

Sub-project III: US-China Relations and International Relations
Involving the US and China
(US-China Relations Study Group)

1. Research overview

Two of the most important variables influencing trends within the international order are the domestic circumstances within the US and China and the foreign policy shifts stemming therefrom. An element of equal or perhaps even greater significance is the nature of relations between these two major powers.

China's relative rise coincident with the US' relative decline can be said to have rapidly reduced the clear asymmetry in power that previously characterized US-China relations. Logically speaking, one extreme to which this trend can go is complete balance and cooperation (G2), with the opposite extreme being complete conflict, i.e., military confrontation as envisioned in power transition theory. If US-China relations were to move toward either of these extremes, Japan would need to ready itself to prevent it based on the principle of international cooperation. If these bilateral relations instead head for somewhere between these two extremes, Japan will need to dispassionately discern where these relations are likely to go, given that they would determine circumstances within the international community as a whole.

Attention should also be paid to the fact that US-China relations in recent years have gone far beyond the category of simple bilateral relations and transformed qualitatively into ties that involve other major countries, including Japan. For example, the US' "rebalance" is seen as a long-term strategy meant to bolster "hedging" vis-à-vis China not through unilateral action by the US alone but rather through responsibility- and burden-sharing with friendly countries and countries surrounding China. As symbolized by its advocacy of an "Asian security concept" at the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, and its proposal of a "One Belt, One Road" concept China has begun seeking to counter US involvement in the region by strengthening its influence with neighboring countries and emerging countries. These developments indicate that the countries surrounding China are increasingly becoming stages on which the US and China are vying to maintain or enhance their influence in the international community.

Consequently, Sub-project III will analyze the directions of qualitative transformations in US-China bilateral relations by issue area, and examine the spillover effects that developments in US-China relations will have on the international community as a whole.

The first task is examining the impact that domestic circumstances in the US and China have on US-China relations, while at the same time identifying the evolution of US-China bilateral relations on issues ranging from traditional problems such as trade and investment to new concerns such as cyber security. Based on developments in US-China relations that involve more of the international community as a whole, the second task is analyzing US-China relations and relations with major countries and associations of states surrounding the US and China, and identifying the transformations that changes in the foreign policies of the US and China and in US-China relations will produce in the international order. The third task is to examine the impacts of US and Chinese foreign policy and their interaction in each issue area on international order and their limitation. This task is carried out with China's efforts in recent years to replace the existing order with a new one in the realm of global governance in mind.

2. Research team (US-China Relations Study Group)

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