlocking pattern of development.”⁹⁰ He concludes with the warning that a tightly coupled arms race has “much potential to destabilize the relationship.”⁹¹ Aaron Friedberg, in a 2009 article for *The National Interest* argues that Americans should take seriously the challenge posed by the continuing growth of the China’s military power. Although Beijing regards its buildup as fully justified given that it is a rising nation, and contends that it is just doing what rising nations naturally do—acquiring the capabilities it needs to project its power, extend its influence, and defend its

⁸⁹ Luis Martinez, “Russia, China Major Threats? Intel Director Clapper’s Comments Perplex Senators,” ABC News, accessed April 20, 2011, last modified March 10, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/russia-china-major-threats-national-intelligence-director-james/story?id=13104936&page=1>.

⁹⁰ Christopher P. Twomey, “Chinese-U.S. Strategic Affairs: Dangerous Dynamism,” *Arms Control Today* 39, no. 1 (January-February 2009): 17, accessed April 20, 2011, ProQuest Central.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

interests—Friedberg believes that it should not make it any less of a concern to the U.S.⁹² He goes on to state that because the system of alliances and diplomatic relationships that make up the U.S. strategic position in Asia is built on a foundation of military power, were the credibility of U.S. security to erode—a development that could arise if it is believed that America is in long-term decline relative to China—it could mean that governments in the region have little choice but to bandwagon with Beijing. Not only would this marginalize America's influence in and access to Asia, Friedberg argues, but it would also have harmful long-term consequences for America's security, prosperity, and ability to promote the spread of liberal democracy worldwide.⁹³

A string of web memos and reports published by The Heritage Foundation in the last year reflect similar wariness over China's growing military capabilities.⁹⁴ James Carafano, in a web memo published in January 2011, compares China's current rise to that of the German Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and in doing so tries to undermine the argument of liberal optimists that China's economic interdependence with the world and increasing involvement in international institutions will result in its peaceful rise.⁹⁵ As is the case with China today, the

⁹² Aaron L. Friedberg and Robert S. Ross, "Here Be Dragons: Is China a Military Threat?" *The National Interest* (September-October 2009): 19, accessed April 20, 2011, ProQuest Research Library.

⁹³ Ibid, 20.

⁹⁴ James Carafano, "Obama Needs to Address Our Cyber-Warfare Gap with China," The Heritage Foundation, accessed April 20, 2011, last modified January 23, 2011, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Commentary/2011/01/Obama-Needs-to-Address-Our-Cyber-Warfare-Gap-with-China>; James Carafano, "Ignoring China's Military Buildup at Our Own Peril," The Heritage Foundation, accessed April 20, 2011, last modified January 30, 2011, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Commentary/2011/01/Ignoring-Chinas-Military-Buildup-at-Our-Own-Peril>; Dean Cheng, "Chinese Military Modernization: The Future is Arriving Much Sooner Than Expected," The Heritage Foundation, accessed April 20, 2011, last modified December 30, 2010, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2010/12/Chinese-Military-Modernization-The-Future-Is-Arriving-Much-Sooner-Than-Expected>; The Heritage Foundation, *A Strong National Defense: The Armed Forces America Needs and What They Will Cost* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2011),

⁹⁵ James Carafano, "Ignoring China's Military Buildup at Our Own Peril"

German Empire at the turn of the century was one of the world's great traders, however, this did not stop the German Empire from declaring war on two of its largest trading partners, France and Britain, in 1914, commencing World War I. Carafano continues his contention that China is a threat to the U.S. by pointing to a study conducted by political scientist Eric Gartzke, professor at the University of California San Diego, that finds that the less economic freedom between two antagonists the higher the propensity for conflict to break out. Carafano argues therefore, that China's abysmal ranking in the 2011 Index of Economic Freedom is yet another sign of an impending conflict between the U.S. and China.⁹⁶ This line of argument is mirrored in The Heritage Foundation's 2011 report entitled, *A Strong National Defense: The Armed Forces America Needs and What They Will Cost*. Citing the same evidence as Carafano, the report labels China as the "greatest potential challenger" to the United States and believes that China's military modernization efforts should be a major concern to the United States.⁹⁷

While Elizabeth Economy's article, "The Game Changer," also touches on China's growing military power, Economy focuses a great deal of her article on the economic aspects of China's recent "go out" strategy, and how they affect the country's relationship with the U.S. As Economy argues, this outward gaze is largely being driven by factors from within China. These include: the efforts of China's leaders to transform the country into a leading center of innovation; the need to supply the needed resources (steel, concrete, etc.) for a rapidly urbanizing society; and similarly, the need to secure sufficient energy resources to quench the growing energy demand—a demand that has propelled China to become the world's number one energy consumer.⁹⁸ Economy displays as proof China's efforts to corner natural resource markets

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ The Heritage Foundation, *A Strong National Defense*...3-4.

⁹⁸ Elizabeth C. Economy, "The Game Changer," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 6, November-December 2010: 143-149

around the world, from the copper mines in Zambia to the bauxite mines in Vietnam. These endeavors, moreover, are often paralleled by China's offers of unconditional trade and aid deals, infrastructural support, and education and training opportunities to these natural resource rich countries.⁹⁹ Economy ultimately comes to conclusions similar to those reached by Martin Jacques in his book *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*. Both Economy and Jacques argue that China is increasingly trying to remake global norms and rewrite the rules of the international order through its "go-out" strategy. Jacques contends that the effects of the global financial crisis have only quickened the pace at which Beijing is tipping the international balance of power in its favor as the meltdown underscored the failings of the neo-liberal economic model and the successes of the alternative Chinese model.¹⁰⁰ The appeal of the Chinese model is augmented even further by the no-strings attached aid and assistance China is pitching at the developing world.¹⁰¹ Both scholars warn that the U.S. needs to pay particular attention to China's growing global influence, because if left unchecked China could usurp America's role as the leader of the international system.

Additionally, negative perceptions of China have soured for reasons beyond those concerning economic and military issues. This has largely been the case within contingents of the policymaking establishment where the issues of China's ongoing human rights violations and the challenge China presents to the United States' role as the global leader in innovation are most relevant. In terms of human rights, this trend can be clearly seen in the U.S. Department of State's *2010 Human Rights Report on China*, released in April 2011. The report details the continued negative trend in key areas of the of China's human rights record, as it notes that "the

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 354.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

government took additional steps to rein in civil society, particularly organizations and individuals involved in rights advocacy and public interest issues, and increased attempts to limit freedom of speech and to control the press, the Internet, and Internet access.”¹⁰² It continues by discussing the PRC’s efforts to silence political activists and public interest lawyers, its increasing use of extralegal measuring including enforced disappearance and house arrest, the continued cultural and religious repression of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet, and a whole host of persistent human rights abuses that seemed to have peaked around high-profile events, such as the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to democracy activist Liu Xiaobo. Very much in line with the report’s findings, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton remarked in a press conference that these negative trends appeared to have worsened in the first part of 2011, citing the recent detention of Ai Weiwei, a prominent Chinese artist and vocal critic of the Chinese government, as an example.¹⁰³ Perhaps the sharpest comments from an American official over China’s human rights record though, came in April 2011 from the departing U.S. Ambassador to China, Jon M. Huntsman Jr. Using a high-profile annual lecture on Chinese-American relations to make his final public address as ambassador, Huntsman bluntly stated that prominent Chinese activists such as Liu Xiaobo and Ai Weiwei have been unfairly detained or jailed. Continuing, he called for the immediate release of these activists while praising them, saying that they “challenged the Chinese government to serve the public in all cases at all times.”

¹⁰² U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *2010 Human Rights Report: China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau)* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2010).

¹⁰³ Hillary Clinton, "Remarks to the Press on the Release of the 2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," U.S. Department of State, accessed April 20, 2011, last modified April 8, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/04/160363.htm>.

Huntsman's comments come as a departure from the normally diplomatic rhetoric of those in his position as such open criticism is often avoided in fear of complicating bilateral relations.¹⁰⁴

Many U.S. government officials, including President Obama, have also begun comparing the competition over innovation with China—innovation pertaining to biomedical research, information technology, and particularly clean-energy technology—with the space race between the U.S. and Soviet Union during the Cold War. Examples include: the U.S. Secretary of Energy Steven Chu's comments during a presentation at the National Press Club in November 2010; President Obama's speech in December 2010 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and the President's 2011 State of the Union Address.¹⁰⁵ In all of these cases officials labeled the perceived U.S. lag in innovation compared to China as America's new "Sputnik" moment, evoking the historical memory of the Soviet Union's success in beating the U.S. into space with the launch of its satellite, Sputnik. Following Sputnik's launch the U.S. embarked on a massive investment campaign, pouring money into research and education, unleashing a wave of innovation that created new industries, millions of new jobs, and solidified America's position as the world's leader in innovation. While these statements were delivered largely as an attempt to rekindle America's innovative spirit, they also play into the growing negative and threat perceptions of China by drawing a parallel between present day China and the Soviet Union, America's mortal enemy and greatest threat during the Cold War.

¹⁰⁴ David Barboza, "Departing U.S. Envoy Criticizes China on Human Rights," *New York Times*, April 6, 2011, accessed April 20, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/07/world/asia/07china.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Steven Chu, "Is the Energy Race our new 'Sputnik' Moment?" (Speech, National Press Club, Washington D.C., November 29, 2010), Department of Energy, accessed April 20, 2011, http://www.energy.gov/media/Chu_NationalPressClub112910.pdf; Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Economy in Winston-Salem, North Carolina" (Speech, Forsyth Technical Community College -- West Campus, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, December 6, 2010), accessed April 20, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/12/06/remarks-president-economy-winston-salem-north-carolina>; Barack Obama, "2011 State of Union Address" (Speech, The White House, United States Capitol, Washington, D.C., January 25, 2011), accessed April 20, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/25/remarks-president-state-union-address>.

Print Media

In regards to the perceptions of foreign countries, the print media is not only a barometer of perceptions in a given country, as it often taps into sentiments and opinions that already exist in the social milieu, but it is also arguably the primary source from which people gather their information about other countries. This medium of news often constructs the world for both the general public and the policymaking “elite”—it has been suggested in a number of studies that the news media is a major information source for people engaged in policymaking as the press is usually available sooner and provides a wider range of information on issues compared to official sources.¹⁰⁶ In recent years, the development of the Internet as a medium of news has added a new dynamic by increasing people’s access to information, as the information that was formerly only accessible via print is now widely accessible and archived on the web. With the news media as the chief source of foreign affairs-related information for most Americans, it has an innate ability to make certain issues salient in the collective mind of the country’s populace. In addition to this agenda-setting function, it can also play an important role in shaping how a certain issue is framed and, consequently, the terms in which it is thought about. Therefore, China’s foreign policies, its domestic issues and developments, the rhetoric from party officials, and so on, are widely understood by Americans through the lens provided by the print media. In the last few years this has meant that the print media has played an important role in facilitating the downturn in U.S. perceptions of China and fomenting a “new Red Scare” that “is putting the fear of God, or Mao, into our [Americans’] hearts.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Li Zhang, "The Rise of China: media perception and implications for international politics," *Journal of Contemporary China* 19, no. 64 (March 2010): 236, accessed April 22, 2011, ProQuest Research Library.

¹⁰⁷ Steve Mufson and John Pomfret, "There's a new Red Scare. But is China really so scary?," *Washington Post*, February 28, 2010, accessed April 22, 2011, ProQuest Research Library.

The issues the print media discusses pertaining to China share significant overlap with those discussed in the literature and rhetoric of the “foreign policy elite,” especially in regards to the economic and military threats China pose to the United States. In articles written by William Hoar and Isaac Stone Fish titled “Being Realistic About the China Threat,” and “The China Threat,” respectively, the authors bluntly state that China is a direct threat to the United States. In one refrain, Hoar responds to the suggestion of a March 2010 *Time* magazine article that China’s decrease in anticipated defense budget growth for 2010 was because Chinese officials had become more cautious of the way the PLA was perceived abroad by stating that, “if you believe that, you are naïve enough—or deceitful enough—to be employed by a number of Western media outlets.”¹⁰⁸ Similarly, *The Economist* published a lead editorial, “China’s Succession: The Next Emperor,” in one of its October 2010 magazines, calling Xi Jinping, the presumed heir to current Chinese General Secretary and President Hu Jintao, a “crown prince” who was “anointed in a vast kingdom.” The editorial continues by stating that too many Westerners think of China as a self-confident, rational power that has come of age, and instead China should be seen as a “paranoid, introspective, imperial court...”¹⁰⁹ The use of these terms and phrases—“kingdom,” “prince,” and “imperial”—may very well spark a reactive and intuitive understanding of China in readers by drawing their thought processes to the expansive and often aggressive nature of kingdoms and empires throughout history, thereby underscoring and perpetuating the threat perception of China.

¹⁰⁸ William P. Hoar, “Being Realistic About the China Threat,” *The New American*, April 12, 2010, 42, accessed April 22, 2011, ProQuest Research Library.

¹⁰⁹ *The Economist* is London-based but the majority of its readership is North American: “China’s Succession: The Next Emperor” *The Economist*, October 21, 2010, accessed April 22, 2011, ProQuest Research Library.

While there is certainly an abundance of examples within the print media of articles discussing the threats of China's growing military and economic might, the print media has also served an important role in raising the awareness on issues not as heavily emphasized by "foreign policy elite" circles but that have also contributed to and are reflective of the recent souring of U.S. perceptions. In the last two years, a topic that has been critically covered in great detail by the print media is China's human rights record. Take the *New York Times* for example. A rudimentary search for "China and Human Rights" on the paper's website results in upwards of 300 articles when limited to those published between 2009 and May 2011; if extended to 2008 the hits nearly double with more than 500 articles, a spike that is likely attributable to the antigovernment protests that flared in Tibet in March 2008 and the lead up to the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games. The articles from this two year period cover a range of issues, including: the 2009 antigovernment protests in Xinjiang which resulted in a severe and bloody government crackdown; the imprisonment of Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo, and the efforts by PRC authorities to pressure some foreign governments not to send representatives to the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony; the recent detention of prominent artist and political activist Ai Weiwei; the government's systematic efforts to extinguish any inkling of a "Jasmine Revolution," including the clamping down on foreign journalists' ability to move about the country freely; and the rounding up of well-known human rights lawyers and advocates such as Gao Zhisheng, who had previously spoken of being pummeled with electric batons and burned with cigarettes during a previous round of detention.¹¹⁰ One recent *New York Times* article notes that the government's recent actions are the "latest in a long and steady process of restricting speech and assembly freedoms that appears to have gained speed," while another likewise claims that official actions

¹¹⁰ Edward Wong, "U.N. Rights Group Calls on China to Release Lawyer," *New York Times*, March 28, 2011, accessed April 22, 2011, ProQuest Research Library.

are part of an “accelerated trend [that] started with the 17th Party Congress in fall of 2007,” and is indicative of a much tighter party line, looking for a comprehensive method of social management.¹¹¹

The print media has also stoked the fears that the U.S. is losing its innovation race with China. As one commentator claimed, “the booming Chinese clean energy sector, now more than a million jobs strong, is quickly coming to dominate the production of technologies essential to slowing global warming and other forms of air pollution.” The same article continues by stating that China’s expansion in the energy sector has been “traumatic for American and European solar power manufacturers, and Western wind turbine makers are now bracing to compete with low-cost Chinese exports.”¹¹² And, as if the deleterious effect on American manufacturers was not contentious enough, the fact that China’s success has primarily been the result of government policies that often skirt international trade rules stains China’s progress in innovation with malicious undertones.¹¹³ While these developments have helped precipitate the deterioration in U.S. perceptions of China, Thomas Freidman, notable pundit of the *New York Times*, interestingly sees some virtue in the CCP’s ability to wield its monopoly on political power to stimulate the country’s clean energy industry: “One-party autocracy certainly has its drawbacks. But when it is led by a reasonably enlightened group of people, as China is today, it can also have great advantages...It is not an accident that China is committed to overtaking us in electric cars, solar power, energy efficiency, batteries, nuclear power and wind power.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Edward Wong, "Human Rights Advocates Vanish as China Intensifies Crackdown," *New York Times*, March 11, 2011, accessed April 22, 2011, ProQuest Research Library.

¹¹² Keith Bradsher, "On Clean Energy, China Skirts Rules," *New York Times*, September 8, 2010, accessed April 20, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/09/business/global/09trade.html?_r=2&adxnnl=1&pagewanted=1&adxnnlx=1303743647-FUIBV4HJP0FoZ5qXtgkTuA.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Thomas L. Friedman, "Our One-Party Democracy," *New York Times*, September 8, 2009, accessed April 20, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/09/opinion/09friedman.html>.

Some of those who have labeled China's thrust to become an innovation leader as America's "Sputnik moment," point to what they believe to be China's superior education system as the root cause of the United States' recent faltering. An international study published in December 2010 looked at how students in 65 countries performed in math, science and reading. At the very top of the charts in all three fields was Shanghai, while the United States came in 15th in reading, 23rd in science, and 31st in math. While Shanghai's success is not representative of all China, it does illustrate the remarkable improvements in the country's education system, advancements that have reached even the most rural areas in China. These developments led Nicholas Kristof, commentator for the *New York Times*, to state that he believes Shanghai's success on these latest test results should alternatively be the United States' 21st-century "Sputnik moment."¹¹⁵ On a similar note, in another Op-Ed piece, Kristof details the success of Hou Yifan, the 16-year old women's world chess champion from China, who in 2010 became the youngest person, male or female, ever to win a world championship.¹¹⁶ To Kristof, Hou serves as yet another example of the massive progress in education and investment in human capital that China is experiencing. Also hitting a nerve in the American psyche over education has been the controversy surrounding Yale Law School professor Amy Chua's article in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior," an excerpt from her book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. The article purports to outline why Chinese parents raise such stereotypically successful kids, arguing that their success is largely the result of the controlled environment that Chinese parents create.¹¹⁷ Chua's article indirectly addresses China's emphasis

¹¹⁵ Kristof, Nicholas D. "China's Winning Schools?"

¹¹⁶ Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Rises, and Checkmates," *New York Times*, January 8, 2011, accessed April 22, 2011, ProQuest Research Library.

¹¹⁷ Amy Chua, "Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior," *Wall Street Journal*, January 8, 2011, accessed April 22, 2011, ProQuest Research Library.

on educational achievement by asserting that Chinese parents carry with them a different set of cultural values than Western parents, and that this set of values is what drives them to so forcefully emphasize education with their children.

Another issue that has received significant coverage in the print media over the last two years, adding fuel to the perception of a “China threat,” has been the speed at which China is developing its capabilities to dominate cyberspace. While this issue has received a fair amount of attention for a number of years now, its presence in the print media grew following Google’s decision to pull out of China in 2010, a move brought about by the company’s discovery that a number of Google email accounts and its corporate infrastructure had been hacked into from a source originating in China. It was later revealed that the attack on Google used a malicious code dubbed “Aurora,” which also targeted thousands of other U.S. companies.¹¹⁸ Such attacks have not only been limited to the private sector. As the *New York Times* discussed in its coverage of WikiLeaks’ U.S. State Department cable leaks in late-2010, China has stolen terabytes of sensitive data—from usernames and passwords for State Department computers to designs for multi-billion dollar weapons systems.¹¹⁹ One of these cables, moreover, pinpoints these attacks, code-named “Byzantine Hades,” to China’s PLA. These developments have led many experts, as one *Reuters* article notes, to believe that in terms of cyberwarfare, China has “gained the upper hand” over the U.S. with “attacks coming out of China not only continuing, they are accelerating.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Ellen Nakashima, Steven Mufson, and John Pomfret, “Google threatens to leave China after attacks on activists’ e-mail,” *Washington Post*, January 13, 2010, accessed April 20, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/12/AR2010011203024.html?sid=ST2010011203048>.

¹¹⁹ James Glanz and John Markoff, “Vast Hacking by a China Fearful of the Web,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2010, accessed April 20, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/05/world/asia/05wikileaks-china.html?>

¹²⁰ Brian Grow and Mark Hosenball, “In cyberspy vs. cyberspy, China has the edge,” *Reuters*, April 14, 2011, accessed April 22, 2011, ProQuest Research Library.

Congressional Campaign Ads

Arguably the most vehement example of how perceptions of China have taken a nosedive in recent years is the highly sensational and paranoid campaign ads used by twenty-nine candidates, either directly or through their supporters, in the run up to the 2010 United States midterm elections.¹²¹ What became the most expensive midterm political campaign in U.S. history—with more than \$3 billion being dumped into political advertising—the campaign season was marked by the emergence of a remarkable bipartisan coalition coalesced around the U.S. relationship with China, a trend illustrated by the barrage of advertisements meant to tap into Americans' anxiety over China's growing economic might.¹²² From the marquee battle between Senator Barbara Boxer and Carly Fiorina in California to the House contests in rural New York, both Democrats and Republicans were blaming one another for aiding and abetting China's imminent economic takeover of America. Before discussing these ads specifically however, it may be useful to first analyze how these ads speak to broader trends in congressional perceptions of China that have been evident for years, especially in regards to economic issues.

China's economic rise has caused considerable anguish particularly in the labor constituency, but also, to some degree, in the business community. This stems from the trade and currency related frictions between the U.S. and China, including: the perception of mounting U.S. manufacturing job losses to Chinese laborers toiling for slaves wages; rampant copyright and intellectual property piracy; and a sense that Beijing is manipulating the value of its currency in a manner that gives Chinese goods an unfair advantage over U.S. products, and has caused the U.S.

¹²¹ All of the ads are listed at the following website:

David W. Chen, "China Emerges as a Scapegoat in Campaign Ads." *The New York Times*, October 9, 2010, accessed April 4, 2011 http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/10/us/politics/10outsources.html?_r=2

¹²² Jeff Yang. "Politicians Play the China Card." *National Public Radio*, October 27, 2010, accessed April 6, 2011. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/tellmemore/2010/10/27/130865009/playing-the-china-card>

trade deficit with Beijing to balloon to \$273 billion.¹²³ The perceptions held by these interest groups are often highly influential in shaping American domestic politics, and particularly congressional elections, as congressional districts and states in which constituents believe they are affected by these frictions will often elect officials sympathetic to their causes. As a result, there is a strong political appeal for politicians in these areas, as well as those running for political office, to “China-bash,” and take a harder-line towards China. This tactic, moreover, is not divided along political or ideological lines. The typical Republican-Democrat, conservative-liberal contours are largely meaningless in considering how American politicians use the China card. In fact, for the better part of two decades, issues regarding China on Capitol Hill have seen the most conservative Republicans join forces with liberal Democrats. Examples include the close work between U.S. Senators Charles E. Schumer (D-NY) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC) on behalf of legislation that was re-introduced in 2009 to vigorously address China’s currency misalignment, which they believe unfairly and negatively impacts U.S. manufacturers, U.S. exports, and the U.S. economy as a whole.¹²⁴ Additionally, in 2005 when Chinese oil firm CNOOC Ltd. moved to purchase the Unocal Corp., a broad coalition of Republicans and Democrats emerged to swiftly kill the bid, denouncing it as a threat to national security.¹²⁵

As such, it should come as no surprise that the campaign ads for the 2010 midterm elections shared significant common ground in how China was cast in a negative light. For the purposes of these advertisements China was portrayed as evil, scary, and as Senator Lindsey

¹²³ Wayne M. Morrison, *China-U.S. Trade Issues* (Washington D.C. : Congressional Research Service, January 7 2011), 1.

¹²⁴ Currency Exchange Rate Oversight Reform Act of 2009 , S. S. 1254, 111th Cong. (2009), accessed April 6, 2011, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s111-1254>.

¹²⁵ Steve Maich, "FEAR OF A NEW RED MENACE," *Maclean's*, August 15, 2005, accessed April 6, 2011, Proquest Research Library.

Graham (R-SC) stated, poised “to eat our lunch.”¹²⁶ This stream of ads occurred largely because politicians were struggling to address the nation’s lack of jobs, voters’ most pressing and obstinate concern in the wake of the global financial crisis. Resultantly, members of Congress—as well as their political opponents—attempted to use China as a scapegoat, redirecting attention from themselves and attempting to demonize their opponents by claiming that they have assisted China in usurping U.S. economic strength. These efforts took into consideration the palpable public fear that American preponderance is on the decline. Polls consistently show that not only are Americans increasingly worried that the United States will have a lesser international role in the years ahead but they are also convinced that China will come to dominate the global stage.¹²⁷

One example of how these sentiments and concerns were tapped into for November’s elections was an ad for Ohio Democratic congressman Zack Space, attacking his Republican opponent Robert Gibbs for supporting free-trade policies that supposedly sent Ohioans’ manufacturing jobs to China.¹²⁸ According to the ad, Ohio has lost some 91,000 jobs to China through “unfair trade deals like NAFTA¹²⁹, the kind of deals Gibb wants more of.” As the commercial comes to a close, a giant dragon flashes on the screen and the narrator sarcastically thanks the Republican in Chinese: “As they say in China, xie xie Mr. Gibbs!” In another ad, Democrat Joe Sestak, who was waging a close Senate battle against Republican Pat Toomey in Pennsylvania, accused the latter of “fighting for jobs...in China,” a claim set against the sound of a gong being struck. The ad continues by stating that in Congress, Toomey voted to give China special trade status, a vote that helped the U.S. lose 2.4 million jobs. To conclude, the narrator

¹²⁶ Yang, “Politicians Play the China Card.”

¹²⁷ Chen, “China Emerges as a Scapegoat in Campaign Ads.”

¹²⁸ Zack Space, advertisement, *Thank You*, October 4, 2010, Youtube, accessed April 6, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/user/ibackzack#p/a/u/0/a_goeIZyV7nE.

¹²⁹ It should be noted that China has no association with the North American Free Trade Agreement.

labels the incumbent a “job-killer” and suggests that he “ought to run for Senate...in China.”¹³⁰

In the race for West Virginia’s 3rd Congressional District, Republican Spike Maynard used an ad featuring Chinese music and a photo of Mao Zedong to charge that Democratic representative Nick Rahall supported a bill that created wind-turbine jobs in China.¹³¹

But perhaps the sharpest example from the recent election of an ad playing on the fears of the American public was the “Chinese Professor.” On par with Lyndon B. Johnson’s infamous “Daisy” campaign advertisement¹³² in terms of sensationalism, the “Chinese Professor” was produced by Citizens Against Government Waste and was an attack on federal deficits.¹³³ It opens with a caption that reads “Beijing China 2030” and is set in a lecture hall adorned with romantic posters of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution. The next shot zooms in on the feet of a Chinese professor as he walks down a darkened hallway, each step echoing ominously in the classroom. The ad then cuts to him beginning his lecture on why the great empires of history—the Greek, the Roman, the British, and the American—all collapsed. The reason, he proclaims, is because they turned their “backs on the principles that made them great.” “America,” he goes on to explain, “tried to spend and tax itself out of a great recession,” relying on government stimulus spending, takeovers of private industries, massive changes to the healthcare system, and a

¹³⁰ Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, advertisement, *Moved*, October 5, 2010, Youtube, accessed April 6, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kaiiJuz8a0&feature=player_embedded

¹³¹ Spike Maynard, advertisement, *Made in China*, September 25, 2010, Youtube, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9NGXfB7PxA>

¹³² The ad featured a little girl picking petals off of a daisy in a field and counting out of sequence just before an adult voiceover interjects a “military” countdown which is then followed by stock footage of a nuclear explosion and the cautionary words of President Lyndon B. Johnson: “These are the stakes – to make a world in which all of God’s children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other, or we must die.” The ad – which never identifies its target – was aimed at reinforcing the perception that the 1964 Republican candidate for president, Senator Barry M. Goldwater, could not be trusted with nuclear weapons at his fingertips. The ad only aired once but it is thought to have had damaging consequences for Goldwater’s campaign for presidency.

¹³³ Citizens Against Government Waste, advertisement, *Chinese Professor*, October 20, 2010, Youtube, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTSQozWP-rM>

massive debt. These are the reasons why, the professor concludes with a contemptuous laugh, the Americans now “work for us.”

Movies and Television Shows

Popular U.S. television shows and Hollywood movies provide further examples of how U.S. perceptions of China have once again soured. These sources of popular entertainment are replete with references to and storylines centered on the “China threat.” To collect data and examples for this section this paper relied largely on the website tvtropes.org, a website devoted to cataloguing TV, film, video game, and comic tropes, which the site’s editors define as “devices and conventions that a writer can reasonably rely on as being present in the audience members’ minds and expectations.”¹³⁴ The tropes used to search for these examples—phrases like “Red China,” “China Takes Over the World,” “Red Scare,” and “Yellow Peril”—speak volumes on how China is perceived in the minds of many Americans. Although these tropes were helpful in compiling an extensive list of TV shows and movies, it was by no means exhaustive. Moreover, it should be recognized that the website’s status as a wiki—a piece of server software that allows users to freely create and edit Web page content using any Web browser—calls into question the site’s legitimacy for academic purposes. As such, the examples chosen for this section have only been used after firsthand confirmation that these allusions and devices in fact exist.

The fears of China in American television and movies can be traced in lineage back to the 1932 film, *The Mask of Fu Manchu*, in which the mad Dr. Fu Manchu, played by Boris Karloff, schemes to find the mask and sword of Genghis Khan, a feat, which if he completes, will enable him to rouse all Asia to wipe out the white race. This movie, as well as subsequent Fu Manchu

¹³⁴ “TV Tropes,” TV Tropes, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/Homepage>.

movies, was based on the fictional character Dr. Fu Manchu, created by British author Sax Rohmer and introduced in his famous series of “Yellow Peril” novels published between 1913 and 1957. According to Rohmer’s description of Dr. Fu Manchu in the *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu*, he was “tall, lean, and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat green. Invest in him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race...Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.”¹³⁵ While Rohmer’s work—wildly popular in the United States—was a successful attempt to capitalize on the fervent xenophobia aimed at Chinese immigrants that led to the United States’ Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the even more restrictive Immigration Act of 1924, it was also notable in another regard. His stories, and the movies that were based on them, frequently portrayed the Chinese as insidious evildoers, intent on destroying Western civilization and taking over the world. As such they laid the groundwork for today’s portrayal of China as a military and economic threat in U.S. television shows and Hollywood movies.

The Simpsons, an animated television series on the Fox Broadcasting Company, is a satirical parody of the working-class American lifestyle epitomized by the show’s family of the same name. The show—the longest running American primetime entertainment series—is famous for its lampooning of American culture, society, and other aspects of the human condition, a wide purview that China has been unable to escape. The most pointed example of China being cast as a threat in the series is in season twenty-two, episode twelve.¹³⁶ The episode, entitled “Homer the Father,” aired on January 23, 2011, and is premised on a plot that has Bart

¹³⁵ Sax Rohmer, *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu* (n.p.: Forgotten Books, 2008), 17.

¹³⁶ *The Simpsons*, “Homer the Father,” episode 2212, Fox, January 23, 2011, Hulu, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://www.hulu.com/watch/207927/the-simpsons-homer-the-father>.

Simpson, one of the show's main characters, conspiring with Chinese secret agents and establishing with them a quid-pro-quo for American nuclear secrets in exchange for a mini-bike. In a similar vein, *South Park*, a satirical animated sitcom that airs on the Comedy Central television network, devoted an entire episode focused on the "China threat." "The China Problem," which premiered in the U.S. in 2008 as the eighth episode of the show's twelfth season, is centered on a suspicion Eric Cartman has that China will invade the United States, a notion he develops after watching the opening ceremonies of the Beijing Olympics.¹³⁷ Cartman believes that these ceremonies, evidence of China's strength and discipline, forebode an impending attack on America. As such, he attempts to rally his friends to join his group, the American Liberation Front, in an effort to subvert the suspected Chinese invasion. In yet another example, Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*, a late night news parody show on Comedy Central, created an entire segment, "The Socialist Network," on its January 10 2011 show discussing what Stewart describes as Chinese "economic imperialism."¹³⁸ During the show, Stewart—in a dig at both the U.S. government and China's position of leverage over the U.S. economically—parallels the debt the U.S. owes to China with the U.S. government bailout of AIG during the financial crisis, stating that the U.S. is "too big to fail." He continues by mocking China's ambitions of becoming the world's sole superpower, stating the U.S. does not want the role anymore, so China can "take the keys, because we [the United States] quit." While these examples render China's threat in a more satirical and parodic light, they are no less relevant in serving as an indicator of perceptions and expectations that exist in the American milieu.

¹³⁷ *South Park*, "China Problem," season 12, episode 8, Comedy Central, October 8, 2008, South Park Studios, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://www.southparkstudios.com/full-episodes/s12e08-the-china-problem>

¹³⁸ *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, "The Socialist Network," Comedy Central, January 20, 2011, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-january-20-2011/the-socialist-network>

In Hollywood, the most recent, and one of the most extreme examples of how China is being portrayed—or was intended on being portrayed—as a threat is the upcoming *Red Dawn* film, scheduled to be released by MGM Inc. in 2011. The film is a remake of the 1984 version in which the U.S. is invaded by the Soviet Union and its Latin American allies, precipitating the onset of World War III. The original *Red Dawn* follows a group of American high school students who resist Communist occupation by using guerrilla warfare. Initially, the remake of the film was intended to be based on a Chinese invasion of the U.S. As such, the movie's producers filmed the movie in Michigan during 2009. However, recent developments seem to indicate that MGM is now in the process of digitally altering the film to change the villains from the Chinese to the North Koreans.¹³⁹ This decision may be in large part because of MGM's attempt to maintain access to China's lucrative box office given China's history of cancelling releases of some films because of "cultural sensitivities." Some recent blockbuster films to be banned in China include *The Dark Knight* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* because of their negative portrayals of Chinese people. Despite an extensive history of movies in which China is characterized as sinister or threatening, the fact that China has become the fifth-largest box office market outside of the U.S.—with \$1.5 billion in revenue—will likely result in a dramatic decrease in these types of movies, even if U.S. perceptions of the country deteriorate even further.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Ben Fritz and John Horn, "Reel China: Hollywood tries to stay on China's good side." *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 2011. Accessed April 6, 2011. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-china-red-dawn-20110316,0,995726.story>

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

A short list of films that have cast China as a threat: *Tomorrow Never Dies*; *Dr. No*; *Goldfinger*; *You Only Live Twice*; *Battle beneath the Earth*; *the Manchurian Candidate*.

Public Opinion Polls ¹⁴¹

Public opinion polls from recent years provide telling insights into the public's perceptions of China. The polls collected for this section, conducted by a number of different organizations including Gallup, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Pew Research Center, Opinion Research Organization and Zogby International, supply further evidence that the perception of China as a threat has recently become prominent in American society. Before diving into the specific statistics from these polls it may be useful to first summarize their findings:

- The majority of Americans believe that the United States' global influence has declined significantly in the last ten years.
- America's decline is being paralleled by China's rise, as the majority of Americans believe that China has become the world's leading economic power.
- The percentage of Americans who view China's growing military power as a bad thing for the U.S. has grown 10% over the last three years.
- China is at the top of the list of countries that Americans believe represent the greatest danger to the United States.
- The United States' debt to China and the development of China as a world power ranked among the top critical threats to the United States as viewed by the American public.

¹⁴¹ Many of these charts were brought to my attention by Dr. Shoon Murray, associate professor at American University's School of International Service, in her presentation entitled "Poll Report: America's Perceptions of China's Rise," given on March 29th 2011. In one instance I use a chart she created, which is a collection of data from various polls on Americans' view of China as an economic threat. In this case I have not only attributed the original source but also Dr. Murray's presentation. Otherwise, I have taken all figures and graphs from their original sources.

At the heart of this growing threat perception of China is the view held by many Americans that the United States' role as the world's leader is diminishing and at an accelerated pace, as exhibited in **Figure 1**. According to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs' data, from 2002 to 2010 there was a 31% decline in the number of Americans who believed that the U.S. plays a more important and powerful role as a world leader today compared to ten years ago.

Figure 1. Americans' Perceptions of U.S. Global Power



(Source: Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2010)¹⁴²

In the eyes of many Americans this decline in U.S. global influence is being paralleled by China's rise. Exacerbating the fears of what this simultaneous rise and fall of global influence could mean for international politics is the view of an overwhelming number of Americans that

¹⁴² Chicago Council on Global Affairs, (2010), *Constrained Internationalism: Adapting to New Realities*. Accessed April 4 2011 [http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/POS_T online%20Report s/POS%202010/Global%20Views%202010pdf](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/POS_T%20online%20Report%20s/POS%202010/Global%20Views%202010pdf)

China has become an economic threat to the United States (**Table 1**). This view is one being fueled not only by Americans' awareness of the imbalanced U.S.-Sino financial relationship—67% percent of Americans believed in 2010 that China loans more money to the United States (**Figure 2**)—but also by the belief that China has become the world's leading economic power—52% of Americans believed in February 2011 that China was the world's leading economic power while 32% believed the United States held this title (**Figure 3**).

Table 1. Americans' Views of China's Economic Growth

<i>Do you consider China to be an economic threat to the United States, or not?</i> (Percent) ^Asked half of sample			
Date	Yes, is	No, is not	No opinion
2005 Dec^	64	33	3
2008 Jul^	70	30	--
2009 Nov^	71	28	2

(Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation)¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Shoon Murray Dr., "Poll Report: America's Perceptions of China's Rise" (Lecture, American University Center for Asian Studies, East Quad Building Atrium, American University, March 29, 2011).

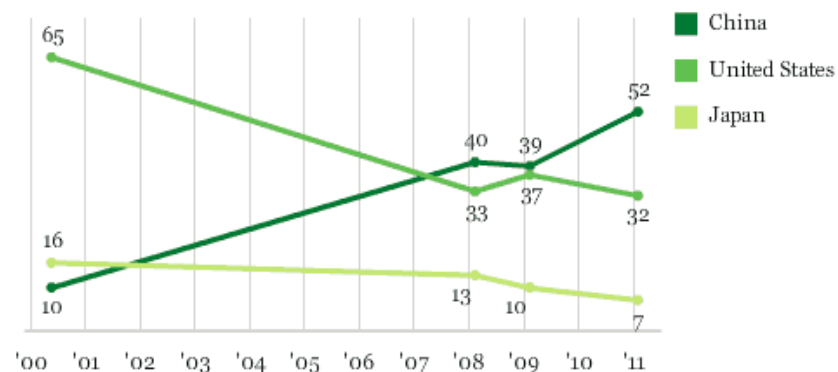
Figure 2. Americans' Awareness of the U.S.-China Financial Relationship

(Source: Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2010)¹⁴⁴

Figure 3. Americans' Perceptions of World's Leading Economic Power Today

Perceptions of World's Leading Economic Power Today

Which one of the following do you think is the leading economic power in the world today -- [the United States, the European Union, Russia, China, Japan, India]?



GALLUP

(Source: Gallup 2011)¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Chicago Council on Global Affairs, (2010)

Also illuminating are the public opinion polls gauging Americans' perception of China's growing military power. As **Table 2** details, from June 2007 to June 2010 the percentage of Americans who view China's military power as a bad thing for the U.S. has grown more than 10%, an increase paralleling China's growing willingness to display its military clout on the international stage as illustrated by recent events. Ostensibly, these factors—the perceptions of China's growing economic and military might, as well as the belief that America's global influence is dwindling—have helped to push China to the top of the list of countries that Americans believe represent the greatest danger to the United States—20% of those sampled for Pew Research Center's January 2011 poll viewed China as the greatest danger over both North Korea and Iran (**Figure 4**). Similarly, in the Chicago Council on Global Affairs' 2010 report the U.S. debt to China and development of China as a world power ranked in the top critical threats to the United States' vital interest as viewed by the American public, coming in at numbers 8 and 13 respectively (**Figure 5**).

¹⁴⁵ Gallup, (February 14, 2011), *China Surges in Americans' View of Top World Economy*. Accessed April 5 2011. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/146099/china-surges-americans-views-top-world-economy.aspx>

Table 2. Americans' Views on China's Military Power

<i>Overall do you think that China's growing military power is a good thing or a bad thing for our country?(Percent)</i>			
Date	Good	Bad	Don't Know
2007 June	15	68	17
2010 June	12	79	10

(Source: Pew Research Center)¹⁴⁶

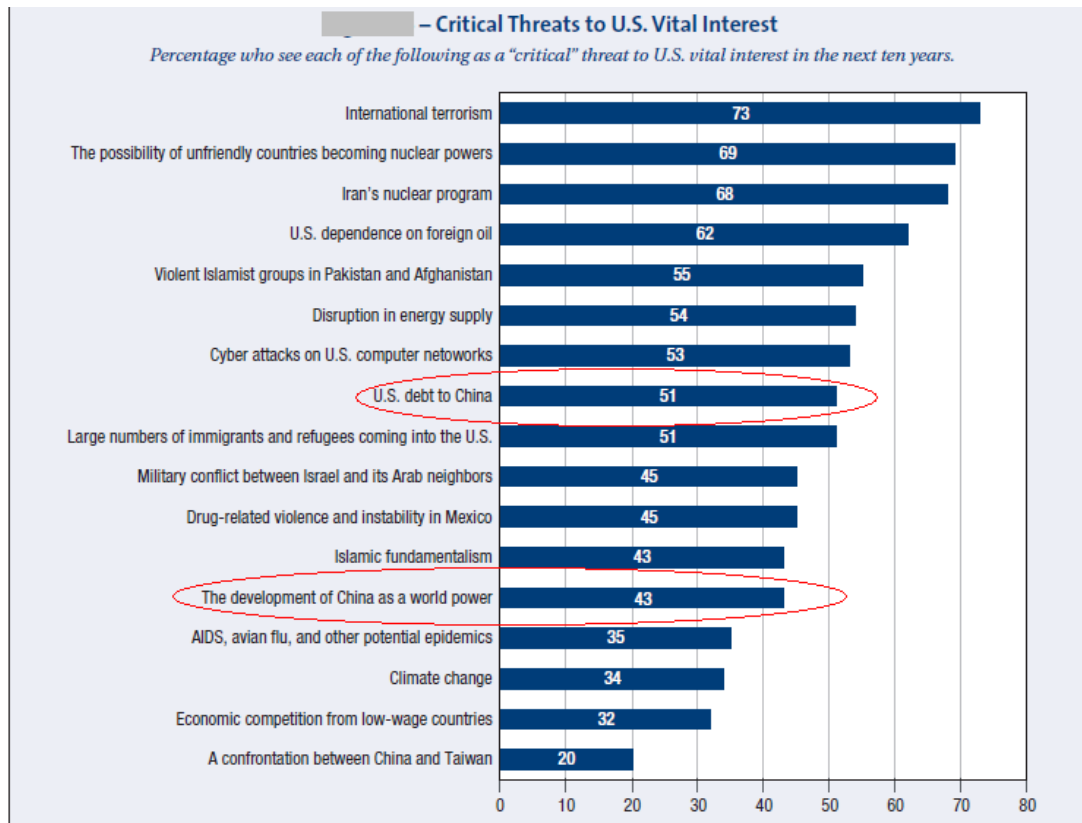
Figure 4. Country Perceived as Greatest Danger to the U.S.

<i>Which country in the world, if any, represents the greatest danger to the United States?</i>										
<i>Country representing "greatest danger" to U.S.</i>	Mar 1990	Feb 1992	Sept 1993	Sept 2001	Oct 2005	Feb 2006	Feb 2007	Sept 2008	Nov 2009	Jan 2011
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
China	8	8	11	32	16	20	14	16	11	20
North Korea	--	--	1	1	13	11	17	6	10	18
Iran	6	4	7	5	9	27	25	21	21	12
Afghanistan	--	--	--	--	2	1	2	5	14	10
Iraq	--	12	18	16	18	17	19	13	14	8
Pakistan	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	1	3	4
The U.S. itself	4	3	--	2	7	5	5	4	5	4
Russia/U.S.S.R.	32	13	8	9	2	3	2	14	2	2
Mexico	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1
Japan	8	31	11	3	1	1	1	1	--	1
Israel	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1
Al Qaeda/Terrorist groups	--	--	--	--	2	4	1	3	2	--

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Jan. 5-9, 2011. Q20F1. Multiple responses accepted. Sep. 2001 poll fielded before 9/11.

(Source: Pew Research Center 2010)¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Pew Research Center (June 27, 2007 and June 17, 2010), Accessed April 5, 2011. Polling the Nations Database

Figure 5. Critical Threats to U.S. Vital Interest

(Source: Chicago Council on Global Affairs)¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

The souring of U.S. perceptions of China has reached such a clamorous pitch by early-2011 that even the CCP has recognized the need to try and push back against this growing tide of anti-China sentiment. In the last few years Chinese officials have become convinced of the need for China to tell its own story to the rest of the world. As one senior propaganda official from the CCP commented, “We must...initiate targeted international public opinion battles, and create an international public opinion environment that is objective, beneficial, and friendly to us.”¹⁴⁹ The

¹⁴⁷ Pew Research Center (January 12, 2011), *Strengthen Ties with China, But Get Tough on Trade*. Accessed April 5, 2011 <http://people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/692.pdf>

¹⁴⁸ Chicago Council on Global Affairs, (2010)

¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth C. Economy, “The Game Changer,” 140.

result has been a huge Chinese advertising blitz, an effort at showcasing the country's soft power to reverse the negative perceptions held not only by Americans, but also citizens of countries all over the world. Last year in 2010, *Xinhua* news agency, the official press agency and propaganda arm of the CCP, launched a 24-hour global English-language television news service stationed out of New York City's Times Square in an effort to provide international and China news with a Chinese perspective to English speaking audiences. Similarly, *China Daily*, the government English-language newspaper, launched a U.S. edition in 2009 and China Central Television recently announced a new English-language documentary channel that will showcase films about China for foreign audiences. Also significant is the increase in number of Confucius Institutes in the U.S. over the last few years. Meant to teach Americans about Chinese culture and Mandarin, fewer than ten existed in the U.S. in 2006. By early-2011 however, there are more than 100 institutes in the U.S. and hundreds more around the world. They are sponsored, and partly funded, by an arm of China's Ministry of Education, which cooperates with schools and universities around the world.

Perhaps the most telling example of how China has attempted to counter the downturn in U.S. perceptions though was the advertising campaign launched in the U.S. by the Chinese government in the run-up to President Hu Jintao's January 2011 visit. The campaign included a sixty-second ad being shown on a mega screen in Times Square, New York City (the ad ran 300 times a day in Times Square between early-January 2011 and Valentine's Day 2011, totaling 8,400 showings), a thirty-second spot on a big screen in Gallery Place, Washington, D.C., and a series of fifteen-second ads airing on several news networks over a multi-week period.¹⁵⁰ These

¹⁵⁰ Loretta Chao, "Pro-China Ad Makes Broadway Debut," *The Wall Street Journal's China Real Time Report* (blog), January 18, 2011, accessed April 20, 2011, <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2011/01/18/pro-china-ad-makes-broadway-debut/>.

ads feature a host of Chinese celebrities, models, entrepreneurs, and athletes, standing and smiling at the camera with their names and significance to China written on the screen in English. After all the banners with these notable individuals on them pass, the ads feature one last message: “Chinese Friendship.”¹⁵¹ Clearly an attempt to assuage American concerns of China’s rise, the ad campaign illustrates China’s growing recognition that perceptions matter on the international stage.

Despite these stabs at transforming the perceptions of those in foreign countries, it is questionable as to how much of an impact these efforts will actually have. In fact, there are many marketing experts who believe that the ads that aired before President Hu Jintao’s visit actually misfired by calling attention to some of the aspects that have put many Americans on edge about China’s rise. One expert went as far as saying that the ads actually “flaunt [Chinese] their material strengths, which worry America, rather than try to bridge the gap of misunderstanding...instead of saying, ‘we are your friends,’ the ads are saying ‘Hello, America. Be very afraid.’”¹⁵² Needless to say, this soft power thrust will not be the only factor in overturning the recent downturn of U.S. perceptions. For there to be a lasting reversal of these perceptions a number of substantial changes need to take place.

The images held by those in a given nation of another country reflect the nation’s knowledge and understanding of that country. Arguably then, for two nations to forge a reasonably productive and beneficial relationship they need to hold a level of accurate mutual

¹⁵¹ *China Promotional Video 中国国家形象宣传片*, advertisement, January 18, 2011, Youtube, accessed April 20 2011, http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=1C3AAE63831AE172&annotation_id=annotation_950337&feature=iv.

¹⁵² Loretta Chao, Jason Dean, and Bob Davis, “Wary Powers Set to Square Off,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 19, 2011, accessed April 20, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704678004576089881162633472.html>.

perception and understanding. To a degree, over the years the lack of knowledge and understanding between China and the U.S. on issues such as human rights, military transparency, and economic strategies, has been an important factor in perpetuating the pendulum-like movement of U.S. perceptions. Therefore, the “love-hate” cycle can be ameliorated to some extent with an improvement in communication and exchange at all levels between the peoples of both countries. In some regards there has already been a move in this direction. For example, in May 2010 U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton officially launched the “100,000 Strong” initiative, a campaign seeking to prepare the next generation of American experts on China who will be charged with managing the growing political, economic, and cultural ties between the U.S. and China.¹⁵³ This initiative will attempt to send 100,000 Americans to study in China between 2010 and 2014. This heavy flow of exchange students is hardly one way. In fact, in the 2009-10 academic year Chinese international students comprised the largest number of foreign students enrolled in U.S. institutions, with 127,628 students studying in the U.S. during that one year period; U.S. students studying in China for the 2008-9 academic year totaled 13,674, making China the fifth most popular study abroad destination for American students.¹⁵⁴

On more strategic matters the U.S. and China have also created a number of different forums and dialogues, notably the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue and military-to-military ties (although military contacts have been intermittently suspended over the years, most recently in 2010 when Beijing temporarily cut off ties following the sale of a \$6.5 billion U.S. arms package to Taiwan). From the U.S. perspective these strategic forums are a way to try and cajole China into becoming a responsible stakeholder in the international system. This last point

¹⁵³ "100,000 Strong Initiative," U.S. Department of State, accessed April 20, 2011, http://www.state.gov/p/eap/regional/100000_strong/index.htm.

¹⁵⁴ Institute of International Education, "Top 25 Places of Origin of International Students, 2008/09-2009/10," *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*, 2010, accessed April 20, 2011, <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>.

bespeaks another important factor in recalibrating U.S. perceptions of China, and that is the behavior of China. The downturn of perceptions in the last two years gathered much of its momentum from the recent actions of China, which left a bad taste in many Americans' mouths. These ranged from the harsh—lashing out at Norway for the Nobel Peace Prize Committee's decision to honor Liu Xiaobo—to the aggressive—flexing its muscles over the Senkaku Island dispute in the East China Sea with Japan—as well as the self-serving—continuing to offer no-strings attached aid to countries that are often at loggerheads with the U.S in order to corner strategic natural resource markets.

However, were China to opt to step away from these policies, it would find that there are significant actors within the U.S. policymaking, academic and business communities who view China in a much more positive light. From academics like David Shambaugh, David Lampton, and Kenneth Lieberthal, to business groups such as the U.S.-China Business Council, and even to a degree the U.S. Department of Commerce (Commerce has been more apt to downplay disputes with Beijing than the U.S. Department of Treasury or the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and are much conciliatory towards China when compared with the U.S. Department of Defense), these are the actors in U.S. society who see China's rise in opportunistic terms. Additionally, as seen throughout the history of U.S.-China relations, given the proper conditions and environment these are also the actors who often help to shift U.S. perceptions of China back in a more positive direction.

It would be too soon though to portend a sustained upturn in U.S. perceptions of China even if the above mentioned factors were addressed. China's rise will surely continue to butt up against U.S. interests and spur an increasing number of contentious issues between the two countries. This is because at its core the U.S.-China relationship is one precariously balanced on

two competing ideologies, with their own unique sets of values and interests. As such, the unpredictable swings of U.S. perceptions from one end of the spectrum to the other will persist as long as China remains a communist nation—it will continue to be America’s “Yellow Peril.” Only when American and Chinese values begin to significantly converge will there be a lasting change in U.S. perceptions. Barring any significant social or political upheavals however, this convergence process will likely be a slow one, stretched out over decades.

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