

Primacy or World Order?

Yuen Foong Khong

The United States and China's Rise— A Review Essay

Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011)

Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why America Should Share Power* (Victoria, Australia: Black Inc., 2012)

Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Political Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011)

One of the early exhibits of the 2010 Shanghai Expo that greeted the visitor was a display of the Chinese living room through time. What made the otherwise prosaic display rise above the ordinary was its point of departure: the year 1978. The 1978 room was dim, dowdy, and equipped with the most basic furniture, reflecting a poor household. The 1988 living room offered visible improvements, while the 1998 living room had many, but not all, of the accoutrements of the middle-class living room. The 2008 living room—whether aspiration or reality—had it all: ambient lighting, leather sofas, and a plasma television screen.¹ The message was clear: China today would prefer not to dwell on the past; the focus needs to be on economic modernization and its payoffs that began with Deng Xiaoping's opening up of China's economy in 1978.

It is the consequences of that economic modernization that Aaron Friedberg, Hugh White, and Yan Xuetong grapple with in their respective works. In *A Contest for Supremacy in Asia*, Friedberg worries that “[i]f China stays on its

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1. Photographs of the rooms may be accessed through Skyscraper City, “Shanghai Expo from A to Z,” <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?s=5e95aacc147d48e8aa2bedd94afd3205&t=1348269&page=4>.

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current path, if it grows richer and stronger without also becoming a liberal democracy, the present muted rivalry with the United States is likely to blossom into something more open and dangerous" (p. 2). A wealthy and strong China, according to Friedberg, will want to displace the United States as the predominant power in Asia. In *The China Choice*, White agrees that surpassing the United States is China's long-term strategic objective; for him, the rivalry is already not so muted, and unless both sides change course, war cannot be ruled out (pp. 4–6, 48–52). Both Friedberg and White will find confirmation for their thesis about China's hegemonic ambitions in Yan's *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*. Described by Friedberg as a leading Chinese conservative and by some Americans as China's Aaron Friedberg, Yan seeks inspiration from ancient Chinese thinkers to guide the contemporary exercise of Chinese power. Yan, who advises his doctoral students to examine the replacement of "one hegemony with another" (p. 245), is explicit about drawing lessons from pre-Qin thinkers and strategists "for the great task of China's rise" (p. 203).

Primacy, supremacy, or hegemony is therefore the name of the international politics game in Asia today. All three authors agree that the struggle is already going on. Will the United States–China strategic rivalry become more intense? Or can it be tamed and steered into more cooperative channels? What should America's response be? Is a war of hegemonic transition inevitable? No answers to questions such as these can be definitive, but Friedberg's, White's, and Yan's interventions are timely and important. To begin with, they advance provocative arguments in a scholarly but accessible style, suggesting that their books are meant for the specialist as well as a wider audience.² Second, their works speak to—instead of past—one another in revealing ways. Third, Friedberg, White, and Yan are among the most influential scholars of their generation; they also come with serious policy experience, links to their

2. Friedberg's book is packed with footnotes; it also contains a helpful appendix on the (translated) Chinese sources consulted and the methods used in assessing them. White's book is sparsely footnoted (thirty-three footnotes in all), but it would be a mistake to dismiss it on those grounds: the scholarship behind his analysis, for the most part, is evident and deep. Yan's volume is undoubtedly scholarly, but it is not exactly a monograph. Part of a new Princeton-China series showcasing the work of "the most original and influential Chinese scholars," it contains five substantive chapters by Yan and three chapters of comments by others on Yan's analysis (including his responses). The reactions to Yan's work are interesting in part because they reveal differences between him and his colleagues. Appendix 2, an interview with Yan about his voyage from construction/farm worker in Heilongjiang to Berkeley and back to Tsinghua University, provides invaluable insights on his approach to politics and international relations.

respective governments, or both.³ They therefore write with considerable authority on the issues at stake.

A close analysis of the three works, I argue, brings to light four key themes that shape our—that is, scholars', policymakers', and opinion makers'—understanding of how the United States should respond to China's rise and their implications for world order. The themes are the assumptions we hold about the existing distribution of power, China's strategic objectives, the role of economic interdependence in Asia, and the relationship between democracy and political legitimacy. Examining the way the authors parse these themes—which ones they bracket or admit into their analysis, and how they weigh and combine them—helps reveal the underlying bases of their, and by implication our, policy preferences. The themes derived from the three works are not exhaustive, but they inform virtually all discussions of U.S.-China relations, in general, and of the United States' response to China's rise, in particular. The essay concludes by taking issue with a fifth theme—time—that is touched on, but not systematically treated, in the books. Contrary to Friedberg's and White's assumption that time is not on the side of the United States, I suggest that it is. Time has something to offer both the United States and China. And if those opportunities are properly understood, the prospects for peaceful competition and coevolution improve.

The Existing and Evolving Distribution of Power

What is the existing distribution or balance of power in Asia? This simple question garners conflicting answers. Asians who welcome the Barack Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia have portrayed it as an attempt to restore the balance of power in the region, implying that the balance shifted in China's favor during the decade when the United States waged its global war on terror. Even Friedberg slips into occasional ambiguity on this issue, as when he describes U.S. policy as "maintaining a balance of power in Asia that continues to favor the interests of the United States and its regional allies" (p. 59), or

3. Friedberg has served as deputy assistant for national security in the Office of the Vice President of the United States; White has been a deputy secretary for strategy and intelligence in the Australian Department of Defense and is coauthor of Australia's 2000 defense white paper; Yan has held senior research positions at the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, a government think tank involved in policy, and is reputed to have good links with the new Chinese leadership.

writes that “[t]he United States and its allies aim to strengthen deterrence by restoring a balance upset by China’s relentless buildup” (p. 277). Elsewhere in his book, however, Friedberg clearly accepts that the existing “balance of power” favors the United States (i.e., that there is an imbalance of power). He worries about China’s intention to replace the United States as the “preponderant power in East Asia” (p. 2), and he argues in favor of a United States that is recognized as “the most powerful and influential player in the region” (pp. 6, 103, 193, and 216).

Yan would agree that the power equation in Asia remains very much in the United States’ favor. As one of China’s foremost analysts of “comprehensive national power,” he has argued that “[China’s] power is not only inferior to that of the United States as a whole but also in every single aspect of military, political, and economic power.”⁴ This is also the mainstream view among American international relations scholars such as Stephen Brooks, John Mearsheimer, Joseph Nye, Stephen Walt, and William Wohlforth.⁵

Where Friedberg (and White) differ from the mainstream is in their analysis of the evolving or shifting distribution of power. They look beyond the general balance to focus on China’s progress in developing antiaccess or area-denial capabilities aimed at the United States.⁶ Both emphasize these newfound capabilities. Friedberg provides a thoughtful analysis of the strategic implications of these capabilities for the United States (chapter 9). White admits that U.S. military forces are “bigger and better” than China’s, but he argues that “what matters . . . is not what forces China and America possess, but what they can do with them where and when it counts” (p. 65). The bottom line of Friedberg’s and White’s analyses is that China is becoming increasingly able to threaten and implement a “sea denial” strategy (White, p. 74) that makes it difficult for the United States to project its naval and air power in Asia in ways it is used to.

Both Friedberg and White discuss the U.S. military’s response to these

4. Yan Xuetong, “The Rise of China and Its Power Status,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Summer 2006), p. 21.

5. Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 27–35; John J. Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to U.S. Power in Asia,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Winter 2010), pp. 381–396; Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), pp. 157–163; and Stephen M. Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), chap. 1.

6. See also the excellent analysis in Michael D. Swaine et al.’s recent tome, *China’s Military and the U.S.-Japan Alliance in 2030* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013).

antiaccess challenges, namely the Air-Sea Battle concept, which seeks to integrate U.S. air and naval power across all domains in an effort to “disrupt, destroy and defeat adversary anti-access and area-denial capabilities.”⁷ White is skeptical that the concept will allow the United States to retake the Western Pacific because, to do that in the midst of a serious crisis, the United States would have to “undertake large scale strikes against a wide range of China’s armed forces” (p. 77), in effect, waging a full-scale war against China. Is it worth risking such a war to maintain U.S. supremacy on and below the seas? White believes not, though he probably underestimates the utility of deploying such a concept for the purposes of (conventional) deterrence.

China’s Ascendance and Aspirations

Friedberg, White, and Yan all agree that China’s economic growth and increasing military clout position China as the key challenger to U.S. hegemony. And to different degrees, they see the contest or strategic rivalry already in motion. Friedberg provides the most detailed analysis of China’s foreign policy since the late 1970s, and the chapters “Hide Our Capabilities and Bide Our Time” and “To Win without Fighting” are especially enlightening. Surveying open Chinese sources such as academic journals and think tank reports, and also relying on his observations about Chinese behavior, Friedberg summarizes Chinese strategy from the 1980s onward in the form of three axioms: “avoid confrontation,” “build comprehensive national power,” and “advance incrementally” (p. 144). As he puts it, he is only “extrapolating slightly” from Deng’s famous counsel to his colleagues to “hide our capabilities and bide our time.”

What of China’s long-term aspirations? According to Friedberg, “[W]hat China’s current rulers appear to want and what their successors will almost certainly want as well is to see their country become the dominant or preponderant power in East Asia, and perhaps in Asia writ large” (p. 157). Friedberg’s fear, and a central thesis of his book, is that the United States has yet to face up

7. Norton A. Schwartz and Jonathan W. Greenert, “Air-Sea Battle: Promoting Stability in an Era of Uncertainty,” *American Interest*, February 20, 2012, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1212>. See also the helpful Brookings Institution discussion with Schwartz and Greenert, “Air-Sea Battle Doctrine: A Discussion with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and Chief of Naval Operations,” transcript (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, May 16, 2012), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2012/5/16%20air%20sea%20battle/20120516_air_sea_doctrine_corrected_transcript.pdf.

to the enormity of this challenge. His book may be read as a clarion call to the United States trumpeting the urgency and necessity of marshaling the resources and formulating the policies necessary to prevent China from displacing the United States in Asia (pp. xiii–xvi, 1–8, 264–284). White agrees that China will seek hegemony if the situation allows, but he believes that the conditions preclude Chinese hegemony because it would be resisted by many states in Asia, including Australia, India, and Japan (p. 61). White assumes that China realizes this and will accept the “good enough” solution of being the United States’ equal in the region, a situation that most in Asia can live with (p. 63).

Yan would agree with Friedberg and White. He represents a strand of Chinese thinking that views Chinese hegemony as possible and desirable.⁸ A Berkeley-trained student of Kenneth Waltz, Yan is skeptical about the possibility or desirability of a Chinese school of international relations in which elements distinctive to China’s approach to international relations are privileged and used to construct a (Chinese) theory of international relations (pp. 200–201, 252–259). His preference is for universal as well as scientific theories, and he is entirely at home with the version of power transition theory that informs Friedberg’s and White’s works. Like the latter, Yan expects China to catch up to the United States and, if conditions permit, overtake it to assume pole position in the international hierarchy of nations. The underlying dynamic, for all three authors, is Thucydides’ observation about the rise of Athens and the fears it generated in Sparta, and how that made war inevitable (Friedberg, pp. 39–40; White, pp. 59–60; and Yan, pp. 202–203). Robert Gilpin’s summary of this Thucydidean dynamic resonates with all three authors: “The conclusion of one hegemonic war is the beginning of another cycle of growth, expansion, and eventual decline. The law of uneven growth continues to redistribute power, thus undermining the status quo established by the last hegemonic struggle. Disequilibrium replaces equilibrium, and the world moves toward a new round of hegemonic conflict. It has always been thus and always will be, until men either destroy themselves or learn to develop an effective mechanism of peaceful change.”⁹

Friedberg, White, and Yan agree that “uneven growth” is redistributing

8. There are other Chinese scholars who do not believe that Chinese hegemony is necessary or desirable. See Yan, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 152–153.

9. Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 210. See also Graham Allison, “Thucydides’ Trap Has Been Sprung in the Pacific,” *Financial*

power in China's favor, even though it will be some time before China approximates the United States in the main dimensions of power. The "undermining of the status quo," however, can already be seen in China's extensive claims in the South and East China Seas, forays into Africa and Latin America (giving the developing world a choice between the Washington and Beijing consensuses), and China's demand for greater influence in the relevant international organizations.¹⁰ All three authors expect the world to move in the direction of "a new round of hegemonic conflict," though they are far from alone in this evaluation.¹¹ The key question is whether scholars as well as policymakers have learned to "develop an effective mechanism for peaceful change."

Consider, for example, the issue of peaceful change and perceptions of China's "new assertiveness," especially in relation to its territorial disputes with the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea and its actions in the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute with Japan.¹² Although some observers have

Times, August 21, 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5d695b5a-ead3-11e1-984b-00144feab49a.html#axzz2cg2O5Mht>.

10. On maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas, see Ralf Emmers, *Geopolitics and Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2009); on China's activism in Africa, see Chris Alden, Daniel Large, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, eds., *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); on China and Latin America, see Julia C. Strauss and Ariel C. Armony, eds., "From the Great Wall to the New World," special issue, *China Quarterly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and on the Beijing consensus's challenge to Washington, see Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: How China's Authoritarian Model Will Dominate the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

11. John Mearsheimer presents a clear, unvarnished, and dispassionate analysis of the coming hegemonic clash between the United States and China. See Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm," pp. 381–391.

12. The literature on these territorial/maritime disputes is voluminous and growing. Ralf Emmers provides a rare and insightful comparative analysis of the competition over territory, natural resources, and power in the East and South China Seas. See Emmers, *Geopolitics and Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia*. On China's approach to the issue, see M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Li Mingjiang, "China's South China Sea Dilemma: Balancing Sovereignty, Development, and Security," in Sam Bateman and Ralf Emmers, eds., *Security and International Politics in the South China Sea* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 140–150. On the East China Sea, see Suk Kyoon Kim, "China and Japan Maritime Disputes in the East China Sea: A Note on Recent Developments," *Ocean Development and International Law*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (July 2012), pp. 296–308; Alexander M. Peterson, "Sino-Japanese Cooperation in the East China Sea: A Lasting Arrangement?" *Cornell International Law Journal*, Vol. 42 (2009), p. 441; and M. Taylor Fravel, "Explaining Stability in the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands Dispute," in Gerald Curtis, Ryosei Kokubun, and Wang Jisi, eds., *Getting the Triangle Straight: Managing China-Japan-U.S. Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010). On the South China Sea, see Sam Bateman, "Solving the 'Wicked Problems' of Maritime Security: Are Regional Forums up to the Task?" *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (April 2011), pp. 1–28; and Sheldon W. Simon, "Conflict and Diplomacy in the South China Sea," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 52, No. 6 (November/December 2012), pp. 995–1018. Robert Beckman is especially good on the legal issues surrounding the South China Sea dispute. See Beckman, "The

questioned how real this new assertiveness is, the perception in East Asia, especially among those involved in maritime disputes with China, is that the People's Liberation Army's Navy has been opportunistic, provocative, and even aggressive.¹³

White sketches a scenario where military hostilities break out between Vietnam/the Philippines and China over disputes in the South China Sea, creating a strategic dilemma for the United States: Could it afford not to come to the aid of a military ally, and if it did deploy military force to help the Philippines, would the result be a major war with China?¹⁴ For White, the issue in such a crisis—for both the United States and China—is not about the strategic or economic value of the shoals; it is about the credibility of their power. U.S. allies would question the reliability of the United States if it did not help the Philippines; China's reputation as a great power and its aspirations as Asia's hegemon would be severely dented if Beijing backed down in the wake of U.S. military intervention. White's scenario results in a U.S.-China war, and it would be a major war, especially if the United States implements its Air-Sea Battle concept.

These maritime disputes, together with the North Korean nuclear impasse, are the most serious flash points in Asia's strategic landscape. Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to delve into them, two points are germane. First, both Friedberg and White rightly treat these disputes within the context of a United States that is rebalancing toward Asia and a rising China with hegemonic ambitions. China's use of force against Vietnam in 1974 and 1988 to wrest control of contested islands in the Paracels and Spratlys was undoubtedly opportunistic, but it was not perceived to have major consequences for the balance of power in East Asia. Today, any attempt by China to use force to settle existing maritime disputes in East Asia becomes a test of wills not just between it and the other claimants, but also between it and the United States. This is because China has become the lead candidate capable of challenging

UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea," *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 107, No. 1 (January 2013), pp. 142–163.

13. Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?" *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Spring 2013), pp. 7–48.

14. White's scenario begins with maritime disputes between Vietnam or the Philippines and China turning nasty, but he fleshes out the trajectory of the conflict via a Vietnam-China struggle that brings in the United States (pp. 123–127). A Philippines-China clash that brings in the United States is more plausible in my view, because the Philippines, unlike Vietnam, is a U.S. military ally. Graham Allison also uses maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas to warn about the danger of falling into "Thucydides' trap." See Allison, "Thucydides' Trap Has Been Sprung in the Pacific."

U.S. hegemony in East Asia, and the challenge would appear particularly stark if China were to use force against a U.S. ally. As suggested by White, both China and the United States would find it difficult to back down because of the attendant negative implications for their status and prestige in the region (p. 124). Understanding this strategic overlay is thus essential in anticipating the future trajectory of the South and East China Sea disputes.¹⁵

Of the two maritime disputes, it is the East China Sea (Senkakus/Diaoyu) that is more dangerous. A rising China “unable to forget” the past, a resentful Japan “incapable of remembering” its World War II aggression,¹⁶ and strident nationalism in both countries all make it harder for the two parties to reconcile their differences and step back from the abyss. Interestingly, China’s superior power vis-à-vis Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam make it easier for China to adopt conciliatory steps when it wants to. Moreover, the cover provided by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can play a facilitating role in defusing tense situations. At the China-ASEAN senior officials meeting in Suzhou in September 2013, for example, China indicated greater willingness to embark on negotiations toward a binding Code of Conduct on the South China Sea. No comparable institutions or mechanisms exist in Northeast Asia. The absence of such venues and pre-arranged meetings makes it harder to float, discuss, and negotiate face-saving gestures and compromises when crises arise.

Economics, Politics, and Strategic Alignments in Asia

If China’s development of asymmetrical military strategies makes it harder for the United States to maintain undisputed command of the Western Pacific, the new economics of Asia pose even greater strategic challenges for the United States. As China replaces the United States as the number-one trading partner of almost all the Asian states, the latter are likely to feel strong pressures to

15. See “The South China Sea Dispute,” special issue, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (December 2011), especially M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Strategy in the South China Sea,” pp. 292–319, and Lyle Goldstein, “Chinese Naval Strategy in the South China Sea: An Abundance of Noise and Smoke, but Little Fire,” pp. 320–347. Mark J. Valencia provides a balanced assessment of recent developments in the South China Sea and a few plausible alternative futures. See Valencia, “High-Stakes Drama: The South China Sea Disputes,” *Global Asia*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Fall 2012), pp. 56–73.

16. T.J. Pempel used the phrases “unable to forget” and “incapable of remembering” to describe contemporary China and Japan, respectively, in his seminar “America’s Pivot toward Asia,” S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, July 31, 2013.

shift their strategic alignments away from the United States toward China.¹⁷ The United States' role as the natural leader of Asia can no longer be taken for granted. This emphasis on the link between economics and strategic alignments is perhaps White's single most important contribution to the debate. White brings to the table a dimension that is often neglected by American strategists:

"National power," according to White, "has many manifestations. . . . but history suggests it has only one fundamental source, and that is sheer economic scale." It follows that "China's economic growth has directly increased its political and diplomatic influence. The openness of its economy means that for many countries, both in Asia and beyond, China has become their most important economic partner, and growing trade with China, or aid from China, is central to their future. This makes a lot of countries sensitive to China's interests" (pp. 44–45). White cites his native Australia as an example: China is not only Australia's biggest trading partner today; it is also seen as the locomotive for future growth. The implication? It gives "Australia an immense stake in China's economic success, and in good relations with Beijing" (p. 45). White concludes, "So Canberra, like so many other capitals, knows that to protect its immense trading interests, China's key concerns must be respected" (*ibid.*).

When White likens "so many other capitals" to Canberra, he is not just writing as an academic, he is conveying his measurement for the political-economic pulse of Asia, based on his extensive contacts with policymakers and analysts in the region. Hence, what is true for Australia is probably even truer of most others in Asia. The latter are less well off than Australia, and if China is going to be their chief economic benefactor, they will also see strategic light in being "sensitive to China's interests."

17. For an early and prescient analysis of this shift, see Jane Perlez, "China Emerges as Rival to U.S. in Asian Trade," *New York Times*, June 28, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/06/28/world/china-emerges-as-rival-to-us-in-asian-trade.html?pagewanted=print&src=pm>. During the decade of the United States' global war on terror, China progressively replaced the United States as the top trading partner of most states in Asia. By 2011, China was the number one trading partner of Australia, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN. For Australia, see Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Trade at a Glance 2012," <http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/trade/trade-at-a-glance-2012.html>; for Japan, see Liu Junguo, "China Becomes Japan's Largest Trading Partner for Five Consecutive Years," *People's Daily Online* (China), February 21, 2012, <http://english.people.com.cn/90778/7735801.html>; for South Korea, see Han Suk-hee, "South Korea Seeks to Balance Relations with China and the United States" (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2012), <http://www.cfr.org/south-korea/south-korea-seeks-balance-relations-china-united-states/p29447>; and for ASEAN, see ASEAN, "Top Ten ASEAN Trade Partner Countries/Regions, 2011," http://www.indiaasean.org/images/trade_statistics/table20.pdf.

This is not the conventional way that international relations theorists have dealt with economic interdependence. The usual debate is about whether the pacifying effects of trade and economic integration are enough to trump the power political aspirations and needs of the great powers.¹⁸ Applied to the United States–China relationship, the issue becomes whether their economic interconnectedness is great enough to ward off political-military conflict. Friedberg’s approach to U.S.-China interactions incorporates this economic dynamic: the United States finds itself in a “novel and ambiguous situation” where “despite the repressive character of its government, [China] . . . is among America’s most important commercial partners” (p. 264). White does not frame the issue quite this way, but he is equally cognizant of the potential pacifying effects of economic interdependence. In the final analysis, however, both he and Friedberg believe that for the great powers, at least, “strategic and political ambition” (p. 54) trumps the effects of economic interdependence.

The inconclusiveness of the debate about the effects of economic interdependence on U.S.-China interactions allows White to shift his gaze to something more “local”: the strategic implications of increasing economic connectedness between China and the lesser powers of Asia. White’s point about the latter’s need to factor China’s strategic needs into their political calculations if they want to prosper from continued economic links with their top trading partner (China) comes close to saying that for these powers, economics drive politics. Although reality is more complex, White’s insight captures the political-economic pulse of contemporary Asia, as the Shanghai Expo living room reminds us. It is not only China’s leadership that wishes to make the 2008 living room reachable for greater numbers of its citizens; most Asian leaders would aspire to the same, whether to improve the economic well-being of their citizens or to enhance their own political legitimacy.¹⁹ Whoever is best poised to help Asia grow economically thus stands to reap political-strategic benefits. Singapore’s prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, summarized this logic succinctly to a group of U.S. business leaders in his April 2013 trip to Washington,

18. See Edward D. Mansfield and Brian M. Pollins, eds., *Economic Interdependence and International Conflict: New Perspectives on an Enduring Debate* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); and Zeev Maoz, “The Effects of Strategic and Economic Interdependence on International Conflict across Levels of Analysis,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 223–240.

19. Yuen Foong Khong and Helen E.S. Nesadurai, “Hanging Together, Institutional Design, and Cooperation in Southeast Asia: AFTA and the ARF,” in Amitav Acharya and Alastair Iain Johnston, eds., *Crafting Cooperation: Regional International Institutions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 32–82.

D.C.: "In Asia, trade is strategy. A more active trade agenda will benefit the US economically and strategically."²⁰ Left unsaid by Lee is White's mantra: economic developments in the last decade have given China the upper hand economically and strategically.

White's approach helps us understand why, for example, the United States is so keen on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as a means to reassert its economic centrality and to counter China's economic primacy in Asia.²¹ As one analyst put it, the TPP is an attempt by the United States to "contain China [economically] by setting a high regulatory bar."²² The fear among some in Asia is that the TPP may be too little, too late, and too exclusive. A trade pact that excludes China and India in contemporary Asia seems out of kilter with the economic realities of the region; moreover, U.S. attempts to structure the rules in favor of U.S. industries have slowed down the progress of the pact.²³

If White's approach seems to privilege economics over politics, Friedberg would prefer if things were the other way round (i.e., politics driving economics). Would East Asians not see the political dangers of shifting their alignments in the direction of an autocratic state, whatever the economic payoffs? Is the United States not the more benign hegemon, compared to China? Do the East Asians not appreciate the intrinsic superiority of democratic governance and individual liberties? These questions are at the core of the disagreements between Friedberg and White. White believes economics will drive politics; Friedberg believes (or at least hopes) it will be the other way round.

Democracy and Legitimacy

The debate over what to do about China's rise and aspirations is not just about military and economic power. For Friedberg, the identity of the potential challenger matters greatly. In fact, it is decisive. He would be less worried if it were Japan or Australia, but that fact that it is China—an illiberal and autocratic regime—makes it worrisome. An unrepresentative government "responsible for crushing the Tiananmen Square protests, denying religious freedom,

20. Robin Chan, "S'pore Remains Pro-business: PM Lee," *Straits Times* (Singapore), April 4, 2013, <http://www.straitstimes.com/st/print/965221>.

21. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is Washington's answer to China's economic dominance in Asia and an attempt to wrest back the economic initiative.

22. Zaki Laidi, "Trade Deals Show Power Politics Is Back," *Financial Times*, March 31, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/e2aae9f4-9254-11e2-851f-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2SawgRqoC>.

23. Paul Cawthorne, "U.S. Drug Patent Demands a Roadblock in Pacific Trade Talks," *Straits Times* (Singapore), March 14, 2013, <http://www.straitstimes.com>.

suppressing political dissent, and oppressing minorities” to use Hugh White’s words (p. 167) is, in the end, not a government that the United States can treat as a political equal, accommodate, or cooperate with (p. 167). The crux of the matter, for Friedberg, is the nature of China’s political regime: autocratic governance is anathema to the American political credo; moreover, there is also a link between autocracies and their propensity to resort to military force externally (pp. 42–45, 159–163). In a revealing passage, Friedberg stipulates the conditions under which the United States may be willing to share or even cede power to China: “In the long run, the United States can learn to live with a democratic China as the preponderant power in East Asia, much as Great Britain came to accept America as the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere. . . . Having kept the peace, encouraged the transition of all the major regional players from authoritarianism to democracy, and overseen the re-emergence of Asia as a leading center of world wealth and peace, Washington will be free to call home its legions” (pp. 251–252).

White shares Friedberg’s valuation of democratic governance. Unlike Friedberg, however, he believes that it is analytically sounder to remove from consideration China’s political system when analyzing the evolving strategic competition, not least because the political-moral equation is difficult to judge. While acknowledging the lack of democracy in China, White puts more weight on the economic reforms that, in the last thirty years, have succeeded in lifting hundreds of millions of Chinese out of poverty. For White, a government that has succeeded in doing that has a claim to legitimacy, and as far as White is concerned, the vast majority of Chinese consider their government legitimate (pp. 148–149, 171–172).

Hence White believes that analysts such as Friedberg, for whom “values” remains the “ultimate sticking point” (p. 169), are mistaken. White also takes President Obama to task for arguing before the Australian parliament, with China in mind, that “prosperity without freedom is just another form of poverty” (p. 171). White counterargues that “no government has done more directly to ‘make poverty history’ than the government of China” (p. 172). He assumes that by leaving aside the issue of China’s political complexion, we see more clearly the issue at stake—that is, China’s case for greater political influence. As the existing hegemon, the United States should share power (primarily though not exclusively) with China to avoid the path of strategic rivalry. The assumption is that when China achieves the political influence that it feels is commensurate with its economic and military might, it will be satisfied.

The United States' Options

What then are the options available to the United States? This question is the focus of White's and Friedberg's books. For White, the United States has three options in response to China's bid for greater influence. It can resist China's challenge and try to preserve the status quo in Asia. It can step back from its dominant role in Asia, and leave Asia to China. Or it can remain in Asia on a new basis, allowing China a larger role while maintaining a strong presence of its own (p. 5). As the subtitle of his book proclaims, White believes that the third option, where the United States shares power, is best for regional peace and stability.

Like White, Friedberg rejects the "cede hegemony" to China option. Yet, he is also against sharing power, because he believes it is primacy or preponderance that has allowed the United States to secure its interests—allies, markets, technology, and resources—in Asia (p. 7). His position is consistent with a long (and bipartisan) tradition in American strategic thinking: successive administrations have emphasized that a vital interest of the United States is to prevent a hostile hegemon from dominating any of the major regions of the world.²⁴ For Friedberg, an unfriendly hegemon in Asia poses a threat that it might "draw on the wealth and military capabilities of the region" and use them "as a secure base from which to challenge American interests and perhaps even to attack the United States itself" (p. 7).

The central message of White's *America's China Choice*, however, is that primacy is no longer a viable or wise choice for the United States. Rather, its only option is to remain in Asia "on a new basis" (i.e., sharing power with, and accommodating, China). It is the option with the best chance of avoiding or mitigating strategic rivalry. The difference between White and Friedberg is that White wants the United States to do the accommodating, to "share power" (i.e., cede some of its predominant power), whereas Friedberg resists the suggestion. Friedberg's preference is for America to maintain its predominance, primarily because for him, and many others not just in the United States but also in Asia, it is U.S. hegemony that has upheld regional peace and

24. See also Robert Ellsworth, Andrew Goodpaster, and Rita Hauser, coauthors, *America's National Interests: A Report from the Commission on America's National Interests*, 1996 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, July 1996); and Robert Ellsworth, Andrew Goodpaster, and Rita Hauser, coauthors, *America's National Interests: A Report from the Commission on America's National Interests*, 2000 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, July 2000).

stability.²⁵ Perhaps ceding power also smacks too much of appeasement (pp. 254, 263); it may whet China's appetite for more, and history suggests that is too perilous a path to take.

The specifics of White's power-sharing argument, however, are less cogent than the rest of the book. He reverts to an institutional arrangement, a concert of powers modeled after the Congress of Vienna, as a way to moderate the ambitions of China and the United States. However appealing the Congress's achievements in ushering in one hundred years of European peace, it seems out of step with the power and political realities in Asia today. On the power distribution side, the situation in Asia is one in which primacy has already been attained by one power—the United States. Why should the hegemon cede power? Here, Mearsheimer and others have argued that the hegemon will cede power only if forced to, probably through a hegemonic war.²⁶ On the political front, White's suggestion of a four-power concert, comprising the United States, China, Japan, and India (while dismissing Russia), would be difficult for China to countenance: the fear of three democracies ganging up against it would prove overpowering. Bringing in Japan and India would give the impression of enhancing, not ceding, U.S. power.

Finally, the concert idea fits awkwardly with the logic and thrust of White's argument. Much of his book is about the United States and China. India and Japan make an appearance only in the discussion of power sharing. Given the hostility between China and Japan, and the distrust between India and China, some analysis of why these obstacles do not preclude a U.S.-China-Japan-India concert is necessary. That is not provided, making the idea of the four-power concert seem almost like an afterthought. The power-sharing arrangement that seems more in tune with the thrust of White's argument is Chimerica or the G-2: if the power struggle is between China and America, the most natural solution has to be one where they accommodate each other's core strategic concerns, without bringing in others who are likely to complicate the situation.

Yan would find White's analysis and recommendations congenial, though

25. See, for example, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's statement during his visit to Washington in April 2013, where he welcomed the deployment of four U.S. littoral combat ships to Singapore as part of the United States' pivot to Asia. Lee linked America's military presence to enhancing regional peace and prosperity. Robin Chan, "PM Lee Welcomes U.S. Combat Ship Bound for S'pore," *Straits Times* (Singapore), April 3, 2013, <http://www.straitstimes.com/st/print/961835>.

26. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm," p. 382.

he is also likely to think that the G-2 method of sharing power is more practical than the concert. Sharing power, however, is just the first step. In spirit and in tone, Yan's book confirms Friedberg's prognostication and strategic fears: China is indeed interested in establishing hegemony not just over Asia, but in time across *tianxia* (all under heaven—i.e., the entire world) (pp. 216–221). Yet, more than most, Yan is also acutely conscious of how far behind China is from the United States on all the traditional power measures. That notwithstanding, Yan's point is that China needs to begin preparing for the day when it replaces the United States as the hegemon.

The Bottom Line

The existing distribution of power in Asia remains in America's favor. On the military front, however, despite overall weakness (relative to the United States), China's adoption of asymmetrical and antiaccess strategies is beginning to chip away at the advantages of U.S. military preponderance. On the economic front, China is poised to overtake the United States as the world's largest economy, based on purchasing power parity terms. Moreover, like all great powers, China aspires to, and is working toward, becoming the regional hegemon. That much the three authors agree on. If one accepts this as an accurate description of the strategic context, what are the prospects for peaceful change?

Early in his book, Friedberg identifies five factors that supposedly work in favor of U.S.-China cooperation and two that work against it. The former are U.S.-China economic interdependence, China's becoming a democracy, China's enmeshment in international institutions, the presence of common challenges and threats, and the existence of nuclear weapons (p. 37). The two factors that make rivalry and conflict likely are "the narrowing gap in national power and the continuing deep differences in their [China's and the United States'] ideologies and domestic political structures" (p. 37). In this five-to-two lineup, Friedberg judges the two favoring competition to be "stronger and more deeply rooted" (p. 38). They trump the five that foster cooperation.

It is unclear what Yan would make of the seven variables given that his book deals only indirectly with U.S.-China relations. Because he believes that the United States and China cannot be true friends, and given his view that hegemony is up for grabs, one would expect him, like Friedberg, to weigh more heavily the factors fostering competition and conflict.²⁷ White's take on

27. Yan Xuetong, "The Instability of China-U.S. Relations," *Chinese Journal of International Politics*,

Friedberg's variables is more instructive. A careful reading of his book suggests that he would take seriously three of the five factors that foster cooperation: economic interdependence, nuclear weapons, and China in international institutions. He would discount China's becoming a democracy (because it is not happening yet) and the unifying role of common threats (slim evidence of that so far). Of the two factors pushing in the direction of rivalry and conflict, White would weigh the narrowing power gap heavily, since he is persuaded that China's ascent is already propelling U.S.-China rivalry. He would, however, omit the political-ideological difference factor from his analysis. Hence, assuming equal weighting for each of the relevant variables, White's work suggests that there is a three-to-one possibility in favor of cooperation.

This exercise reveals the importance of the "democracy-legitimacy" and "economic interdependence" variables or themes in shaping one's approach to the issue of peaceful change. Of the four themes identified in the beginning of the essay, the authors are in basic agreement on two of them: the existing and evolving distribution of power, and China's political aspirations. It is the different ways in which they handle the "democracy-legitimacy" and "economic interdependence" variables that lead them to different conclusions.

Neither White nor Yan questions the political legitimacy of the Chinese government. Friedberg does. By integrating the political complexion of China—an autocratic government—into his analysis, and by emphasizing this political-ideological difference vis-à-vis the United States, Friedberg concludes that Chinese hegemony is unacceptable and that the United States needs to maintain its military edge in Asia. It is U.S. preponderance that will keep China in check. The choice for China is whether to accept this situation or embark on a heightened contest with the United States for primacy. For Friedberg, either of the latter situations is preferable to one where the United States cedes hegemony to China.

Putting aside China's political complexion leads White to a different conclusion. Arguing that most Chinese and most Asian nations do not question the legitimacy of the Chinese government, White believes that the United States and China must work together. They should be able to see beyond their political-ideological differences, especially now that China is as comfortable with capitalism as anyone in Asia. The United States, as the extant hegemon,

Vol. 3, No. 3 (Autumn 2010), pp. 263–292. Kenneth G. Lieberthal and Wang Jisi's discussion of "strategic distrust" would seem to support Yan's point about the difficulty of China and the United States becoming true friends. See Lieberthal and Wang, *Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust*, John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series, No. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, March 2012).

should be big and wise enough to “share power” by giving China the greater political influence it desires. The rest of Asia, with the exception of Japan, is already “adjusting” to a more influential China.²⁸ For White, this “adjustment” has much to do with China’s economic clout and how the latter predisposes most in Asia to give serious consideration to China’s political and strategic interests. It follows that for White, this is a decisive constraint on the options available to the United States: few Asian states will line up to check or contain China’s growing influence.

A comparison with the Cold War calculations of the Asian states (except for Indochina) reveals why this is so. Back then, all the relevant considerations—ideology, economic opportunity, and military security—moved noncommunist Asia in the direction of aligning with the United States. Today, China is no longer the ideological “other” for most Asians—socialism with Chinese characteristics is too capitalistic for that. China’s political complexion is also less central, in part because there is wide variation in the political systems of the Asian states. It is only in the realm of security that China remains worrisome for some, especially Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines—all of which have serious maritime disputes with it.

The rest of Asia is less worried about China. The strategic orientations of these other countries have been described as “hedging”—a policy of engaging both the United States and China in the hope of “not having to choose” between them.²⁹ During the Cold War, they were content to align themselves explicitly with the United States, in part because of what China was (a communist state) and what it did (supporting local communist insurgencies). All things considered, then, it will prove extremely difficult today for the United States to corral a serious Asian coalition to check China’s power. That is why, for White, the United States, as the existing hegemon, has to share power. To be sure, for now and the foreseeable future, most countries in Asia would not want China to replace the United States as the hegemon—the ideal would be a

28. For an early, comprehensive analysis of East Asia’s adjustment to China’s rise, see Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross, eds., *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power* (London: Routledge, 1999). Australia’s most recent defense white paper, released in May 2013, takes a more moderate stance on China. Unlike Australia’s 2009 defense white paper, it does not portray China as a threat. See Australian Government, *Defence White Paper 2013* (Canberra: Government of Australia, 2013), http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper2013/docs/WP_2013_web.pdf.

29. Evelyn Goh, *Meeting the China Challenge: The U.S. in Southeast Asian Regional Security Strategies* (Washington, D.C.: East West Center, 2005); Cheng-Chwee Kuik, “The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore’s Response to a Rising China,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (August 2008), pp. 159–185; and John D. Ciorciari, *The Limits of Alignment: Southeast Asia and the Great Powers since 1975* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

situation where neither is the hegemon (i.e., White's power-sharing solution), which White sees as the only guarantee of peace and stability.

White believes that his power-sharing option is the best bet for peaceful change, even as he gives it a lower probability of being adopted by the United States than the "maintain primacy" option. Yet he has faith in the role of knowledge, argument, and persuasion in swaying decisionmakers. His book is an earnest call to U.S. leaders to eschew the "struggle for primacy" and to follow the power-sharing route. One can imagine a second volume that focuses on China, delving into the reasons why hegemony now is neither attainable nor advisable.

Friedberg is not opposed to the United States sharing or even ceding power, but for him, it is only safe and strategically wise to do that when China transforms itself into a liberal democracy. Until then, Friedberg supports the maintenance of U.S. primacy: China will have to choose whether to live with that or actively challenge it. A China willing to live with U.S. primacy—as in the last thirty years—will mute the strategic rivalry between an existing hegemon and a rising power; a China bent on challenging U.S. primacy will intensify the strategic rivalry between the two, with all the political-military implications that would entail.

Yan would agree with both White and Friedberg. Like White, he believes that peaceful change is possible, especially if the United States eschews its preponderance policy and shares power. Like Friedberg, Yan is also not averse to an intensification of the U.S.-China rivalry should the United States insist on maintaining primacy. For Yan, sharing power is just a stepping-stone to the *longue durée*, where China replaces the United States as the hegemon. His examination of pre-Qin strategic thought leads him to the conclusion that, to be successful, China's bid for regional hegemony must be undergirded by a form of political leadership, policy creativity, and moral authority that are acceptable to those China wishes to lord over. This emphasis on leadership, creativity, willing followers, and humane authority portrays a path to hegemony that is noncoercive and nonviolent (pp. 137–144); it sounds surprisingly similar to the "benign" and "public goods" discourse that has been used to characterize or justify American hegemony.³⁰

30. For a succinct account of the public goods and benign U.S. hegemony perspective, see G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), especially pp. 142–144, 297–298. For an account that emphasizes the substantial payoffs for the United States associated with its provision of pub-

Conclusion

Aaron Friedberg and Hugh White write on the assumption that time is running out for both the United States and China. I would argue that time has something to offer both sides. China is currently in no position to replace the United States as the Asian hegemon, which Chinese leaders recognize. Although it is hard to deny that in recent years China has acted more assertively, especially with respect to the territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas, these exertions are not about displacing the United States. If they are, the strategy is remarkably incompetent, because it helped pave the way for the United States' pivot to Asia.

China's best shot at dislodging the United States is to continue growing at 6 to 8 percent annually for another quarter century. When China's leaders say that they must continue to focus on internal economic development, and that in turn requires a peaceful and stable Asia, I read that to mean that they are in no hurry to displace the United States. Yan Xuetong seems content with his studied approach to drawing lessons of hegemonic statecraft from ancient Chinese thinkers. Deng Xiaoping's adage about "hiding your strength and biding your time" remains relevant. Another twenty-five years of strong economic growth and China might be in a position to play the role that the United States played after World War II, in Asia and beyond.

Chinese strategists adopting what Friedberg calls "the propensity of things" calculations (chap. 5) should worry about others provoking it to act prematurely on issues that, over time, may resolve themselves in China's favor. Consider Taiwan. With Ma Jing Yeou (instead of Lee Teng Hui or Chen Shui Bian) in charge, China-Taiwan relations are on an even keel. Reunification can wait. As China-Taiwan economic interdependence intensifies, it is the Taiwanese captains of industry who are likely to push for unification. In March 2013, a Taiwanese tycoon and his associates who favored "Taiwan's absorption by China" tried but failed to acquire Taiwan's largest newspaper. Owning the largest newspaper would have given the "pro-China businessman," who already owns one Taiwanese media company, serious power to shape public opinion. Strong opposition to his owning a second company, however, scuttled the deal.³¹

lic goods, see Carla Norrlof, *America's Global Advantage: U.S. Hegemony and International Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

31. "Pro-China Tycoon's Bid for Taiwan Media Assets Collapses," *Straits Times* (Singapore), March 27, 2013, <http://www.straitstimes.com/st/print/940987>.

A few decades from now, China's political-military clout will also be such that Taiwan will have great difficulty resisting reunification, peaceful or otherwise. It is Taiwan that does not have the luxury of biding its time: since the 1990s, Taiwanese leaders have been confronted with the "it's now or never [to declare formal independence]" syndrome. Presidents Lee and Chen tested the waters of formal independence but were beaten back by Chinese as well as U.S. pressures. Both China and the United States would prefer that Taiwanese leaders put off moves toward formal independence indefinitely. The political-military frictions between China and Taiwan in the 1990s (which embroiled the United States) have obfuscated Mao Zedong's stance on Taiwan, conveyed to Henry Kissinger in 1973: China was in no great hurry to bring Taiwan back to its fold, it could "come after one hundred years."³²

For the United States, shelving the Taiwan issue is not only prudent; time will also be the best test of its confidence in its ability to outcompete China and to retain its hegemonic position. Although China has the advantages of scale (four times the population) and geography (permanent resident of Asia), the United States has many other advantages, including its absolute wealth, democratic politics, military allies (with more than 700 bases worldwide), soft power, and a culture of innovation.³³ Assumptions of continued Chinese growth are just that. Will China be able to maintain its high growth rates over the next two decades? Although the Chinese economy has defied predictions about its implosion in the 1990s or being dragged down by the "hard landings" in the 2000s, Chinese policymakers are only too aware of the challenges they face in the future. Time will tell if China will muster the economic base and technological innovations to mount a credible challenge to U.S. hegemony. Perhaps the greatest advantage for the United States is that the current rules of the international economic and political systems are largely stacked in its favor.³⁴ China has done remarkably well under those rules, and although it is safe to assume that China will want to change some of them, it comes to the table as a relatively satisfied power, not a dissatisfied one.

Time will also allow the United States to help nudge along or witness China's possible transformation into a democracy. For Friedberg, promoting "regime change" or nudging China to become a liberal democracy is an important element of U.S. policy (p. 2). Americans and others who put their faith in

32. Cited in Henry Kissinger, *On China* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), p. 280.

33. See Joseph Nye, "American and Chinese Power after the Financial Crisis," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Autumn 2010), pp. 143–153; and Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

34. Norrlof, *America's Global Advantage*, pp. 5–6.

the sequential development of capitalism and democracy and who were disappointed by the Tiananmen crackdown may have a better chance of seeing their expectations realized with the expansion of the Chinese middle class in the next few decades. A democratic China, going by Friedberg's analysis, would make it a much more acceptable Asian hegemon to the United States.

Finally, if the United States–China contest is a long-haul endeavor (as Yan assumes), where one is thinking in terms of decades instead of years, both sides will have opportunities to experiment with policies capable of blunting the sharp edges of such a contest, even if they are unable to eliminate it. The United States' pivot to East Asia, for example, has encouraged some in China to call for its own "pivot to the West" (i.e., Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East), not only to secure its energy needs, but also to expand its strategic space, such that over time, its economic and strategic well-being will not rely exclusively on developments in East Asia. The prospects for U.S.-China cooperation in these areas are deemed to be better, given their "common interests in economic investment, energy, anti-terrorism, non-proliferation and regional stability."³⁵ This would fit with Kissinger's view that there is room for "coevolution," whereby "both countries pursue their domestic imperatives co-operating where possible, and adjust their relations to minimize conflict."³⁶ Competition will not be absent, but will manifest itself more on the economic and political, rather than military, fronts.³⁷

Kissinger's emphasis on "domestic imperatives" is pertinent and prescient. It can be read as a lament and warning to his fellow Americans about the dangers to the United States' international standing of the political infighting and dysfunction—witness the budget sequestration in the spring of 2013 and the government shutdown of October 2013—that have come to characterize the United States government of late. The world's greatest democracy is having trouble agreeing on its domestic imperatives. The government shutdown forced President Obama to cancel his trip to Bali, Indonesia, to attend the East Asia Summit at a critical moment of the United States' "pivot" to Asia. His absence was perceived as a setback for the pivot. It also made it hard for the United States to twist some arms on the TPP or reassure its Asian partners about the TPP's clauses. The international and regional media were also quick

35. Yun Sun, "March West: China's Response to the U.S. Rebalancing," *Up Front* blog, Brookings Institution, January 31, 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/01/31-china-us-sun>.

36. Kissinger, *On China*, p. 526.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 525.

to portray the Chinese as stealing a march on the United States.³⁸ The implied comparator in Kissinger's point about domestic imperatives is of course China. The Chinese leadership seems united in pursuing sustained economic development, in part because their political survival and legitimacy depend on it. The global market worries about "hard landings," but has so far been pleasantly surprised by China's economic resilience. Asian states interested in growing with China are reassured. Thus the argument about time is not about how it will nudge Chinese and U.S. interests toward convergence; that may or may not happen. It is about which side will be better able to marshal its domestic political, economic, technological, and cultural resources to implement a grand strategy that facilitates its becoming or staying the hegemon, in a manner that makes its leadership congenial to Asia and the rest of the world.

38. Mark Landler, "Another Shutdown Victim: U.S. Efforts to Offset China," *New York Times*, October 2, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/03/world/asia/another-shutdown-victim-us-efforts-to-counter-china.html>; and Rowan Callick, "Asian 'Pivot' Losing Its Edge," *Australian*, October 8, 2013, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/asian-pivot-losing-its-edge/story-e6frg6z6-1226734331986>.