

## Tom and Jerry in US-China Relations

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### ABSTRAK

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Abstrak Dalam konsep liberal, khususnya neoliberal, negara yang melakukan kerjasama cenderung memiliki potensi konflik yang lebih kecil. Namun, hal ini tidak berlaku pada hubungan AS-Tiongkok yang lebih sering mengalami ketegangan, namun hingga pemerintahan Biden Tiongkok-Amerika masih memiliki ketergantungan yang kuat dalam hubungan ekonomi. Hubungan China-AS sering disebut sebagai "Perangkap Thucydides" namun teori ini memiliki banyak kekurangan dalam menjelaskan realitas. Setelah melakukan analisis, ditemukan bahwa hubungan China-Amerika lebih mudah dianalogikan dengan hubungan antara kucing dan tikus dalam serial kartun "Tom and Jerry" yang sering bermusuhan namun sesekali juga bekerja sama untuk kepentingan, tujuan, dan keamanan bersama.

*Kata Kunci: China-AS, Hubungan, Tom and Jerry, Biden*

### ABSTRACT

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In the liberal concept, especially neoliberal, countries that cooperate tend to have less potential for conflict. However, this does not apply to US-China relations which are more often in tension, but until the Biden administration China-America still has a strong dependence in economic relations. The China-US relationship is often referred to as the "Thucydides Trap" however this theory has many shortcomings in explaining reality. After analyzing, it is found that China - America relations are more easily analogized to the relationship between cats and mice in the cartoon series "Tom and Jerry" who are often hostile but occasionally also work together for mutual interests, goals, and security.

*Keywords: China-US, Relations, Tom and Jerry, Biden*

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### INTRODUCTION

Sino-American relations are always interesting to follow, as both countries are major players on the global political stage today. The relationship is often strained for a while, but both or one of them always try to improve the situation by opening up cooperation. Especially in the era of Biden's leadership in America and Xi Jinping in China, the relationship between the two was filled with small surprises, such as the arrival of Nancy Pelosi at the beginning of Biden's inauguration, Chinese spy blimps, humanitarian issues in Uyghur and other things that attract attention to this day. Until now, US-China relations are still far from peaceful, especially in the early 2024 several issues such as technology feuds, (Indonesia, 2023) human rights (Wangke, 2020), and competition in the Pacific region still color this dragon year. (STEKOM, 2017).

#### Objective

This research aims to analyze how the dynamics of the relationship between America and China are sometimes good, but also a lot of bad according to time, leaders and interests, especially in the current Biden Era. The US-China relationship described by some scholars as "Thucydides Trap" is not suitable to explain the relationship between these two big countries. Sino-American relations are more suitable like the cat and mouse relationship in the "Tom and Jerry" series due to various factors

## METHODS

The research was conducted using a qualitative method by using relevant and existing data from various sources, especially in terms of history and foreign policy of the two countries, then analyzing it according to the initial theme.

### Theoretical Framework

In liberal, especially neoliberal, concepts, countries that cooperate tend to have less potential for conflict. (Polachek, 1999) However, this has not always been the case with the relationship between the United States and China under the Biden administration. China, which is the power counterweight to the United States, poses more threats than peace in the United States. On Biden's part, he will continue to increase his support for the Chinese government. Meanwhile, China under the leadership of Xi Jinping continues to strengthen its flexibility towards all regions, especially Asia. On the one hand, the relationship between China and America is a relationship characterized by liberalism, but if China's development also poses a threat to American power, it will be very difficult to find a balance in the cooperation between these two major countries. On the one hand, China for America is an important partner and should not be absent, and vice versa. However, China is also the biggest threat that should be considered in the first place, even if China itself does not intend to compete with America (Patsy, 2024).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Thucydides Trap and its feasibility

In the book "Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap" written by Harvard professor Graham Allison, the book has attracted worldwide attention since its publication in 2017, as it concludes that the situation known as the "Thucydides trap" is very likely to trigger a war between the United States and the People's Republic of China. Comparing current US-ROC tensions to those in history between ancient Sparta and Athens described by Thucydides, Allison argues that "it was the rise of Athens, and the fear inspired by Sparta, that made war inevitable." In contrast, some US statesmen, including former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, still believe that Washington and Beijing will be pragmatic enough to continue to cooperate for mutual benefit, given the "complex interdependence" that exists between the two countries and the need to rely on each other. (Allison, 2018) To this day, neither country was truly victorious like Sparta of old, but both countries lost the war and to this day tensions between the two countries continue. Meanwhile, Sparta has become history. Thucydides' Trap concept highlights how a rising power challenging an existing dominant power can lead to conflict, often resulting in losses for both parties involved. While Thucydides' concept has attracted a lot of attention and makes sense in theory, in practice it has been questioned for several reasons:

- 1) The first reason is China's rising power: While China is indeed growing economically and technologically, the United States still maintains its superiority in aspects such as economy, geography, alliances, and military experience. This undermines the assumption that conflict is inevitable due to a new power challenging existing hegemony. (George, 2020)

- 2) The second reason is economic interdependence: The significant economic interdependence between the US and China acts as a deterrent to conflict. China relies heavily on exports, with a large portion going to the US, making both countries vulnerable to disruptions in trade. (Chunlong, 2010)
- 3) The third reason is domestic challenges: Both countries face internal challenges that prioritize domestic issues over external conflict. Issues such as declining civic engagement and lack of trust in politics encourage leaders to focus on internal stability rather than engaging in conflict. (Allison, 2017)
- 4) The fourth reason is a misunderstanding of the Thucydides Trap: The Thucydides trap is not merely about a rising power challenging an established power; it also involves the dynamics of fear and honor that shape the decision-making process. Understanding these psychological factors is crucial to escape the trap. (Dingding, 2016)

Moreover, scientifically, Thucydides' concept is weak for several reasons:

First, Misleading Translations: The Thucydides Trap concept is weakened by misleading translations of Thucydides' original texts, which do not accurately support the structural forces that cause instability in US-China relations. Second, Lack of Empirical Support: The case of the Peloponnesian War, often cited as an example of Thucydides' Trap, does not provide strong empirical support for the concept, raising doubts about its applicability in contemporary scenarios. Third, Historical Context: The historical context of the Peloponnesian War, which focused on the expansion of the Athenian Empire rather than the shifting distribution of power, challenges the direct applicability of Thucydides' Traps to modern power dynamics. (Lee, 2019)

## **Discussion**

### **History and Characteristics of U.S.-China Relations**

#### **1. History**

Despite the perennial disputes over Taiwan, territorial issues, and human rights concerns, the two countries have maintained diplomatic relations and engaged in various agreements over the years. The economic interdependence between China and the US, as the world's largest and second largest economies, underscores the importance of their relationship on a global scale. The history of China's relationship with the United States has been complex and sometimes tense since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The US officially recognized the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China in 1979, but continued its military support for Taiwan, leading to ongoing tensions. The two countries have significant economic ties but are also engaged in global hegemonic great power competition. (U.S Mission, 2018) Some of the key events in US-China history such as the 1845 Treaty of Wangxia was one of the first major events between the US and Chinese governments. In 1972, Nixon's visit to China marked a significant shift in US-China relations. Then 1979 saw the normalization of relations, with the US recognizing the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China. After some time, in 2000 trade relations were normalized again. China granted permanent normal trade relations with the U.S. Later, Blinken's 2021 speech directly described China as a "serious long-term challenge" to the international order (Foreign, 2023).

## 2. Characteristics

The encounter between the United States and China has been going on for nearly two and a half hundred years. Many consider Sino-American relations to be the most important bilateral relationship of our time. "The US-China relationship is arguably the largest bilateral relationship in the modern world. Some features of the relationship between the United States and China, viz:

Early, Chinese-American relations are a web of contradictions. The two countries were called an "odd couple" by *The Economist* in late October 2009 and referred to as a "power couple" by others. (Allison, 2024)

Second, the US and China are rooted in each other and neither is left out. Their bilateral relationship grew from a private trade, the Old China Trade, in 1784 - relatively marginal in politics and economics at the time - to the center of their strategic attention. This transformation resulted in a web of diplomatic, economic, social, religious, cultural and military relations between the two countries. More than three million Chinese immigrants currently live in the United States. (US Department, 2024)

Third, from a historical perspective, the relationship between the United States and China took place in three phases, roughly in the mid-19th and 20th centuries. They shifted significantly from an interaction between an empire (Qing China, 1644-1911) and a young nation-state (the United States), to an interaction between two nation-states (Qing China/Republic of China 1912-1949 and the United States from the same period), and then a broad encounter between a nation-state (People's Republic of China, 1949-present) and an empire (the United States, post-World War II). (Zhang, 2020)

Fourth, the two countries compete on world markets, resources and power. On the economic front, China has been catching up, against the wishes of the United States, but China is unlikely to overtake the US in key areas of development any time soon. The presence of Covid19 which has caused a global economic downturn, followed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine since early 2022 has changed things on a global scale.

Fifth, Sino-American relations imply competing political cultures. America's power in the world comes from the triangular relationship between Destiny, wealth and military might, while the ruling party - either the Nationalist Party (1928-49) or the Communist Party of China (1949-present) - along with the Chinese people have been identified as the source of China's power. Development and peace are China's themes for the 21st century. China stands with democracy and freedom, America's most powerful values. (Dong, 2017)

Sixth, the US is a significant model for China. The role of the US as a model or tutor for China is perhaps best symbolized by American missionary efforts in China (1831-1951) and the large influx of Chinese students to the United States. Beginning in the 1870s, American and Chinese sponsored educational efforts fostered an elite power base in China, along with a belief in American values and their influence on China's future, especially its intellectual elite.

Seventh, Chinese-American antagonism is partly due to the wide gap between Chinese and American concerns expressed in public discourse. Contact between the two countries in domestic and foreign affairs means that many images and labels are exchanged on the other side of the Pacific. These perceptions and labels include Chinese market vs US Open Door, red China vs American imperialism, the return of Chinese allure vs American allure, and the Chinese threat vs American new imperialism. (Dong, 2017)

Eight, the United States and China share responsibility for the post-World War II uncertainties in the Asia Pacific region. Long-term stability and peace on the Korean Peninsula, in the South and East China Seas, and in the Taiwan Strait are shared security interests of both countries in the region. (Pu, 2019)

Ninth, America is a champion of scientific and technological innovation, led by large companies and an independent state and protected by a strong intellectual property rights regime. For China, science has many meanings, from high technology and natural science to the rationality and justice of social transformation under Hu Jintao's "scientific vision of development" (Kexue fashion Guan). For the founders of the Chinese Communist Party during the first quarter of the 20th century, the Father of Science was the Father of Democracy. The real competition between China and the US is how to address climate change, ecology, mineral resources and energy. (Ryan, 2021)

Tenth, the "Chinese Dream" (Zhongguo Meng), proposed by new leader Xi Jinping, aspires to emulate the American dream. Before dismissing it as a mere copycat slogan, let us consider that throughout history, glorification labels have often changed owners. (Michael, 2017) It is undeniable that the U.S.-China relationship is characterized by rivalry, cooperation, and opposition, which can simultaneously run and change, inseparable from the needs of both sides.

#### **US-China Relations Under Biden Administration**

US-PRC relations under the Biden administration were characterized by a mix of competition and cooperation. The Biden administration inherited a challenging relationship with China, which emphasized the struggle between democracies and autocracies. The relationship involves deep economic interdependence alongside strategic rivalry, which includes economic, military, technological and diplomatic competition. (Stephanie, 2023) The Biden administration views China as a strategic competitor, focusing on diplomatic, military and technological competition. The Biden-Xi meeting at APEC was described as constructive, aiming to prevent further crises in relations while addressing major issues such as China's actions in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. Biden highlighted the competition with China, emphasizing American values, interests, and alliances while addressing concerns about trade policies, human rights abuses, and unfair practices. (Whitehouse, 2023)

#### **Tom and Jerry in US-China Relationship**

The US has a very unique relationship with China. Often at odds, yet always together and cooperating in many ways. If Thucydides' trap during the Roman empire centuries ago is described as a more political form of US-China relationship, then the condition of US and China today is very different from Sparta and Athens in the past. If Thucydides' trap in war writing got Sparta as the winner, then Thucydides' trap analogized in the US-China relationship has no "winners and losers", therefore many Chinese scientists disagree with the analogy of Thucydides' trap in the US-China relationship because it is too pessimistic, moreover the leaders of the two countries (America-China) have also stated that the US-China relationship will not lead to Thucydides' trap. In 2015, David Lampton, an American academic, had high hopes for Chinese-American relations. From China's point of view, the Thucydides trap does not fit the label of U.S.-China relations because China's philosophical model of "Yin and Yang" is so different from the Western philosophy of "Conflict and Confrontation" that China's rise should be judged from a comprehensive and historical perspective, not from the perspective of a zero-sum game. (The Asia, 2015)

It is huge complicated to explain the US-China relationship like the Thucydides trap, although scientifically it sounds more scientific, but some criticisms and also the characteristics that have been described by many scholars show that the Thucydides trap has many shortcomings, especially if it is seen that the term Thucydides trap comes from Western thought, and of course it is only suitable for thoughts based on Western beliefs and perspectives, while China believes in different beliefs in the sense that the western perspective is only acceptable in the West, not for Asia, especially China. However, it cannot be denied that what is happening today clearly shows the competition, mutual vigilance, and cooperation between the two powerful countries. America-China is like the cat and mouse characters in Tom and Jerry cartoons, who always fight but often get along because there are common interests and missions that must be carried out in order to achieve the same goals (Cartoonvibe, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

The U.S.-China relationship is still a concern today, even though the relationship between these two countries has been established for a long time but the pattern has been the same since the last few decades. The Sino-American relationship is a strange and complex one, often tense and often good. This is due to many factors. Previously, around 2015, it was predicted that the relationship between the two countries would be like the "Thucydides" trap in Athens, where the two warring nations both suffered losses, but Athens came out victorious. However, this theory does not fully work in explaining the U.S.-China relationship due to many factors, one of which is that this theory cannot function well in reality.

The current U.S.-China relationship is not unlike the cat and mouse relationship in the Tom Jerry cartoon series, two animals that almost every episode fight over food, power, and differences of opinion, but often make up and cooperate if there are common goals to be achieved, or block common enemies for the sake of convenience. It's just that the placement of Tom and Jerry characters is not very clear in this paper, whether Tom is America and Jerry is China, or vice versa. Or maybe the positions of the two can be swapped and changed along with the conditions and the game on the political stage. It is hoped that this paper will be useful for future studies.

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