The United States and China: On the Cusp of Conflict

An Analysis of U.S. and China’s Strategies and the Bridge between Prominent Realist Perspectives

By:

Jeffrey S. Soria

Thesis Submitted to the
Department of Political Science at
California Polytechnic University, Pomona
Supervised by: Dr. M. Scarcelli
April 2021
Abstract

ARE THE EVOLVING STRATEGIES BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA LEADING TO PEACEFUL COOPERATION OR UNAVOIDABLE CONFLICT?

In recent time, China has experienced a prominent rise in their global power as a result of their growing economy, technological advancement, and expansion of military capabilities. While their rise to power has been generally peaceful, recent power developments by China have sparked the attention of the United States. Such developments include China’s territorial expansion into the South China Sea, and their increased political involvement with the territorial ownership of Taiwan. As the United States has reigned supreme as an international leader and figure, their national interest is to retain their position in the global community. As a result of China’s increasing opportunity to surpass the U.S. in international prominence, the U.S. has become cautious about their position and relationship with China, as the probability of their authority being challenged increases. In an attempt to contain China’s expansion and limit the scope of their power, the United States has developed an ever-evolving strategy for proceeding with their relationship with China. Experts in the field have also taken note of the severity of the situation, devising the future of their relationship and any possible repercussions for all observable outcomes. In a best-case scenario, both China and the United States will cooperate in their relationship. A worst-case scenario, greater, long-term conflict between these countries will arise and create devastating effects to the rest of the international community. These rivaling perspectives have been examined to understand and provide meaningful application of international relation theory. While there are different camps of theoretical deduction, realism provides the greatest opportunity to examine both potential outcomes of the U.S./China relationship. The most prominent perspectives of realists have been attributed to a balance of power and power transition theories. This thesis seeks to examine these rivaling theoretical perspectives as an application towards the U.S./China relationship and strategies. With hope, this theoretical framework seeks to provide further insight that can help provide deduction and prediction of their future relations.

Key Terms: Asia-Pacific Region, Balance-of-Power Theory, International Relations, Power Transition theory, Realism, Taiwan

Word Count: 11775
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   a. Introduction of Power Relations between China and the U.S. .................. 3
   b. Statement of the Problem ................................................................. 4
   c. Introduction to Theoretical Framework ............................................. 5
   d. Statement of Purpose ........................................................................... 6
   e. Significance of Study ........................................................................... 8

2. **LITERATURE REVIEW**
   a. China’s Rising Power ........................................................................... 9
   b. U.S. and China Strategies against Each Other .................................... 11
   c. Realism .................................................................................................. 13
   d. Power Transition Theory ...................................................................... 14
   e. Balance of Power Theory .................................................................... 16
   f. Discussion ............................................................................................ 18

3. **METHODOLOGY**
   a. Introduction to Research Question ................................................... 19
   b. Study Design and Context .................................................................. 19
   c. Sources + Collection ........................................................................... 21
   d. Focus on Realism .................................................................................. 22
   e. Research Analysis ................................................................................ 23
   f. Assumptions, Limitations, and Timeline ........................................... 24

4. **ANALYSIS**
   a. Perspective One: Power Transition Theory ....................................... 26
      i. China’s Rapid Growth in Power ......................................................... 26
      ii. China’s Power Rivaling the United States ...................................... 27
      iii. China’s Growing Dissatisfaction with the U.S. ............................ 28
      iv. Critique of Power Transition Theory ............................................. 30
      v. Implications for Future Relations ................................................... 30
   b. Perspective Two: Balance of Power Theory ...................................... 32
      i. Security + Hegemony ....................................................................... 32
      ii. Internal + External Balancing ......................................................... 33
      iii. Emulation ......................................................................................... 34
      iv. Critique of Balance of Power Theory ........................................... 36
      v. Implications for the Future .............................................................. 36

5. **CONCLUSION**
   a. Main Argument ................................................................................... 38
   b. First Sub-Question ............................................................................... 40
   c. Second Sub-Question ........................................................................... 41
   d. Future Research .................................................................................. 42

6. **REFERENCES**
   a. Scholarship ......................................................................................... 44
I. Introduction

a. Introduction of Power Relations between the U.S. and China

With the largest population on Earth, China has steadily been advancing their presence in the international community and is recognized as a rising power. This has largely concerned the philosophical and strategic interests of the United States, which has been universally recognized as a leader in the global hegemony. The United States has been able to reach this level of international recognition due to the political circumstances of the twentieth century. Since reaching the top, the U.S. has been active with their partnering countries and closely examining the relationships they retain. As such, the United States began to take notice of China's rise in power as they started to modernize their country towards the later half of the twentieth century. China has harvested their increased global presence through the expansions of their technological advancements, militarial capabilities and economic prosperity. As China continues to escalate in power, their ability to influence global realities becomes more prevalent. This power acts to decrease the amount of influence that other powerful nations, such as the U.S. currently possess. With the potential shuffle of the global hegemony, the United States has begun to adjust their international strategy of containing China’s rise to power. “Issues surrounding power transitions --the relationship between a rising state and a declining great power (often the hegemon)--are an important topic for both international relations theory and contemporary policy” (Zhang, 2020). This process is not new for the U.S., as they have substantial history in preserving their own identity and influence in global politics. However, as the U.S. has begun to initiate their strategic containment plans and policies, China has started to take notice, and the repercussions of these actions are creating unavoidable tension. The influx of rising power and escalating tension between China and the United States has created a questionable state of the global community.
As a result, scholars and political leaders are investigating the potential for future conflict between these nations, or the possibility of continued peace. The largest question between the U.S. and China remains through the uncertainty of their situation and of each other. “The conventional wisdom in IR holds that when the declining state is uncertain about the riser's intentions, power shifts can produce preventive war even between rational rising and declining states with compatible goals, due to rational-but-misplaced fear” (Yoder, 2019).

b. Statement of the Problem

As the biggest topic in international relations, the future of U.S./China relations remain a prevalent conversation in modern academia. Most scholars have argued in their research that with the current strategic evaluations of their affairs, China and the U.S. are headed to become adversaries in the future. This potential conflict has risen as a result of China’s rise in power and the United States’ demise in their global hegemony. As it stands, conflict is the connection and relationship between the methods of China’s continuous rise and how the U.S. shifts and adapts their strategic policies. “The rise of China can be perceived either as a threat or as an opportunity to and for the US, mostly depending on US grand foreign policy interests and its related strategies” (Pratiwi, pp. 351). If a threat is imminent, a future conflict between China and the United States could devastate not only the international community, but their own domestic fronts as well. Great powers, such as these nations, are interwoven members of the global community, allying with many smaller nation states. With both China and the U.S. also leading the world’s economic system, those allying states are dependent upon the support and market opportunities with them. Long-term conflict between these nations would surely produce a negative domino effect towards their allies. Additionally, both the U.S. and Chinese economies
would also collapse. The costs of potential war between China and the U.S. are considerably high, for themselves and for the global economy. Predicting the outcome or probability of conflict/peace between China and the U.S. remains a difficult challenge. Scholars of international relations have sought to assess their theoretical applications through the perspective lens of realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Even within each camp of ideology, there exists multiple theories that attempt to conclude different possible implications. With multiple perspectives, it becomes difficult to rationalize and infer the state of relations between China and the U.S. This study will, instead, investigate the realist camp of theoretical inference to provide context and analysis to the future relations of these nations.

c. Introduction to Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis takes a deeper investigation into established and prominent theories of realism that help to explain the different implications/outcomes of international relationships. Examining international relations theories is a prominent source for theoretical analysis due to its influence over strategy and politics. Before offering a substantive summary of the theories that will provide the foundational support for this thesis, it is important to introduce the school of thought that they reside in, realism. Realism was developed within the context and creation of other international relations camps and ideologies. Realism remains as one of the dominant schools of ideology in international relations, and can be traced back to scholars such as Thucydides in Ancient Greece. IR theory was created out of the age-old contemplations of war and the causes of it. In its most simplistic form, realists seek to answer the conflictual arrangements that are created out of international relations. From the realist theoretical framework, scholars have since devised calculated observations of perspective in
creating the theories of interest for this thesis: power transition and balance of power. These theories have been the most prominent in realist schools of thought and have largely shaped the outcome of U.S. strategy and policy. “US policy has been shaped by two distinct schools sharing the balance-of-power concept within the realist paradigm” (Wantanabe, pp. 6).

Power transition theory contends that conflict arises between great powers when the rising force is dissatisfied with the status quo and wants to change the system. The most prevalent scholarship pertaining to this theory rationalizes that China is dissatisfied with U.S. involvement in the territorial disputes of Taiwan, and that dissatisfaction will ultimately create conflict between them. However, there is a possibility that conflict will not arise as a power transition between these nations. Balance of power theory investigates that employing balancing techniques and strategies to rising powers will avoid conflict. Scholarship within this framework finds that the U.S. deploying military personnel and strategies in the Asia-Pacific region will allow them to avoid conflict as they are working to balance China’s influence in the region. Just as power transition theory studies highlight that conflict can be created through this theoretical perspective if the incumbent power fails to provide substantial balancing strategies to the rising power. Through the foundational support of realist thought, these theories will offer different perspectives and implications within the same camp of ideology to provide the essential tools for analysis to properly examine the future relationship of China and the U.S.

d. Statement of Purpose

This thesis will examine the nature and relationship between realist theories, ideologies, and strategies in analyzing the state of China’s rising power and the American response to it. The existing scholarship and pre-determination of China/U.S. relations deduces that conflict is
gaining momentum. However, due to the theoretical nature of this examination, it is impossible and academically irresponsible to provide a definitive answer to the outlook of the U.S./China relations. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, different perspectives of international relations ideology will be thoughtfully analyzed to engage with the subject matter. Examining different perspectives, from their similarities to their differences, it will be possible to illuminate the full spectrum of possibilities when investigating what the future relationship between China and the U.S. might look like. This study will only be concerned with the main theories of realism in international relations. Power transition and balance of power theories provide enough substantial and rivaling viewpoints of the U.S./China relations that can give enough meaningful analysis to further understand their potential outcomes.

Firstly, this thesis will undertake A.F.K. Organski’s original deductions of power transition from his work, *World Politics*, that will provide context for providing the first major source of perspective. The second perspective will be provided by William Wohlforth, who provided the foundations for consistency in defining balance of power theory in his article *Testing Balance-of-Power Theory in World History*. After the proper application of theory has contextualized the U.S./China relationship, this thesis will then bridge theory with these nations strategies. The perspective of both authors will be backed by additional scholars and experts to provide substantial evidence supporting their work. Strategies and implementations that will be examined include the events ongoing in the Asia-Pacific Region and the territorial disputes of Taiwan. The examination of real events and interactions between the U.S. and China will provide enough evidence of their strategies and potential for peaceful/conflictual outcomes. Overall, this thesis will map the perspective and position of realism theory that is grounded in the relations of the United States and China. The case of this thesis will ultimately examine the relationship
between realism theory and U.S./China relations within the context of the later nation’s rise to power. This thesis examines the question of whether the evolving strategies between the United States and China are leading to inevitable conflict or cooperative peace. Analyzing the main question of this thesis through different ideological perceptions will result in the creation of further sub-questions and perspectives.

- Why are power transition and balance-of-power theory an applicative approach to studying U.S./China relations and what do they have to say about their potential for peace/conflict?
- Is power transition or balance-of-power theory a more appropriate realist interpretation in studying the dynamics of the U.S./China relationship?

e. **Significance of the Study**

With China’s continuing rise to power, the subject and debate between China and the U.S. remains one of the most prevalent subjects today. Lack of a general grand strategy towards China results in the ongoing discussion and evaluation of future policy implementation and tactics. Continued discussion and need for a definitive strategy creates the desire for evaluative recommendations. Furthermore, there have been multiple attempts by academic scholars to provide the context, evaluation and perspective of international relations theories towards the implications of the future relationship between China and the United States. This thesis wishes to continue the work of previous scholarship that has provided the relevant and necessary groundwork by bridging theory and application of strategy. It seeks to provide to the scholarship a consistent and coherent work of observation that can be useful in further developments between the United States and China. This work will become even more critical to academia as
tensions continue to escalate between these nations. As long as there is the possibility or likelihood of conflict between China and the U.S., this work can provide substantial investigation and context for analysis.

II. Literature Review

This literature review first discusses two topics that will help provide and shape part of the context for the analysis: China’s rising power and the examination of the U.S./China strategies against each other. This is relevant to provide the necessary background and history to provide an established foundation for understanding the dynamics between these nations. Once this is complete, the second half of this review will engage in the ideology of realism, followed by its two most prominent theories: power transition and balance of power. Highlighted in this review are the works of A.F.K. Organski and William Wohlforth. Ultimately, the establishment of historical context with the applicative utilization of theory will provide the tools and guide for developing the later portions of this paper.

a. China’s Rising Power

Before we can examine the current state and evolving strategies between China and the United States, it is important to establish the scholarship that accepts China’s growing power. The rising state of China has become one of the most prevalent topics in international relations. China’s growth has been exponentially increasing over the past few decades in part to their expanding global economy. China began to grow their power towards the end of the seventies, as they started to reform their own economic structure. Since that change, Joseph Tse-Hei Lee
found that China’s market economy has exploded in growth, producing double digit increases in their gross domestic product (2007). As a result of an expanding economy, the increasing size of their market capabilities has led to more influence and persuasiveness in the international community. At the beginning of China’s economic transformation, their economy only accounted for only one percent of the world’s economy. Zheng Bijian asserts that, “Today, it accounts for four percent of the world economy and has foreign trade worth $851 billion -- the third-largest national total in the world” (pp. 3). China’s rise in economic capability continues to expand faster than any other nation, including the U.S. Robert Ross (2018) argues that the current state of China’s economy has influenced other nation’s economies dependent on China. However, despite the alarming rise of China’s economy, there remains an agreement in scholarship that attests to China’s economic expansion as not the sole reason for their rise in power.

From China’s expanding economic capability, those increased profits from their markets allowed for further military developments. Recent efforts by the Chinese military has focused its priorities to modernizing their forces. Thi Thuy Hang (2017) assessed that China’s military building efforts have been focused towards emphasizing maritime securities, long distance mobility operations and cyber attacks. Scholars generally argue that along with the expansion of their military, their navy operations too have grown in quantity and quality. Understanding China’s rise, from expansion in their economy to advancements in their military foundations, is critical to understanding how relations are being transformed with the United States. China’s rise in power is the foundational phenomenon that provides the basis and grounds for this thesis. Scholarship regarding U.S./China relations and strategies investigate the changing dynamics challenged by China’s rise to international leadership. However, the unknown implications about China’s rise in power is creating the necessity for further investigation and study. Scholars are
unsure how the continuance of fluctuating power relations will influence other nations in the community. The literature finds that while other great power nations are beginning to prepare for future conflict, there is little understanding about what points will tip the balance with China’s partners.

b. U.S. and China Strategies against Each Other

China’s rise in power has resulted in both countries devising strategic tactics and policies toward each other. As a rising power, China has no choice but to continue their expanding path towards hegemonic leadership, caring little for who might stand in the way. As the current dominant power in the international arena, the U.S. has no choice but to defend their position in the global order to protect their own national interests. Wexing Hu (2020) argued that the U.S. views China as a direct challenge to their own influence and interests, which ultimately threatens their future prosperity and security as a nation. Part of the U.S. strategy against China can be outlined there, a plan called the Indo-Pacific Strategy. This is to limit the scope of mainly China, as well as other rising nations near the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Currently, China has no official response to this specific strategy, and scholars debate what impact this will have for the international community. Scholarship argues that an unofficial response to this strategy has China mitigating any security risks while continuing to expand their own influence in specific regions. Such strategies can be prescribed by certain literature to be ‘a negative balance.’

Negative balancing strategies refer to a nation's effort to undermine their rival’s power. Kai He (2012) argued that China has deployed negative balancing strategies in its efforts to undermine the U.S. hegemony. As a result of China’s self-perspective as a rising power suggests that their opinion is that the U.S. is not an immediate threat to them. Furthermore, scholarship has
analyzed that economic policies have become a critical component for China’s strategies against the U.S. Aaron Friedberg (2017) examined that China has pursued an economic strategy that has promoted their own development at the expense of their partners. Such advancements could be used to surpass the U.S. in total gross domestic product.

There remains an agreement in the literature that validates the need for U.S. strategy development against China. The rising tension between these nations, and China’s recent investments into nuclear technologies, addresses the need to protect national security. Charles Glaser (2016) argues that the U.S. is actively assessing whether to expand or minimize their damage-limitation capabilities in the case of a potential nuclear war with China. Other scholars adhere that these assessments are congruent with China’s expanding military power. With China possessing further military capabilities for deployable strategy against the U.S., America is further increasing their own military presence in the South China Sea. Derek Grossman (2019) assesses that the Taiwan disputes and involvement in the Asia-Pacific region are key components to U.S. military strategy against China. However, the literature cross-examines how effective these strategies and tactics will hold against their developments with China.

Assessing the literature regarding China and the United States’ strategies towards each other portrays a cause-and-effect relationship. When one nation deploys certain tactics, the other retaliates in anticipated strategy. The main causes for strategy development between China and the U.S. involve China’s economy and military expansion, investments in nuclear technologies, involvement in the Asia-Pacific region and territorial disputes over Taiwan.
c. Realism

Realism has a substantial history of theoretical deduction and evaluation, primarily through the realization of international relations. It has been established through careful consideration by intellectuals and scholars such as Thucydides and Machiavelli. As time has progressed, the concepts and definitions foundations of realist thought have evolved further into the modern era. With the ever-evolving times, scholars suggest new principles and substitutions to redefine the ideologies of realism itself. For example, William Wohlforth (2011) found that applying the substantial work of Kenneth Waltz was critical in developing the modern-day classifications of realism. As such, realism began to formulate new and invigorating theories within international relations, and began to subcategorize itself into separate camps, such as classical and neo-realism. Its importance to theory and political institutions remains in its ability to help formulate debates and intuitions about the world and how to understand it. There is a general consensus in the scholarship that realism has substantial principles and ideology to offer the world. Duncan Bell (2017) argued that realists offer answers to methodological, ethical, and political questions. Its ability to shed insight and perspective of the shaping political world has a lot of powerful ability to relay the interests and identities of the international system. Ultimately, realism is a political conception that concerns itself with attempting to convey arguments toward the politics of the world. Inanna Hamati-Ataya posed that, “Among the many reflexive questions scholars may ask, the ultimate interrogation that concerns IR is the following: how is theory itself affected by the cultural, normative, and material characteristics of the international system, and the position of IR theorists within it?” (pp. 1081).
d. Power Transition Theory

Power transition theory is a realist ideology that analyzes the structure of international politics. It portrays international relations as fundamentally rooted within a hierarchy of nations. The dominant power of the hierarchy possesses the highest proportion of resources at their disposal. Power transition theory contends that war between nations arises when the competing state rivals the power of the incumbent leader, and that they are dissatisfied with the current system. Power transition theory is generally presented to prescribe a forthcoming power between two great powers. Many scholars argue that the future of U.S./China relations look grim as a result of the application of this theory. Yves-Heng Lim (2015) argues that China has become dissatisfied with the current system as a direct result of U.S. involvement in the Asia-Pacific Region. Lim further contends that U.S. withdrawal from the region or acknowledgement of China’s claims to the area would satisfy China, and that war would be inevitable. Other academic research has found that while this power transition will still result in war, it is not derivative of China’s disasstirication, rather, it is that of the U.S. Serafettin Yilmaz (2019) assessed that China is content as a rising power, and that the United States’ dissatisfaction with the status quo could lead to war, despite their position as the incumbent hegemon.

Additional scholarship investigating power transition theory also examines that there is a lack of existence in power transition. Renee Jeffery (2009) analyzed that China resumes a non-threatening position to the U.S., and as a result, a power transition between the U.S. is not likely. However, Jeffery argues that there is still the possibility of conflict over the ideological clash of Taiwan. Further scholarship assesses that power transition theory will not hold true between China and the U.S. due to each nation’s military capabilities. Woosang Kim (2015) found that power transition theory argues that if China’s military cannot overpower the U.S.,
then the likelihood of conflict between these nations diminishes. This ideology is further supplemented by the rationale that conflict will not arise further even if their military powers are equally matched, and if China remains satisfied in the status quo.

While power transition theory has risen to prominence in international relations theory, the originating source of its creation, A.F.K. Organski, still sets the standard in the academic community, as outlined in his work *World Politics*. Organski asserts that power transition is the prominent theory in scholarship due to the nature of power being unable to balance itself in the international community. Organski outlines that there are three stages to reaching a full power transition: stages of potential power, transitional growth, and power maturity. The final level is obtained when a nation becomes unanimously industrial and their economy continues to expand. When a nation reaches capacity for full power transition, there are two realities that set the stage for potential conflict between the existing hegemon and rising power. Organski contends that powers, who are satisfied in their position, who maintain dominance over the international system usually arrive at peaceful cooperation. However, war may arise when, “A recently industrialized nation may be dissatisfied with the existing international order because it rose too late to receive a proportionate share of the benefits, and it may succeed in drawing to its side lesser nations who are also dissatisfied because they are exploited by the nations that dominate the existing order” (Organski, pp. 372). Overall, wars between nations in power transitions will start as a result of the challenging nation’s power equalling the dominant nation, if their rise is rapid, and they have reached substantial levels of dissatisfaction.

A majority of scholars find that the application of power transition theory will ultimately lead to conflict between China and the U.S. This theoretical application is a result of scholars investigating that China has become dissatisfied with the original status quo, and seeks to
challenge the U.S. for hegemonic dominance. Their disasterication has largely grown from U.S. involvement in the Asia-Pacific region. Other scholars argue that power transition is not likely, as China is not an imposing threat to the U.S. Furthermore, if China cannot surpass U.S. military capabilities, then a power transition is not possible according to the theoretical framework. Common pitfalls in power transition research finds difficulty in measuring the determinant leveling of what makes a country truly dissatisfied. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction remain determinant variables that are left to interpretation by the scholar.

e. **Balance of Power Theory**

Scholars have created a balance of power theory as a realist interpretation to international relations in analyzing the strategies of war creation or prevention. Balance of power theory rivals power transition theory in that while the latter dictates war is inevitable, the act of balancing great power relationships can/will avoid conflict. This theory is one of the most fundamental cases within international relations. Balance of power theory retains the idea that a nation protects its own survivability by limiting the power of other rising states to prevent them from dominating the international community. When a certain state begins to feel threatened by another, they might employ balancing tactics against the rising power as a defensive mechanism. A nation's attempt to balance a rising power is utilized to prevent conflict between themselves and their rivals. The perspective that has established and connected the U.S./China relations prescribes that the U.S. has been strategizing as a balance towards China’s rise over recent time. Woosoon Choi (2007) acknowledged and analyzed that China was the first to apply a balance of power strategy toward the U.S. with their alliance to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. This was a result of America’s emergence in power towards the end of that conflict with Russia.
However, this time also marked China’s rise in prominent power, and as time passed, the U.S. shifted their own policies and strategies to balance China. Robert Ross (2006) further argues that balance of power theory plays an intrinsic role in examining the dynamic relationship between China and the U.S. This camp of ideology argues that balancing of power behavior plays a pivotal role in great power relationships. Ross further exemplifies that both China and the U.S. are currently employing balancing tactics and strategies in their interactions in East Asia. Proof that balance of power strategies are being deployed in this region is highlighted by the use of military and strategic cooperation by both nations.

It is also important to note that some scholars evaluate the deployment of balancing strategies to also lead to inevitable conflict. Shih-yueh Yang (2013) proposed that during the process of nations’ balancing strategies and policy enactment, the likelihood for war to arise becomes greater until the balance of power is restored between nations. Other ideological responses to this perspective ascribes to the rationale that many nations have not formed well developed balancing strategies towards China. Zhen Han (2020) argues that if there are not harder balancing strategies deployed, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, conflict will arrive. Despite this analysis, Han also contends the livelihood of China’s prosperity will have to include future economic relationships with nations, such as the U.S.

Balance of power theory provides a great source of analysis and examination of the wearing state of affairs between the United States and China. In this perspective of realist ideology, it can be addressed that the competing/rising nation can be balanced by the existing hegemon to create an equilibrium in the international community. However, the issue with this theory is the abundance of different definitions the scholarship creates. William Wohlforth’s exceptional article, in his examination of balance of power theory in the world order, provides
the appropriate context for analysis of the U.S./China relationship. “This version of balance-of-power theory posits that because units in anarchic systems have an interest in maximizing their long-term odds on survival (security), they will check dangerous concentrations of power (hegemony) by building up their own capabilities (internal balancing), aggregating their capabilities with those of other units in alliances (external balancing), and/or adopting the successful power-generating practices of the prospective hegemon (emulation)” (Wohlfarth, 2007). Through this assessment, balance of power theory can help explain the outcomes between rising and existing hegemons.

f. Discussion

It is important to establish the main takeaways from the literature and summarize the main implications from those studies. For power transition theory, scholars have analyzed that it is mostly China who is dissatisfied in their relationship with the United States. As power transition theory states, a nation’s dissatisfaction with the status quo is a primary precursor to the start of a conflict. It is important to highlight that China’s dissatisfaction is derivative of U.S. involvement in the Asia-Pacific Region, which is a result of U.S. military strategy against China. Scholars of this perspective also retain the possibility that China and the U.S. will not arrive at conflict as a result of a power transition. For balance of power theory, scholars argue that the U.S. is applying balancing strategies against China to avoid future conflict with them. The strategic and military deployment in the Asia-Pacific region by the U.S. is proof of their attempts at balancing their great power relationship with China. However, scholars establish that conflict can still arise from balancing strategies. Conflict can be created in an imbalanced relationship,
and if the U.S. fails to fully balance China’s rise in power, conflict will be created until that balance is restored.

III. Methodology

This section of the thesis will seek to examine the methods of analysis for conducting this research to arrive at a reasoned conclusion.

a. Introduction to the Research Question

This thesis seeks to examine and answer whether the evolving strategies between China and the United States are leading towards conflict or peaceful cooperation. With the theoretical and predictive nature of this thesis, this research will seek the guidance and connection of international relations theories to reach an appropriate conclusion. As a result, two further questions need to be sought and addressed while attempting to arrive at the main conclusion of this paper. These additional questions will examine whether power transition and balance of power theories are applicable approaches to answering the question and what their implications have to say about future China/U.S. relations. Additionally, the examination of which theoretical application is more suitable for analyzing China/U.S. relations will be contemplated.

b. Study Design and Context

The purpose of this research is to examine the main theoretical perspectives that shape the scholarship regarding U.S/China relations and strategy to predict the potential of conflict or peace. In effect, the strategies and geopolitical implications between the United States and China
will be examined and approached from the context of theories of international relations. With the theoretical nature of this research, it will be conducted as an evaluative study between the theory and exemplification of cases. The research design will explore a descriptive content analysis of each theory’s implications towards U.S. and China strategy in order to predict what the future relationship between these nations might look like. The main focus of the methodology will be the application of theory toward cases of implication that resulted in China and U.S. strategy against each other. The analysis framework of this research will focus on the work of the theoretical authors of William Wohlforth and A.F.K. Organski, who created an updated balance of power and created power transition theories, respectively. It is important to use the work of the original theoretical proprietors, as these established theories have not been changed or tampered with. It will further be examined under the context of the literature established for this research, which has been created with the purpose of correlating those theoretical perspectives to the realities of the U.S./China relations.

By investigating the theoretical examinations of power transition and balance of power, it is important to establish the guidelines for the analysis that suggests the potential for peace or conflict. For power transition, there are certain expectations that can be found if the United States and China are reaching toward conflict or not. If a power transition is to occur, and conflict does arrive, then we can expect to see China’s power and influence continuously expand in various governmental sectors. A power transition can only arrive and create conflict with the rising influx of power of China. This can be visualized in sectors such as rising GDP figures and increasing Chinese investments in their own infrastructure. On a relational level, we should observe that the United States has increased their dealings with Taiwan. If we can observe a failure in the arrival of power transition, we should observe that China’s power begins to either
decline or remain stagnant. Furthermore, the United States’ involvement with Taiwan can either be dissolved or decide to deploy distant levels of operations with them. For balance of power, there are also expectations that can be met if the U.S. and China are heading toward cooperative peace. If cooperative peace endures, then the United States has proved that they have engaged in effective balancing strategies against China. We could observe that the United States is maintaining effective external relationships with allying nations, and possibly even looking to formulate new ones. Additionally, the U.S. would further increase their own internal security strategies and policies. Finally, the United States could either maintain their current posture in the Asia-Pacific region, or possibly resign from the region to pursue peace between them. If balance of power tactics does not arrive, this fact could be the result of their alliances not being strong enough or their pursuits causing too much tension/conflict in the region.

c. Sources + Collection

The main case for data collection in this research is purely qualitative and is sourced by applying theory/goal of hypothesis. As a result, the publications that were analyzed in context with the research were sourced through scholars, experts, and researchers of international relations. The insight from the utilized scholarship in this thesis relates to the concepts of the rise of China, U.S./China relations, realism, power transition theory, and balance of power theory. Different authors and experts' observations and analysis are obtained for prominent background and insight to the development between China’s rise in power to their relations with the United States. Additionally, different scholarship regarding international relations and realism is dissected to provide deeper insights into the existing literature and perspective of experts. Sources highlighting power transition and balance of power theories provide the foundation for
analyzing two different perspectives of realism to analyze the hypothesis of the thesis. It was equally important to collect these sources that weigh different perspectives and outlooks regarding application of theory/prediction of outcome. While it is generally accepted that the realist perspective in international relations believes that the outcome between the U.S. and China will be stable and peaceful, it is critical to obtain literature that attests that realist ideology can deduct the potential for conflict as well. Finally, the main evaluation of theory is being taken from the works of A.F.K. Organski’s *World Politics* and William Wohlforth’s *Testing Balance-of-Power Theory in World History*. These works will provide the main insight to apply the appropriate theoretical perspectives towards the relationship between China and the U.S.

d. Focus on Realism

The choice to focus this research utilizing two prominent theories of realism is strategic. While other theories of international relations contain useful tools for analysis, their goals and focus are not best suited for the context of this thesis. Other theories that were not included in this research are the ideological camps of liberalism and constructivism. These schools of thought project different sources and tools of analysis for their connections of the U.S./China relationship. Liberalists are mainly concerned with the domestic and economic interdependence factors in their application of their relationship. Constructivists only look for the goals, ideas, and elements that can shape the international order. Realists are only concerned with security and material powers. Even with realism, there are other expansions of ideology in the camps of neo-realism or classical realism. To simplify the analysis of this thesis, only the general assessment of overall realism will be evaluated. Many scholars have already attempted to transcribe the similarities and differences between these schools of thought, such as realism v.
liberalism, or realism v. constructivism. Therefore, by looking to assess two theoretical assumptions of realism regarding their relationship, this research looks to build further investigation into one particular subset of ideology. There is great value and knowledge in analyzing liberalism and constructivism, however, realism offers the most strategic utility in investigating the potential for the United States and China to arrive at conflict.

e. Research Analysis

The nature of this research will not provide a coded or quantitative examination of the material. Instead, this thesis will explore the two perspectives, from its application to its evaluative qualities, of power transition and balance of power transition theories. It will be guided by the works of A.F.K. Organski and William Wohlfforth to define the respective perspectives of realist ideology towards U.S./China relations. In analysis of the questions asked in this thesis, the first sub-question will be separated into perspectives. This will provide the context to answer the overarching and second sub-question of the thesis in the conclusion.

**Perspective One: Power Transition Theory**

- Why is power transition theory an applicative approach to studying U.S./China relations?

The standards and guidelines set by A.F.K. Organski in his work, *World Politics*, will provide the descriptive analysis of power transition theory as an applicative approach to understanding the dynamics of U.S./China relations. To understand the power transition perspective, there must be three qualifying attributes of the rising power: the rising power must equal the dominant power, have rapid growth, and have growing dissatisfaction with their
situation. Academic scholarship will be provided to satisfy the requirements of these categories in the different aspects of China’s rising power and strategies. By assessing that this situation meets the criteria of the power transition perspective, it presents itself as a qualifying outlook to investigate U.S./China relations. This section will conclude at the projected outlook that this prospective prescribes at either arriving at peace or conflict between the U.S. and China.

_Perspective Two: Balance of Power Theory_

- Why is balance of power theory an applicative approach to studying U.S./China relations and what does it have to say about their potential for peace/conflict?

The outline of balance-of-power theory by William Wohlfforth will provide the application of theory to investigate the rivaling perspective regarding the outcome of the U.S./China relations. Wohlfforth insisted that there are three qualifications to contend that the dominant power is attempting to balance the power of a rising force. These qualifying factors are: the dominant power is attempting to maximize the survivability, work to balance internally and externally with alliances, and adopt hegemonic power capabilities. Scholarship will provide the outlook of U.S. strategies and engagements that satisfy the qualitative and applicative insight to setting the foundational precedents of this theory. This section will be concluded by asserting the theories implications of the future relationship between the U.S. and China.

_f. Assumptions, Limitations and Timeline_

Before we can analyze the research, it is important to declare assumptions about U.S./China relations. First, we must assume that the original creators of the theories utilized in
this research remain true and are fully applicable. This will imply that the theoretical works of A.F.K. Organski and William Wohlfforth are reasonable sources of application towards investigating the U.S./China relationship.

There are a multitude of limitations that provide difficulty in reaching the conclusion of this thesis, but these challenges are inevitable. Firstly, the scope of this research can only be limited to major points of interest in the case of the U.S./China relationship. It can not be expanded to the probabilities or inference of future, specific developments. As such, only cases such as the Asia-Pacific Region and the disputes of Taiwan can be assessed in this thesis. Additionally, while the rise of China has major implications for all international actors, only the United States can be qualified for examination as it pertains to this study. Furthermore, this thesis does not seek to answer any other questions about the current or future developments in their relationship. It does not regard aspects such as right or wrong, or any other factor, to examine this framework. It simply accepts what is to determine what will be. Finally, this thesis does not answer my own personal opinion about the future outcome in the relations, rather, my own deduction of established theories is predicting.

The timeline for this study ranges greatly between the scholarship used for background in this research and the cases utilized for understanding strategy implication. Timelines for the literature and other background information can range from the beginning of China’s rise in the late seventies to the present day. Specific cases are analyzed over recent years, and continue to the present day, as they are still continuing to evolve.
IV. Analysis

In the analysis section, the theoretical qualifications of power transition and balance of power theory, created by A.F.K. Organski and William Wohlfforth, respectively, will be presented to highlight the two distinct perspectives regarding the outcome of the U.S./China relations.

a. Perspective One: Power Transition Theory

In this perspective, A.F.K. Organski accounts that there are three qualifications to assess if a power transition is inevitable between the rising power and the dominant hegemon: the rising power must obtain power rapidly, they must have enough power to either match or eclipse the dominant power, and they must exhibit some levels of dissatisfaction with the original system or with the dominant power. These qualifications will be exhibited through the analysis of China’s expanding economy, U.S. trade war implications, and discuss China’s dissatisfaction with U.S. involvement in Taiwan.

i. China’s Rapid Growth in Power

To first qualify as a state of power transition, China must first be identified as a force that is growing quickly and rapidly in power. Through recent time, China has been able to massively expand its economic markets that have pushed their power and influence internationally. China’s long-term and rapid growth began to develop around 1992 during the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Chinese government instituted, “aggressive economic reforms re-ignited rapid growth catalysed by large scale foreign trade and investment” (Goldstein, pp. 841). Analysts regard that China’s economic growth is a large contributor to their overall testament of power
capabilities, and their development has not been replicated by any other nation. “Over the period 1978–2000, GDP may have grown at an annual rate of close to 10%, with per capita income multiplying by a factor of about five” (Boltho, pp. 257). This economic increase in China’s economy has developed their position as a major player in the international market. As it stands, China has been able to obtain a prominent chunk of the world economy’s GDP, an accomplishment that only other great powers have been able to partake in. China’s successful and rapid growth in power has been accomplished through their ability to navigate their way through the challenging and new unprecedented circumstances. In the last few decades, China has witnessed, “an annual 1.2% growth of population and an annual 7.4% increase of per-capita income led to a rising demand of private households in every category of consumption, including energy, e.g. for transportation purposes” (Li, pp. 1413). China’s evolving economic capabilities is continuing to reshape the global markets and help contribute to their rising power.

**ii. China’s Power Rivaling the United States**

Not only has China’s power quickly and rapidly expanded over the course of the last two decades, they are extremely close, if they haven’t already, to eclipsing the U.S. in total power. The next qualification of the power transition ideology insists that the rising power must be able to match or surpass the hegemon in power to fully take their position as a leader. China’s ability to match U.S. power can be examined through the scope of their evolving economy. During the 2000’s, China possessed the largest single source of foreign currency reserves. Furthermore, China in, “2013 had the world's second largest military budget following a decade and more of double digit increases in defense spending” (Foot, pp. 836). China’s increased defense budget
and additions to their military infrastructure/technology is creating an impactful example to the U.S. The potential for China to have a rivaling military in comparison to the U.S. showcases that they retain the ability to match them in a potential conflict. China’s military improvements are sourced through their developments into nuclear capabilities. “China will not allow the United States to achieve strategic primacy and is therefore increasing the size and sophistication of its ICBM force” (Fravel, pp. 23). Even if a potential conflict will not head towards a nuclear path, China’s possession of nuclear weapons remains a serious threat and rivaling source of power to U.S. defense capabilities.

However, a better analysis of China’s matching and eclipsing power over the United States can be witnessed in their trade-imbalance relationship. As the U.S. debt began to increase under China’s borrowed funds, their economic dependency has become far more prevalent. The United States’ critical strategy of initiating a trade war with China highlights further insight to suggest that China’s economy may soon topple that of America. During the height of the recent trade war, “President Trump said the previous tariffs of 10% levied in US$200 billion worth of Chinese goods will be raised to 25%” (Liu, pp. 167). The United States’ efforts to stall the advancement of the Chinese economy aggregates their potential threat to their defending hegemonic placement.

**iii. China’s Growing Dissatisfaction with the U.S.**

China’s rapid rise to power has shifted the scales of their economy and military infrastructure to eclipse the United States in total power. The final qualification for power transition to occur is that the rising power must become dissatisfied with the current system in place, and with the current dominant power. As China’s power continues to expand, their efforts
are being routed towards expanding their regional influence, especially in regards to Taiwan. As they have pushed for more territorial investment and ownership of the region of Taiwan, the United States has equally pushed back against China. This has created tension and dissatisfaction from China towards the U.S., as they believe they have more of a regional claim to the territory. China’s dissatisfaction is stemming from the United States’ lack of awareness of how to proceed in the region. While they are attempting to balance China’s rising power, there is a concern from the U.S. in how to treat their ally of Taiwan. There are, “concerns about how to treat a democratic friend such as Taiwan and an authoritarian regime such as China which is rapidly rising and may potentially pose a serious threat” (Hsiegh, pp. 6). During the Bush administration, the United States resorted to continuing relations with Taiwan as a defensive pact against China’s draw on the region. This administration believed, “that the United States must strengthen its diplomatic and military ties with Taiwan, even though such ties could disrupt the U.S.-China relations and regional stability” (Ross, pp. 52). The ongoing involvement of the United States into the affairs of Taiwan is furthering the development of dissatisfaction and conflict between them.

Additionally, China’s dissatisfaction with U.S. involvement with Taiwan is creating a universal assumption that the relations in this region could be a proprietor in the creation of potential conflict between China and the U.S. China’s dissatisfaction with the U.S. may resort to conflict in the region to finally change the pre-existing system of power in the international system. With the strategic placements of Chinese military in the Taiwan-Strait, “it appears primarily designed to give Beijing the means of contesting the US position at the top of the East Asian system” (Lim, pp. 284). It can be assumed that the rapid developments and modernization
of the Chinese military in these regions can be a strong indication of their growing dissatisfaction with the U.S.

*iv. Critique of Power Transition Theory*

While power transition theory remains a prominent realist perspective and ideology, there are many scholars who suspect that its occurrence in international relations is circumstantial. “Power transitions involving leading powers are rare. They are hardly ever the result of gradual differences in economic growth rates, as power transition theories expect them to be” (Lebow, pp. 405). This rationale is derived from the conceptual perspective that China has already taken over the leadership role in the international community, thus, taking the United States’ former position. This would contradict the primary focus of power transition theory, which iterates that a hegemonic shift has not happened yet, but will do so in the near future. Additionally, critiquing the objectivism of power transition theory contrats the sentiment that power transition wars occur in the absence of a preceding leading hegemon. Lebow ultimately found that the future outcome between the United States and China will not be a result of a power transition. “The greater risk is that conflict will result from the misperception that such a transition is imminent, and the miscalculation by decision makers in the United States (or China) that China will soon be in a position to do what no state has done before – unilaterally dictate the rules of the international System” (Lebow, pp. 408).

*v. Implications for Future Relations*

China’s culmination of rapid power, their ability to rival the United States, and their growing dissatisfaction with U.S. involvement envisions a conflict between these great powers
on the horizon. While the first two qualifications of power transition theory are independent of U.S. control, the final indication in the struggle of territorial claims of Taiwan presents a cautious flashpoint of interaction between them. China’s power has not stopped expanding, and will only continue to rise in the future. Only the future can predict whether or not their power can fully engross the United States. America’s involvement in Taiwan does not seek to stop any time soon, and their continued presence is causing an ideological disassociation by China in regards to their relationship with the U.S. If the implications of power transition theory stands to embrace current strategies and trajectories, conflict will arrive soon.

The influx of Chinese analysts’ coverage of their power expansion strengthens the argument that conflict is inevitable. They argue that the inevitability of conflict is due to power transition’s rationale to be deterministic by nature. “With their structural focus on anarchy or power hierarchies, mainstream Realist and power transition (PT) theories produce narratives that are highly deterministic, depicting great power conflicts as hard to escape” (Gries, p. 458). Additionally, the argument that a power struggle is likely to occur is reflected by the United States and China possessing opposing strategic goals, both internally and externally. If this theory comes to fruition, China’s dissatisfaction, as previously mentioned, may be the causing root of palpable conflict between these nations. While other theories of international relations might see cooperation as a possible outcome in the highlighted points of interests of power transition, they tend to avoid the psychology of the rising state, such as China, in said matters. Power transition ultimately maintains the pessimistic outlook that rising points of tension between the United States and China can only lead to conflict. From this angle, the vulnerability of the United States in relations to China’s rising dominance creates a unanimous realist perspective that the hierarchical order will soon shift.
b. Perspective Two: Balance of Power Theory

In this perspective, the various qualifying factors of the United States’ strategy will be evaluated to exhibit the balance of power perspective. From this perspective, the United States is: securing their own survival in preparing themselves against China’s rise, formulating external alliances to increase their international presence, and emulating similar power forces against China in the hopes of balancing their rise so they do not reach threatening hegemonic levels.

i. Security + Hegemony

The United States has maintained a substantial history in developing policy and strategies with the goal of self-preservation. The rising threat in China’s rise to power presents a unique challenge to the U.S. as they seek to implement policies to help sustain their position in the international community and their own survival. The U.S. began to take awareness of China’s rising threat based on their developments in East Asia. Feeling the threat of China, the United States has attempted to strengthen their own national security strategies and empower their military capabilities in preparation for any potential outcome. “Ongoing modernization of US defense capability has been especially important for balancing the rise of China” (Ross, pp. 32). The U.S. has expanded their defense capabilities by strengthening their presence in regions such as the Philippines and Malaysia. Ross examined that the U.S. had increased their military fundings from two-million to one-hundred twenty million in these regions. Furthermore, the severity of the United States’ goals to strengthen its security strategies results in their official departure of international goals in favor of an official ‘pivot’ towards China. This was a direct international policy approach under the Obama Administration to defensively prepare them for
the rising threat of China. By making their view of China’s rising power official, the United States is giving substantial and reasonable acknowledgement of these developments. These guidelines for looking to secure U.S. strategy are supported in the 2015 National Security Report. “The document calls for ‘collective action’ and a promotion of "international rules and norms" to ensure security and order against current threats” (Goldgeier, pp. 37). The goals of the U.S. strategy report intends to retain their international power, avoid military conflict, and develop strategies by forming alliances with other nations. The United States’ international acknowledgement of China’s threatening power, and the development of their military/national security strategies provides the footsteps for their goal to balance the rising hegemon.

ii. Internal + External Balancing

The United States has developed multiple partnerships and alliances with many Asian countries to assert their regional balance as a balance to China’s power. The growing rise of China created the need for allying partnerships to strengthen their position in the international community. Maintaining these alliances not only builds the internal security of the U.S., but also helps to implement an external balance of power in the region. These alliances with the U.S. serve as a source of insurance and protection against the threat of the rising state of China. This insurance of protection mutually benefits partnerships of the alliance. “The allies invest for such benefits with arrangements to ensure alliance preservation against challenges that arise as a result of alliance mismanagement” (Park, pp. 343). These alliances provide both internal and external strength to provide a balance towards the rising power. In a mutual and cumulative alliance, the relationship becomes too large and dependent to topple. The United States’ pursuit of alliances with other Asian nations would not only create security, but it would also provide leverage in
their challenging interactions with China. “The preponderant power of the US in Asia would give the US more leverage to construct any rules and norms it preferred and to punish any free-riding behavior without facing substantial resistance and challenge due to the huge power asymmetry between the United States and other Asian countries” (He, pp. 171).

The alliances that the United States has formed include: Thailand, Korea, Taiwan, and South Vietnam. Many of these alliances were formed from military contributions from the United States in the support of those nations. Even though the United States has been forced to decrease their engagements with these nations to a certain degree, the remaining alliance still imposes their regional assertion into their external presence. Maintaining these alliances is mutually administered to prevent the takeover of the rising power in the international community. “The United States and its regional allies wish to insure the status quo US-led regional order against unspecified adversaries” (Park, pp. 4). As the United States formed and maintained external alliances, not only is their internal security preserved, but their international presence becomes multi-faceted in an attempt to block China’s rising power in their own region.

iii. Emulation

The United States has adopted power-generating practices in an attempt to balance China’s power in the Asia-Pacific region. After the United States has properly identified the growing threat in China’s rise to power and established external alliances with nations to improve their own national security, they have begun to emulate physical strategies to assert their presence to China. This can be witnessed in the United States’ increasing deployment of troops and vessels in the Asia-Pacific region. This increase has been issued as a direct response to China’s growing interest and military presence in the region. The most critical aspect to
balancing China’s power is to equally match and rival the physical power and presence of the growing hegemon. To the United States, this region has become both pivotal and critical to balancing the development of China as a result of the resources laid throughout this region. “The emergence of the Asia-Pacific is reflected in the regions high economic growth and large volume of maritime trade” (Prabhakar, pp. 232). China seeks to extend their rise in power through the undertaking of these resources to push their international influence to the next level.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the developments in this region are important to the United States based on the geographic implications it conveys of general strength and power by China. China’s assertion in this region signals to the United States the strategic course it needs to implement to provide more or less concerning balancing policies. “Within the Asia-Pacific region, Northeast Asia is unquestionably the most vital region in assessing power in all of its dimensions and in seeking to estimate the relative strength of real or potential contenders for influence” (Scalapino, pp. 374). With China evolving its strategic military deployments, the United States is deploying equally measurable power to balance out their prominence in the region. With these developments, the United States is hoping to sustain large enough levels of balancing power and strategy to shift the dynamic in their relationship with China. “The Asia–Pacific region has become a test ground to determine whether China and the United States can build a new model of big power relations” (Zhao, pp. 382). The only hope for successful balancing remains in the United States re-evaluation of their military imposition in the region in response to China.
iv. **Critique of Balance of Power Theory**

William Wohlforth’s assessment and dictation of balance of power theory has set a precedent, and as such, many scholars have critiqued his views and of the theory itself. There is a growing consensus in the academic community that Wohlforth provided a mischaracterization of balance of power theory. “To counter what they describe as a universalistic balancing proposition, the Wohlforth team offers a set of generic hypotheses regarding collective action problems, domestic-level constraints on emulation and uncertainty” (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, pp. 363). Wohlforth’s insights into balance of power theory is out of date, to some, as it fails to address many contemporary points of interest in international relations analysis. Some factors of analysis that were left out by Wohlforth that many critics argue are critical to the U.S./China relations are: social cohesion, velocity of economic growth, and technological advancement. There is a growing academic sentiment that balance of power theory should be applied in the modern day to reflect the utilization of land-based military force. Even analyzing the context of world politics against the scope of balance of power theory, it does not provide a fundamental means of testing for U.S. and Chinese power. Ultimately, the shortcoming in Wohlforth’s deduction is the lack of awareness of insight that studying the current international system can provide in analyzing the U.S./China relationship.

v. **Implications for Future Relations**

The nature of balance-of-power theory in the investigation of the U.S./China relationship presents that they will not arrive at conflict. The course of U.S. actions, strategies, and policies appropriately represents the qualifying foundations of balance-of-power theory presented by William Wohlforth. From this realist perspective, the United States is seeking to mostly protect
their own interests through the course of forming alliances and emulating China’s rising power against them. If this perspective is accepted, this course of ideology and strategy will outweigh any other, and most importantly, outweigh China’s rising power with the United States’ force of balancing. If the United States’ can continue to implement effective balancing strategies, both in their interactions in the Asian Pacific, creating further external alliances in the name of developing their own national security, a war will not arrive between China and the U.S.

Realists who prescribe to the balance of power perspective maintain that it is dependent on the United States’ ability to maintain and uphold balancing strategies against China to resort in cooperative peace. Demonstrating to the international arena that the United States can effectively balance China’s rise in power will exhibit a new model relationship. Suisheng Zhao argued that, “The new model can be built only if China and the US demonstrate a strategic restraint and maintain a delicate balance of power to prevent their rivalry from boiling over into a new Cold War” (p. 377). The United States involvement in the Asia-Pacific region presents an optimal and necessary platform to demonstrate their own balancing capabilities. While the situation remains delicate in their interactions with China, this platform can easily push the U.S. and China relationship towards cooperative peace. This is why realists succumb to the balance of power perspective: the opportunity presented to the United States in this political arena can help shape peaceful relations with China. It does not remain without challenges, however, as the future depends on effective strategies and policy implementations by the United States. It also requires insightful investigations and analysis of future tactics deployed by China. As it stands, balance of power theory can applicatively suggest that peaceful and cooperative relations between the United States and China are not only possible, but probable. The security of the
relationship between these nations rests upon the politically insightful behavior of the United States and of China.

V. Conclusion

The results from the analysis will be concluded within the context of the arguments and questions originally presented in this thesis. It will first evaluate the main argument of the thesis before diving into the sub-questions. Further research will conclude the research for future insight into U.S./China relations.

a. Main Argument

- Are the evolving strategies of China and the United States leading toward inevitable conflict or cooperative peace?

As in any case of theoretical prediction, the answer is varied, and can be traced to two very opposing perspectives of outcome outlined through power transition and balance of power theories. Power transition theory outlays an inevitable path between the United States and China that leads to conflict, while balance of power theory alludes to the possibility of cooperative peace in their relationship. Despite this very different opposing conceptions of theoretical outcome, it is important to establish that both are rational assessments that have considerable merit in the academic community. Both outcomes can be reliable predictions of future relations, and their continued merits will rely on the intricacies and developments of the U.S. and China partnership.
Realists who ascribe their beliefs toward the power transition perspective highlight that the rise of China will ultimately pave the way for long-term and devastating conflict with the United States. A.F.K. Organski provided the original outline for power transition theory, and the requirements that will exhibit its existence in international relations. Organski’s assessment of this perspective first predicted the potential for conflict, through the application of this theory, to occur between the United States and China. Since its origination, numerous scholars and experts have contributed to theory, and even offered their own findings and critiques. The overarching consensus, by applying power transition, exhibits that China’s rising power is expanding to eclipse the United States. Additionally, U.S. involvement in Taiwan upsets China to the point that they are considering the initiation of conflict between them. However, no theoretical argumentation is universally accepted, and critics fault that power transition conflicts rarely occur. Regardless, there is an imperative precedence that this ideological camp prescribes a near-future conflict.

As previously mentioned, the likelihood for conflict that is applied through power transition inversely creates the conditional potential for the United States and China to reach cooperative peace through balance of power. Assessing William Wohlforth’s qualifications for a balance of power exhibition between great powers establishes the United States’ attempt to balance China to avoid confrontation with them. With the assistance of other academic scholar’s contributions to this theory, it becomes an acceptable case that gives considerable opportunity for these nations to arrive at peace. This is outlined through the United States’ expansive external alliances, as well as their progressing attempt to prioritize their own internal security. Additionally, the U.S. position in the Asia-Pacific region highlights on-hand military strategy to physically balance China’s expansion into other key aspects that will ultimately continue to grow.
their power. Just like power transitions, balance of power theorists have practical critiques that exhibit that this ideology is out of date and fails to consider contemporary aspects that are critical to assessing the future of U.S./China relations. Regardless, advocates of this perspective engage the possibility that the U.S. is actively pursuing balancing strategies, and that their probability for success will dispose them of any potential conflict with China.

As seen in the analysis of both power transition and balance of power theories, the evolving strategies of China and the United States maintain the possibility of both arriving at peace or conflict. This theoretical prediction cannot possibly provide a finite resolution or optimal outcome in concluding this research. The future of U.S. and China relations will continue to change due to the evolving policies, strategies, and tactics. Even the smallest implementations of these relational aspects can shift the balance of their relationship towards peace or conflict.

b. **First Sub-Question**

- Why is power transition and balance-of-power theory an applicative approach to studying U.S./China relations?

Power transition and balance of power theory maintains its prominence and usefulness in assessing U.S./China relations in realism ideology. Despite these theories resorting to different outcomes in the U.S./China relationship, these ideological principles remain as an applicative approach to examining two rivaling perspectives. Additionally, while there are further theoretical evaluations within the ideological camp of realism, these primary theories offer valid deduction that attests to the two most probable outcomes between their relationship: total conflict or
cooperative peace. This thesis wished to offer two perspectives that completely rivaled each other in terms of potential outcome, and these theories offered that assessment. While their theoretical implications offered valuable overlapping in principle, the totality of their opposite deductions provided valuable and distinct perspectives. Power transition theory was able to offer the research the perspective that certain points of strategy and interaction between the United States and China was leading to an inevitable conflict between them. While on the other hand, balance-of-power theories offered this thesis the rivaling view that the United States was attempting to balance China’s expanding power to avoid conflict, and extend a lasting peace between them. With the theoretical proposal and assessment of the U.S./China relationship, it is important to offer at least two different points of view to engage with the prediction with critical assessment. The singular source of one perspective becomes too much of a prescription, and does not give as much credit to the prediction of the thesis without evaluating other points of view. Therefore, power transition and balance-of-power theories provided the necessary groundwork to analyzing and interpreting the dynamics of the relationship between the United States and China.

c. **Second Sub-Question**

- Is power transition or balance-of-power theory a more appropriate realist interpretation in studying the dynamics of the U.S./China relationship?

With the different potential outcomes of these ideological perspectives, it remains challenging to pinpoint which interpretation of future outcome is more appropriate regarding the relationship between China and the United States. Through the examination, application, and critique of power transition and balance of power theories, there remains substantial evidence
and prediction that creates a convincing argument that their relationship can head towards either outcome that these theories propose. Through the analysis of this thesis, both the United States and China are capable of opposing or supporting each other through keen points of interaction, such as in Taiwan or the Asia-Pacific region. The main idealisms of realism composes and highlights the competitive side of international relations, and both these theories act as opposing pathways sto managing the conflicts of their relationship. As it stands in their relationship, the United States and China possess an indifferent stance of possible outcomes towards each other. With the future development of strategy and policies, it is possible that either power transition or balance of power theories can become a more appropriate assessment in studying the dynamics of their relationship. But as it stands, the uncertainty and rising tension of their relationship creates the optimal analyzation opportunity for this thesis to present that both these ideological philosophies possess useful tools for imagining their future potential of peace or conflict.

**d. Further Research**

As examined, the theoretical applications of I.R. propose some significant and challenging contributions to understanding future relations between China and the U.S. In the evaluation of power transition and balance of power theory, their ideological deductions envision the U.S./China 's relationship to divide into two very different outcomes. Further collection of evidence can only help contribute to provide additional context and analysis for theoretical investigation. This evidence of the future can be further scrutinized to evaluate developments in the various flashpoints of interactions mentioned in this research. The ongoing territorial debates of Taiwan and the military involvements of the South China Sea will continue to provide useful analysis and projection. Additionally, any new points of interaction between future U.S.
presidential administrations and the People’s Republic of China will add to the assessment of their relationship. The final and exact outcome of this research can not be concluded, unless these nations arrive at conflict. As long as they continue to serve peacefully or cooperatively with each other, there is always the potential for strife in their relationship. Until better analytical tools are developed, theoretical ideology is the most useful source of examination in inferring the outcome of the relationship between the U.S. and China.
References


