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**China-US Competition:  
The Chinese Perspective**

**A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
*Master's in International Relations and Security Studies*  
at  
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by  
Tao Zheng Liu**



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## Abstract

In the last two decades, the rise of China became the priority concern of the US and the Western world. The competition between China and the US is becoming increasingly more serious during this time of uncertainty and instability. Following the current steps in the development of relations between the two countries it is likely that the competitive relationship between China and the US will essentially get worse in the future. This is a strategic reality. Indeed, the China-US relationship and competition is a dilemma. Whether China and the US can escape from the Thucydides Trap stays uncertain as the situation is approaching a dangerous point, especially when the US and Western countries frequently try to use a Western mentality to understand China regarding international relations, development, and military affairs. Therefore, it is indeed very significant to understand the Chinese perspectives of the China-US competition. The major International Relations theories of this thesis include the Chinese International Relations theory, realism, and offensive realism. The idea of defensive realism and liberalism may play a supportive role in this thesis. Apart from an introduction and conclusion, this thesis includes five major sections.

The first section focuses on China's political and strategic culture. This is very significant for understanding the China-US competition from a Chinese perspective and how to differentiate Chinese views from Western views toward political and strategic culture. In terms of political and strategic culture, it includes history, mentality, ideology, culture, tradition, and political system and how these factors shape the Chinese mentality for its national political and strategic culture today. Understanding China's political and strategic culture has an important role to play in understanding China's policymaking, national strategies, and behaviours today.

The second section focuses on the Chinese International Relations theory. Even though the Western International Relations theory still dominate the field of IR, it is very significant to understand and consider non-Western views and theories on international politics. This can help to promote mutual understanding and interdependence in the international world. Therefore, it is indeed very important to understand the Chinese International Relations theory especially under the complex international background and the era of China-US competition.

The third section focuses on the competition of ideas. This includes Chinese diplomacy under the new era of President Xi Jinping, national manufacturing strategies, the relations between the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Belt and Road Initiative, the diplomatic battle between China and the US over the Uyghur issue due to the establishment of the BRI. The change of China's national diplomacy with the influence of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy strongly shows China's changing attitude under the era of China-US competition. China's clear national manufacturing

strategies, SCO and the BRI are some of the major strategic pressures the US is facing, competition towards these areas will become more serious in the future.

The fourth section looks at the China-US economic competition. The economic boom and the continuous increase in term of comprehensive economic ability and capability of China is driving China-US economic relations into different forms of competitions. This became clearer under the Trump administration. Trump's trade war strategy against China escalated the economic competition between China and the US. However, even under competition, there is a need for cooperation and interdependence. The economic phenomenon is not only that China's economic is rapidly increasing. Also, China is constructing its own way of economic development and systems which are completely different from the US. For example, the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

The fifth section considers China-US military competition. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the US military became far more advanced and powerful than any other countries in the world in term of military capability and ability. The US is a truly global military power in the contemporary era. Even though the Chinese military is rapidly rising and modernizing, however, it still needs time to become a real global military power like the US. The PLA in the Asia-Pacific region is a real threat to the US. The 2015 Chinese military reforms made significant changes to the PLA. Therefore, this section will look into the China-US military competition comprehensively including for example, China's military modernization program, major geographical areas of competition, alliances, and potential alliances.

The China-US competition is a strategic reality as China's rise is challenging the US global hegemony, and the US-Western led world order. China's resentment towards the West and its national strategies are aiming for systemic change in the US and Western dominant world.

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## Introduction

The current China-US competition is in many ways aggrandizing the complexity and uncertainty of the international situation and international society. In the last two decades, China's comprehensive power and ability, status, and influence has grown at an incredibly fast speed. At this point, the rise of China is inevitable. This is not only the necessity of history, but also the inevitability of this era. As Napoléon Bonaparte's famous quote said: "China is a sleeping giant. for when she wakes, she will move the world." (Roberts, 2014). The China-US competition is a strategic reality, and it is getting increasingly more serious. This thesis will focus on China-US competition from the Chinese perspective, as most Political Science and International Relations literature and academic works in Western countries usually discuss and analysis China-US competition from the Western dominant perspectives. Therefore, to understand the Chinese perspectives of the competition is indeed very important, as China and the West can be very different in terms of culture and mentality. The frequent use of Western Cold War mentality and policies towards China by the US and its allies is certainly leading to more potential conflicts. Whether China and the US can avoid the theory of the Thucydides Trap is not easy under the phenomenon when competition is a strategic reality. The Thucydides Trap is a very dangerous dynamic that happens when the rising power threatens to replace the ruling power or begins to challenge its hegemonic position (Da Costa, 2017). This dynamic creates structural conditions of severe stress, which includes rising power syndrome, ruling power syndrome, and transitional friction. Under such conditions, intentions aside, not only unexpected events by third parties or accidents that would otherwise be inconsequential or manageable, but even ordinary flashpoints in foreign affairs can act as sparks that trigger large-scale conflict (Da Costa, 2017). "The United States cannot sit by while China grows its military potential, economic dominance, and political leverage to the end of shifting the regional balance. Were America to back away, partners and allies in the region would feel rising pressure to comply with Beijing's policies and to show deference in many ways." (Nacht et al., 2018). Americans believe that if the US takes one step back, China will move one step extra forward. "The United States would lose the ability to influence events in the region constructively and would pay a tremendous price in lost credibility that would resonate globally. A perception held by many would be affirmed that of America in hegemonic decline." (Nacht et al., 2018). China continues to develop rapidly and industriously for its national rejuvenation and challenging the US and Western lead global order, while the US is trying to maintain their global hegemonic position and the dominant Western world order. This is a significant reason why competition is a strategic reality.

The major International Relations theory of this thesis is the Chinese International Relations theory, realism, and offensive realism. The idea of defensive realism and liberalism may play a supportive

role. There are five major sections in this thesis. The first section focus on China's political and strategic culture. The second section about the Chinese International Relations theory. The third section focus on idea competition between the two nations. The fourth section looks at China-US economic competition. And the last section focuses on China-US military competition. At the end, a conclusion strings the thesis to a close.

## Section One: China's Political and Strategic Culture

### Define Political Culture and Strategic Culture

The first section focuses on China's political and strategic culture. The political culture means a nation's political behaviour norms. Political culture can be a form of subjective value scope. A model of a nation's political value orientation towards political life, political cognition, feelings, attitudes, values and other elements of political psychology, political ideals, beliefs, theories, evaluation standards and other political ideologies are among them. The form of expression is in an interactive and balanced relationship with the material political system. Indeed, people inside a nation can be very different politically. However, the political culture of a nation is formed through time, conflicts, and social experience. In term of strategic culture, strategic culture is strategic thinking and strategic theories formed on the basis of a nation's history, cultural values, traditions, spirit, and mentality. The use of such thinking and theories guides strategic actions and influences social culture and ideological trends. It is the cultural tradition, philosophical thinking and social concept deposited in the strategic thinking, strategic principle and strategic decision of a nation or country. The combination of ideological culture and strategy can be called strategic culture. It has attributes such as ideological form, historical inheritance, national system, and regional characteristics. It is the latent consciousness and historical and cultural complex for making realistic strategies because strategists can only conduct knowledge and practice creative activities in a specific historical and cultural environment. Simply put, strategic culture is those deep-seated cultural factors that have an impact on a country's strategic thinking, strategic orientation, and strategic intentions. Therefore, understanding China's political and strategic culture can systemically enlighten the understanding of the China-US competition today from the Chinese perspective.

### The Chinese Way of Unification

Historically, for most of the time, China's unification was always accomplished by force using harsh military means. This can be referred to as the Chinese way of unification, which is very similar to Otto von Bismarck's policy of Blood and Iron. On 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1862, Bismarck mentioned in his speech: "Not through speeches and majority decisions will the great questions of the day be decided, but by iron and blood." (Eyck, 1950). China, during the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States period from 770 BC to 221 BC, experienced over 500 years of conflicts and wars. From 230–221 BC, the state of Qin from the Northwest part launched a war of unification against the other six states. Ying Zheng, the King of Qin, later became the First Emperor of China and finally achieved unification. Ying Zheng raised an army of 1 million which swept over the heartland of China and eradicated the other six states in only 9 years. As one steps into the breach another falls, through

dozens of generations of rulers and the blood of the Qin army, the dream of over 20 generations of the Qin rulers and Qin army finally became a reality. A famous quote mentioned about the Qin army said: "The Qin army never stop fight wars unless they all bleed out and die." The other six Chinese states usually refer to the Qin army as one made out of tigers and wolves. Chinese historians sometimes refer to the state of Qin as the Prussia of China. Ying Zheng, or the First Emperor of China, not only unified China through harsh military means, he also systemically conducted the standardization of the system of measurement, road size, and Chinese written script. For example, Wu (around Shanghai area), Cantonese, and Mandarins cannot directly communicate or converse but can read or write the same way because of the First Emperor's standardization of the Chinese written system (Du Bois, 2014). The First Emperor succeeded in unifying China after hundreds of years of conflicts and wars. Thanks to his foresight, China remained a unitary state for more than two millennia afterwards (Du Bois, 2014). The First Emperor's greatest achievement was to establish the Chinese centralized authoritarian system which still influences China's political system today.

In recent history, the Chinese Civil War between the CCP (Communist Party of China) and the KMT (Nationalist Party of China) is another example of unification by harsh military means. As Mao Zedong said: "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." (Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, n.d.). In the Chinese mentality a leader who can achieve and preserve the unification of China essentially becomes a god like individual. Chinese President Xi Jinping as a strongman leader understands this mentality very well. The CCP and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) never made any forms of commitment that Taiwan's unification with mainland China will exclude the use of military means or force. As President Xi clearly stated: "Taiwan's unification with mainland China is inevitable. China must and will be united. We make no promise to give up the use of force and reserve the option of all necessary means, not ruling out the use of military action against separatist efforts in Taiwan." (Time, 2 January 2019).

### Rebellions and Civil Wars

In Chinese history, rebellions and revolts brought tremendous damage and serious troubles to Chinese Empires. Historically speaking, they were much more severe and deadly to the ruling regimes than any forms of foreign invasions. For example, during the Second Sino-Japanese War, the President of the Republic of China, and leader of the KMT, Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) stated: "The communists are a disease of the heart, but the Japanese are only a disease of the skin." (Ming, n.d.). As Chiang sometime refers the communists as the "red bandits" or the "red rebels". Chiang was really confident that China could beat Japan in a long-term war. However, he was afraid that one

day, China would become a communist regime like the Soviet Union, which of course was what happened.

A significant reason for Chiang's main policy towards the Japanese before the war started was the policy of appeasement. Chiang stated on 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 1931: "To fight against Japan, the red bandits must be suppressed first, the internal must be settled before fight against external threats, to suppress the red bandits is to contribute the fight against Japan." (Fenby, 2005). For example, when the Japanese invaded the Chinese region of Manchuria (Northeast China) in 1931, Chiang ordered Manchuria warlord Zhang Xueliang and his 300,000 troops to retreat into the heartland of China. Thus, handing one of the most industrialized regions in Asia to the Japanese. The Germans usually refer South Manchuria's Liaoning (Fengtian) province as the Ruhr of the East. Zhang Xueliang was unwilling to do so and felt extremely discontented towards Chiang. In addition, Zhang Xueliang bitterly hated the Japanese and had a strong will to start the war against Japan as his father, the old Marshal of Manchuria, Zhang Zuolin, was assassinated by the Japanese on 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1928. In December 1936, a political crisis took place in Northwest China's city of Xi'an, known as the Xi'an Incident. Although Zhang Xueliang and General Yang Hucheng of Shaanxi province had been ordered by Chiang to suppress the communists (Ming, n.d.), instead, Zhang formed an anti-Japanese coalition with the CCP. Zhang also kidnapped Chiang as a prisoner when Chiang flew to Xi'an. Zhang released Chiang after he agreed to a ceasefire with the CCP and to form a United Front against the Japanese (Ming, n.d.).

Rebellions, revolts, and uprisings in China take various forms and can be started by different types of individuals. They can be a fatal threat to the existing regime. Firstly, there are rebellions led by the ruling class, such as aristocrats, governors, and generals. During the Han Dynasty, in 154 BC, the Rebellion of the Seven States happened. It was led by 7 regional semi-autonomous kings all from the same Imperial Liu clan as the Han Emperor. The main reason of this rebellion was to resist the emperor's attempt to remove the 7 regional semi-autonomous states to centralize the power of the government. During the Qing Dynasty, the Revolt of the Three Feudatories from 1673 to 1681 was led by three Han Chinese Princes and Generals who ruled Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangdong, Fujian, and part of Sichuan and Hunan Provinces against the Qing central government. The Pingxi Prince, Wan Sangui, instigated the rebellion under the banner of "opposing Qing and restoring Ming", as Qing was ruled by the Manchus instead of Han Chinese. In addition, Wu himself was a Ming General. Wu also made alliances with Wang Fuchen, the provincial military commander of Shaanxi Province; Ming's loyalists Zheng Clan who ruled Taiwan and Chinggisid Chahar Mongol Prince Abunai Borjigin who was the direct descendant of Genghis Khan from the golden family. However, in reality, the

reason for this rebellion of the three princes was to oppose the Qing Emperor's policy to take away the autonomous provinces from their rulers.

Secondly are rebellions led by ordinary people. Zhu Yuanzhang was a poor peasant and a beggar who later established the Ming Dynasty and became the emperor. He joined the Red Turban Rebellions then overthrew the Mongol Yuan Dynasty. However, around 300 years later, the Ming Dynasty was overthrown by another rebellion led by an ordinary man named Li Zicheng, who worked on a farm, in a blacksmith's shop and tavern, and as a mailman for the state courier system. The Li Zicheng Rebellion ended the Ming after Li's rebel army besieged the Ming Capital of Beijing; the last Ming Emperor committed suicide. Li proclaimed himself the Emperor and established the Shun dynasty.

According to statistics, listing out the top ten deadliest wars in human history, China participated in 9 of the wars, 6 of these wars happened in China directly, and 3 of these wars were rebellions that happened in China. The three rebellions are the An Lushan Rebellion which happened during the Tang Dynasty from 755 to 763, (estimated death toll of 36 million), the Taiping Rebellion during the Qing Dynasty from 1851 to 1864, (estimated death toll of 30 million), and the Dungan Revolt during the Qing Dynasty from 1862 to 1877, (estimated death toll of 12 million). (War History Online, 18 June 2017). The history of rebellions in China can be frightening and inconceivable. Therefore, the history of rebellions in China has a really significant influence towards on CCP today. Centralized power can attract not only power-hungry elites, but even the masses. Like how Hegel described, for thousands of years, China is like a gambling table, ambitious villains and rulers take turns sitting in the change of power, the cannon fodder making sacrifices (Hegel, 2004). When mistakes are not rectified or rectified in the right way, by the change of time, it can bring tremendous troubles or even fatal to the ruling regime. This is especially so the Chinese authoritarian style regime with a strong centralized authoritarian system or the Celestial Empire system. As Chinese political elites always say, internal problems and enemies can be much more lethal than any external enemies.

External threats are nothing to China, but we certainly need to put an eye on ourselves. "In 1912, Mao Zedong's high school teacher gave him a book that became his lifelong favourite. The book is *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance*, which was edited by Sima Guang, an intellectual and politician in the Northern Song dynasty, and published in 1084. It is a 294-volume, three-million-word chronological narrative of China's history from 403 BCE to 959 CE. The emperor asked Sima to write this book to examine the lessons learned from previous emperors, so that future emperors could learn from them, avoid their mistakes, and become better rulers." (Wang, 2018). Mao told people that he had read it seventeen times, and he frequently referred to the book during

conversations with Party officials (Wang, 2018). Mao understood clearly that the CCP must avoid historical mistakes and eliminate the risk at all costs. Mao and Xi share some similar thoughts, both believing that the CCP and the PLA must learn from history, especially the traditional way of governance. “Linking the authority structure of the traditional Chinese dynastic rulers with the Leninist discipline of today’s CCP, the Confucian governance model based on the family and loyalty to authority maps well onto the theoretical frame of Xi Jinping Thought. Reconciling Marxism-Leninism with the rampant pursuit of glorious wealth is, however, another matter. Under Xi, the CCP constructs the narrative of law-based governance as an instrument that helps legitimise modernisation and wealth-building.” (Garrick & Bennett, 2018). Xi believes in combining and linking the ideas, and structures of communism, socialism, Chinese dynastic rulers, nationalism, and traditional Chinese thought in governance. The importance of this is to help the CCP to avoid historical mistakes and to improve and maintain what the CCP needs from traditional ways of governance.

#### Imperial Authoritarian System and the Mandate of Heaven

China is the world’s longest continuous civilization and has 5000 years of history. It is known as the cradle of civilization alongside ancient Egypt, the Indus Valley, and Mesopotamian civilizations. However, due to natural disasters, foreign invasions, and other causes, the ancient Egyptian, Indus Valley and Mesopotamian civilizations were destroyed. The civilizations that remains in these three regions today are not fully protogenetic. This is why China is usually referred to as the world longest continuous civilization. In China’s more than 2000 years imperial history, the Chinese imperial authoritarian system played an important role, it still has a strong influence on the Chinese political system today. Indeed, the Chinese imperial authoritarian system contributed to the stability of Chinese civilization. This system had three main aims: strong centralization, serving the nation and emperors with absolute loyalty, and strict laws and orders. However, this system did not help the Chinese Empires to avoid dynastic cycles. Corruption, rebellions, natural disasters can all cause the loss of the Mandate of Heaven.

According to the idea of the Mandate of Heaven, there could be only one legitimate ruler of China at a time, and this ruler reigned as the “Son of Heaven” with the approval of the gods. If a king ruled unfairly, he could lose this approval, which would result in his downfall (Lumen Learning, n.d.). Overthrows, natural disasters, and famines were taken as a sign that the ruler had lost the Mandate of Heaven (Lumen Learning, n.d.). The Mandate of Heaven does not require a ruler to be from a noble background. Apart from that, sinocized ethnic minorities can also claim the Mandate of Heaven; it is not just for Han Chinese. China is a multicultural nation which includes Hans, Manchus,

Mongols, Tibetans, Huis, etc. For example, Grandson of Genghis Khan, Kublai Khan established the Yuan Dynasty. Kublai Khan was extremely sinocized, he was an expert on sinology and quite good at writing Chinese poetry (Delgado, 2009). Even though the Mongol Yuan Dynasty was overthrown by Ming, many Mongols still served the Ming Empire with absolute loyalty. The famous Mongol General Man Gui, of the Ming Dynasty was a good example of this. As when the Ming was collapsing, Man Gui continued to suppress the rebels and fight against the Manchus. He died in the Battle of Beijing in 1629 against the Manchus, also known as the Jisi Incident (Kenneth, 2014). In addition, the Qing Dynasty was ruled by ethnic Manchus from Manchuria. Huang Taiji claimed the Mandate of Heaven and established the Qing Dynasty in 1636, as the Ming was suffering greatly from famines, rebellions, and corruption. Huang Taiji claimed the Mandate of Heaven and establish the Qing with both rightful reasons and legitimacy. The whole of Manchuria was under Ming rules from 1388–1616 includes both Inner and Outer Manchuria. Many of Huang Taiji's ancestors were Ming's generals and local governors in Manchuria. Huang Taiji's father, Nurhaci, was a low rank military officer under the Ming General Li Chengliang, later became a chieftain with titles given by Ming Emperor.

During the Japanese invasions of Korea from 1592–1598, the Ming Empire sent 150,000 troops to fight against Japan as Korea was a Ming vassal. Nurhaci requested the Ming imperial court multiple times to fight against the Japanese to prove his loyalty to the Ming Empire. His requests were rejected by Ming as Koreans had a strong discontent toward him. In 1618, the year Nurhaci began to rebel against the Ming, he announced a document entitled the Seven Grievances to prove his legitimacy.

The Mandate of Heaven requires a ruler to be just and good in order to gain his legitimacy to rule. Rulers with immoral behaviours, incorrect political decisions, who drink alcohol and have sexual intercourse excessively, who ignore national affairs, and abuse their power can lead the ruler to lose their legitimacy to rule and the Mandate of Heaven. In order to maintain the Mandate of Heaven and the legitimacy to rule, the ruler must have capabilities to manage national affairs. In order to gain the Mandate of Heaven and the legitimacy to rule, the ruler must be smart, studious, cunning, good at managing national affairs, and with both strong military and scholarly capabilities. As Niccolò Machiavelli stated in his famous work, *The Prince*: “The lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves. One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten wolves.” (Machiavelli, 1993).

## Nationalism

From the 1840s to the 1940s, China experienced a period known as the Century of Humiliation or ‘One Hundred Years of National Humiliation’, whereby military failure caused the nation to be

ruthlessly exploited by external imperial powers. Within only one hundred years' time, China's capital city was occupied three times. First during the Second Opium War; secondly during the Boxer Rebellions; and thirdly during the Second Sino-Japanese War. This period of time left a deep mark on the Chinese people, "Chinese identity and security are shaped by the historical insecurity of national humiliation." (Scott, 2007). This explains why Chinese nationalism today not only includes pride and a certain superiority complex, in addition, it also includes xenophobia and resentments toward Western countries and Japan. Apart from the reunification of China, and reform policies, to a large extent, the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy comes from its hard-line position toward external powers. A first example of this was during the Amethyst Incident in 1949. When several British warships entered the Yangtze River, the People's Liberation Army launched bombardment toward British warships which forced them to escape from China's inner river. The Amethyst Incident was in stark contrast to the Opium Wars.

Secondly, during the Korean War from 1950 to 1953, China gained great military success facing the opponents force made up of 17 nations, dominated by US forces. In the book "Korea: The First War We Lost" by famous American military historian, Bevin Alexander, it is explained comprehensively why the Korean War was a military failure and political failure for the US against China. (Alexander, 1986). The Korean War was the first major war after the founding of the People's Republic of China. It was a tough war for China, mainly due to financial burdens, supply shortages, and backward military equipment compared to its opponents. It did, however, stimulate a sense of pride in the Chinese that they had stood firm against armies led by the world's most powerful country. It also helped maintain border security in the future. During the Vietnam War, the United States informed China that it would not repeat McArthur's error by sending ground forces into North Vietnam, and the two nations remained at peace with each other (Du Bois, 2014). On September 21, 1949, during the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Mao Zedong clearly stated: "The Chinese people have stood up." (Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, n.d.). The CCP uses Chinese nationalism as a tool as the CCP understand how powerful it is. In many ways, Chinese nationalism has become a major part of the CCP's political agenda and political ideas.

China's Historical Expansion and Territorial Disputes Today.

Historically, most Chinese Empires was expansionary powers. The construction of the Great Wall cannot simply prove China as a defensive, conservative, agricultural civilization. Instead, the Great Wall was an extra security guarantee for the safety of the Chinese heartland. For example, the Han Dynasty's war against the Huns (Xiongnu) forced them to migrate westward, at the same time it expanded into Korea, Vietnam, and Central Asia. During the Tang Dynasty, China expanded into

South Siberia, Mongolia, Manchuria, Korea, Vietnam, and Central Asia eradicating dozens of nations and regimes including the powerful Turkic Khanate (Göktürks), the ancestors of Ottoman Turks. The Tang Empire at its height covered a territorial area (not including tributaries and vassals) of 12.37 million square kilometres (Tan, 1991). This made it 2.67 million square kilometres larger than PRC, although smaller than Qing Empire which was 13.5 million square kilometres (Tan, 1991).

Apart from direct military conquest, Chinese Empires also have a vassal and tributary system. The Chinese vassals usually have closer ties to Chinese Empires than just Chinese tributaries. Chinese Empires would not necessarily give direct military support to tributaries; however, they were more likely to give direct military support toward vassals. For example, during the Japanese invasions of Korea of 1592–1598, the Ming Empire sent around 150,000 military force to fight against the Japanese. During the Ming Dynasty, one of the key missions of Yongle Emperor's treasure voyages was to bring more nations to the Chinese tributary system. Yongle Emperor's fleet was enormous, with over 300 ships and 28000 men (Levathes, 1996). It consisted of 63 treasure ships and over 200 other ships. The largest ships were the treasure ships with dimensions of 140 metres in length and 55 metres in width. In addition, the fleet was also equipped with the most advanced firearms in the world at that time, such as cannons, flame tubes, and explosives (Levathes, 1996).

In many ways, the Chinese vassal and tributary system was an imperial system to let other nations acknowledge China's superiority and precedence. As this system lasted for thousands of years it therefore certainly has an influence on the Chinese foreign policies today. An ancient Chinese quote says: "Those who follow the Celestial Empire's trend will prosper, while those who go against it will perish." Over the recent Hong Kong issue. China's stance in a way corresponded to this view. "Xi Jinping warns that attempts to divide China will end with 'crushed bodies and shattered bones.'" (Business Insider Australia, 14 October 2019). China's foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian also said: "No matter if they have five eyes or 10 eyes, if they dare to harm China's sovereignty, security and development interests, they should beware of their eyes being poked and blinded." (The Guardian, 20 November 2020).

Chinese usually refer to the Xi Jinping era diplomacy as "Wolf Warrior Diplomacy", and expansionism still exists, as it is a significant component of national interest. Today's China still has territorial disputes with many of its neighbours. The latest 2020 China-India military clash happened on 15 June 2020 along the border left casualties on both sides, including 20 killed, 76 injured and 10 captured on India's side and 4 killed and at least 1 injured on China's side (The Wall Street Journal, 19 June 2020) (Reuters, 19 February 2021). In the South China Sea area, China has disputes with Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan (ROC), and Brunei. In the East China Sea area,

there are disputes with South Korea and Japan. Internally, China has issues with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Muslim minorities at the moment. In addition, China's relation with its closest comprehensive strategic partner, Russia, can be very unique. These two must cooperate to combat US and Western threats. However, historically, from 1858 to 1921 China lost around 3 million square kilometre of land as a result of Russian aggression including the independence of Mongolia, the Russian annexation of Outer Manchuria and Chinese Central Asia territories (today part of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan). Even today, one of Russia's main policies is to prevent Chinese infiltration to Siberia. In Central Asia, land disputes between China and Central Asian countries have been resolved. A "deal for Kyrgyzstan to hand over 1,250 square kilometres of its land to China was signed in 1999," and "Tajikistan and China also signed a border-demarcation agreement in 1999, but it was not until 2002 that Tajikistan acknowledged it was prepared to cede some 1,122 square kilometres of disputed territory to China." (Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 2 May 2016). With the country of Mongolia, many Chinese nationalists have the intention to reannex it to China. Currently, out of 11 million Mongols, only 3 million are in the country of Mongolia, with 1 million in Russia, and 7 million in China. This turbulent, unstable, and complex international background in many ways reflects US offensive realist John Mearsheimer's argument that China will not rise peacefully.

#### Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

China is a single party dominated socialist republic ruled by the Chinese Communist Party. "In 2019, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had about 91.91 million members, making it the second largest political party in the world. The CCP is the sole governing political party in China, and it pervades all parts of the Chinese society. Over the years, the number of its members has been increasing constantly." (Statista, June 2020). Socialism with Chinese characteristics is a Chinese political theory which adopts communism, socialism, nationalism, patriotism, authoritarianism, democratism, and capitalism. The CCP has stated that by 2021, China shall become a moderately prosperous society, a term which originally came from Confucianism. According to the International Monetary Fund, China has an estimated GDP per capita of 11710 USD. This meets the criterion of moderately prosperous (IMF, 2021). In addition, according to the CCP's plan, by 2049, China will become a fully developed, rich, and powerful nation (The Atlantic, 31 May 2017).

During President Xi Jinping's rule, the CCP and China started to adopt a new thought. Often known as the Xi Jinping Thought, the official name is "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Era." It was first mentioned during the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP and was incorporated into the Constitution of the CCP. According to the CCP, Xi Jinping Thought is scientifically summarized and accurately positioned in terms of historical development, era

character, subject ownership, content system and guiding value. Revealing its ideological content and practical strategy, Xi Jinping Thought provides great ideological and theoretical guidance for the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Xi Jinping Thought covers comprehensive areas, including the economy, politics, the rule of law, science and technology, culture, sport, education, military, diplomacy, ecology, people's livelihood, ethnicity, religion, society, one country, two systems, China's reunification, united front, and building the Chinese Communist Party. In another words, Xi Jinping Thought targets every comprehensive area for the purpose of the Chinese nation's great rejuvenation.

## Section Two: Chinese International Relations Theory

The origin of Chinese International Relations theory is a debatable topic. One of the arguments is that as early as the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) there prevailed all kinds of schools on how to deal with interstate relations, relations with nomads, and other neighbouring people (Geeraerts & Jing, 2001). One of the main ones was known as the School of Diplomacy or the School of Vertical and Horizontal Alliances which looked at political and diplomatic alliances during the Warring States period. The School of Diplomacy was originated by Guiguzi. The rich experience of balancing relations among states in ancient times is still valuable in the current situation (Geeraerts & Jing, 2001). Some believe that Chinese IR theory originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Geeraerts & Jing, 2001), following the rise of China and its increasingly stronger international position and influence.

“The academic development of IR in China is usually divided into two phases since 1949 when the People’s Republic of China was founded: the first phase from 1949 to 1979, and the second from 1979 to the present.” (Qin, 2011). During the first phase of Chinese IR theory development, there were a very small number of academic works on Chinese IR theory, as during this period, most of the thinking related to IR was about strategies and foreign policies put forward by political leaders and political elites (Qin, 2011). As the PRC is a communist regime, from 1949 to 1979, Marxist International Relations theory played an important role at this time. Marxist IR theory includes five major theories: world history theory, state theory, war and revolution theory, internationalism and national theory, international cooperation, and peaceful coexistence theory. However, after China’s economic reform and opening up policy since 1979, the Marxist IR theory may not suit China the best. One clear example is that many politicians and academics advocate the Sinicization of Marxism and Marxist IR theory. “Understanding Chinese theory construction is conducive to a better comprehension of Chinese foreign policy. As China grows stronger in state power, it also becomes more mature in dealing with international relations. It is quite possible that the combination of increasing experience and a rich cultural heritage will help China produce its own well-developed contribution to the further development of IR theory.” (Geeraerts & Jing, 2001).

During the first phase (1949 to 1979), IR theory development was lack of Chinese values and characteristics. After over 40 years of development, Chinese IR theory today has become much more comprehensive and abundant, even though there are many arguments over this theory. However, the contemporary Chinese IR theory certainly adds in more Chinese values and characteristics, and also Sino-centrism. Chinese IR theory is a social science theory with systematic thinking. When thoughts are systematized and become organized as a whole, they become a theory, and Chinese IR

theory certainly has this characteristic. The fast development of Chinese IR theory is certainly because the rise of China as a non-western power has led to significant changes in the global power structure or the balance of power situation, which makes the world focus more on non-Western areas.

“China’s prominence in international relations has emboldened Chinese IR scholars in recent years to advocate a “Chinese way” of thinking about international relations and incorporate traditional Chinese ideas into mainstream IR scholarship. Qin Yaqing, the president of the China Foreign Affairs University, observes that efforts to develop Chinese IR theory have gathered momentum since the start of the 21st century given China’s growing economic strength and international influence.” (Ho, 2019). Chinese IR theory contains Chinese mentality and includes philosophy, politics, tradition, history, and culture etc, and particularly important points of Confucianism which emphasize the diverse nature of the world. It is thus pointed out that the world cannot be unified in many aspects such as ideology, religion, tradition, culture, system, and mentality. Therefore, it promotes the acknowledgement of differences between cultures, multiple ways of thinking, and also promotes peace and cooperation. One of the clear examples of this is that China believes that the so-called Western democratic system and values are not suitable for China, and it is often labelled by Chinese politicians as hypocritical. As on many international issues and China’s internal affairs, the West often use the democratic values to criticize China. Under President Xi Jinping, China has become much tougher on International issues and foreigner powers. China’s IR theory is an open theoretical system more likely to include some realists’ and offensive realists’ values in it. As Chinese always say: “National interest is above any other interest.” The Chinese mentality can be both stubborn and flexible which makes it adopt both traditionalism and pragmatism. In addition, in the eyes of some people, as China is rising and Xi promotes the idea of Chinese national rejuvenation. Chinese IR theory may contain a Celestial Empire and Sino-centric world view. This make its foreign policy likely to contain components of a “Carrot and Stick” policy.

Chinese IR theory is an open theoretical system, it can also adopt other theories and ideas and add Chinese characteristics to them. It does not matter whether it embodied in an Oriental or Western philosophical way. However, it should become more practical for present Chinese national interests to the international community. The construction of Chinese IR theory has achieved remarkable results, but there are still certain deficiencies in terms of systematicness and integrity. Chinese scholars and politicians believes it is necessary to incorporate Chinese values and ideas into the mainstream IR theory (Ho, 2019). Given the global prominence of China, it behooves scholars and policymakers alike to consider how these ideas are being translated into contemporary Chinese conceptions of international order and influencing China’s foreign policy practices (Ho, 2019).

As contemporary IR theories are dominated by the Anglo-American and Western world, Chinese see this as privileging a Western-centric reading of international affairs and giving the Western world better discourse power on the international stage. Those nations with strong discourse power on international stage can benefit from the overall situation and lead the big trend of the world. Therefore, China certainly believes it is very important to continue the development of the Chinese IR theory. In addition, it is also important to incorporate Chinese ideas and values in mainstream IR theories, especially during the era in which China-US competitive relations have become a reality. China's IR theory development and incorporation have an extraordinary connection with its competition with the US. The rise of China is not only a threat to the US global hegemony, but it is also a threat to the US and Western-led world order.

## Section Three: China-US Competition for Ideas

### Chinese Diplomacy Under the Xi Jinping Era

This section focuses on China-US ideational competition that mainly looks at ideas on diplomatic and national development levels. However, this is deeply linked with the economic and military competition between the two nations as diplomacy is inseparable from a nation's economic and military. A famous quote stated, "diplomacy is the art of letting somebody else have your way." Under the current international situations, there are two major ways: the Chinese way, and the American way. The Chinese way of diplomacy is changing under President Xi, it is transforming the way of diplomacy which is made more suitable for China as a rising power.

Firstly, China's diplomacy measures under the Xi era became much more aggressive and assertive with strong nationalistic values, this form of diplomacy is commonly known as "Wolf warrior diplomacy". China has taken a hard-line approach toward security issues, economic issues, and foreign affairs under the Xi era. It has clearly demonstrated its determination to defend its national sovereignty and security interests. China insists it is pursuing peaceful development but will never give up its legitimate rights and interests. Foreign powers should not expect to interfere with China's core interests or its national sovereignty. China has clarified its position, drawn the bottom line, dared to fight, and vigorously defended its core interests and legitimate rights, including a series of issues involving its major core interests, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and the South China Sea. Xi has strengthened the communist orthodoxy values, as China is becoming more rich and powerful under the rule of the CCP.

Secondly, China is shaping its own diplomatic style. China's diplomatic thought must adhere to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The new era diplomacy needs to reflect the institutional advantages of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Under the competitive phenomenon between China and the US, to build a new type of benign and interactive relationship between China and the world, it must conform to the development trend of this era, and it must proceed from China's reality, and organically integrate the characteristics of the times with Chinese characteristics. Change is the law of life, and the world is in a period of major development, changes, challenges, and adjustments. China adheres to the mission of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation to promote diplomacy with Chinese characteristics, as national rejuvenation and socialism with Chinese characteristics are also deeply linked with China's diplomacy under the Xi era, to promote Chinese culture, ideologies, and values through diplomacy is to increase China's influence in the international world.

Thirdly, under this new era, as China approaches to the centre of the world stage as never before, China's national rejuvenation is also deeply linked with the world. Unprecedented historical changes have taken place in the relationship between China and the world. The role of China in international relations has unprecedentedly increased. It will continue all sorts of participation in world affairs, and promote cooperation, interdependence between regional partners and global partners. China, under Xi era diplomacy, believes that the future of mankind is deeply linked. As China is aiming for both short term and long-term benefits, it must cooperate with the world. China is advocating the construction of a new form of international relations to forge a global partnership, adhering to the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits to promote the construction of the BRI. The principle of fairness and justice should lead the reform of the global governance system, from serving national rejuvenation to promoting human progress. The US, under President Trump, strongly embodied its "America First" policies. Trump's actions on the international stage made China able to fulfil certain gaps left by the US. For many developing countries, China's promotion of interdependent international development and mutual benefits is the new hope of their future. For decades, many developing nations did not gain any substantial benefits from the US led economic world order. Even though certain Chinese policies are often labelled as "Trap" or "Economic colonization" by the West, for many developing nations, they would like to see substantial benefits rather than political labels.

#### Made in China 2025

China's manufacturing through decades of development since Deng's economic reform has made significant progress. In 2015, China's State Council issued the "Made in China 2025" plan aiming to transform China's manufacturing into a more powerful one. "This 10-year national guideline came out in light of China's imminent need of economic restructuring. China, as a world factory, is now suffering from a series of challenges, such as rising labour cost, low added value and razor thin margins." (Find China Info, 20 May 2015). Even though China's manufacturing can product most products from light industrial, heavy industrial, high tech industrial, to modernized technology, in many sectors there are still gaps between China's manufacturing capabilities and those of traditional powerful manufacturing countries.

The official notice of China's State Council named "Made in China 2025", stated the strategic manufacturing goals of China. The first step, from 2015 to 2025, in ten years' time is to become a manufacturing powerhouse. The first stage here is, by 2020, to achieve basic industrialization, consolidate the status of manufacturing powerhouse, improve the level of manufacturing informatization, master the core technologies in key areas, further enhance the competitiveness of

advantageous areas, and greatly improve product quality. Significant progress has been made in the digitization, networking, and intelligence of the manufacturing industry And in decreasing energy consumption, material consumption and pollutant emissions by major industries. By 2025, manufacturing industry's overall quality will be greatly improved to a new level, innovation capabilities will be significantly enhanced, labour productivity will be significantly improved, and both industrialization and informatization will reach a completely new level. The energy consumption, material consumption and pollutant emission of major industries will reach advanced level of the world. Formation of strong and competitive multinational companies and enterprises, and industrial clusters. In global industrial division, their values will be significantly improved (The State Council of the PRC, 19 May 2015).

The second step, to be completed by 2035, will see China's overall manufacturing industry reach the mid-level of the world's advanced manufacturing powerhouse nations. Innovation capabilities, development in the key areas, and overall competitiveness will be significantly improved and enhanced. China's competitive industries will become global innovation leaders, and it will achieve full and comprehensive industrialisation (The State Council of the PRC, 19 May 2015).

The third step, by 2049, which will be the 100 years anniversary of the founding of the PRC will see China become a manufacturing superpower, its comprehensive manufacturing abilities and capabilities will be at the top of the world. In the major areas of manufacturing, it will have innovative leadership capabilities and clear competitive advantages. Also, it will establish a leading system in term of technology and industry in the world (The State Council of the PRC, 19 May 2015).

The "Made in China 2025" program has become a bone of contention for US President Trump's administration and has partly been responsible for the trade war between the US and China (China Briefing, 28 December 2018). In term of China-US competition, the US has seen China's clear and comprehensive short term and long-term national manufacturing development strategy as a threat to its manufacturing base. In many ways, US' efforts to suppress and sanction Chinese manufacturing companies and businesses is a clear sign of this. In the next two decades, it will become more serious as China's manufacturing will become much more competitive in the international market, while many US manufacturing businesses and industries are already struggling under the neo-liberalism development model and the lack of a grand national manufacturing strategy. Simply attacking China's manufacturing industries might be enough to change its manufacturing development and strategy significantly. Instead, the US might need to reform and develop its own national manufacturing strategy. The neo-liberalism model in the US has created many monopoly businesses and industries, with the main difference being that they are based on

self-interest. China operates according to the national-interest level. However, for the US to reform and develop its new grand national manufacturing business and industry strategy is not easy under such development model and the political and business interest culture complex.

The relations of between the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the rise of China became one of the key issues for the US and the West. From the US perspective, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's attempt to try to create a massive alliance or strategic partnerships in Eurasia which may in many ways cut off US influence and dominance in this region. This is seen as a much bigger threat than the old USSR as during the Cold War the Sino-Soviet Split created a power rivalry within an existing alliance inside the communist world.

The SCO is not a real military alliance like NATO, however; it has comprehensive strategic meanings and China always tries to avoid using the term alliance officially. The SCO and the BRI have great complementarity in many aspects. Both were first advocated and established by China. All member states of the SCO are from along the ancient Silk Road. The SCO and the BRI are important arrangements for China to actively participate in regional and international governance. The principles of the SCO and the BRI are consistent: extensive consultation, joint construction, and sharing. According to China, this is in sharp contrast to the hegemonic international hierarchical order of the West. The key areas of the SCO and BRI include Central Asia and South Asia. These regions are also the first stop and the key regions of the BRI. In the six major economic corridors of the BRI, all of them pass through the SCO member states, observer countries and dialogue partner countries. The five key routes of the BRI also pass through the area where the SCO participants are located. The goal of the SCO is to build a security community based on mutual benefits and destiny among its member states, while the BRI focuses on building a community of responsibility, interest, and destiny among countries along the route. The term "a community with shared future for all mankind" was first used by China's President Xi and is also the ultimate goal of SCO and BRI. In terms of the cooperation under the SCO and the BRI, the SCO aims to promote the strengthening of comprehensive cooperation among the member states, and the BRI building interconnections that focus on policy communication, facility connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial connectivity, and to achieve prosperity for all nations. The core of the BRI is to promote infrastructure construction and interconnection, link the development strategies of various countries, and promote coordinated development and common prosperity through deepening pragmatic cooperation. Within the framework of the BRI, nations can cooperate and construct, seek new driving forces for

development, expand new space for development, create new opportunities for development, and achieve complementary advantages and mutual benefit.

#### The Xinjiang Humanitarian Issue and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

China certainly believes the US is taking countermeasures towards China's BRI project. There are several aspects to prove this. Firstly, the magnifying of the Xinjiang issue on international stage. On 22 March 2021, the foreign ministers of Canada, and the United Kingdom, and the United States Secretary of State released a joint statement on Xinjiang issue. In this, they accused China of harsh treatments towards its Muslim minorities, and sometimes even refer it as "Cultural Genocide." According to the joint statement, it mentioned: "We, the Foreign Ministers of Canada and the United Kingdom, and the United States Secretary of State, are united in our deep and ongoing concern regarding China's human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang. The evidence, including from the Chinese Government's own documents, satellite imagery, and eyewitness testimony is overwhelming. China's extensive program of repression includes severe restrictions on religious freedoms, the use of forced labour, mass detention in internment camps, forced sterilisations, and the concerted destruction of Uyghur heritage." (US Department of State, 22 March 2021).

During China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on April 23, 2021, "South China Morning Post asked: The UK's House of Commons on April 22 passed a motion declaring that there is genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang. What's China's response?" "Zhao Lijian: The accusation that there is genocide in Xinjiang is a monstrous lie fabricated by international anti-China forces. The Chinese government and people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang firmly oppose and strongly condemn this. The UK has enough problems of its own. British lawmakers should manage their own business and do more practical things for their constituents." (Ministry of Foreign affairs of the PRC, 23 April 2021). The BRI strategy was originally announced during President Xi's visit to Kazakhstan in 2013. The origin of the alleged Uyghur genocide issue began in 2014. Xinjiang is a critical region for the BRI projects, geographically it connects China to Central Asia and the Middle East. Four out of six of the land routes of the BRI go through Xinjiang, also includes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). However, unlike the South China Sea, the US cannot directly use military means to target the Xinjiang region. The use of political means might also be more suitable in this region.

According to a pro-Western source, it explained why China use repression policies towards the Muslim minorities. "The BRI projects will enhance Xinjiang's connectivity with countries in Central Asia and the Middle East, and that means the Muslim population in Xinjiang will be more widely exposed to the external influences from those regions. The CCP has good reason to be worried about

such increased connectivity. In 2014, the East Turkistan Islamic Party threatened to conduct a jihad in China, a year after Beijing announced the launch of the BRI projects. In the same year, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also threatened to seize the territory of Xinjiang, which it identified as a legitimate part of Islamic Central Asia. Such threats from Central Asia and the Middle East amplifies the CCP's concerns about terrorism, separatism, and extremism in Xinjiang. In this context, Anna Hayes, a professor at James Cook University, argues that Beijing started to focus on "re-educating" the Muslim minorities so China could fortify the population against the external influences when it launched BRI projects." (Cho & Turner, 2020). However, China's anti-terrorism, anti-extremism, and anti-separatism policies in Xinjiang gained the support of the local people from all ethnic groups. Xinjiang's fast-growing economy and fast infrastructure development certainly makes its Muslim minorities enjoying the prosperity. It is not a valid reason to make them turn against the Chinese government because of increase of external influences. In addition, China's re-education policy is only toward a small group of people that hold terrorism, separatism, and extremism views. And re-educating is not "cultural genocide". The re-education policy in Xinjiang is to correct the terrorism, separatism, and extremism views from these small group of people's minds and help them to go back and live a normal life. By calling such policy alleged "cultural genocide" is an absolute political means for achieving political purposes. China as a rising power cares about its international reputation, putting millions of people based on religious beliefs or ethnicities in alleged concentration camps is not political matureness. China as a political mature nation cannot implement such low-quality ideas. Also, China has great relations with most Muslim countries; it will not conduct alleged "cultural genocide" policy to ruin such important diplomatic relations. Indeed, not a single Muslim country condemned the alleged "cultural genocide" in Xinjiang. On the other hands, many stand up defend China on this issue. In Samuel P. Huntington's famous work, *The Clash of Civilizations: and the Remaking of World Order* Huntington stated that China and Islamic civilization are nature allies against the Western civilization. (Huntington, 1996). In recent years, this trend is becoming increasingly clearer. It is very hard to change this trend by use certain unsuitable political means.

## Section Four: China-US Economic Competition

### Economic Background

This section focuses on China-US economic competition. The economic competition between China and the US is becoming increasingly more serious due to China's rapid growth in term of comprehensive national power and one of the main factors that made that possible is because of its fast-growing economy since the economic reforms that began in 1979; also known as the reform and opening up. In the contemporary era, under President Xi Jinping, China's economy continues to grow at a fast rate. In addition, China has many grand economic plans and policies that directly threaten US economic hegemony worldwide.

In 1950, when the PRC had just been established, China's population was around 22% of the world. However, its GDP (PPP) value was only around 5% of the world (Maddison, 2007). In 1950, China's GDP (PPP) per capita was only \$614 USD, slightly higher than India's \$597 per capita. However, at that time, the GDP (PPP) per capita of the US was \$9573 (Nation Master, 6 April 2011). Therefore, in 1950, China was one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of GDP per capita. In 1979, the Chinese economic reforms led by Deng Xiaoping opened a new era of China's economic development. Deng created many special economic zones in China with his first market economic experiments taking place in Southern China's Guangdong and Fujian provinces from 1979 to 1984 (Vogel, 2011). Later on, China opened up more and more coastal cities from the North to the South. Deng's economic reforms were seen as a great success in China. After over 40 years of economic reforms, this policy has shown remarkable achievements and it is usually referred to as the Chinese economic miracle. The GDP per capita of China in 1980 was only \$312 USD (nominal) (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). In 2021, however, according to the International Monetary Fund's estimation, China's GDP per capita is approximately \$11712.853 USD (IMF, October 2020). This means China's GDP per capita has grown 38 times over a 41-year period. In 2020, China's per capita was \$10582.102, higher than Russia's \$9972.495 per capita. But still much lower than America's \$63051.398 (IMF, October 2020). In terms of total nominal GDP in USD, in 2020, total US GDP was around \$20.8 trillion, and China's was around \$15.42 trillion. However, in term of PPP value in 2020, China's GDP (PPP) value was \$24.16 trillion USD, the US was \$20.8 trillion. US GDP in terms of PPP is the same as its nominal GDP, as both PPP and nominal GDP are counted in US dollars (IMF, October 2020) (Xinhua Net, 18 January 2021). This means China's nominal GDP is around 74% of the US value, and 16% higher than US in term of PPP value. According to the IMF's estimation, by 2025, China's nominal GDP will be around \$23.02 trillion USD and the US will be around \$25.78 trillion USD. Therefore, it is likely China will overtake the US to become the largest economy in the world in

less than a decade. When the rising power's economy meets the criterion of 2/3 of the greater power's total GDP value, it means the threat of the rising power to the greater power has already been shaped. This is especially so when the rising power have a faster economic growth rate than the greater power or superpower.

In the next two decades, the economic competition between China and the US will essentially become more serious. The Chinese authoritarian system and its market economy with some government intervention and government regulation seems to work well for Chinese economy. In China, there are many forms of business and enterprise. These include state owned, private, foreign, joint venture, a mixture of foreign business and the Chinese state, and a mixture of state owned and privately owned ones. However, it is clear that no business or enterprise has the power to challenge the Chinese government in China. The CCP certainly do not want to see big business and enterprise have the ability to threaten the Chinese government and China's national interest. In South Korea, the "Chaebol" dominated economy is an example. "Chaebol" is a Korean word meaning plutocrat and refers to groups such as Samsung, Hyundai, SK, LG, Hanwha, and Lotte etc. However, these 6 groups are already the majority of the Korean economy, creating over 60% of its GDP. Samsung group alone holds over 20% of South Korea GDP. The Chaebol can indeed have a decisive influence on the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of South Korea as a whole. China usually sees such model as an negative example. In today's era, the economic competition between China and the US is becoming increasingly intense. The China-US trade war, China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) strategic projects are the clearest examples of this competition. These grand strategic projects do not just simply aim for economic growth and cooperation. In addition, they help China to create its own economic world order. Therefore, the China-US economic competition is also a significant challenge for the US and Western lead world order.

#### China-US Trade War

The China-US trade war began in 2018 and it is still an ongoing economic conflict between the two nations. President Donald Trump's trade war policies consisted of setting tariffs and other trade barriers to China, whilst also including the use of other political means. China's Ministry of Commerce has mentioned in an official statement that the United States has launched the biggest trade war in economic history so far (The New York Times, 5 July 2018). Trump's America first policy not only targeted China, also many other countries, including American allies. Trump also attacked American allies in term of trade and other financial disputes such as US overseas military expenditures in certain countries. It is unclear whether the Biden government will end the trade war

or not. “Biden will strike a more predictable and diplomatic tone than former President Donald Trump. But analysts say that the new administration is not likely to ease up on Beijing too much when it comes to tech and trade.” (CNN Business, 26 January 2021). Biden, as a professional politician, certainly acts much more rationally than Trump. However, that does not mean the Biden government will ease up toward China in term of economic competition. Indeed, Biden is not China friendly. Removing tariffs on Chinese products does not seems like Biden’s government’s priority.

In term of technology tensions between China and the US, “Biden will also have to navigate escalating tensions in technology and business. Those likely aren't going to subside given bipartisan support for the view that China poses a major threat to US national security.” (CNN Business, 26 January 2021). In terms of technology, Biden’s government is most likely to continue to pressure China as China’s comprehensive technology development is currently developing at a very fast pace. As one of the key parts of China’s clear national manufacturing strategies, “Made in China 2025”, and also the 2035 and 2049 plans, is about technology development because the world has already entered the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, also known as Industry 4.0. “Industry 4.0 enables the manufacturing sector to become digitalized with built-in sensing devices virtually in all manufacturing components, products, and equipment. The analysing of related data within a ubiquitous system with the fusion of digital data and physical objects has the ability to transform every industrial sector in the world to evolve much faster and with greater impact than any of the three previous industrial revolutions.” (Mrugalka & Wyrwicka, 2017). For both China and the US, technology development is one of the most important components to achieve Industry 4.0 successfully. The Fourth Industrial Revolution will have a decisive impact on China-US competition. Therefore, Biden’s government will continue to contain and pressure China on comprehensive technology areas.

Biden’s government is likely to try to fix the trade and financial disputes between US and their allies. This will most likely come first as Biden understands the importance of US allies, especially in the key regions of Asia-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East. Regardless of whether it is the Democrats or the Republicans who are in power, the US will continue its China containment strategy. However, the US also must maintain a cooperative relationship with China due to the globalized world economy framework. For the US, to balance this competitive and cooperative relationship with China is not easy. The Covid-19 and the post Covid-19 era can make this even more difficult. The trade war is a “double edged sword”, it hurts both China and the US economically and also the global economy, especially during the impact of Covid-19 pandemic. The Trump administration stated that China damages the US economy, in Trump’s words: “China is ripping America off.” Firstly, according to the 2018 data, the US imported \$539.2 billion worth of goods from China and only sold to China \$120.2

billion worth of goods. This means the trade deficit was \$419 billion (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Secondly, the Trump administration officially accused China of manipulating its currency “to gain unfair competitive advantage in international trade” (The Guardian, 23 August 2019). The last time such a complaint was made officially was in 1994 and came at a time with the dollar strengthened against world currencies. This time, the US recognizes China’s RMB threat toward the US Dollar’s global economic position. On the other hand, China argued and accused the US of “deliberately destroying international order” with “unilateralism and protectionism”. The IMF’s statement argued the devaluation of the yuan is largely in line with worsening economic conditions in China (The Guardian, 23 August 2019). Thirdly, the Trump administration accused China of intellectual property and technology theft, which caused massive economic loss to the US. In addition, the US believed that such behaviour deliberately damages US national security.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) released a paper warning that the trade war leaves both US and China worse off. It certainly led to diversion of trade flows away from both China and the United States (Brookings, 7 August 2020), an increase in unemployment and inflation, business investment froze, bankruptcies grew and there were decreases in productivity and investment, manufacturing and transportation all hitting the lowest points since the last recession. “A September 2019 study by Moody’s Analytics found that the trade war had already cost the U.S. economy nearly 300,000 jobs and an estimated 0.3% of real GDP. Other studies put the cost to U.S. GDP at about 0.7%. A 2019 report from Bloomberg Economics estimated that the trade war would cost the U.S. economy \$316 billion by the end of 2020, while more recent research from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and Columbia University found that U.S. companies lost at least \$1.7 trillion in the price of their stocks as a result of U.S. tariffs imposed on imports from China.” (Brookings, 7 August 2020). “While the U.S. deficit with China decreased, its overall trade deficit did not. Trump’s unilateral tariffs on China diverted trade flows from China, causing the U.S. trade deficit with Europe, Mexico, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan to increase as a result.” (Brookings, 7 August 2020). However, this can be a type of deterrent toward China’s fast economic growth. The trade war causes a slowdown of economic output growth in China as some US entrepreneurs and companies move their supply chains to other countries, which may lead to China-US economic decoupling. Even though China is able to counter certain negative impact by allowing the RMB to fall, and using other economic tools, including fiscal and monetary stimulus, the trade war will definitely cause a fall in Chinese exports to the US, and investments which directly leads to slower economic growth for China. The trade war significantly affects trade globally, even though a few countries did benefit in the short term by filling in manufacturing gaps. However, the trade war affected most countries negatively in both the short and long-term. It directly affected global trade

and the global supply chain as under the framework of economic globalization, currently no nation can escape from that.

In a journal article named *U.S.-China Trade War and Its Global Impacts* by Dan Steinbock, the author made a scenario analysis toward the US-China trade war including four likely hypothesis scenarios. Under the "Return to Cooperation" Scenario, the US and China achieve a trade agreement, both agree to phase out additional tariffs, renounce trade threats and establish working groups to defuse other potential friction areas in industrial, intellectual property rights, social and political issues, and military matters." (Steinbock, 2018). This scenario is very unlikely no matter the administration because the China-US economic competition is the strategic reality. "The "Muddling Through" Scenario, would see the economic impact of tariffs as limited, and the US and China would develop a path to a trade agreement during the truce. However, in terms of advanced technology areas there would be new skirmishes and confrontations. Uncertainty decreases but fluctuates. Volatility grows erratic. Global economic prospects barely improve. Markets witness rallies and plunges. Global recovery fails to resume." (Steinbock, 2018). The "Muddling Through" Scenario is more likely to happen under the Biden administration. However, Biden's administration is also likely to take a tougher stance toward China in other areas, such as China's internal affairs and China-US military confrontation and competition.

"The "America First" Scenario would see neither nation agree to phase out additional tariffs; both would renew trade threats. Talks would linger, fail, or result in new frictions. Uncertainty increases and volatility returns. Global economic prospects decline further. Markets stagnate or even plunge. In this scenario, neither truce nor diplomacy would prevail." (Steinbock, 2018). From the time Trump started the trade war until the beginning of the Biden administration. China and the US was either between the "Muddling Through" Scenario and the "America First" Scenario or just directly under the "America First" Scenario.

"The "Global Trade War" Scenario sees the US and China fail to agree on a trade compromise. Additional tariffs are enacted. New trade threats are declared. The White House escalates attacks against Chinese industries, intellectual property rights, social and political issues, and military modernization. Uncertainty escalates and volatility soars." (Steinbock, 2018). This scenario is probably the least ideal and most dangerous scenario out of these four, leading to global depression, fall of GDP growth, global recession, and more geopolitical conflicts.

China as a strong global player prefers economic globalization, international cooperation, and interdependence. However, China also strongly defends its national interest. China's Ministry of Commerce has stated China's position very clearly, China is not intending to fight a trade war

although they are not scared to enter into a trade war (Jain & Saraswat, 2019). The Chinese authority is ready to follow the trend and is ready to go to any extent to win this trade war. The ministry further quoted, China must implement a new comprehensive reaction and resolutely defend the interests of the nation and its citizens (Jain & Saraswat, 2019). Therefore, China prefers the “Back to Cooperation” Scenario.

From the Chinese perspective, China promotes the idea of rising peacefully. However, Western countries cannot believe the reliability of this view, especially the US as in the last 500 years the rise of the Western powers is through colonization, conquest, exploitation, plunder, and invasion. Under the China-US trade war, China’s stance is tough. “Professor Song Guoyou at Fudan University’s School of International Relations and Public Affairs advocates taking a hard line towards the United States and to “fight back”. He acknowledges that the trade war has adversely impacted business operation but “from a holistic and long-term perspective, this impact is overall. It is controllable, and the comprehensive advantages of China’s economic development are obvious.” These comprehensive advantages he is referring to include the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the expanding domestic consumer market, increasingly sophisticated infrastructure, and extensive connections with the global economic system. He identifies the desire to maintain American hegemony in the face of a rising China as the root cause of U.S.-China trade frictions. As such, the American leadership’s rhetoric in the liberal international order is but a disguise for its selfish pursuit of national interest.” (Institut Montaigne, 2019). Professor Song Guoyou’s view is somehow similar to Chinese government’s stance toward the trade disputes.

In the Chinese perspective toward the trade war, China and the Chinese people must acknowledge that the China-US economic competition is a reality and, unless fair and equal agreements can be made between China and the US, China must fight back. China must increase and enhance international cooperation; it certainly will not take the unilateralist position of the US. In term of America’s accusation of intellectual property and technology theft, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, Zhao Lijian has stated: “In recent years, China’s innovation capabilities continuous to enhance, both quality and quantity of scientific and technological innovation achievements is also increasing. China has adopted a series of policy measures to enhance its intellectual property protection capabilities. Any groundless accusation and malicious slander cannot change the fact.” (The State Council of the PRC, 28 February 2020). However, China must continue to work on building an innovative country and becoming a major technological power. The Chinese perspective toward the trade war is clear, that China prefers to resolve trade disputes through peaceful dialogue approach. However, China is certainly not afraid of the trade war and will not accept any unequal and unfair trade deals.

## The Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank (AIIB)

The Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank (AIIB) is an international financial institution (IFI) and a multilateral development bank (MDB). The AIIB was proposed and created by China to improve economic and social development in Asia and Oceania. It can also directly and essentially improve the economy of the world. The establishment of the AIIB is also to coordinate with the Belt and Road Initiative. These two grand economic strategies are crucial for China to establish its own economic world order. A proverb says, “there is no free lunch in the world.” However, the AIIB is a “shared lunch”. China has always promoted the idea of economic globalization and interdependence. Therefore, it understands the concept of mutual benefit. For China, to improve the economic and social conditions of Asia and Oceania region is important for the long-term prosperity and economic benefit of China. “Projects bankrolled by the AIIB have the potential to improve trade by easing the movement of goods across borders. Improved ports and roads mean that goods can move far more efficiently from producer to consumer, creating swathes of new opportunities for importers and exporters. Regional supply chains, in which inputs and processes come from multiple places, are far more achievable with easy movement between locations.” (Australian Institute of International Affairs, 31 July 2015).

According to China’s state-owned media, Xinhua News, AIIB made great achievements over the past five years period (Xinhua News, 16 January 2021). Membership states have grown from 57 to 103; the AIIB's cumulative approved investment grew from 1.69 billion U.S. dollars at the end of 2016 to 22.02 billion dollars at the end of 2020, and the total number of approved projects rose from eight to 108. The AIIB has secured Triple-A ratings from the major international credit rating agencies and is now capitalized at 100 billion US dollars. In April 2020, the AIIB created a Covid-19 Crisis Recovery Facility to support its membership states and clients due to pressures brought by the pandemic. The size of the facility expanded from 5 billion to 13 billion US dollars. 7.075 billion dollars’ worth of loans have been approved under this framework so far. The AIIB has made continued efforts to forward its green agenda in recent years. It decided that climate financing will account for half of its total financing approvals by 2025.

There was concerns at first that China was going to use the AIIB to direct money to itself. However, the region of East Asia, where China is located at, only received 1.24 billion US dollars. South Asia received 8.71 billion dollars, 3.53 billion dollars for Southeast Asia, 3.48 billion dollars for West Asia, and 1.87 billion dollars for Central Asia. Therefore, concerns can be cleared up by these statistics (Xinhua News, 16 January 2021). In addition, the AIIB is not just simply for the purpose of regional economic and social development or boosting the world economy. Indeed, it is one of the grand

economic strategies that helps China to create its own global economic order. The US sees such attempts as a clear threat to its global economic position. “Beyond the pursuit of geo-economic interests, China may also use AIIB as an instrument to realize its own geopolitical objectives, including expanding its sphere of political and security influence westward through the new belt and road initiative. Potential adversaries surround China, with Japan in the east (and the U.S. beyond it), the Philippines and Vietnam in the southeast and India in the south. Thus, China seeks closer ties with Central Asian countries through overland routes and with friendly Southeast Asian, South Asian, and Middle Eastern countries through maritime routes. China may use AIIB in addition to the Silk Road Fund and even the BRICS’ New Development Bank to expand its geopolitical influence.” (Park, 2016).

The AIIB impels the US’s regional allies and partners to reconsider their position between China and the US. Many Asian countries in the last decade did not receive much benefit from the US. Some have also been used by the US as a tool against China’s rise. Therefore, China can use the AIIB to rebalance power in Asia and Oceania region and reshape the geopolitical order by using the AIIB as a lure to attract nations. During the Obama administration, the Philippines was a strong US ally and had a strong stance toward China in term of territorial disputes in the South China Sea. However, the Philippines is now a close partner with China because of the boosting of economic cooperation between the two nations. It once putted aside the territorial disputes with China due to strong economic cooperation and interest.

The AIIB also lifts up the Chinese currency, the Yuan’s, global position against the dollar as the world’s reserve currency. The Yuan officially became a world reserve currency in 2016. “Beijing has sought to play down the degree to which the ventures will serve to help establish a new world economic order with China at the helm, the fact that Beijing may encourage the \$100b AIIB and \$40b Silk Road Fund to issue loans directly in Yuan and the fact that the AIIB will establish a currency basket with China set to push for the Yuan to take a prominent role with the AIIB members. Therefore, the Yuan promoting an international reserved currency and potentially declined the dollar.” (Park, 2016). For example, the petrol-dollar system is one of the key domains of US domination over the global reserve currency as nations must purchase US dollars to be able to purchase oil in the open market. Following the rise of the Yuan, this rule has been broken. Russia and China’s oil trade has started to use the Yuan. Although the Yuan is rising in the international market, for it to match the US dollar’s global position there is still a long way to go. It is clear, apart from the idea of economic interest, the AIIB is also used by China for gaining geopolitical interest, global currency position, to strengthen its global economic position, and coordinate with the BRI. All

this is for the purpose of the China-US economic competition, the AIIB is one of the grand economic strategies that helps China to challenge the US led global economic order.

#### The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's global infrastructure development strategy to promote worldwide economic development and inter-regional connectivity. The BRI was originally unveiled by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 (BRI, n.d.). On 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2015, the official outline for the BRI was issued by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), with authorization of the State Council (BRI, n.d.). In 2017, the BRI was incorporated into the Constitution of PRC, the resolution was approved during the 19<sup>th</sup> CCP National Congress (Xinhua Net, 24 October 2017). On January 26, 2018, the State Council Information Office of the PRC published a white paper titled "China's Arctic Policy", vowing to actively be participating in Arctic affairs. The document is a blueprint for China's Arctic strategy and its ambition to develop a "Polar Silk Road" under the "BRI" (BRI, n.d.). The BRI project has a target completion date of 2049, which coincides with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the PRC (Pantucci, 1 January 2021).

The BRI aims to "promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road, set up all-dimensional, multi-tiered and composite connectivity networks, and realize diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries." (BRI, n.d.). The BRI was inspired by China's historical Silk Road, both land and maritime. As China believes the historic Silk Road contributed to China's prosperity, the BRI will be a greater version of this historic idea which is one of the strategies for the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Historically, when the Celestial Empire brought prosperities to its tributaries, vassals, and neighbouring states it was seen as a positive way to increase its Mandate of Heaven or the legitimacy to rule. Today, China's neighbouring countries are mostly poor and undeveloped. Russia is the richest and the most developed country that shares a land border with China, in addition, it is also the comprehensive strategic partner of China. However, Russia's GDP per capita is lower than China and it also faces undeveloped infrastructure in most of its regions, especially in Siberia. China believes that helping its neighbours can be beneficial for China in the long term. With most of its undeveloped neighbouring countries, it is no longer the best suitable condition for China's economy. "Economists sometimes portray the global economy as a huge bazaar. But it is not. It is a network, in which the links are built by expanding the flows of goods, services, people, capital, and importantly information. China's goal

is to create these links, and it has plenty of assets that will allow it to act as a catalyst of global growth and development.” (World Economic Forum, 18 June 2015).

China understands the importance of BRI to its development. In addition, China understands how the US sees the BRI as a threat to its own national interest. The US believes the BRI will bring significant changes to the US hegemonic position and dominance worldwide, which will significantly break the strategic balance. China understands exactly that passive policies cannot change how the US views China. Deng Xiaoping’s idea of hide your strength and bide your time is no longer suitable for the contemporary era. Many Chinese diplomats have mentioned that the US and the West’s patronizing position needs to change and should adapt to China’s changing attitude.

## Section Five: China-US Military Competition

### China's Military Modernization and China-US Military Competition

#### China and World Military Revolution

Since the Age of Discovery, the world's military revolution started to change rapidly. China's military supremacy on the world stage ended when the world entered the 1800s. However, in terms of military technologies, there was already a very clear gap between China and the West since the 1700s. China, during the early-Ming and mid-Ming Dynasty period had clear military advantages compared to the rest of the world. During the Ming's war to overthrow the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, and its later wars against the Mongols, apart from the Ming's strong cavalry, firearms also played a significant role. This stated in a Ming military book named the *Military Equipment Illustrated Handbook*: "Firearms are what the Barbarians fear China the most." During the Battle of Lake Poyang between Zhu Yuanzhang (who later became Ming Emperor) and Chen Youliang (a Chinese Warlord who also fought against the Yuan Dynasty), it was mentioned by an historical source: "Zhu Yuanzhang's fleet arrived at Poyang Lake on 29 August with a force only a third the size of Chen's army. According to one Ming source, Zhu's forces arrived armed with "firebombs, fire guns, fire arrows, fire seeds (probably grenades), large and small fire lances, large and small 'commander' fire-tubes, large and small iron bombs, rockets." (Andrade, 2016). The Battle of Lake Poyang was the largest navy battle during the medieval period in the world involving hundreds of vessels and boats, 650,000 troops on Chen Youliang's side and 200,000 on Zhu Yuanzhang's side (Andrade, 2016). In addition, there were also many battles fought between the Ming Empire and European powers, mainly the Dutch and the Portuguese. These included both navy and land battles such as the Battles of Tunmen, Shancaowan, Penghu, Liaoluo Bay, and the Battle of Fort Zeelandia. Even though the Portuguese and the Dutch were the dominant sea powers in the world at that time, they lost every single battle against Ming China.

Qing China's military failures from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century are symbolic in Chinese history. The military of the Qing Empire during its early and mid-period was powerful, it conquered the heartland of China, Korea, Mongolia, Tibet, Xinjiang, and vast territories in modern day Central Asia and Siberia. The Qing conquered the Ming, Chinese warlords, the intrepid Mongols, defeated its Russian rival in Siberia and Manchuria. By 1790, they had extended China's territories to its largest in history, covering an area of 14.7 million square kilometres (Rein, 1997). This was around 5 million square kilometres larger than the current PRC. The First Opium War mark the begin of China's 'century of humiliation' (1840s – 1940s). During the First Opium War (1839 – 1842), a 20,000 strong British force defeated a Chinese force of 200,000, which also included the 16,708 Eight Banners Army (Martin,

1847). Whilst the British casualties were only 804, with 353 killed and 451 wounded, total Chinese casualties were 7100, with 3100 killed and 4000 wounded, making it almost 10 times higher than the British (Martin, 1847).

There have been six significant world military revolutions since the first industrial revolution: the late maritime power firearm era (such as the First Opium War); the railway semi-mechanization era (such as WWI); the maritime, land, and air integrated mechanization era (such as WWII); the nuclear weapon era (such as the Cold War); the air power informatization era (such as the Gulf War), and today's cyber and outer space complex era. The only two military revolutions that China did not fall behind in are the nuclear weapons era and today's cyber/outer space complex era. With the air power informatization era, China was able to catch up quickly, so it did not completely fall behind.

### The 2015 Chinese Military Reform

The 2015 People's Republic of China military reform was one of the most significant and one of the biggest military reforms of the PLA. This was an unprecedented reform of the PLA. The official name of the 2015 PRC military reform is deepening national defence and military reform. This reform is definitely not formalism. It is a grand, significant, reform that engineered by President Xi Jinping to turn the PLA into a real-world class military with actual combat capabilities. President Xi as a realist does not hold idealistic views and ideas toward the US and the West. He clearly understands China needs to maximise its power, especially military power under this complex international world. Xi once said that any attempts to drive a wedge between China and its territories will “end in crushed bodies and shattered bones” (Business Insider Australia, 14 October 2019). Without doubt this is clearly targeting the US and Western countries. “The Chinese leader is not just revolutionizing the PLA. Xi is making a series of moves that are transforming both China and the global order. He has abandoned reform architect Deng Xiaoping's injunction that China should hide its strength and bide its time.” (Reuters, 23 April 2019). Following the rise of China and its international position, President Xi as a strongman type leader has completely abandoned Deng's hide one's strength idea, as he believe that no longer suit China's position in the contemporary era.

The 2015 military reform is vital for China. The Ming era General Qi Jiguang (1528 – 1588) said: “the military must seek advantage in every area in term of combat.” The military must understand the concept that change is the law of life. Change, reform, and revolutionizing the military is vital for the national security and national interest. China cannot afford mistakes like it made back in the late Qing era. Qing's military misoneism caused destructive consequences. Which means the Chinese identity and security are shaped by the historical insecurity of national humiliation (Scott, 2007). Theoretically, Sun Tzu's *Art of War* is something that never gets old. “The art of war is of vital

importance to the State. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected.” (Sun, 2007).

Prior to the 2015 Chinese military reform, the PLA was already undergoing many significant changes since Xi became the Chairman of the Central Military Commission of China. Firstly, Xi started a massive scale anti-corruption drive in China, one of the main targets of which is the military. Xi believes that people who joined the military that wish for rank promotions and gain financial benefits cannot fight wars. These people only brings shame to the PLA. Instead, the military is for people who are passionate, skilful, and fearless with sense of responsibility and most importantly they are nationalistic, patriotic, and loyal. “At the core of this vision of national renewal is a loyal, corruption-free military that Xi demands must be prepared to fight and win. His push to project power abroad was accompanied by a power play at home. Xi has purged more than 100 generals accused of corruption or disloyalty, according to the official state-controlled media.” (Reuters, 23 April 2019). For example, General Guo Boxiong was once the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission of China, which means he was the second most powerful man of the Chinese military. He was being purged harshly during Xi’s anti-corruption campaign in the PLA. Guo also was expelled from the CCP, and his military rank deprived. This signal is clear, as military corruption is indeed a great threat towards the national security system. Military corruption can significantly affect the mental sharpness and combat abilities of the PLA command system. Therefore, such threat must be eliminated from reality.

Secondly, Xi urged the PLA to sharpen its combat readiness to fight and win every wars. There are three main areas that assist the PLA to achieve this: enhance political learning, includes nationalism, patriotism, and socialism with Chinese characteristics values; enhance military modernization technologically, strategically, and tactically; and enhance military drills and exercises under real combat environments, which means to simulate military drills and exercises under real combat conditions. “In its enthusiasm to follow Xi’s call to win the next war, the PLA has set capability enhancement at the core of its agenda. China’s assertiveness in staking its territorial claims is as unprecedented as PLA combat drills. In 2013 the PLA arranged more than 40 military region MR-level joint exercises. In 2014 over 200 war drills at divisional level or above were conducted and 30 with foreign militaries. Clearly the PLA’s daily focus has been increasingly outward focused.” (You, 2016). An increase in real combat condition military exercises is indeed very important for the PLA. Apart from the Battle of Laoshan in 1984 and Johnson South Reef Skirmish in 1988 (Battle of Chigua Reef) against Vietnam, which were small scale battles, the last time the PLA fought a large-scale war was in 1979 during the Chinese invasion of Vietnam. Chinese refer to this as the self-defence counterattack against Vietnam. Even though China claimed victory, they found out many problems

with the PLA during the war in 1979. Previously, China had experienced 10 years of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 – 1976, which significantly impacted on the combat ability of the PLA. The war in 1979 was one of the important reasons which made Deng push for military reform and modernization after 1979. Xi understands conducting military drills under real combat condition can make the PLA face real obstacles which can increase their problem-solving skills. Also, it is the best way to test out new strategies, tactics, and new military equipment and technologies.

There are three key aspects of the 2015 Chinese military reform in relation to China-US military competition. Firstly, changes to the PLA control and command structure. Secondly, the creation of the PLA Rocket Force. Thirdly, the creation of the PLA Strategic Support Force. In terms of the PLA control and command structure changes, the previous semi-autonomous general departments, the General Staff department that responsible for operations, the department of armaments and equipment, the department of political work, and the department of logistics were all dissolved (Wuthnow & Saunders, 2017). The PLA understands they must use modern control and command structure and control technologies in the PLA forces. There are now 15 functional departments, commissions, and offices within the Central Military Commission (CMC) (Wuthnow & Saunders, 2017). “Seven new departments of the Central Military Commission are established: the Joint Staff, the Political Work Department, the Logistic Support Department, the Equipment Development Department, the Training and Administration Department, the Combat Command and Control Department and the National Defense Mobilization Department. These structures also include the following commissions: the Discipline Inspection Commission and the Politics and Legal Affairs Commission of the Central Military Commission. In addition, the Central Military Commission incorporated such structures as the Science and Technology Commission, the Office for Strategic Planning, the Office for Reform and Organizational Structure, the Office for International Military Cooperation, the Audit Office, and the Agency for Offices Administration of the Central Military Commission.” (Kokoshin, 2016). “The Central Military Commission (CMC) takes charge of the overall administration of China's armed forces. It has 15 functional sections including seven departments (offices), three commissions and five directly affiliated bodies.” (Ministry of National Defense PRC, n.d.). This new leadership management system focuses on strengthening the centralized and unified leadership of the Central Military Commission, strengthening the strategic planning, strategic command, and strategic management functions of the military commission agencies. Additionally, optimizing the function configuration and institutional settings of the military commission agencies, improving the leadership management system of the PLA forces, and making decision-making, executive powers, operating, planning, management, and supervision system much more practical, reasonable, and unified is more occurring.

The previous seven province level military regions have been replaced with five theater commands (Kokoshin, 2016). Chinese sources describe the Theater Commands (TCs) as the highest joint headquarters within their respective regions, with a primary responsibility for “maintaining peace, deterring wars, and winning battles.” (Wuthnow & Saunders, 2017). Senior Colonel Wang Xiaohui of the PLA National Defense University (NDU) explains that the TCs will be mainly concerned with conducting joint training during peacetime and will exercise command of theater-based combat forces during wartime (Wuthnow & Saunders, 2017). Previously there was the Beijing, Shenyang, Nanjing, Jinan, Guangzhou, Lanzhou, and Chengdu military regions. Now there are the Eastern Theater, Southern Theater, Western Theater, Northern Theater and Central Theater Commands. The headquarter of the Eastern Theater Command located in Nanjing, Southern Theater Command located in Guangzhou, Northern Theater Command located in Shenyang, Western Theater Command located in Chengdu, and the Central Theater Command located in Beijing (Kokoshin, 2016).

This is similar to the US unified combatant commands. The US have seven geographic combatant commands and four functional combatant commands. The geographic combatant commands include Central Command, Africa Command, European Command, Northern Command, Southern Command, Indo-Pacific Command, and Space Command (U.S. Dept of Defence, n.d.). The four functional combatant commands are Strategic Command, Transportation Command, Special Operations Command, and Cyber Command (U.S. Dept of Defence, n.d.).

Whilst the US military commands are for its global military hegemony, China’s five theater commands are still limited to the Indo-Pacific and other Asiatic regions. In other words, China does not possess a complete global combat system, capability, and experience like the US. “According to Chinese sources, the TCs are aligned against specific threats within their respective region or “strategic direction”. The Eastern TC, which replaced the Nanjing MR, is focused on the Taiwan Strait and East China Sea. The Southern TC, which succeeded the Guangzhou MR with the apparent additions of the southwestern Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, will take responsibility for the South China Sea. Southern TC commander General Wang Jiaocheng states that his command will “resolutely” defend China’s maritime rights and interests in the region. The Northern TC replaced the Shenyang MR with the addition of parts of Inner Mongolia and is focused on the Korean Peninsula. The Western TC, largely a merger of the Lanzhou and Chengdu MRs, will handle challenges emanating from Central Asia, such as cross-border terrorism, and safeguard the Sino-Indian border. The Central TC will defend the capital and might provide support to other TCs as needed.” (Wuthnow & Saunders, 2017). In addition, the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission can directly control the five theater commands with the assistance of other 14 departments. As is stated clearly by the Ministry of National Defense of PRC, the main duties of the

CMC Joint Staff Department include carrying out combat planning, command control and combat command support, studying and formulating military strategy and requirements, organizing combat capability assessment, organizing, and instructing Joint training, construction of combat readiness and routine war preparedness work (Ministry of National Defense PRC, n.d.). This can significantly increase the joint combat ability and modernized warfare ability of the PLA. The establishment of the five theater commands is significant for the joint operational command system which can meet the requirements of integrated joint operation command and makes joint operations between different theater commands, provide joint and unified training, military drills, and military exercises during peacetime, build a strategic operational command system that is capable, efficient, and adjustable during war period.

The transformation of military regions into theater commands is based on the principle of war and determined in accordance with the national security environment and the major missions and tasks undertaken by the military. The five theater commands delimitation is based on China's national defence requirement, which is suitable for China's national defense strategy, that sets the main target to win modern wars. In addition, the 2015 Chinese military reform reduced the number of active military personnel from 2.3 million to 2 million in keeping with the CMC's call for elite troops with real combat ability and capability. The reduction will optimize the quality of the military, reduce non-combat agencies and personnel, optimize the scale and structure of military equipment, and reduce outdated military equipment. Overall, it will accelerate the transformation of the military from a quantity-scale type to a quality and efficiency type. This is very significant in order to fight and win modern wars. Therefore, the change of the PLA control and command structure must make breakthrough developments in term of the leadership mechanism, strengthening the power of the CMC, joint and unified operations command system, suitable for real combat conditions and environments. Improving the policy system, optimizing scale structure, and overall military modernization from strategy, people, tactics, command, and military equipment can make the PLA can fulfil its major mission and task to win modern wars.

#### Establishment of the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF)

The 2015 Chinese military reform also established the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF). The PLA Rocket Force was formerly known as the Second Artillery Corps (SAC), which was a branch under the PLA Ground Force previously. The PLA Rocket Force is now the 4th branch of the PLA that is directly commanded by the CMC. It consists of around 150,000 personnel. The PLARF controls both strategic and tactical missiles of China's land-based missiles, both nuclear and conventional. The Russians named their branch as the Strategic Missile Forces. Even though the PLA did not name it the PLA

Strategic Rocket Force, however, the important strategic values of the PLARF are the same as the Russian Strategic Missile Forces. The US-USSR Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) expired in 2019, which because the US and Russia do not possess comprehensive ballistic missile development in terms of certain ranges like the PLA. One of the main reasons for the US withdrawal from the INF is because of the PLARF's fast development and China's refused to be a part of the INF treaty. It is likely that both the US and Russia are going to rebuild up their short medium-range and intermediate-range land-based ballistic missiles and cruise missile armoury. This is because short and medium-range and intermediate-range land-based ballistic missiles have significance tactically and strategically. Short, medium, and intermediate-range missiles also have better convenience, more practical, cost and maintenance efficiency in comparison with long-range missiles and ICBM under conventional warfare, regional war, and limited war. According to President Xi, the PLA Rocket Force is the core of China's strategic deterrence, the strategic support of China's status as a major world power, and an important cornerstone for safeguarding and guaranteeing national security. The PLA Rocket Force possess the most comprehensive and one of the most advanced ballistic missile armouries in the world consisting of short-range ballistic missiles, medium-range ballistic missiles, intermediate-range ballistic missiles, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles.

The DF-41 is the newest generation of the PLARF's solid-fuelled road-mobile or rail-mobile intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) (Missile Threat, n.d.). It is one of the most advanced and destructive ICBMs in the world with the operational range of around 15,000km which would make it the longest-range missile in operation with a top speed of Mach 25 it will be capable of delivering up to 10 multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV) warheads. These are projected to be able to strike the continental United States within 30 minutes. The Dong Feng 41 is believed to be approximately 21.0 m in length, 2.25 m in diameter, and 80,000 kg in weight. Its payload probably carries either a single warhead or up to 10 MIRV with a total weight of 2,500 kg. Its warheads can be single 1 million tonnes (MT) nuclear warhead or a selectable yield of 20, 90 or 150 Kilotons (KT) on each MIRV. It uses inertial guidance, likely with stellar updates and a Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) system, which gives it an accuracy of 100-500m circular error probable (CEP). The DF-41 uses a three-stage solid propellant engine (Missile Threat, n.d.). The numbers of DF-41 China currently has is unclear. Both Chinese and foreign sources have different estimation from 16, 20, 24, 36, to 50. According to The Pentagon's 2020 China Report, the estimation of China's fielded DF-41 is 16 in 2020 with 48 nuclear warheads. By 2030, the estimation of China's fielded DF-41 will be 24 with 72 nuclear warheads (Department of Defense (DOD) USA, 2020). From military strategy point of view, China will continuously increase the numbers of DF-41 for its national security and nuclear force's modernization.

China's nuclear weapons are mostly land based with around 70% taking this form. This differs from the US, whose are mostly air and sea based. However, China's nuclear triad ability and capability is growing rapidly. In term of China's sea-based nuclear capability, the current major sea based strategic nuclear equipment is China's 094 Jin Class nuclear ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) equipped with JL-2 ballistic missile with an operational range of 7200 km (DOD USA, 2020), some updated models of the JL-2 ballistic missile in the future may have an operational range of 9000 to 12000 km. The next generation of China's SSBN is the 096 Tang Class will be equipped with the JL-3 ballistic missile with an operational range of 12000 km (DOD USA, 2020). The 096 Tang Class SSBN and JL-3 ballistic missile will be in service by approximately 2025 or 2026 (DOD USA, 2020).

In terms of China's air based nuclear capability, the H-6K bomber is designed for long-range attacks and stand-off attacks (Military Today, n.d.). It is considered as a strategic bomber that is capable of attacking US carrier battle groups and priority targets in Asia, Oceania, and the Pacific regions. This aircraft has nuclear strike capability. The H-6K has a combat radius of 3500 km with precision-guided munition (PGM). Long-range cruise missiles effectively extend the bombers range to about 4 000-5 000 km. It is enough to reach, Japan, India, Australia, Taiwan, Philippines, Vietnam, Guam, Hawaii, Alaska, and Moscow from Chinese mainland without leaving China's air defense zone (Military Today, n.d.). By operate long range fly and inflight refuelling it does have the capability to strike the US mainland with both conventional and nuclear weapons. China's next generation air based nuclear strategic bomber; the H-20 subsonic strategic stealth bomber is expected to be in service by 2025 (DOD USA, 2020). The US military usually refers to the H-20 as the Chinese version of the Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit subsonic strategic stealth bomber.

In the Indo-Pacific region, the PLARF's DF-17, DF-21, and DF-26 are serious threats to the US military. The DF-17 medium range hypersonic glide-boost ballistic missile along with the DF-ZF Hypersonic Glide Vehicle are the world's first and most advanced operational hypersonic missile and hypersonic missile systems under operation. China is widely acknowledged to be the leader in the field of hypersonic systems (Defense News, 15 March 2021). The DF-17 is the first system of its type known to be operational in the world, although several other nations, including the U.S., are developing similar systems. In addition, China is also believed to be developing an air-launched hypersonic glide vehicle (HGV). A video briefly posted on Chinese social media showing a PLA Air Force H-6N bomber landing at an air base carrying what appeared to be a boost-glide HGV, or at least a mock-up used for carriage and other flight tests (Defense News, 15 March 2021). The DF-17 is also able to use nuclear warheads, conventional warheads, thermonuclear warheads, or thermonuclear weapons. Current missile defense system have around 0% chance to block hypersonic missiles. There is currently no capability to intercept even standard ICBMs (Asia Times, 2 June 2020). "A hypersonic

missile exceeds Mach-5 (3,800 mph) and is five times faster than the speed of sound. Currently, there is no operational defence system that can deny the use of these strategic weapons.” (Part Yard Military, 10 May 2020).

The DF-26 is an intermediate-range ballistic missile with an operational range of 5000 km and the DF-21 is an medium-range ballistic missile with an operational range of 1800 km (DOD USA, 2020). These two types of missiles are sometimes referred to as ‘aircraft carrier killers’, for example, inside the DF-21 missile group, there is the DF-21D which is the world’s first anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM). The US believes that China developed the DF-21D aim to counter directly at the US aircraft carrier battle groups. Some other models of the DF-21 developed into anti-outer space satellite weapon and anti-missile weapon. Both the DF-21 and DF-26 are capable of using both nuclear and conventional warheads. Even though these two missile types are sometime referred to as ‘aircraft carrier killers’, this is not the only purpose. The DF-21 and DF-26 are developed directly for target US military facilities in the Indo-Pacific region to make China capable of changing the strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, they may assist China to be able to win wars against the US in the Indo-pacific region.

Even though the PLA air force and navy are modernizing and developing rapidly, there are still gaps in comparison with the US military. In other words, the PLAAF and PLAN are at a disadvantage in comparison with the US air force and navy. However, there are two major advantages for the PLA. Firstly, the US military is widely distributed worldwide. Even though most of its navy and air force are based in the Indo-Pacific region, US global military demands in many ways lower the strategic pressure on the PLA. The PLA can focus on the Asia region and the Pacific region. Secondly, the PLARF is the US most feared PLA military branch. It offsets China’s disadvantage in air and navy power in comparison with the US. The PLARF has extraordinary strategic meaning in terms of China-US military competition. After the PLARF become the fourth military branch of the PLA, it enhanced its development direction and significant strategic meaning. It will continue to enhance credible and reliable nuclear deterrence, nuclear attack, and nuclear counterattack capabilities as this is the core meaning of China’s nuclear modernisation and the PLARF. In accordance with the strategic requirements of both nuclear and conventional warfare the PLARF creates strategic balance globally and enhances missile modernization overall. For example, PLARF missile’s accuracy, speed, survival, destructive power, conventional strike ability, nuclear strike ability, counter-satellite, counter anti-missile system ability etc. This greatly improve China's overall strategic deterrence capabilities and create strategic balance against the US, break the strategic blockade the US military created in the Indo-pacific region toward China.

## Establishment of the People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force (PLASSF)

The PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF) was also established as a significant part of the 2015 Chinese military reform. It is the 5th branch of the PLA mainly focusing on cyberwarfare, space warfare, electronic warfare, and psychological warfare. The PLASSF is directly control and command by the CMC. Its establishment has significant strategic meaning. The PLASSF is a modernized combat force for integrating various types of support on basic level, supportive level, and strategic level. The establishment of a strategic support force is conducive to optimizing the structure of the PLA and improving comprehensive support capabilities. "The Strategic Support Force demonstrates China's evolving understanding of how information serves as a strategic resource in warfare. The PLA recognizes that harnessing outer space, the cyber domain, and the electromagnetic spectrum and denying their use to adversaries are paramount needs if the PLA is to attain superiority in a conflict. These three domains are the primary conduits by which a military force collects, processes, transmits, and receives information. If a force is denied use of these domains, the informationized system-of systems infrastructure that underpins modern military operations cannot properly function. For the first time in the PLA's history, the creation of the Strategic Support Force largely unifies both responsibility for fielding critical systems in these domains and conducting operations to dominate each domain's battlespaces." (Costello & McReynolds, 2018).

The main mission of the PLASSF is to support battlefield operations, which can make the PLA obtain advantages in aerospace, space, cyber, and electronic battlefields to ensure the progress of battlefield operations. Specifically, the tasks of the PLASSF include early warning, communication, command, control, return battlefield information, detection, reconnaissance, undertaking navigation operations, manage the Bei Dou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), launch cyber and electronic attacks, support to strike foe's outer space satellites, and space reconnaissance. The PLASSF is also one of the most important branches for the PLA as a whole to achieve joint operations and combat. In today's era, any combat operation is inseparable from cyber, electronic, and space offense and defense. Therefore, the PLASSF will ensure the PLA is able to win wars understand modernized and informatization era. "The Strategic Support Force will form the core of China's information warfare force, which is central to China's strategy of pre-emptive attack and asymmetric warfare. China's new military reforms seek to synthesize military preparations into a "combined wartime and peacetime military footing." These "strategic pre-sets" seek to put China's military into an advantageous position at the outset of war in order to launch a pre-emptive attack or quickly respond to aggression. This allows China to offset its disadvantages in technology and equipment through preparation and planning, particularly against a high-tech opponent, generally a by-word for the United States in PLA strategic literature." (Costello, 2016). Indeed, the PLASSF's major opponent

is the US, as the US have the world's most thorough cyber, electronic, and space combat abilities and experiences. It is also the major opponent of China militarily. In addition, the PLASSF is not a separate force or a separate combat branch. Its existence integrates the operations of the PLA Army, PLA Navy, PLA Air Force, and the PLARF into an integrated joint combat operation. The PLASSF's support on all levels (basic, supportive, and strategic), especially with strategic levels for other PLA military branches with comprehensive cyber, electronic, space, and psychological warfare combat abilities and capabilities will become the key for the PLA to win informationized modern wars in the contemporary era.

## Major Geographical Areas of China-US Military Competition

### Maritime Competition

There are four such major areas of China-US military competition: the South China Sea, the East China Sea, Taiwan, and the West Pacific region. Indeed, all the major areas of China-US military competition embrace the sea and the ocean. China was once a naval superpower during the early Ming Dynasty. After the Opium Wars, the Qing Dynasty's military modernization made some progress, and they once had the 9th largest navy in the world and the largest navy in Asia. However, it was defeated by Japan during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). After the defeat of Imperial Japan during the Second World War, and the defeat of the KMT in the Chinese Civil War, the new People's Republic of China had almost no navy. At one point, the PRC's navy power was only made up of dozens of frigates and even armed fishing boats. The PLA tried to liberate Taiwan from the KMT during the 1950s and was blocked by the US Seventh Fleet which made landing operations in Taiwan almost impossible at that time. Through many decades of development, the PLA Navy is no longer a coastal defense style navy: it is moving from to become a blue water navy.

In April 2018, during the largest maritime military parade in the history of the PRC for celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> years founding of the PLA Navy in the South China Sea, "Xi noted that the mission of building a strong navy has never been more urgent. This is crucial to point out in today's international environment and his tone carried a robust sense of mission. History reminds us that the closer we are to accomplishing a glorious goal, the more the pressure and risk. Building a strong navy, as well as national defense, has never been more significant to China." (Global Times, 13 April 2018). Xi understands clearly the US is the PLA Navy's largest threat and if a military conflict or war break out between China and the US, the PLA Navy will need to be at the first line. This is something that is unavoidable.

The PLA navy has two types of pressure on it: the national defense pressure and the history pressure. In term of national defense pressure, this refers to the significance of the PLA Navy in terms of the China-US military competition and the PLA Navy holds an important responsibility to safeguard China's national security and national interest worldwide. In terms of history pressure, the Qing's navy failure is a clear warning for the PLA Navy, especially regarding the First-Sino Japanese War. The Qing's navy failure is still a must learn lesson for all PLA Navy recruits and commanders. Even though the PLA Navy has not lost any wars or conflicts, its defeat of South Vietnam during the Battle of the Paracel Islands in 1974 and Vietnam during the Battle of Johnson South Reef in 1988 (Chigua Reef). These lessons may not be useful as Vietnam is incomparable with the US in term of navy power.

## The South China Sea

The South China Sea is one of the most important trading routes in the world. It covers an area of around 3.5 million square kilometres. It has tremendous strategic meaning and importance to China; and it is also a significant area of the BRI's maritime route. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), one-third of the world's shipping passes through the South China Sea with over 60 percent of China's trade in value traveling by sea (China Power CSIS, n.d.). For many of the world's largest economies, the South China Sea is an essential maritime crossroads for trade. Over 64 percent of China's maritime trade transited the waterway in 2016, while nearly 42 percent of Japan's maritime trade passed through the South China Sea in the same year. In comparison, the US relies on the South China Sea less, but still 14 percent of its maritime trade go pass through this region (China Power CSIS, n.d.).

Apart from trade, there are also lucrative and abundant fisheries, huge gas and oil reserves which lie beneath its seabed. According to the US Energy Information Agency, the South China Sea holds around 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 11 billion barrels of oil in proved and probable reserves (US Energy Information Administration, 7 February 2013). The actual numbers may even be much higher. From the US view, the South China Sea is the frontline to contain China's economic and military rise. It is one of the key areas to stop the PLA Navy moving beyond the First Island Chain, it consists of many islands including Taiwan, Okinawa, and the Philippines. China's stance on the South China Sea issue is tough which means giving up claims within the Nine-dash line is impossible. China will continue to militarize this zone and expand its navy and air power in this area. The PLA has announced countless times that they will defend China's territorial sovereignty at all costs. China sees US Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea area as purposely violating Chinese law and creating conflict, and an unstable regional situation. In the long term, the South China Sea tension is likely to get worse. The US will continue to put pressure on China in this area; this is a strategic reality of China-US military competition. China has already established an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea area, and it is very likely that China will establish an ADIZ in the South China Sea area. "An Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) is air space over a land mass or water body where identification, location and control of civil aircraft is undertaken by a state declaring ADIZ over the region for its security purpose. One of the limitations of an ADIZ for the South China Sea is that this ADIZ does not fall under any treaty and not regulated under any international body making the ADIZ issue even more complex for global security." (Defense Info, 17 August 2020). Currently, China prefers to maintain a status quo in the South China Sea area due to the global pandemic. However, the establishment of a SCS ADIZ is only a matter of time.

In addition, the PLA will increase both defensive and offensive military equipment in this area to achieve strategic advantage. China has fortified multiple forward operating bases with anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) and surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) along with underground storage facilities, hangars, radars, and sensor arrays (Grossman, 2020). China's also deepening port facilities, making it able to berth deeper draft ships at these new bases, such as those responsible for resupply and maintenance as well as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) missions. Land reclamation from dredging has also produced at least 3,200 acres of new land in the Spratly Islands as well as hundreds of additional acres in the Paracel Islands. China in 2016 also deployed HQ-9 missile defence batteries to Woody Island, though it is unclear whether they remain in place today or are deployed on a rotational basis (Grossman, 2020). In term of defensive equipment, China has comprehensive air defense, missile defense, anti-submarines equipment in this area, and offensively, it can conduct accurate missile strikes from land, air, and sea. China's attack submarines maintain strategic navigation. Some of the PLARF's most advanced and lethal missiles are deployed in this area. Not only near the coast of China, many islands on the SCS area are also militarized, including many artificial islands. A Chinese navy general even suggested that China should make these islands in the SCS area into unsinkable aircraft carriers.

For the PLA Navy, war in the SCS area is a coastal defense mission. If the CMC is not confident that the PLA Navy cannot even be qualified for coastal defense missions, then the CMC will not call for the development of a blue water navy. In late June 2019, Beijing conducted anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) tests in the vicinity near the disputed Spratly islands to showcase the Chinese military's growing counter-intervention capabilities to deter the U.S. and its allies (Grossman, 2020). Regardless, these deployments and upgrades across the SCS have significantly enhanced PLA power projection against regional adversaries (Grossman, 2020). In the long-term, status quo and small conflicts is likely the situation in the SCS between China and US. If China established ADIZ in the SCS area, tensions will be more likely to involve into more serious conflicts. The chance of a full scale or large-scale war in SCS is small because the US understands China possesses certain strategic advantages in this area. China certainly does not want war in this region, or any other regions as it is still focusing on economic development. The SCS area has too many uncertainties due to its strategic importance to both China and the US. Therefore, tensions in this area is most likely to increase in the future.

## Taiwan

The Taiwan issue is one of China's key interest areas and an issue that requires a solution. Ethnically 96% of Taiwan's population are Han Chinese, mainly from Southern China's coast provinces of

Fujian, Guangdong, and Zhejiang. Many Chinese immigrants from elsewhere in China fled Taiwan with the KMT after the KMT lost all of mainland China. These people were mainly KMT soldiers and officers. Only 2% of Taiwan's population are identified as the indigenous ethnicities. Ethnically there are not too many differences between mainland Chinese and Taiwan Chinese. Taiwan's independence movement is not based on ethnicity but based on ideology. With the influence of many decades of anti-communism sentiment and the indoctrination of Western liberalism ideology, Taiwan's attempt to gain independence is becoming increasingly serious. The CCP understands this well, as it keeps on giving warnings to Taiwan by announcing independence will mean war and it will face serious consequences. The current Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in power in Taiwan favours the Taiwan independence movement and political ties or even military ties with the US and Japan. The political ideology held by the DPP is very similar to the US Democratic Party. Adm. Phil Davidson, then the commander of Indo-Pacific Command, recently stated: "Taiwan is clearly one of their (China) ambitions before then (2050). And I think the threat is manifest during this decade, in fact in the next six years." (The Diplomat, 30 April 2021). Following the military rise of China, if Taiwan is under attack by the PLA, the US is likely to get involved.

Taiwan is critical for China's national rejuvenation, and important economic and military strategic meaning. Taiwan is one of Asia's economic powerhouse, for example, Taiwan's nominal GDP in 2021 is approximately 759 billion (IMF, 2021), while Pakistan's GDP in 2020 is only 262 billion (IMF, 2021), which means Taiwan's nominal GDP is almost 3 times the size of Pakistan while Pakistan's population is 8 times the size of Taiwan. From the military view, Taiwan is crucial for the PLA Navy to break through the First Island Chain, also take Taiwan can significantly increase the depth of strategic defense. Meaning there will be extra strategic safety for China's southeast coastal provinces. Taiwan has significant offensive and defensive meanings for China. For the US, if China takes over Taiwan, it means there will be a big hole in the middle of the First Island Chain, which will make the PLA Navy and submarines more able to access the West Pacific region. Re-strategic military deployment and re-occupation of Taiwan by the PLA can be a threat to the US forces in the whole Western Pacific region. The PLA can deploy both tactical and strategic weapons in Taiwan. This will indeed break the strategic balance of the West Pacific region, and both directly and indirectly assist China's world class blue water navy development and its activities in the whole Indo-Pacific region and elsewhere in the world.

The PLA occupation of Taiwan would be a modernized joint operation. It must successfully take over Taiwan in the shortest amount of time and prepare to defend it against potential US and its regional allies attack and reinforcements. Firstly, the PLA will prepare anti-aircraft, anti-missile, anti-submarine, anti-cyber warfare, and anti-electronic warfare defense, maintain and prepare nuclear

strategic deterrence, then conduct both electromagnetic pulse (EMP) and cyber-attack toward Taiwan. Secondly, the PLARF, PLA Air Force, and PLA Navy will conduct missile strikes and bombing from land, air, and sea toward all important military facilities in Taiwan and surrounding islands. The PLA Navy and PLA Air Force will shield the PLA Navy Marine Corps to conduct first wave amphibious landing operations with PLA Army conducting second wave landing operations. At the same time, the PLA Air Force Airborne Corps will conduct airborne landing. PLA Navy and submarine force will also surround Taiwan Island to defend from potential US attack and reinforcements. Thirdly, the PLA will rigorously monitor seven countries: the US, Japan, India, Australia, South Korea, Philippines, and Vietnam. The US needs both political and military response times toward Taiwan if it is under attack. Many PLA officers claimed that most likely Taiwan will fall under the PLA within 24 to 72 hours under modernized joint operation. Even though China prefers peaceful reunification or a way similar to Anschluss, however, military reunification is also possible.

#### The East China Sea

The East China Sea is another major area of China-US military competition. It is one of the closest regions to US military bases in East Asia (for example in South Korea, Japan, and on Okinawa). The East China Sea is a key region for the US to contain China militarily. The island of Okinawa is a key location to contain China in the East China Sea region. There are 31 US military base in Okinawa covering an area of 45984 acres, which represents 8.2% of Okinawa's prefectural land and 14.6% of Okinawa main island (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2018). There are 25843 US military personnel in Okinawa, which represent 70.4% of all military personnel in Japan (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2018). At the highest point, the US deployed approximately 1200 nuclear warheads in Okinawa (Japan Times, 4 June 2013).

For the PLA, it must be able to secure the East China Sea, therefore it can work on a breakthrough of the First Island Chain and of Okinawa. If war happens in the East China Sea, the South China Sea, or Taiwan, US troops in Okinawa will be at the first line to respond to conflicts in these regions. In the East China Sea region, China and Japan also have strong disputes around the Diaoyu Islands (Senkaku Islands). Japan is a strong US ally in the Indo-Pacific conflict and has important strategic meaning to the US, especially for the containment of China's military rise. Even though Japan's Self Defense Force are not allowed to access and obtain many types of offensive weaponries like Germany, as both were Axis powers that lost WWII, Japan is an economic powerhouse with strong potential military industrial foundations. The US must keep an eye on Japan, also must use it for maintain its regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region. In 2013, China established the East China Sea Air

Defense Identification Zone (ECS ADIZ) which is mainly used for target US and Japan in this region for its national interest and national security.

### The West Pacific Region

In addition, another major area of China-US military competition is the West Pacific region. China's naval strategy is to develop a combat-worthy world class navy or blue water navy. Following the rise of China, China's international status and overseas national interests are growing worldwide. If China wants to be able to protect and defend its oversea national interest it must develop a strong navy. For its navy to become combat-worthy worldwide, it must increase its activities and training in the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean, especially the West Pacific region between the First and Second Island Chains. The Second Island Chains refers to a list of islands, from Bonin Islands and Volcano Islands near Japan to the Mariana Islands which includes Guam, stretching through the western Caroline Islands all way to Western New Guinea. From the military perspective, the West Pacific region between the First and Second Island Chains is vital to whether the US can contain the Chinese navy in the West Pacific region. If the PLA navy go through the Second Island Chain, it will create stronger strategic threat to the US mainland. Even though there is the Third Island Chain, this goes through half of the globe from North to South, stretching all the way from the Aleutian Islands near Alaska to Hawaii and then to the Oceania region. This makes it much more difficult to contain naval activities using the Third Island Chain. The Third Island Chain is also the last security guarantee of the US mainland. As China holds certain military and geographical advantages within the First Island Chain, the area between the First and Second Island Chains in the West Pacific region will be a vital region for military competition.

The West Pacific region is one of the ideal locations for PLA navy's nuclear powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) to launch strategic nuclear strikes toward US mainland as the current PLA SSBN's missile range does not cover the Chinese coast to the US mainland. The PLA's SSBNs entering the West Pacific region will also give them much higher survival rate, especially when they pass the Second Island Chain. The region between the Second and Third Island Chain will be the most ideal location for the PLA SSBNs to launch nuclear missile strikes in the Indo-Pacific region. Apart from the Pacific region, the PLA SSBNs can also take the other routes to the Indian Ocean then to the Atlantic Ocean to form strategic threat to US mainland and NATO allies. China's military power will continue to grow in the West Pacific region. China will be very likely to search for islands outside the Second Island Chain to build up military bases in the Pacific region to combat US military threat.

## Military Cooperation, Alliances, and Potential Alliances in Term of China-US Competition

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD or Quad) is a strategic level dialogue of the US, Australia, India, and Japan. The US attaches importance to the Quad because it has strong strategic meaning for the US Indo-Pacific strategy and its policy of the containment of and competition with China. It is possible that the Quad may evolve into an anti-China military alliance at certain level. Firstly, in term of politics, China-US military competition and competition in other areas is already a strategic reality. This relationship is very difficult to change in this era, unless one country fully collapses or completely loses the ability to compete with the other country. India's political relationship with China is also very conflictual. The two countries still have strong land border disputes. In 2020, the China-India border skirmishes left casualties on both sides. Whether it might involve into a war in the future like the one in 1962 is still uncertain. Apart from this, China is also one of the closest strategic cooperative partners with Pakistan, which is India's rival. There is also disputes between China and Japan in the East China Sea and Japan is also the closes military ally of the US in the Indo-Pacific region. In terms of historical issue, China suffered 15 million population death and massive economic loss during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1931-1945). Australia is probably the most reliable US ally in the Indo-Pacific region due to its geography, shared values, and cultural similarities. On many issues toward China, Australia usually stands strong with the US. The current China-Australia relations is getting worse under the Morrison Government. Australia has criticized China politically not only on the South China Sea issue, but also human rights issues relating to Hong Kong and Xinjiang. The result is that China has applied certain economic sanctions toward certain Australian products, such as raw materials, wine, and lobsters etc.

The US, Japan, and India are three key simulated enemies of the PLA. On 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, The White house released a joint statement named Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: "The Spirit of the Quad". It mentioned: "We (The Quad) will begin cooperation on the critical technologies of the future to ensure that innovation is consistent with a free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific. We will continue to prioritize the role of international law in the maritime domain, particularly as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and facilitate collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas." (The White House, 12 March 2021). This clearly proved that the purpose of the Quad is to target China. Dai Xu often considered a Chinese strategist with strong hawkish views is a professor at the PLA National Defense University who also holds the Senior Colonel rank in the PLA Air Force. Dai mentioned in his book *The C-Shape Encirclement*, the three most important countries for the US to form a C-Shape encirclement ring in the Asia-Pacific region are Japan, India, and Australia (Dai, 2010). If the Quad increase its strategic cooperation or evolves

into a real meaning alliance, it will become a serious threat to China's national security. China must prepare and take countermeasures toward the Quad, as it is crucial for China's national security and national interest. Therefore, China must consolidate the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) (apart from India), and its relations with Russia, Pakistan, and Central Asia countries.

Central Asia is one of the important land routes of China's BRI project and resource and energy support. Pakistan is important for China to contain India. China in its official statement often like to avoid using the term alliance. Russia is one of China's most important strategic partners politically, economically, and militarily, even though China once lost land in Central Asia, Outer Manchuria, and Mongolia due to Imperial Russia, and in 1969 the Sino-Soviet Split almost involved into a full-scale war or even nuclear war. However, there is no eternal allies or enemies, only eternal interest. Both China and Russia must consolidate their relationship with each other to combat the US threat. If either nation collapses, it is very hard for China or Russia to survive without the other one. Dai also mentioned, for the US to maintain its global hegemonic empire in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it must vanquish three potential enemies. The Islamic world, Russia, and China. This is the idea of former National Security advisor of the US, Professor Zbigniew Brzezinski under President Jimmy Carter. The US is still carrying out his theory (Dai, 2010). Take a look at the Middle East and North Africa, Iraq, Libya, Syria have already been vanquished by the US. The deterioration of US-Iran relations is not a simple question. Iran is just another target for the US to achieve its hegemonic position in the Islamic world. China and Russia need to understand that if Iran collapsed like Iraq, Libya, or Syria. China and Russia will face much more serious strategic pressure from the US and its allies, especially China. If the US launches a war against Iran. Russia and China are likely to get involved directly with military force and military support. China's BRI project is another countermeasure it has taken to combat the US military encirclement. If China-US competition gets more serious in the future, a massive anti-US, anti-Western alliance might form in Eurasia. It will be an upgraded version of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with new rules, new economic, politic, and military cooperation ideas, and forms. The current observer countries of Iran, Mongolia, Belarus, and Afghanistan will likely join the SCO in the future.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the rise of China is inevitable. The CCP regime is stable and strongly holds the Mandate of Heaven, and it is becoming stronger during the Xi era. Its power will continue to grow comprehensively in its own way by using its own system and development models. The US not only sees China as a competitor, but it also sees China as a threat to US hegemony, Western civilisation, and the US led Western world order. This is a strategic reality that cannot be changed. History has shown that China grows stronger every time it falls, and the use of military force to maintain unification is the major way of China. China's political culture and strategic culture shows that China is a unique civilisation. The ideas of authoritarianism, nationalism, socialism, traditionalism, and Chinese mentality played an important role in its history, and it is still influencing today's China. China today still has a strong resentment toward the West as a result of the 'century of humiliation'. This resentment is much stronger than that created by the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, when Germany had to cede its territories and pay massive reparations due to its defeat in WWI. The US and the West must realise the difference between the Chinese mentality and the Western mentality as this is crucial in term of policy making. As the Art of War stated: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." (Sun, 2007).

Indeed, there are still many debates towards the Chinese IR theory. However, to best describe the Chinese IR theory, it is a combination of Chinese mentality, the idea of interdependence and mutual benefit, Chinese views on international orders, and with strong realism values, both defensive and offensive, although, more toward the offensive realism side. Its diplomacy, economic, and military strategies have shown this clearly. China's diplomacy under the Xi era is becoming more aggressive and provocative. China's clear national manufacturing strategy under the contemporary era of the Fourth Industry Revolution is a real threat to the US national interest, due to the many problems of the neo-liberalism model of development in the US, the lack of a national manufacturing strategy, and its political and business culture complex.

In the future, competition between China and the US will become more serious. China's economic strategies aims to compete with the US in both short and long term. The AIIB and the BRI are a beginning of China's grand economic strategy as China is aiming for systemic change in the global economic order. China understands that without systemic change in the global economic system and long-term economic plans and projects it will be at a disadvantage in its competition with the US. The US is currently lacking long-term economic strategies and plans. Economic containment polices

toward China have little effect, and it also hurt the US. The US needs to figure out how to balance economic competition and economic cooperation with China regarding its national interest as China currently still prefers cooperation in many areas.

China's rapid military rise and military modernization can be a serious threat to the US, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. The US will continue and strengthen its military containment strategy toward China because the PLA certainly has the ability and capability to fight the US military in the Indo-Pacific region following China's rapid military rise and military modernization. In the next one or two decades, it is possible that the PLA will become a military superpower like the US. Whether China and the US will fall into the Thucydides Trap is still uncertain, however, it is possible. As aforementioned, China is not only a threat toward the US global hegemony and world order, but also a threat toward the Western civilisation. In term of the Thucydides Trap theory, by reviewing the past five hundred years, a case study by Harvard University found out that out of 16 historical instances of an emerging power rivalling and competing with a ruling power, 12 of the examples ended in war. The early 20<sup>th</sup> Century peaceful British-American power transfer was largely due to the cultural similarities and shared values. However, China and the US are at the very opposite sides. The rise of Germany and Japan after WWII are only economic rises, with demilitarization in many areas and neo-liberalism indoctrination. Both Germany and Japan were spiritually and militarily defeated, and war becomes less possible under this condition. These are significant reasons Japan's rise in the 1970s and 1980s did not lead to war with the USSR, just as Germany's rise from 1990s did not lead to war with the UK and France. Indeed, the US and USSR power competition did not develop into war.

An important point that needs to be stated here is that it was the USSR which collapsed, not Russia, Russia today is still a military threat toward the US and NATO. Even though the USSR collapsed, the relationship between Russia, the US and the West is not improving. In terms of China-US competition, Russia's shift toward China's side will make this competition more complex. Russia and many former Soviet Republics in Central Asia are China's important strategic partners, and very important for China's BRI project as from the military perspective the BRI is a new lifeline for China's national security, especially its economic and energy security. Under the era of China-US competition, it is very likely both the SCO and the QUAD will deepen military cooperation and even evolve into real, meaningful military alliances in the future. Military conflicts between China and the US are uncertain, but it is possible, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. China-US relations will undoubtedly become more sensitive in the future and, therefore, China-US competition is a strategic reality that cannot be changed.

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