

CHINA & US FOCUS DIGEST

Hope Even at Low Point



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China-US Focus Digest is a bi-monthly magazine of exclusive commentaries on China-US relations. The articles express views of influential opinion leaders and scholars in China and the US on the issues faced by the two nations.

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Repair and Rebuild

Zhang Ping

For China-U.S. relations, the past 12 months have been tumultuous, framed by the COVID-19 pandemic and marked by an accelerating downward spiral caused by an incessant stream of sanctions from an openly hostile Trump administration. With Joe Biden in the Oval Office, a window of opportunity will open for readjustment.

In this issue, we highlight measured hopes, earnest reservations and, most important, recommendations from a range of Chinese and American academics outlining what both governments and societies can do to offset the damage already inflicted. Their thoughts shine light on the path leading out of the abyss.

We dedicate this issue to Professor Erza Vogel who died in December. As one of the leading U.S. scholars on East Asia, Vogel devoted his life to bringing people closer. His academic research and writing, as well as his interaction with different cultures, are invaluable. In July, China-U.S. Focus had the honor of

hosting Vogel in a video interview, one of the last he gave before his death.

Ambassador He Yafei opens this issue by suggesting a new framework for relations between China and the United States — an approach to cooperation and competition that features little ambiguity. Zhao Minghao cautions that there is no evidence the relationship will automatically turn for the better when Biden takes office, and U.S. scholar Minxin Pei argues strongly in favor of lifting restrictions on people-to-people exchanges, which have hampered trust-building at its foundation.

A new year brings new hope. In a short month, Chinese people around the world will usher in the Lunar Year of the Ox, a symbol of perseverance and hard work. We hope 2021 will bring about reconciliation between two countries whose relations are the most consequential of the 21st century.



**Hong Kong Forum on
U.S.-China Relations**
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U.S.-China Relations: The Way Forward

January 26-28, 2021

Competition in a Cage



He Yafei

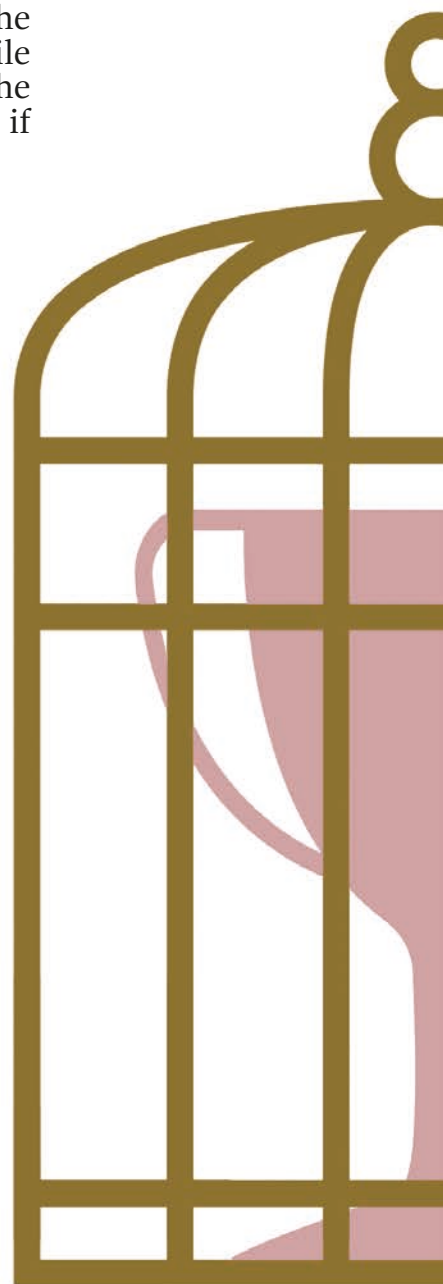
Former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs

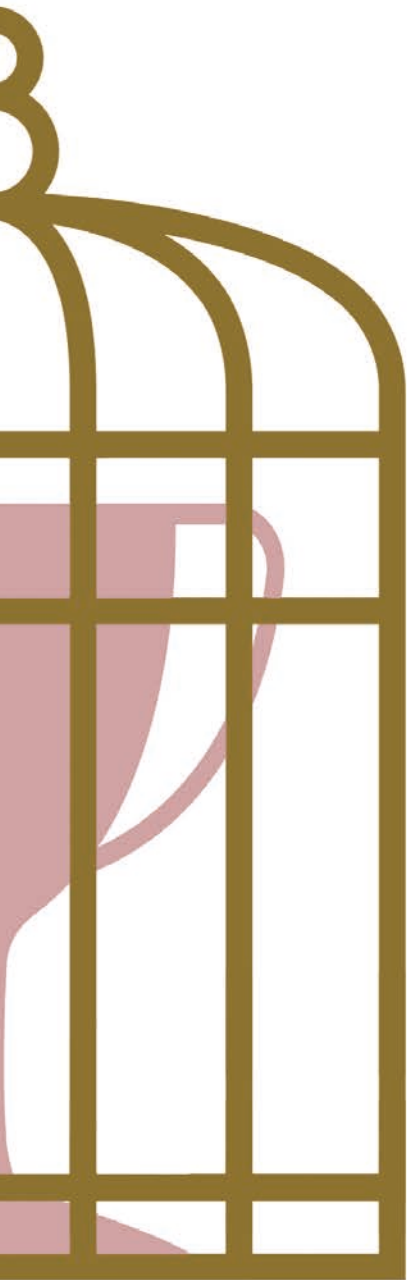
A strong framework needs to be built in which China and the United States can work together with little ambiguity while competing peacefully based on rules recognized by both. The two countries are currently positioned to help the world, if only they are willing to seize the moment.

Strategic competition is not what China wants. That is a misjudgment based on U.S. notions and reflections on bilateral relations over the years. Those may not change in the near term. The crux now is how to cage the differences and arrest the free-fall, while at the same time striving for cooperation via dialogue and confidence-building measures.

The inauguration of Joe Biden on Jan. 20 will provide an opening for renewed China-U.S. dialogue. Both sides need cool heads as they consider where we've come from and where we're going. They should make every effort to avoid a new cold war, while expanding the space for cooperation. Of course there's no basis for assuming blindly that a new U.S. administration will instantly change everything.

The crux now is how to cage the differences and arrest the free-fall, while at the same time striving for cooperation via dialogue and confidence-building measures.





This year's U.S. general elections, ending in a riot on Capitol Hill by Trump supporters on Jan. 6, exposed the unprecedented multiple crises facing capitalism, triggered by political radicalism and the polarization of society. The wealth gap continues to widen; equality is steadily deteriorating; identity politics, populism and the "America first" attitude remain mainstream. The roughly 74 million votes cast for Donald Trump show that the polarization of American society has solidified. Antagonism between the elites and those at the bottom layer of society, and between labor and capital, mostly in the form of identity politics, will become increasingly fierce and will continue to influence U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

The Biden administration will face daunting challenges in resolving domestic problems and adjusting foreign policy. Adjustments to China-U.S. relations will also be subject to constraints.

The present imperative is to build a "cage" — a framework with bottom lines, and rules — to prevent competition from becoming vicious and getting out of control.

The two countries need to reevaluate and prudently position themselves to handle bilateral ties at the levels of both strategy and action. A new pattern is needed in which they can engage both in active cooperation and peaceful competition. The present imperative is to build a "cage" — a framework with bottom lines, and rules — to prevent competition from becoming vicious and getting out of control. This is a positive way to turn bilateral relations around.

First, proceeding from bottom-line thinking, the two countries' competitive relationship should be acknowledged and clarified. China-U.S. competition is objective existence; an ideal world simply does not exist. Whether

their future will be competitive cooperation or cooperative competition, and whether they can enlarge the space for cooperation and realize peaceful competition, all hinge on their respective perceptions and policy interactions.

The two devastating world wars and the U.S.-Soviet Cold War teach us that China and the U.S. must coexist in peace and avoid getting bogged down in mutually diminishing zero-sum competition — especially cold or hot wars. Anything less will be disastrous for both countries and the world as a whole.

This was precisely what President Xi Jinping meant when he emphasized in his congratulatory telegram to Biden that he wants China and the U.S. to proceed in a spirit of no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation. They should focus on cooperation, manage differences and promote healthy and steady development of bilateral ties. This is the bottom line of the cage.

Currently, swaths of people in the two countries have developed negative feelings about the other.

Second, the two countries need to have a correct understanding of cultural and ideological differences to reduce hostility and avoid sinking into an ideological quagmire. Currently, swaths of people in the two countries have developed negative feelings about the other. Unilateral restrictions by the U.S. side, as well as the worsening pandemic, have brought bilateral personnel and people-to-people exchanges to a virtual halt, even affecting students on both sides who are simply seeking to study overseas in the other country. It is worrying that key Democratic Party figures and major U.S. think tanks are making ideologically charged statements against China.

In a jointly signed article in Foreign Affairs (September/October 2019 issue), Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan claimed that China presents a greater ideological challenge to the U.S. than the former Soviet Union did. Ignorance about Chinese culture and the Judeo-Christian sense of cultural superiority have led to prejudice against the Chinese political and social systems among U.S. elites in both major political parties. Many now look at cultures and political institutions that are different from their own from a perspective of confrontation. If the “shining city on a hill” thinking doesn’t change, U.S. understanding of China will go awry and misjudgments will inevitably follow.

In this regard, the first imperative is to stop fixating on cold war/hot war talk and de-escalate mounting tensions. The persistent ideologically charged Cold War-style rhetoric on the U.S. part has severely worsened the biosphere of bilateral ties and resulted in increasingly negative feelings on both sides.

The new U.S. administration should try to restrict and guide officials-in-waiting, as well as major think tanks, so that they can evaluate and make comments on the present and future of China-U.S. relations from a positive and objective perspective to create a balanced and objective public opinion environment for resetting the relationship.

If the “shining city on a hill” thinking doesn’t change, U.S. understanding of China will go awry and misjudgments will inevitably follow.

Second, cultural and ideological differences between the two countries should be read rationally to prevent ideology from becoming an overriding priority in bilateral ties. Some would-be members of the upcoming U.S. administration, as well as Democratic Party veterans, are advocating rallying allies along ideological lines to jointly deal with China — for example, excluding and suppressing China in the field of high technology, with a “technology group of 12” (T12); enhancing U.S. dialogue with Japan, India and Australia in the Indo-Pacific to promote a four-nation alliance against China; and focusing in trade negotiations on asking China to change its development path characterized by “state intervention.” This mode of thinking, which mistakes cultural differences for ideological ones and labels China as “non-democratic” or “illiberal” will only drive China-U.S. relations into a dead-end. This should be part of the framework of the cage so as not to sleepwalk into a cold war.

Third, the two sides should consider taking parallel, pragmatic confidence-building measures as soon as possible in selected areas of common interest, patch up any serious trust deficits, expand dialogue and look for opportunities for cooperation. This will create conditions amenable to or-

This mode of thinking, which mistakes cultural differences for ideological ones and labels China as “non-democratic” or “illiberal” will only drive China-U.S. relations into a dead-end.

derly, peaceful competition and function as the stabilizer of the cage.

One inspiration that can be drawn from the steady progress of China-U.S. relations over the decades is that the two countries are not like Britain and Germany before World War I, nor like the U.S. and Soviet Union during the Cold War. The two have successful experiences in seeking points of convergence based on cooperation in the face of changes in conditions. Such points of convergence and room for cooperation still exist but need to be explored much more seriously.

If the public-opinion foundation of the relationship is undermined and is not repaired in a timely manner, cooperation will become a castle in the air.

It may be advisable to proceed from the easy to the difficult, to pick the low-hanging fruit, so to speak, by selectively conducting dialogue and undertaking confidence-building measures:

First, restore cultural and people-to-people exchanges as soon as possible, starting with the acceptance of foreign students for study. State-to-state relations are built on good feelings between peoples. If the public-opinion foundation of the relationship is undermined and is not repaired in a timely manner, cooperation will become a castle in the air.

Second, taking COVID-19 as a pressing joint battle, the two countries should engage in emergency cooperation in such aspects as vaccine research and development, distribution of vaccines, prevention and treatment, as well as mutual recognition of international health codes. They should actively discuss how to strengthen the role

of the World Health Organization, establish efficient pandemic response mechanisms worldwide and improve preparedness for future epidemics.

Trade negotiations should be resumed as soon as possible.

Third, trade negotiations should be resumed as soon as possible. It is also imperative to start consultations about possible adjustments in the two countries' supply chains, which have been disrupted by changes in America's China strategy and shocks from the pandemic. Given the significant influence of bilateral economic and trade ties, both the content and format of negotiations should be pragmatic and feasible to truly benefit the people of both countries. The recent actions by the U.S. administration to add more Chinese com-

panies to the sanctions list and the New York Stock Exchange's delisting of some major Chinese companies need to be reviewed and corrected once the new administration is in.

Fourth, dialogue on financial concerns is needed to prevent financial risks from evolving into financial crises. The two countries' close collaboration during the 2008 financial crisis remains fresh in memory. The practical significance of such dialogue is to preempt tremendous global financial risks. Depreciation of the U.S. dollar and dramatic ups and downs in capital markets are inevitable and already happening, so preventing a new financial crisis that could keep the world economy locked down at rock bottom for the long term will be a challenge that must be confronted head-on.

China and the U.S. should again promote the G20's leadership role as the primary platform for global economic



- ▲ At the heart of Biden's China policy is what he calls a Summit of Democracies that would seek to establish a clear alternative to Beijing's autocratic rule, the Wall Street Journal has quoted Biden senior advisers as saying in interviews during and after the presidential campaign.

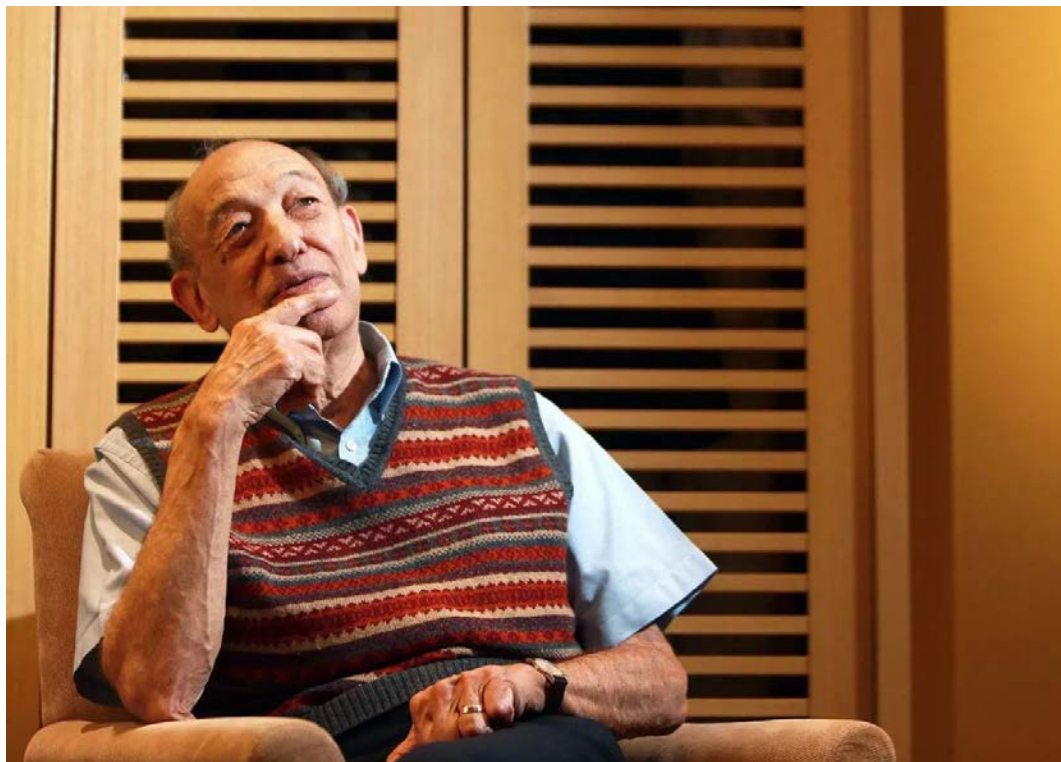
governance for the purpose mentioned above. It is equally important to facilitate steady opening of the Chinese financial market while massive amounts of U.S. capital flow into China. This calls for adroit and persistent risk management by both sides.

Fifth, dialogue and negotiations on cyberspace and network security are indeed necessary. Cybersecurity involves national security and people's livelihoods in both countries. Practical dialogue is imperative. Its content should include making rules to prevent cyberattacks, establishing the threshold for when cyberattacks constitute acts of war, exploring rule-making for global network governance and corresponding mechanisms and building a crisis-management platform for timely communication and consultation on cybersecurity issues that have already arisen or may arise.

Sixth, restore and enhance cooperation on climate change. China and the U.S. should be exemplary in the international community for mitigating damage from climate change. In collaboration with Europeans and others, they should find ways to meet the challenges no matter the costs and difficulties. President Xi delivered an important speech at the recent Climate Ambition Summit in which he proposed to "close ranks," "raise ambition" and "boost confidence." He also announced China's emission reduction goals, including peak year and carbon-zero, respectively, for 2030 and 2060. Hopefully the incoming U.S. administration will join hands with China to facilitate implementation of the Paris agreement and possibly move ahead for a better deal in the future.

By now, China and the U.S. should have developed, over decades of cooperation, sufficient wisdom and political will to take full advantage of new opportunities. So long as both sides have a clear understanding of new patterns — both the pros and cons — and new developments in bilateral ties, and so long as they earnestly strive to create conditions for peaceful coexistence, peaceful competition and multifaceted cooperation, they certainly can bring benefits to people on both sides and to the world at large.

Hopefully the incoming U.S. administration will join hands with China to facilitate implementation of the Paris agreement and possibly move ahead for a better deal in the future.



Hope, Even at the Low Point

In memory of Professor Ezra Vogel, one of the leading U.S. scholars on East Asia, who died on Dec. 20, 2020, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, we are publishing a transcript of an interview conducted by Editor-at-Large James Chau on July 28 with Professor Vogel and Professor Jia Qingguo of Peking University. It has been lightly edited for clarity and shortened to conform to space requirements.



You can listen to the interview by scanning the QR code.

James Chau:

I'm thrilled this week to honor two people who have done so much through their lifelong work to shape the world and humanity — Professor Ezra Vogel, who is the former director of the Fairbanks Center at Harvard University, and Professor Jia Qingguo, dean of international studies at Peking University. You're over in Beijing and in Boston, and I'm in Hong Kong. But what about the world we live in today? Foreign Minister Wang Yi says that about four decades on from the forging of relations between China and the United States, the two have hit their lowest point. Jia Qingguo, do you agree?

Jia Qingguo:

It is at least one of the lowest points, depending on how you measure it. I think, politically speaking, the relationship is at the lowest point. But if you talk about economic relations and social contacts, I think we are way ahead of that. So, I think the political relationship is at the lowest point since then.

James Chau:

Professor Vogel, you've seen this relationship literally open and develop and evolve in many beautiful and complex ways. Some people call it the lowest point. Jimmy Carter warned about a year and a half ago that we're heading toward a new cold war. Are these just words or has the prediction now come to full fruition?

Ezra Vogel:

I agree with Jia Qingguo that, politically, we're perhaps at our lowest point. As you know, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made a speech the other day that all of us who consider U.S.-China relations important thought was terrible. And the reaction has been very strong to that speech. I think, politically, discussions of coronavirus — where each country blames the other and the leaders blame the other country



and probably say things that are not true, or they exaggerate — are really a very serious and very dangerous matter. And I agree that politically it's the worst point. At the same time, we still have many contacts, even in the medical field. We have people in the two countries working together. We certainly have many businessmen working together, scholars working together. So it's not like it was in 1973 when I first visited China, when there is almost no contact at all.

James Chau:

Professor Vogel, your new piece in *The Washington Post* recalls many of the Chinese students that you've taught over many decades. You say that they're now being torn between a loyalty to their own country, a genuine loyalty, and their affection for America, which many of them would see as their second home. Is it now impossible in a binary world to balance both interests, to be friends with both?

Ezra Vogel:

They feel as I do, that I want to be patriotic to my own country but I want to have good relations with the other country. And many of them who were here enjoyed their time here. When Americans criticize without thinking, and they criticize every member of the Communist Party of China as if they were all the same, as if they all hated America, that's just not true. And for the many who were here and want to be patriotic to China, who want to help their country but want to maintain good relations with their friends and their studies, their fellow scholars and colleagues in the United States, they're put in a bind. They want to help the country, and of course they're proud of their country. But at the same time, they realize there are many good Americans and even though American government policy toward China is very nasty, and Trump and Pompeo say some crazy things, they know that many Americans are still ready to be good friends and work with them.

James Chau:

So, Professor Jia, what he says over there, what he writes in the headline about U.S. policies pushing friends of China toward anti-American nationalism — how do you stop this from evolving further? You've seen in your own country, in Chengdu, an American consulate shut down, just in the last day or two. We saw a couple of days before that the Chinese consulate in Houston, after many years — a very important mission — they're also shut down. How do you say stop or pause? If we can't go forward, that's OK. But how can we pause and then stop the rot from seeping further into the soil?

Jia Qingguo:

It's difficult at the moment, I think the Trump administration appears to be determined, to provoke some kind of a crisis in order to enhance its political position at home for reelection. So it's very difficult to stop. And there is domestic politics in China, too, so when the U.S. closes down the Houston consulate, China feels that it has to close down the Chengdu consulate. And if the U.S. decides to do something else, then the Chinese government may feel it's necessary to do something else. So our relationship is still on a slippery slope, and deteriorating. I just hope that people on both sides will cool down and take a more pragmatic approach to handle the relationship. It's difficult, but I think people on both sides should make some efforts.

James Chau:

Professor Vogel?

Ezra Vogel:

There's news in the United States that I would like to tell you about, in just the last two or three days, that I think puts a new slant on things. After Pompeo's speech, the reaction in the United States was virulently against it.

Ezra Vogel shared his trenchant analysis and insightful views on U.S.-China relations at the AsiaGlobal Dialogue in November 2019. (AGD) ▶



A lot of people who had not been speaking out are now speaking out. And in the last three days, in addition to my article in The Washington Post, there have been several prominent articles that are critical of Pompeo, much more than in the past. One was on The New York Times editorial page yesterday. The whole page was very critical of Pompeo. Second, there was an article in The National Interest by Paul Heer, who was the national intelligence officer for Asia for seven or eight years. And he was very critical and went into detail about what was wrong with the speech. And at CSIS, there was an article that just came out that said we were wrong to deal with Huawei the way we did. It's in America's economic interest to keep open all the channels, and even our semiconductor industry needs to have sales to a lot of other countries to keep the preeminent position it now has. So, I sense in the United States now, just in the last three or four days, that the Pompeo speech has aroused such opposition that it makes me very hopeful.

And of course Trump will not change before the election, I'm afraid. They will say a lot of things. And I'm afraid a lot of the Democratic candidates will also say a lot of things that are not good for promoting good China-U.S. relations. But I think that there is forming now a group of people who are much more expressive, who are beginning to say we've gone too far. That makes me much more hopeful that if we get a new president in January, that we can begin to try to pull the relationship back to a better one.

That makes me much more hopeful that if we get a new president in January, that we can begin to try to pull the relationship back to a better one.

James Chau:

There are still obviously a few moving parts, and as you astutely said, Professor Vogel, a few “ifs” are still involved in all this.

Ezra Vogel:

Oh yes.

James Chau:

Professor Jia, you recently had a conversation with ChinaFile. In that conversation you describe China’s diplomacy as being consistent with the past. Does that necessarily indicate or imply that what has significantly changed in that time has been the United States’ approach to its relationship with Beijing? Or is that in itself an oversimplification?

Jia Qingguo:

What I meant is that the substantive aspects of Chinese foreign policy have not changed very much. China still wants to have a peaceful international environment, and from that, domestic reforms and economic development. And China still adheres to the sovereignty principle against foreign intervention. So, in substance, China’s foreign policy has not changed that much. But in style and posturing, it has changed a great deal. It’s more proactive in doing things. And that, in a way, gave a lot of people the idea that China’s foreign policy had changed. I think at a substantive level the change is not as significant. But, of course, China has risen with greater capabilities. So, many of the things that previously were viewed as having less importance, now people attach a lot of importance to it. We have a different situation.

James Chau:

Ezra Vogel, you talk about the Fulbright

program, you say Americans sent to China by the Fulbright program have done a marvelous job at establishing academic relationships and making important connections. That’s now under threat as well. But I want to speak to a broader issue on education because many students — many of your own students — will be worried about where they’re going this fall, not only Chinese students but international students as a whole. And of course, American students who don’t know whether they should be packing their bags and going back to school in a couple of weeks. What do you tell them?

Ezra Vogel:

What I tell my students is that even though our country has adopted a very bad policy, our educators have fortunately been very united. The presidents of Harvard and MIT immediately tried to figure out a way to stop the effort to make it more difficult for foreign students to come. And they had very strong support from American universities. Part of it is financial, of course. Chinese students pay a lot of tuition and are very helpful. A lot of them are very im-

So I think what I want to do when I talk to students from China is to reassure them that even though there are some crazy people in the government and some crazy individuals at universities, overwhelmingly the American people are welcoming and want to make our universities attractive for Chinese students.

portant for research laboratories. But a lot of it is because we believe in international education. We think it's good for our country to welcome students from all over the world. They have free discussions about all kinds of issues, and we want to take a welcoming position. And we think it's good for our country. We think it's good for the world. So I think what I want to do when I talk to students from China is to reassure them that even though there are some crazy people in the government and some crazy individuals at universities, overwhelmingly the American people are welcoming and want to make our universities attractive for Chinese students.

James Chau:

So I was going to ask you whether educational exchanges, which are the great backbone of the U.S.-China relationship, are going to become a thing of the past or become less of a factor in the relationship. But do you say then, Jia Qingguo, that online exchanges may therefore replace or make up for some of the physical exchanges that we're limited by because we can't travel? Because we are still waiting for a vaccine and other public health measures to contain our own outbreaks.

Jia Qingguo:

During the pandemic, I think this is the most efficient way for us to continue exchanges. But I think afterward that we still need to send students overseas and receive overseas students ... to have an in-person relationship. I think that relationship is very, very important. I myself am a product of this kind of exchange. I went to the U.S. in 1981, I did my PhD there, I forged great friendships with a lot of people there and I think I understand the U.S. much better, just because I was physically there. If I were just taking courses online, probably I wouldn't get the same level of understanding. So I think in-person exchanges are very, very

important. I hope the current U.S. policy of discouraging foreign students, especially students from China, will change in the days to come. And I believe that it's in the best interest of our two great countries for us to carry on that kind of exchange.

James Chau:

Well, you were both in each other's countries at seminal points in their history. Professor Vogel, you mentioned it was 1973, in the midst of the cultural revolution, when you first visited China, just a year after Richard Nixon made his historic visit to Beijing. What was China like in 1973?

Ezra Vogel:

It was extremely poor. It was very closed. People were afraid to talk with Americans. There were almost no cars. And everything was very carefully scripted. And yet I could feel among the Chinese academics we met that there was an eagerness and a hope to get exchanges started. There were a few people in '73 who, like Zhou Peiyuan at Peking University, had been in the United States in the 1930s. And you still had contacts, and one could just sense their eagerness of wanting to get something started. And we felt the same way in the United States. As a small number of our delegation from the National Academy of Sciences had contacts with some Chinese scholars, they were very eager to resume those contacts. And it's very good for international science, it's very good for friendship. But it was, unfortunately, not to be. Some of them had hoped that by '73, things would really begin to open up. But it turned out it wasn't until after the Third Plenum in 1978 that relations really began to open up and changes really began to blossom. But one could just sense that for many people who had had opportunities to study in the other country, and knew each other, that it was good for everyone.

James Chau:

As you said, 1978 was when China opened up and when it began its reforms. And very soon after that, Jia Qingguo, you first went to the United States to study, which meant that you would be one of the very first Chinese students to go to America. What did you find when you landed at the airport? Which airport did you arrive at? Which city?

Jia Qingguo:

New York Kennedy Airport — yeah, that was an experience. I was there, I did not know what I was going to face because no Chinese students had been there before me after the founding of the PRC in 1949. There was no example of Chinese students graduating from U.S. universities. So I was very much scared, in a way. It was a very interesting experience. People were very nice to me. Also, I think the study opened my eyes. I found there were people sharing a lot of common interests — curiosity — in a lot of things. So, it was a good experience. Of course, at that time, physically living or living standards in the U.S. were much better ... housing, food, almost everything. China has caught up in many ways since then, but I think as human beings we still share things in common. Those things have not changed.

James Chau:

The reason I ask you both about your earliest experiences is that this for you, I know, is not an academic discussion. This is a relationship that impacts you, your families, your friends and your students — and all of them together. So it's an emotional point of discussion as well if you talk to Ezra Vogel about 1978. And Jia Qingguo elaborated on that as well. That was a period when there was so much richness in the technology

and science relationship that they shared, with Zbigniew Brzezinski and Jimmy Carter pushing China to elevate itself on those fronts as well. Yet now, a couple of decades later (and a couple of decades is not a very long time) we have Huawei, we have TikTok, emerging as the pillars of contention, almost as weapons, the sticks one side or the other side may be wielding. What happens now? Because obviously it creates a very delicate balance between the pragmatism of economics and the delicacy of security. What happens now? What are some of the decision-making processes that need to happen here?

Ezra Vogel:

Well, I think we have to admit that there are a lot of problems in the United States that we have not handled well. And we have not handled the problem of equality well, and there are some people who are very rich, and yet there are many who have been displaced because they were industrial workers and don't have a place to work. And we haven't found good jobs for them to give them confidence, income and self-respect. And when we have competition coming from the outside, it's very scary. Some people want to blame China for interfering and taking our jobs away. Some of them feel that the Chinese have stolen our technology. They feel that we work hard to invent things, that it takes a lot of time to develop a new idea, a new technology. And sometimes the Chinese have learned about it by open study, which we can't really complain about. We have to admire it. But sometimes, some Chinese have done so surreptitiously and by not following rules. And so those cases become the focus of people who are upset about other things, about losing their jobs or inequality. And I think that to improve our relations with China over the next decade or two, we need to work on

solving our own problems, too. We need to have a fair distribution of income; we need to have medical care that covers the entire population. We need to have a school system that provides opportunities for people in the bottom ranks as well as the top. So we have a lot of homework to do on our own side. And we Americans also feel that China needs to be more careful about respecting intellectual property, that it needs to show proper appreciation. And we're very worried now that some new Chinese electronic equipment might get secret information since we see that the Huawei machinery is used in China to follow what people are doing. Some of our people who are worried about their human rights and protection, are afraid that [information] could be used secretly. So there are a lot of issues that we Americans need to work on and need to work on with the Chinese in order to relieve the tensions.

And I think that to improve our relations with China over the next decade or two, we need to work on solving our own problems, too.

James Chau:

Professor Jia, do you think that the Chinese, or China as a whole in the broad sense, could begin to heal and apply some of that healing balm to the relationship by perhaps sharing more?

Jia Qingguo:

Well, I think there are many reasons for the current problems. I think the U.S. and many Americans are suspicious of what China does in part because they subscribe to different assumptions. One is the realist

assumption that when a great power arises, it will expand and challenge the established power — the so-called Thucydides trap. And of course, others subscribe to the argument that U.S. policy is to change China into a liberal democracy like the U.S. And they are so very disappointed that China has not changed according to their expectations. And the Trump administration of course has contributed to poisoning the atmosphere further by arguing that China is the enemy, is the rival. China is the thief, is the criminal, is the country that does not follow laws, is the aggressor, that sort of thing. So now I think a lot of people in the U.S. have little trust in China. That's the issue underlining this 5G or high-tech problem. Basically, as Thomas Friedman would argue, during the 5G period, countries in a relationship require some level of trust, because of the internet, because of the high speed of information transmission. So you need some kind of trust to conduct a relationship. Basically, I think the two countries are suffering from a trust deficit. As a result, the Trump administration can push for this technological decoupling policy with China. What China can do is, of course, try to repair, to do a better job of explaining whatever it does, ranging from the South China Sea to Xinjiang and Hong Kong. I don't think China has done a good job of explaining its actions, why it does this, and what the situations are, and invite people to see what's going on in those places. Another thing that China can do is, you know, Huawei has offered to open its source code for some of its software. And so in this way, it tries to make sure that other people are not worried about whatever things they may put into the software. So, basically, on the technological front, I think we should have more exchanges. Also to assure each other. I think Americans also have a responsibility to assure China that Microsoft and Google are not going to undermine China's national

security. So both sides have to make a lot of effort in this regard to rebuild some of the trust for the relationship to continue. But at the moment, I think the problem is that I don't have faith in the Trump administration in doing it. I am looking forward to the next administration to do it.

James Chau:

I need to finish by asking you a question that I'm sure many ask. What do you think is going to happen next, with or without the elections, if we remove that factor, what do you see happening?

I think the top leaders have to be involved in the process of rebuilding trust and getting better relations.

Ezra Vogel:

I think it will depend partly on the election because I think under the Trump administration we cannot expect much improvement. People are making various crazy statements, and it's not a well-organized administration that values diplomacy or has a long-term strategy. I think the best hope, on our side, is that by January, that we begin to have working groups on the two sides that meet and talk about how we develop trust. One of the things that Americans are most concerned about is whether the Chinese market is really fair to American companies. And I think many of them have complaints about how their products were used and taken away and how the Chinese

government favors Chinese firms, not American firms. When China was weak, it didn't matter that much. But now Chinese firms are strong, and the Chinese are very competitive. So that becomes a very big issue. I think we're also very concerned in places like the South China Sea, where Chinese airplanes and ships begin to move, and that creates great concern about what Chinese intentions are and makes trust all the more difficult. So, I think in short that in January, should we get a new administration, we can begin to have meetings. And there are a lot of people on both sides who are perfectly capable of carrying on those discussions if they have the full support of the top leaders. I think the top leaders have to be involved in the process of rebuilding trust and getting better relations. But I'm hoping we can begin to do that and that in areas such as dealing with the coronavirus and dealing with global warming internationally, so that we can begin to develop some cooperative projects, which will then expand into security areas so that we can begin to rebuild some of the trust. I think we're going to be rivals, but you know, ball teams are very big rivals but they operate in a framework. I think that's what we need now. We need the framework to contain the rivalry so that we can work together and have friendly relations that are really in both our interests.

Remembering Ezra Vogel (1930-2020)



James Chau

Ezra Vogel may have been a titanic figure in foreign affairs, but across a laptop screen he appeared delicate, fragile and warm. In the obituaries written since his death on Dec. 20, 2020, this is the story that has been told and retold: He was a man who brought a deep sense of humanity to his prolific studies of East Asia and the United States.

I would be ill-qualified to attempt to embellish on those tributes. I met Professor Vogel only once — through Zoom — when I interviewed him last July for an episode of “The Pacific Dialogue” on China-US Focus. But in that single interaction I was moved by his compassion for people and the need to bring us together in a year marked by a devastating pandemic.

COVID-19 aside, he was acutely aware of the enormous political divisions engulfing the world. In our interview, he spoke of the deteriorating U.S.-China relationship and the contribution to that decline from U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, whose speech a week earlier at the Nixon Library Vogel flatly described as “terrible.”

More broadly, Professor Vogel forecast the growing tide against an administration that valued neither diplomacy nor long-term strategy. He said, “I think there is forming now a group of people who are much more expressive, who are beginning to say we’ve gone too far.”

Professor Vogel was a firsthand witness to the story of modern China, visiting the country for the first time in 1973 during the cultural revolution. He recalled the great poverty and remembered a country closed to most of the world. People, he said, were “afraid to talk with Americans.” But he also sensed, among Chinese scientists in particular, an eagerness to resume contacts with their friends and colleagues in the United States — a precursor to the rich and varied partnerships that would follow diplomatic normalization in 1979.

He discussed current stress points, such as the South China Sea and intellectual property, and raised concerns about the threat to human rights from new technology. But he also encouraged fairness: “When Americans criticize without thinking, and they criticize every member of the Communist Party of China as if they were all the same, as if they all hated America — that’s just not true.”

My heart sank when I read Steven Vogel’s tweet sharing the news of his father’s passing. I looked for our last email in August in which he thanked me for offering to send facemasks and reassuring me that he had a sufficient supply. More than anything, I had the joy and immense honor of speaking with Professor Vogel in one of his final interviews. While I did not have the privilege of being one of the many students he taught over the years, I, too, was blessed by the knowledge and compassion he exuded during his life.

I send my condolences to the Vogel family, to everyone he loved and who loved him.



The Pacific Dialogue



The Pacific Dialogue is a new way to virtually connect thought leaders across the Pacific Ocean to continue frank and direct conversations during this difficult time.

‘Changing Pacific Tides’



Prof. Zhu Feng,
Nanjing University

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If both sides decided to do outreach, very warmly and very positively, I think it would be echoed very positively.

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There are opportunities to signal a change, a new direction, without necessarily a wholesale reversal.



Prof. Robert Ross,
Harvard University

In this episode of The Pacific Dialogue, James Chau interviewed professors Zhu Feng of Nanjing University and Robert Ross of Harvard University on Nov. 30, asking his guests a host of questions on the current state of U.S.-China relations and what the relationship might look like under the incoming administration of Joseph R. Biden.

Ross teaches political science at Boston College and serves on the faculty of the Fairbank Center of Chinese Studies at Harvard. At Nanjing University, Zhu teaches international relations and leads the Collaborative Innovation Center of South China Sea Studies.

The interview has been lightly edited for clarity.



You can listen to the interview by scanning the QR code.

James Chau:

Hello, I'm James Chau, host of The Pacific Dialogue. I'm in Hong Kong and delighted to welcome two guests, Professor Zhu Feng of Nanjing University, and Professor Robert Ross of Harvard University. Robert Ross, let's begin with you. The next president of the United States will be sworn in on Jan. 20. It's still a couple of weeks away, and that feels like a very long time. What do you expect from Donald Trump between now and then? What do you think he will do between now and then?

Robert Ross:

What to expect? We never know what to expect from Donald Trump. But that's what's so worrisome, that there are a lot of possibilities out there that make us nervous. For example, just in the last few months, I'd say he's been breaking through all sorts of taboos, with our arms sales to Taiwan and our visits in Taiwan. We have put new sanctions on Chinese companies affiliated with the PLA.

So there's a range of actions it seems the Trump administration wants to take that would lock in the Biden administration, first of all, and second, perhaps reflect the president's own animosity toward the mainland, toward China. Third, it does seem like Secretary of State Pompeo is on a crusade, you might say, an anti-China crusade. We understand that support for Taiwan is less about the support for Taiwan democracy and more about what can we do to cause the mainland trouble. And so whether it's his visit to Vietnam, whether it's a policy toward Taiwan, whether it's ideological speeches, the combination of President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo all the way through Jan. 20 makes us nervous. Yes, there are things he can do. But we never know what they could be.

Zhu Feng:

I think the Trump administration, along with the China hawks, Pompeo and other colleagues at the White House, are putting our relations at risk of fundamental demolition. So it has a really horrible effect. On the other hand, we also see that even President-elect Biden probably will be getting [the U.S.] back to a sound track, not just acting as mad as Trump. The problem is that today, hitting China harder and hitting China back has across-the-spectrum consensus.

The problem is that today, hitting China harder and hitting China back has across-the-spectrum consensus.

So I don't think the American administration under Biden will totally conduct a sort of "de-Trump" approach in its relations with Beijing. As you mentioned, we're a couple of weeks away from President-elect Biden's inauguration, and the problem is we don't know how far Trump will go to punch China, and get our relations to crash.

James Chau:

The Biden-Harris transition team has begun to announce the names of people who are going to shape America's interactions with the world over the next four years. Robert Ross, do any of these people stand out for you? And what kind of tone and tempo will this White House set through them?

Robert Ross:

I think what we're seeing is a team of negotiators. A team of problem solvers. Not great global strategists, not geo-politicians, not Cold Warriors. Now they look around the world and they say, "What are the pro-

blems? Who can we negotiate with?" Let's see if we can solve some of these issues that affect American interests, American national security.

So as they approach the U.S.-China relationship, the president, as well as his nominated or chosen secretary of state, Blinken, will make clear that they will compete with China. And this, I think we all recognize, is inevitable. The two great powers, rising powers, status quo powers, the conflicts of interest in East Asian security — we will compete. And we will have economic friction. When President Trump came in, he adopted an all-of-government approach to the containment of China. So, the American embassy in Beijing was de-staffed of all its experts, of all the functional experts. Dialogue ended. In the State Department, positions were never filled. Dialogue ended. This will be a government that will restore dialogue and restore experts. It will restore function, cooperation and compartmentalized relations.

James Chau:

Certainly, it's a very experienced lineup, Zhu Feng, when you look at people like John Kerry, the new climate change envoy, who of course is very familiar to China and also to the world. You've got foreign policy experts. You've got Antony Blinken, whom people cite as the next secretary of state. Are these individuals, or this team, a lineup that China can work effectively with?

This will be a government that will restore dialogue and restore experts. It will restore function, cooperation and compartmentalized relations.

Zhu Feng:

Yes, basically, I agree. The foreign policy team picked by Joe Biden appears to be very professional and experienced in international affairs, as well as China policy. So that kind of professional foreign policy and national security team, I think, is a big modification for China-U.S. relations. We see a lot of big guys sitting in the Trump administration, such as Michael Pompeo and Peter Navarro. They are very emotional China hawks who just return to [the notion of] “punch China, punch back.” As Bob also mentioned, wherever we compete, we also have to cooperate, because today, in thinking about world affairs, [we are all] inherently indispensable from one another.

So the U.S. and China are number one and number two, because of the economy. We are also obliged to ensure world peace, economic stability and prosperity. I really understand how the American strategic community feels anxious about China’s rise. But we should also note that U.S.-China relations are a [multifaceted] story.

My view is this: The Biden administration will not just take American policy on China back to the Obama era. Those professional and experienced diplomats and security experts know how to strike a delicate balance between competition and cooperation. So I’m totally looking forward to that.

James Chau:

I have to ask either of you what your reaction is on this: There’s been some dismay, quiet dismay, that while the Biden-Harris transition team has come in with a lot of grace, and with a lot of pragmatism in approaching the work ahead for them, there’s been this rhetoric, which is somewhat familiar even now during the Trump era, of “We’re going to restore America’s lea-

Those professional and experienced diplomats and security experts know how to strike a delicate balance between competition and cooperation.

dership to the world. We’re going to be leading the world all over again.” Is it a mistake to go back to that kind of American exceptionalism, which commentators across the political board have been warning about and which got Americans in trouble in the first place?

Robert Ross:

I think we need to differentiate between American leadership and multilateral institutions. And to a large degree, this is what the Biden team is talking about — reacting to American isolationism, American attacks on multilateralism, American attacks on morality. Within multilateral institutions, America can play a leadership role. But, it can’t play a leadership role without China, without Chinese cooperation. And without U.S.-China consensus, these institutions cannot succeed.

On the other hand, leadership can be shared. The United States can exercise its leadership in NATO; it can exercise leadership with our allies around the world; it could exercise leadership economically, particularly when it comes to negotiating

And without U.S.-China consensus, these institutions cannot succeed.

with China. That's very different from saying, "America can be No. 1 in the world" in terms of security in East Asia.

James Chau:

But Robert, will this fundamentally change things? We've seen, for example, that you're at home teaching online classes. When you think about your students, your international students, do you think things will change for them? Because the kind of exchanges at the student level or in diplomacy, for example, have in a way collapsed from how we once knew them. And these were the exchanges that really fueled the bilateral relationship for so many decades, from the late 1970s onward. Will that reverse in some way? Will it course-correct and improve?

Robert Ross:

Well, I think what you're getting at here is, will countries look to America as a leader? Will students and intellectuals want to come to American universities? And it will take time to restore America's reputation in the world.

It will take time for a number of reasons. One, people will continue to look at the United States cautiously. Can Biden restore welcoming the world to come to America? Can it begin to stand up for values that much of the world agrees upon but that Trump disavowed, not just internationally but within American politics? So that will take time just to reassure people to come.

Second, it will take time because Biden has a very large agenda. He's got to deal with the economy; he's got to deal with COVID; he has to deal with immigration; he has to deal with healthcare. So I think you will want to deal with immigration and visas

for Chinese students as well, and opening up American universities to Chinese [students].

So there are opportunities to signal a change, a new direction, without necessarily a wholesale reversal.

But for many issues, I think what we should look for is not a reversal of policies but rather a slowing down and perhaps doing nothing. So the United States does nothing on Taiwan for two years, that would be welcomed by many. If we just stopped giving Pompeo ideological anti-China speeches, that would be welcomed. If we simply use the words "People's Republic of China" instead of the "Chinese Communist Party," that would be a symbol for me. So there are opportunities to signal a change, a new direction, without necessarily a wholesale reversal.

James Chau:

Robert Ross, your book "China in the Era of Xi Jinping" describes the Chinese leader as the most powerful and decisive in decades. And we saw with Jimmy Carter and Deng Xiaoping how important it is for leading personalities to find the right dynamic together. When both of you look at Joe Biden and Xi Jinping, two men who are already familiar to one another, do you think that that dynamic could then return us to an era in U.S.-China relations in which great things happen not just for these two countries but really for humanity?

Robert Ross:

I'm skeptical that the United States and China can be broad, great friends in the

global order. I'm skeptical that the personal relationship between Xi Jinping and Joe Biden can fundamentally affect the direction of the relationship. Certainly, Xi Jinping is a political mastermind who always has his eye on China's interests and his political interests. And I don't think we can expect a personal relationship to transform his objectives or even his policies.

Having said that, this is a U.S. team that wants to accomplish something. This is a team that wants results, that wants to reach agreements with China. So the opportunity is there for this team. And I believe they will work together well. They are pragmatists and they are rational. They're not emotional, as Zhu Feng was saying. These are rational people who approach the national interest in a rational way, with attention to cost-benefit analysis to help the United States. And they recognize working with China is imperative. Whether we can reach agreements ... As we say, "It takes two to tango." The United States wants to work on North Korea. Will China cooperate? We want to work on Iran. Do we have enough common interest to reach agreement? Those remain open questions. I will simply say that the opportunity exists today, unlike before under Donald Trump, for us to compartmentalize the relationship. To compete where we must and cooperate where we can. And that itself is better for mankind, better for the world and better for U.S.-China relations.

Zhu Feng:

As both of you mentioned, President-elect Biden and China's top leader, Xi Jinping, have gotten along well

in past years. Now the problem is, what changed? What's changed a lot is our bilateral relations and even very basic policy frameworks. So no one can overlook such a big change. As Bob just clearly mentioned, no one can expect a lot under Biden — that the U.S.-China relationship will just warm up.

If both sides decided to do outreach, very warmly and very positively, I think it would be echoed very positively.

The problem is, I think, there are at least two things we can expect, realistically. If both sides decided to do outreach, very warmly and very positively, I think it would be echoed very positively. I think there is a growing sense of risk and crisis over bilateral relations. So then outreach is very important. I mean, who will take the first step, to extend a hand and say, "Hi, let's come together and sit down." And then the second point is also very important. What kind of policy expectation do we want to fulfill?

James Chau:

Professor Zhu Feng at Nanjing University and Professor Robert Ross at Harvard University, thank you both very much.



Relations Must Be Rebuilt



Tao Wenzhao
Researcher
Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

China and the United States have patched things up before, but this time it's going to be more difficult. The necessity of doing so, however, remains. Neither country can afford instability, much less war.

The Jan. 20 inauguration of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden will throw open a window of opportunity for China and the United States to start rebuilding relations.

Strained ties were repaired twice during the past 70 years. The first started with Henry Kissinger's 1971 visits to China, followed by Richard Nixon's ice-breaking trip in 1972 and the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1979. These events fundamentally changed the nature of China-U.S. relations, turning them from hostile to normal.

The second round of rebuilding occurred after the end of the Cold War. Since the strategic basis for bilateral reconciliation had disappeared, many in the U.S. thought the relationship would be valuable, and some even assumed that China would eventually collapse like

the Soviet Union. Relations saw a steady stream of ups and downs in the first several years.

The Chinese side proposed rebuilding relations through reform and opening-up, including the building of a socialist market economy. The U.S. side came to understand that the two countries would continue to need each other in the post-Cold War era. It gradually changed its mindset and policies and became willing to meet China halfway.

During his trip to New York in October 1995 for the United Nations commemoration of the 50th anniversary of victory against fascism, Chinese President Jiang Zemin spoke with U.S. President Bill Clinton, and agreement was reached on a number of points. Then, via dialogue and communication at various levels, the two sides managed to organi-

ze Jiang's October 1997 state visit to the U.S. and Clinton's visit to China in 1998, successfully rebuilding bilateral ties.

The key to the rebuilding was affirming the two countries' common interests in the post-Cold War era. Days before Jiang's visit, Clinton delivered a lengthy speech in which he systematically expounded upon the two sides' shared interests in six areas, which represented both the mainstream consensus of the Democratic and Republican parties in the U.S. and that of China and the U.S.

***Beyond economic and trade ties,
relations between China and
the U.S. actually don't
have much left.***

Thanks to this round of rebuilding, China and the U.S. were able to endure the shocks of incidents such as the accidental U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the collision of Chinese and U.S. military aircraft over Hainan Island. They also reached agreement on China's membership in the World Trade Organization. The U.S. passed a law establishing permanent normal trade ties with China, while China joined the WTO and saw its economy truly began to take off. Since then, China-U.S. relations have marked more than two decades of healthy, stable development.

My proposal for rebuilding the China-U.S. relationship now is based on three ideas:

First and most important is that the Trump administration has substantively changed America's China policy and

done serious damage to relations. It has challenged all of China's core interests — security, sovereignty and development.

The U.S. has also challenged China's current political system and vilified the leadership of the Communist Party of China. It continually hammers on the one-China policy, fosters and connives with pro-independence forces in Taiwan, supports separatism in Xinjiang and Hong Kong and frequently makes trouble in the South China Sea. It suppresses Chinese high-tech industries, sparing no effort to confine the Chinese economy to the middle and low-end of global industry chains. It does everything possible to obstruct normal people-to-people exchanges between the two countries, fabricating charges to prevent them and attempting to cut off this last link between the two countries.

Beyond economic and trade ties, relations between China and the U.S. actually don't have much left. Rebuilding is thus imperative.

Second, since the 1990s, great changes have taken place in China and the U.S., as well as in international conditions. One of those is a change in the relative strength of the two countries. China became the world's second-largest economy 10 years ago, and its GDP is expected to reach around 70 percent of U.S. GDP this year. China is also the world's biggest goods trader and the No.1 holder of foreign exchange reserves.

This is very different from the 1990s, when the two sides' economic, military and technological strengths were nowhere near equal. This certainly

should be taken into account when structuring bilateral ties. But for the devastating damage the Trump administration has done to bilateral ties, it would have been possible to reflect actual changes through proper adjustments and mutual adaptation.

But competition calls for rules to be observed.

Not so now, although the Chinese proposal in 2013 to build a new-type of major country relationship was an attempt. The U.S. side partially accepted the proposal and to some extent offset its strategy of “rebalancing” to the Asia-Pacific. Lately, with all the antics of the Trump presidency, the foundation for adjustments has effectively been destroyed.

Third, the competitive aspect of China-U.S. relations has expanded, from economics to the military and to science and technology, from Taiwan to the South China Sea, from regional order to global governance. Yet this does not mean there is only competition: Cooperation is still possible in many respects. But competition calls for rules to be observed.

Take the competition between the U.S. and Soviet Union during the Cold War, for example. During the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the leaders of both countries touched their respective nuclear buttons and caught a vision of the abyss of nuclear war. A lesson for both parties from the crisis was that competition can't go without rules. Afterward, the two sides continued to engage in an arms race, but arms control negotiati-

ons were also formally put on the agenda. The U.S. and Soviet Union agreed on a series of treaties with mechanisms for examination and verification – which is an important reason they had managed to avoid a hot war during the Cold War.

Unfortunately, quite a few of those treaties have been scrapped by the U.S. in recent years. Not that rules for crisis management are absent: During the Obama presidency, for example, the two countries established a mutual notification mechanism for major military operations and formulated a code of conduct for safety in sea and air encounters.

It's far past time for China and the U.S. to have a comprehensive, in-depth and lasting dialogue on managing all aspects of their differences.

Still, rules are obviously lacking in many areas (not that the Trump administration would have respected them anyway). Trump has thrown other countries into dangerous positions through his frequent policy flip-flops. It's far past time for China and the U.S. to have a comprehensive, in-depth and lasting dialogue on managing all aspects of their differences. This is an extremely important part of getting along.

There is no doubt that rebuilding the China-U.S. relationship will be a gigantic project of system engineering. And this round of rebuilding will be more complicated than the previous two because the elements of the relationship are richer and broader in scope. But rebuilding is essential – perhaps inevi-



In the future, bilateral ties will remain at a stage in which competition and cooperation coexist, but where there will very likely be more competition than cooperation.

table – if only because China-U.S. relations have entered a new era in which they cannot afford instability. Over the past four decades, during each U.S. administration, China-U.S. relations would get a more-or-less new definition. Yet it generally has been a constructive, cooperative one. The two countries' common interests outweighed their differences, and cooperation outdid competition.

In the future, bilateral ties will remain at a stage in which competition and cooperation coexist, but where there will very likely be more competition than cooperation. Both the Democratic and Republican parties have identified China as a major challenge to U.S. global leadership and as their country's main strategic competitor.

In the process of rebuilding, both China and the U.S. will adjust their corresponding policies. At the end of the day, the two must seek peaceful coexistence. The idea that both benefit when they cooperate and both suffer when they fight will ultimately prove true.



Approaching the End Game



An Gang

Research Fellow

Center for International Strategy and Security

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The future of China-U.S. relations obviously depends on the two countries' choices going forward. The good news is that a window of opportunity is now open to create a new approach after years of turmoil driven by the Trump administration.

In dialogues with different American think tanks organized by the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University since 2019, we frequently encountered three key phrases that left me with a deep impression.

The first is “strategic assumption.” Both China and the U.S. have a set of strategic assumptions — about themselves and each other — when dealing with their relationship and designing their global roles. Mutual suspicion in this regard is a fundamental issue that may lead to strategic misjudgment. Therefore, we must persist in dialogue to actively strengthen our understanding of each other and ourselves and to identify the strategic hypothesis most faithful to reality and the guiding principles most suitable for managing our relations.

Of course, merely reactivating a dialogue framework is not enough. The dialogues must have substance in a way that reflects the concerns of both parties equally. Also, it is necessary to establish an implementation mechanism that does not compromise the dignity of either side.

***Of course, merely reactivating
a dialogue framework is
not enough.***

The second key phrase is “end game.” China-U.S. relations are fluid and continuously evolving, with each stage exhibiting distinctive features. At present, competition may be the predominant aspect. The Trump administration has chosen a unilateral path of strategic competition with China and continues to spare no effort to gain leverage in its

sprint to complete a domestic mobilization that forces China to follow.

When President-elect Joe Biden takes office, his policy orientation, many Chinese observers believe, may offer a window of opportunity for easing tensions. Some of them used the word “reset” in their comments. However, I have noticed that American scholars have repeatedly reminded China in recent two-way academic dialogues that reasonable expectations must be in place for any new U.S. policy toward China, as well as for the prospects of China-U.S. relations. So “reset” may be an inappropriate term.

***It is highly possible for his
administration to continue to
focus on strategic competition
with regard to China.***

In Biden’s first six months in the White House, it is unlikely that his administration will unveil any fully formed China policy. Nevertheless, it is highly possible for his administration to continue to focus on strategic competition with regard to China.

We must have a clear and rational understanding of the historical stage we are in, and then design policies accordingly. Meanwhile, we should avoid being trapped in the present as we try to figure out future trends. As to what will eventually happen — whether there will be benign competition or vicious confrontation, or even war — the jury is still out.

Neither China nor the U.S. is passively willing to accept any outcome; we must

make our own choices. What we choose, and the “end game” we play, will be determined by articulated policies, as well as by bilateral interaction. The attitudes of third parties, such as Russia, the European Union, Japan, ASEAN countries, India and Australia must also be factored in.

I envision a spectrum of multiple possibilities for China-U.S. relations. At the dark end of the spectrum lies full-scale confrontation and vicious competition, which can only lead to the total fragmentation of the global system. The bright end offers benign competition, through which China and the U.S. promote the institutional progress of human civilization. The international community would benefit greatly from China-U.S. cooperation — that is, the realization of a positive-sum game.

Relations now stand in the middle of the spectrum, but are perceptibly moving, inch by inch, to the dark end. This is a dangerous trend, and we must take action to prevent further deterioration. For China, stopping this treacherous development requires not only active dialogue and cooperation but also resolute struggle and sound strategy. That way, we could prompt the U.S. to envision things that are beneficial to the two countries’ common interests and avoid adopting policies or taking actions aimed at containing China’s development and harming its interests.

If the two countries — limited by their own capabilities and the external environment — are unable set a course characterized by partnership; or if they neither dare nor desire to choose the worst prospect — vicious conflict; or if they don’t want to completely cut off

their intricate ties and broad functional cooperation, then they have no alternative but to set boundaries and bottom lines for competition to effectively manage risks and steer through crises.

At the same time, they should attempt to maintain and expand the scope of cooperation, and set up a “buffer zone” between competition and cooperation. By striving for virtuous competition, they could enhance their mutual understanding, so that each will respect the other’s values while cherishing their own. This paradigm for coexistence will eventually lead to a “positive sum” end game.

The third key phrase is “tool kit.” While making choices about the future, we must be prepared. On one hand, we need to work on resuming rational dialogue and restarting mutually beneficial cooperation — and even opening up new cooperative spaces. On the other hand, we must prepare for resolving specific concerns and thorny issues. These all require adequate policy preparation and a reserve of tools for proactive action and response.

China and the U.S. still have sufficient motive and latitude for cooperation, both bilaterally and globally. In response to the initiative of State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi that was introduced on July 9 at the China-U.S. Think Tanks Media Forum, Chinese think tanks are picking up their efforts to advise on policies that may help the Chinese government enrich its toolkit.

In that speech, Wang proposed to bring China-U.S. relations back to the right track in part by reviewing and agreeing on lists of interactions. According to

Wang, the first list is the one that specifies all areas, bilateral and global, where China and the United States can work together. The second is a list of dialogues that itemize the differences that could be resolved through productive talks. The third is a list of issues that the two countries have little chance to agree upon and that need proper management.

***There will be more situations
in which the slightest nudge
could cause a wide chain
reaction.***

Given the extensive nature of China-U.S. contradictions, as well as changes in the domestic political climate and popular sentiment in the two countries, specific differences and disputes are now difficult to address using a case-by-case approach. There will be more situations in which the slightest nudge could cause a wide chain reaction.

Therefore, when managing China-U.S. relations in the future, we must also consider how to control the scale and intensity of a crisis in a certain area or touching on a sensitive issue to prevent it from spreading to other areas. The best way to tackle a problem is to adopt the method most effective in the area in which the problem arises. Such a mentality gives pragmatic meaning to the notion of a “tool kit.”

Both China and the U.S. are able to shape the future. China’s influence on relations is rising. As Professor Wang Jisi (of Peking University)

pointed out in one of his recent articles, several times in history it was actually China, rather than the U.S., that shaped the basic trajectory of China-U.S. relations by adapting itself to the situation.

This time, however, I believe China will resort to using other approaches besides continuing its own process of reform and opening-up.

In his congratulatory message to Biden, President Xi Jinping expressed hope that the two sides would develop a relationship featuring no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation, to jointly promote the noble cause of global peace and development. This message reminds us that both parties should recognize the current window of opportunity and use it to establish a new orientation — new perspectives for China-U.S. relations that could make both of us feel comfortable and proud.

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A Restart for U.S.-China Relations?



Doug Bandow
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While we wait for the Biden administration to transition into office, there are several steps Beijing should take to encourage a more productive relationship between the two governments.

The U.S. presidential campaign has mercifully ended. Joe Biden will enter the White House on Jan. 20. The change in administrations creates an opportunity to reset relations between Washington and Beijing.

Both sides should work to move off paths of violent collision and hostile confrontation toward careful competition and critical cooperation. Polls indicate that China's reputation in the West has tanked. Whi-



le harder to measure, popular Chinese sentiment, especially toward America but also toward its closest allies, has likely dropped as well.

Certainly, warmth between the two governments has dissipated. Nevertheless, there is a vital difference between the two states treating each other with unrestrained animus or controlled dislike. The latter makes possible a peaceful and productive relationship, even if uneasy and difficult at times.

Although China is the most important international puzzle awaiting the new administration, the new U.S. president's attention initially is likely to be diverted by domestic crises: the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recovery and domestic dissension.

Iran might pose the most urgent international challenge. With the relatively moderate Hassan Rouhani leaving office in August, Washington will have little time to repair the nuclear accord, as promised by Biden. Also topping the agenda will be restoring arms control with Russia and halting the U.S.-backed carnage in Yemen.

Setting the administration's course with regard to China will be no easy task.

Moreover, an issue as vital and complex as that of Washington's relationship with Beijing will require serious review, and it will be shaped by those chosen to fill critical positions within the administration. The policy posture toward the People's Republic of China will be affected by sub-cabinet-level appoint-

ments in the State Department, the new Defense Department chief, National Security Council appointments and choices for important trade and economic positions. Setting the administration's course with regard to China will be no easy task.

As the Biden administration considers policy, chooses officials and deals with other crises, the PRC should help set the stage for a more productive relationship. Unsurprisingly, contentious appeals to nationalism, which might satisfy personal frustrations and feed public anger, tend to degrade international relationships. It would be better to set aside perceived slights and wrongs in hope of improving vital ties, which are at risk of going badly awry.

What might Beijing do while waiting for the Biden administration to fully engage?

1) High-level officials should speak of a new relationship that accepts the inevitability of serious disagreement but limits confrontational behavior. At the same time, areas of cooperation should be pursued out of necessity, if not comi-

Unsurprisingly, contentious appeals to nationalism, which might satisfy personal frustrations and feed public anger, tend to degrade international relationships.

ty. Beijing also should note the importance of both sides being willing to compromise when the counterpart's critical interests are at stake, and it should state its willingness to respond to overtures from the new administration.

2) The PRC should use its rising clout with North Korea to counsel Kim Jong-un to forego the sort of provocations in which the regime often seems to delight. Creating a new crisis in Northeast Asia likely would postpone serious discussions of U.S.-China relations. The China hawks in the U.S. would blame Beijing for the North's misbehavior, which would push the U.S. toward a greater military investment against Pyongyang — which would dovetail with proposals for a military build-up elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific directed against China.

3) President Xi Jinping should develop inclusive economic ideas. U.S. trade with China has been a more controversial issue among Democrats than Republicans. Proactively indicating his willingness to seek a modus vivendi for controversies involving intellectual property, commercial espionage, forced technology transfers and more would demonstrate that he's serious about improving the relationship. Doing so would not require Beijing to surrender substantively, but rather address U.S. concerns seriously.

4) China would be wise to minimize “wolf warrior” diplomacy and economic belligerence directed at close American friends. Washington has observed concerted attacks on Australia, in particular, leading some policymakers to urge greater American support for allies it sees as threatened by the PRC.

Those U.S. partners are more likely to push tougher policies in Washington. Moreover, Beijing's behavior reinforces the contention by the China hawks that the PRC poses a serious menace to Asia and beyond.

5) Undoubtedly, U.S. and allied attacks on the Belt and Road Initiative appear to be self-serving. Western-dominated financial institutions spent decades pouring money into Third World nations — money that was wantonly stolen and wasted, leaving poor peoples with large, unsustainable debts. Nevertheless, Beijing has paid a price for bad BRI projects and debts. It should propose discussions, perhaps lodged within the G-20, on all manner of financing for development. Can the East and West cooperate to help meet the needs of developing states?

Nevertheless, Beijing has paid a price for bad BRI projects and debts.

6) The coronavirus remains a global crisis whose genesis will remain a significant issue. Beijing could help address the political impact by indicating its willingness to participate in a wide-ranging review of how the problem developed, so long as the study also covered how nations responded to the disease's spread. Moreover, responsibility for the investigation should be vested in individuals and organizations with no stake in the ongoing dispute between the U.S. and PRC. There is much to learn from an honest, open review, and Chinese willingness to cooperate would help the incoming Biden administration defuse accumulated antagonisms.

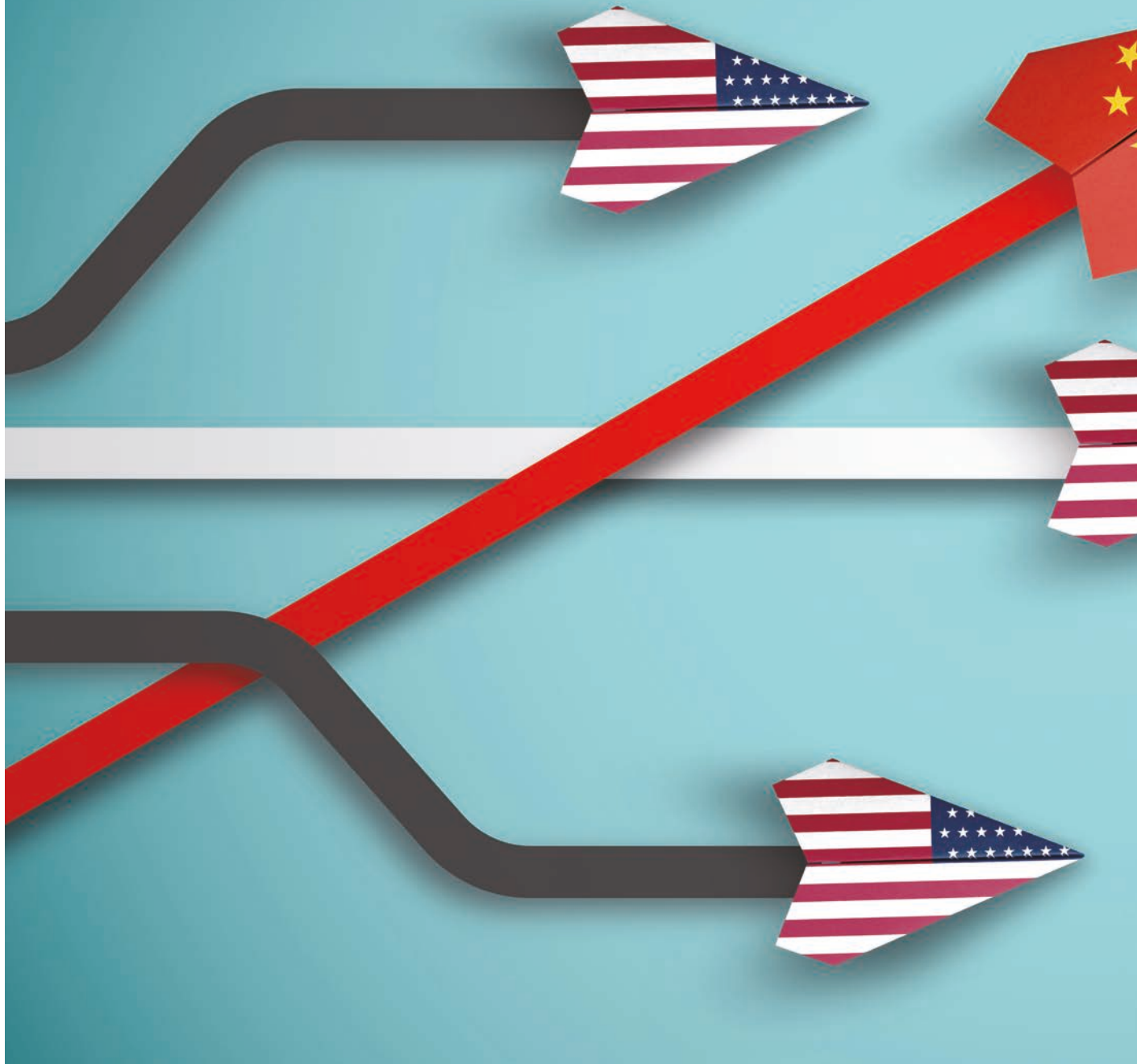
7) Territorial disputes in East Asia's Pacific waters are a growing flash-point. The issue understandably matters more to Beijing than it does to the U.S., which sits thousands of miles away. Nevertheless, the PRC should voice its respect for Washington's interest in freedom of navigation and reiterate its own commitment to the peaceful resolution of regional disputes. It should note the necessity of other states exhibiting a willingness to engage and negotiate. Thus, Beijing might indicate that it is open to proposals for creative and cooperative development that put off intractable sovereignty decisions while maintaining peaceful relations.

These are not the only issues, of course. Deescalating tit-for-tat retaliatory cycles over visas and media restrictions is also a must, but relations will not improve significantly unless more fundamental issues are addressed. The PRC could help create a more favorable environment in which to initiate far-ranging discussions over multiple issues of interest.

There is at present little trust or rapport between the U.S. and China. That is unlikely to change anytime soon. The two governments nevertheless must find a way forward. The Xi government should help that process by using America's political transition to signal its interest in working jointly to address the toughest issues between the two nations.

Relations will not improve significantly unless more fundamental issues are addressed.

Strategic Breakthrough Within Reach





Zhao Minghao
*Research Fellow
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There is no evidence indicating that U.S.-China relations will turn for the better simply because Joe Biden takes over the presidency. But the opposite is true as well: There is no reason to pass up an opportunity to ease tensions and strive for a reset.

It is widely expected that once Joe Biden takes office as president of the United States he will usher in a reset of U.S.-China relations, so that any further escalation of tensions between the world's two largest economies will be averted.

Biden and his core foreign policy advisers believe that while China is not the biggest threat confronting the U.S., it is the most consequential in the long run. As such, the U.S. should not engage in any form of new cold war. Although Biden will continue to see U.S.-China relations through the lens of great power competition, his goal will be to make the U.S. run faster, and engage in positive-sum competition.

While it is true that under Biden, the tenor of U.S. China policy will moderate somewhat from the maximum pressure and confrontational tone of the Trump administration, there should be no illusion that the current “red alert” state will unwind automatically with Biden in the White House. Unrealistically high expect-

tations will be counterproductive for U.S.-China relations going forward. The Biden administration has its job cut out when it comes to recalibrating this key relationship.

There should be no illusion that the current “red alert” state will unwind automatically with Biden in the White House.

First of all, Biden will have to deal with the Obama legacy and the Trump legacy simultaneously. He will make sure not to be perceived as going soft on China and can be expected to selectively inherit some of Trump’s rationale and approach. As the Trump administration draws to an end, its team is running on all cylinders to concoct a Trump legacy. The State Department, led by Mike Pompeo, released a report – Elements of the China Challenge – primarily to harden narratives and constrain the incoming administration. Even if Biden is inclined to remove a particular pressure-inducing measure, he may make himself vulnerable to political backlash if he is perceived as being soft on China.

Second, Biden will face pressure from within the Democratic Party. For example, Jake Sullivan, his designated national security adviser, and a cohort of high-flying young Democrats of a new generation, hold hard-line views on China that are on the same page as Republicans and whose attitude toward the Communist Party of China are even more ideologically driven. Progressive Democrats such as Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, do not view China favorably and have said that its trade practices are unfair and have harmed

U.S. workers and the middle class. The “progressive” foreign policy championed by such people puts a premium on the geopolitical implications of international economic policies. These people are wary, suspecting that China or other powers may weaponize their economic heft.

Third, as Biden will be occupied with his top priorities of pandemic control and associated economic challenges, he will have limited capacity and political wherewithal to pursue a policy agenda with China.

Biden will also face pressure from Congress if the Republicans retain their Senate majority and Democrats lose some of their previous political leverage in the House. Both chambers share substantial common ground when it comes to taking a hard-line policy toward China. This is borne out by the China-related content of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2021.

In a report released in October by House Republicans’ China Task Force, more than 400 proposals were laid out to crack down on China. While the group is made up of Republicans only, the report drew on consultations with Democrats and reflects some Democratic views.

The Trump administration has pushed U.S.-China relations into dire straits. As Dr. Henry Kissinger cautioned, the risk of war should not be underestimated. How the Biden administration crafts and implements its China policy not only bears on relations over the next four years but also on whether the two powers can achieve competitive coexistence in the decades to come.



▲ A violent mob inspired by President Trump's tweets stormed and trashed the Capitol on Jan 6, 2021.

Over the next few years, the shared challenge for Chinese and U.S. leaders is twofold — first that they need to properly handle short-term risks and confrontation; second, that they need to work out a framework and a set of rules for managing strategic competition between the two countries in coming decades.

Given the magnitude of the challenge, combined with the difficulties Biden will encounter in governing, both sides will need to work on realistic goals and create a road map for resetting bilateral ties. They must put in the time, energy and political capital needed. Proposed steps include the following:

- **Repair U.S.-China relations by reversing the extreme approaches pursued by President Donald Trump.** Severing cultural and people-to-people exchanges will fundamentally harm ties, as any cultural decoupling will only serve

China and the U.S. can take measures in tandem to create conditions for bilateral talks, starting with reopening consulates, lifting visa restrictions and ending bans or expulsions of resident journalists.

to aggravate the current rift. China and the U.S. can take measures in tandem to create conditions for bilateral talks, starting with reopening consulates, lifting visa restrictions and ending bans or expulsions of resident journalists.

- **Restart bilateral dialogues and strengthen the ability to efficiently handle specific issues.** Apart from continuing the economic and trade negotiations, strategic dialogues on the diplomatic track should be reconstituted after the hiatus triggered by the Trump administration.

The U.S. hopes to pursue a results-oriented relationship with China, but for that to happen the U.S. must make compromises as well, not just make unilateral demands. Both sides need to improve the quality and professionalism of bilateral dialogues, which is a shared challenge for officials in both countries.

- **Push forward pragmatic bilateral cooperation.** This should be carried out in light of the domestic political and economic agendas of the respective countries. China has taken proactive steps in market access and IPR protection. And it is favorable to the idea of joining the CPTPP.

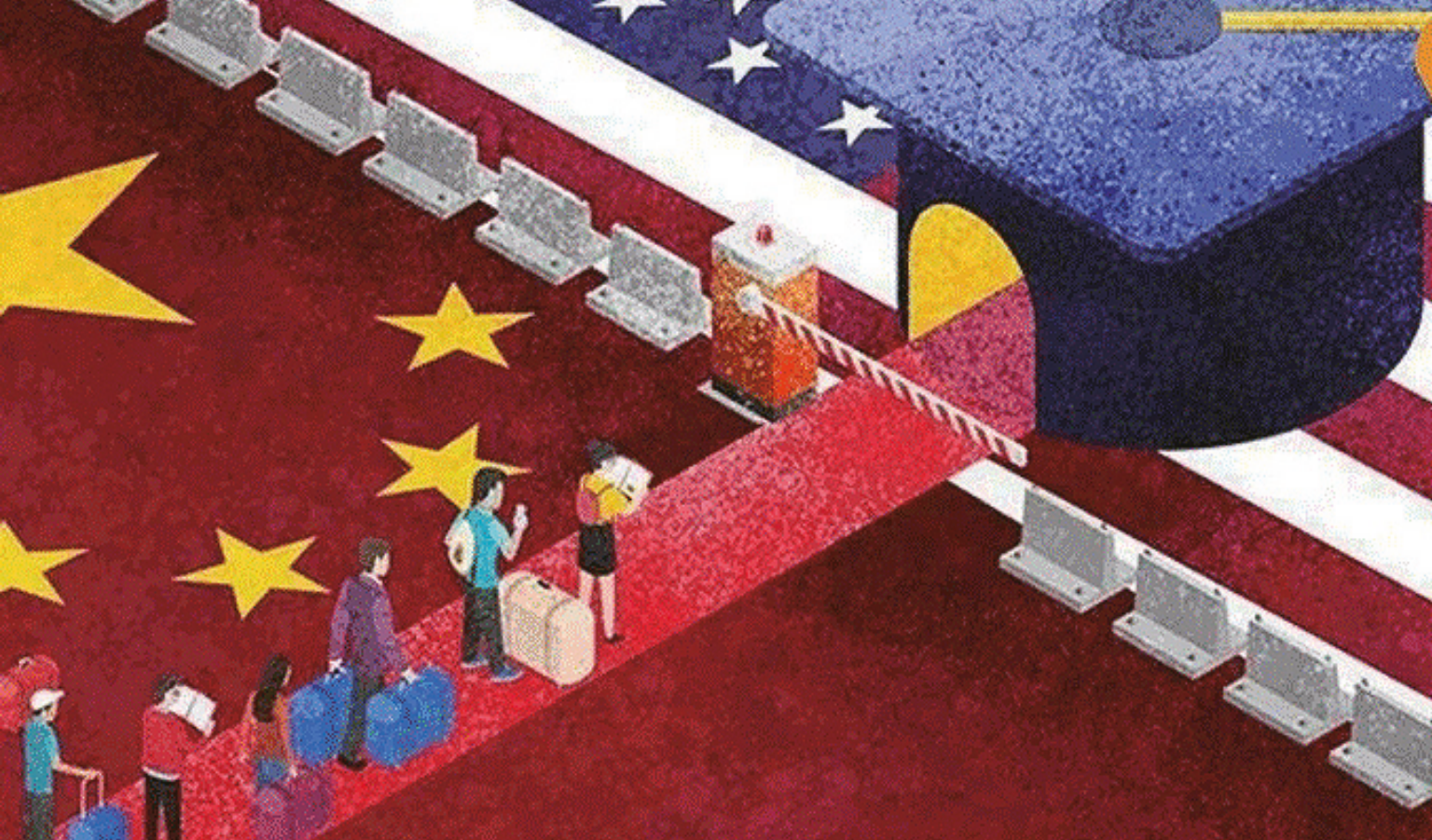
Both sides should also work out specific plans for cooperation in enforcing the Paris climate agreement, developing clean energy, maintaining global financial stability and advancing nonproliferation. Furthermore, infrastructure, data use and protection, counterterrorism and moves against money laundering also present room for U.S.-China cooperation.

- **Strengthen crisis management mechanisms and avoid military confrontation.** This is crucial in the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea and other areas. Communication between China's Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff should be enhanced, with multilevel crisis communication channels.

- **Create processes to improve crisis response.** In particular, the crisis control consciousness and ability of front-line military personnel should be enhanced. Under the Obama administration, a consultation mechanism for Asia-Pacific affairs was set up between China and the U.S. Similar arrangements should be organized to avoid miscalculations; otherwise they face a scenario in which the two countries will slide into conflict as a result of some "third party factor."

It's true that there is no evidence indicating that U.S.-China relations will turn for the better simply because Biden takes over the presidency. But the opposite is true as well: There is no reason that we should let slip the opportunity to ease the tensions and strive for a reset.

Both sides must work with a sense of urgency and resort to unconventional solutions when necessary to achieve a strategic breakthrough. It is worth mentioning that China should not underestimate its own ability to steer and shape Sino-U.S. relations and take positive measures to salvage them.



The Importance of People



Minxin Pei

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Stabilizing U.S.-China relations is one of the top items on President-elect Biden's agenda for 2021, but success depends on the restoration of mutual trust and cooperation. The incoming administration should seek to revive cultural, educational and people-to-people exchanges to repair years of structural damage.

Few would dispute that the toughest foreign policy decision facing the incoming administration of Joe Biden is how to stabilize relations with China so the two countries can compete for geopolitical influence and cooperate in areas of shared interest. Unlike the outgoing Trump administration, which sees no room for cooperation with China, President-elect Biden and his incoming senior national security advisers seem to be trying to chart a more balanced course and seek to work with Beijing on issues such as climate change and the coronavirus pandemic while maintaining tough positions on trade, human rights and national security.

Tragically, when bilateral relations began to deteriorate in 2018, people-to-people ties were collateral damage.

What has not received sufficient attention is exchanges in culture and education. Tragically, when bilateral relations began to deteriorate in 2018, people-to-people ties were collateral damage. The two countries expelled each other's journalists and imposed restrictions on the activities of those who remained. Suspicious of Chinese influence, Washington also significantly curtailed cultural exchanges by classifying the China-sponsored Confucius Institutes as "foreign missions." Fears of leaks to Chinese graduate students of advanced knowledge also prompted the U.S. to tighten visa issuance. Dismissing the value of cultural exchanges, Republican lawmakers engineered the shutdown of the Peace Corps' China program, which had sent more than 1,300 volunteers to China since 1993.

While these measures are unlikely to make either country more competitive in

their protracted geopolitical duel, they are almost certain to fuel mutual distrust and antagonism among ordinary people.

One of the most important differences between the U.S.-Soviet Cold War and the unfolding great power contest between the U.S. and China is that, while there were practically no cultural or educational ties between the two superpowers during the Cold War, the U.S. and China have forged extensive, deep and dense people-to-people networks and relationships over the last four decades.

Maintaining these networks and ties will be crucial in helping mitigate the distrust and antagonism created by the competitive policies of the two countries' governments. If Washington and Beijing wish to have built-in stabilizers in their relationship, people-to-people exchanges must be one of them.

Three data points illustrate how ties in culture and education now closely bind the two societies. Between 1999 and 2019 Americans adopted 82,456 Chinese children. Since diplomatic relations were normalized in 1979, millions of Chinese students have come to the U.S. to stu-

If Washington and Beijing wish to have built-in stabilizers in their relationship, people-to-people exchanges must be one of them.

dy, and many of them have remained. In 2019, American higher educational institutions hosted 369,548 Chinese students who now account for one-third of all international students in the U.S. In 2018 about 2 million Chinese tourists visited the U.S.

But because of the rising hostility and distrust between China and the U.S., both governments will need to take politically courageous steps to repair the damage done in 2020. They need to restore cultural and educational exchanges to a healthy and mutually beneficial level after the coronavirus pandemic has been contained.

In repairing their cultural and educational ties, both governments should prioritize measures that will generate the greatest mutual benefits at the least political cost, while delaying things that may arouse controversy.

At the top of the list should be the return of American journalists to China and the end of American restrictions on Chinese journalists in the U.S. Both countries will benefit from this. Greater freedom to work in the U.S. will enable Chinese journalists to gain a better understanding of the country, which will improve their reporting and convey a less distorted picture of the U.S. to their Chinese readers.

China and the U.S. will benefit even more from the return of American reporters for The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal, and from the lifting of restrictions on other U.S. news outlets in China. It is true that some American news coverage of China is often critical and even offensive to the Chinese government, but the vast majority of coverage is professional, objective and informative, and it helps the American public gain a better understanding of

China. Without these reputable news organizations providing quality coverage, most Americans may have to turn to less credible, if not fake, news sources for information about China.

At the top of the list should be the return of American journalists to China and the end of American restrictions on Chinese journalists in the U.S.

The second area that needs urgent attention is the return of the Peace Corps and other U.S.-sponsored exchange programs, including the Fulbright program, which was suspended in July 2020 as part of American sanctions against China's enforcement of its national security law in Hong Kong. The Biden administration, which is expected to maintain a tough position on human rights, is well-positioned to lift this symbolic sanction because it will advance Washington's agenda of promoting American values through educational exchanges. China, needless to say, should welcome the return of such programs with open arms.

The third item on the agenda should be a cooperative push to encourage Chinese tourists to visit the U.S. The economic benefits to American businesses hard hit by the pandemic are self-evident. But making this happen will not be easy. The Biden administration needs to reiterate that the 10-year tourist visa for Chinese visitors will remain unchanged and decide whether the enforcement of visa restrictions recently imposed on members of the Chinese Communist Party by the Trump administration should be delayed pending a feasibility study.



These restrictions, designed to discourage Chinese visitors, will almost certainly force Beijing to retaliate at some point. If a face-saving compromise can be worked out, Beijing should implement a program to channel more visitors to the U.S., which will also help fulfill China's commitment to buying more American services under the phase-one trade agreement.

Last, both governments must cooperate to ensure that Chinese students will continue to be welcome on American college campuses. Beijing should curtail anti-American propaganda portraying the U.S. as an unsafe and hostile place. The U.S. should be more transparent and less arbitrary about the fields of study it does not want Chinese students to pursue in the U.S. and remove unnecessary and burdensome visa restrictions that not only discourage Chinese students but also hurt the STEM graduate programs in the U.S. that need them.

These are modest and realistic steps for repairing the damage done to the people-to-people exchanges in the last few years. They also serve as litmus tests for both presidents Biden and Xi. If they are genuinely interested in stabilizing bilateral relations in the coming years, these are the kinds of low-hanging fruit they must pick first to demonstrate goodwill.

Both governments must cooperate to ensure that Chinese students will continue to be welcome on American college campuses.

Why Subnational Interests Matter



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Local and subnational governments play an indispensable role in maintaining healthy relations between the United States and China. By proactively engaging and empowering them, the incoming administration can achieve positive results.



While the debate over the new U.S. administration's China policy disproportionately centers on competition and issues of contention between Washington and Beijing, it is only fair to factor in the perspective of America's state and local policymakers, who are keenly interested in the impact of the bilateral relationship on their states, counties and cities.

Conventional wisdom holds that a bipartisan consensus supports strategic rivalry between China and the United States, but local leaders in America are struggling to salvage the economic, educational and cultural ties with China that they have spent decades cultivating for their constituents.

During the Trump presidency, especially with its comprehensive decoupling with China over the last two years, bilateral relations have deteriorated at an astonishing rate. Yet subnational exchanges across the Pacific have largely survived and, in some cases, flourished.

For example, between the start of the trade war in mid-2018 and the halting of international travel in early 2020 because of the pandemic, three governors (all Republicans) undertook trade missions to China. The fact that governors in President Trump's own party have not rallied behind his call to decouple with China shows that there is more than domestic politics at play.

Perspectives outside the beltway

This observation differs significantly from views within the beltway, where there is bipartisan congressional agreement on a confrontational China policy.

It has often been said that Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill disagree on everything except China. This contrast is important for the incoming Biden administration's search for a new, more coherent and effective way to deal with the China challenge. A successful China policy by the new administration will need to balance subnational collaboration and strategic competition.

***America's local leaders are
already familiar with the avenues
that lead to success.***

Local governments are important stakeholders and drivers of U.S. foreign policy, especially given the aim of the Biden administration to promote international cooperation and public good, while vigorously advancing the interests of the American middle class. With previous support and guidance from the federal government, America's local leaders are already familiar with the avenues that lead to success. Over more than four decades of engagement, the two largest economies in the world have established 50 sister state-province partnerships and more than 200 sister cities. State governments in the United States have set up 27 representative offices in China — more than in any other nation.

Subnational engagement between the United States and China has burgeoned as a result of commercial and cultural exchanges that are largely independent from national-level politics. Robust and targeted subnational collaboration brings jobs and investment back home

Robust and targeted subnational collaboration brings jobs and investment back home to both countries, delivering tangible economic benefits for the middle class.

to both countries, delivering tangible economic benefits for the middle class. Unilateral actions have cost jobs at the local level.

Decoupling hurts local interests

The pervasive view among senior officials in the outgoing Trump administration about subnational cooperation, including educational and cultural exchanges, is no longer one of hope for positive change through engagement. Instead, it has been one of fear, the concern that the Communist Party of China aims to exert outright authoritarian influence in American politics and “weaponize” Chinese scholars and students to hasten the country’s rise at America’s expense.

The list of the victims of decoupling extends to soybean farmers in South Dakota and ginseng growers in Wisconsin.

In particular, the Trump administration has picked subnational engagement as one of the battlegrounds for decoupling. In November, the State Department an-

nounced that the United States would be pulling out of the U.S.-China Governors Forum, which was established in 2011, citing concerns over Chinese influence.

While concerns of possible foreign interference in the American political process are legitimate, painting U.S.-China subnational engagement with broad strokes risks throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The decision to decouple is made by Washington, but the pain is felt in communities across the country.

For example, in the state of Washington, where one in every three jobs is directly or indirectly related to trade — from fresh cherries to Boeing aircraft — the state saw exports drop 65 percent in 2020. Michigan saw a 16 percent drop in the number of Chinese students on the campuses of the University of Michigan and Michigan State University from 2018 to 2020 even before COVID-19 hit last spring. The list of the victims of decoupling extends to soybean farmers in South Dakota and ginseng growers in Wisconsin.

A nonpartisan initiative

Since the establishment of the U.S.-China diplomatic relationship more than four decades ago, subnational partnerships between the United States and China have not been primarily motivated by politics and are not likely to end over politics. Even in the face of economic hardship and deteriorating relations, there is broad bipartisan consensus at the state and local level for collaboration on issues ranging from promoting economic development and tackling climate change to furthering cultural exchanges and providing PPE support during the pandemic.



▲ Trump faces second impeachment as Democrats set to move quickly after the mob of Capitol Hill on Jan 6, 2021. (REUTERS)

When asked by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to be cautious about Chinese companies with connections to the Chinese government, the response of Lee's team was: "The great news is we recruit companies, not countries."

When trade and mutual investment with China appear at the top of the balance sheet for governors across the United States, it becomes vital for them to find ways to collaborate. Politics aside, when Michigan was struggling from the economic recession in 2011, Governor Rick Snyder chose China as the first destination of his trade mission — an expedition to determine why America was losing jobs to China and how that trend could be reversed. The subsequent seven trade missions during Snyder's term brought \$1.21 billion in new Chinese investment to Michigan, resulting in 6,304 new jobs created for state residents, which put the state at the top of the Midwest for number of jobs created through Chinese investment. Despite strong headwinds, America's state and local leaders have managed to turn China from a destination for industrial outsourcing to a source of investment and job growth.

Even at the height of the pandemic and amid mounting pressure to decouple, governors have worked to fend off political pressure and find solutions for their states. Tennessee Governor Bill Lee appeared in a video at the North America Investment Summit held in Beijing in September 2020 in which he welcomed Chinese businesses to his state. When asked by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to be cautious about Chinese companies with connections to the Chinese government, the response of Lee's team was: "The great news is we recruit companies, not countries." A rigorous review process surely needs to be in place to vet inbound foreign investment, but subnational leaders cannot afford to cut all economic ties with the world's second-largest economy out of fear of ill-defined "foreign influence."

Perhaps no other subnational initiative would provide better inspiration for the incoming administration than a partnership on climate change. A 2015 U.S.-China Climate Leaders Summit hosted by mayor Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles paved the way for a bilateral national agreement that enabled the Paris climate accord. Even as the Trump administration pulled the United States out, a bipartisan group of 25 governors formed the U.S. Climate Alliance, which aims to tackle climate change. Local American leaders have led the way and provided a roadmap with which the Biden team can address climate change as one of its top priorities.

Subnational diplomacy can benefit

the middle class

Having deemed a Cold War-style decoupling to be unrealistic and counterproductive, the incoming administration has the opportunity to formulate a nuanced China policy that enjoys bipartisan support on the state and local level and that will yield more benefits for middle-class Americans against the backdrop of strategic competition.

In a survey of middle-class Americans in Colorado, Nebraska and Ohio, respondents did not perceive foreign policy the same way as strategists in Washington. From their perspective, an effective China policy needs to strike a balance between countering China's unfair trade practices and preventing an all-out geopolitical rivalry, since endless confrontation between the two largest economies deters investment and costs jobs. Maintaining a distinction between geopolitics and subnational collaboration enables the American middle class to reap the economic benefits.

Clearer communication as well as better coordination between the federal government and local leaders is the key to successful subnational diplomacy. Effective intergovernmental communication can help the incoming administration formulate a clear and functional scope of national security for local leaders. An all-encompassing definition of national security only disrupts cross-border transactions and erodes the remaining trust between the citizens of both nations.

An effective and disciplined style of American subnational diplomacy can be achieved if the federal government helps level the playing field for local leaders.

Subnational diplomacy starts at home with comprehensive and sustained government investment in education, infrastructure and innovation. Broad decoupling on the subnational level will not help the U.S. compete with China because it diminishes economic growth in the United States and cuts off channels of soft power influence and cooperation between Americans and their Chinese counterparts.

An effective and disciplined style of American subnational diplomacy can be achieved if the federal government helps level the playing field for local leaders. When U.S. governors and mayors travel overseas to promote the economic and commercial interests of their states or cities, their work deserves backing from Washington rather than excessive scrutiny and over-politicization.

By proactively engaging and empowering subnational leaders, the incoming administration can promote the positive impacts of U.S.-China subnational diplomacy, benefit the American middle class and enhance the nation's leverage in strategic competition with China.

First on Mars, Second on Earth



Philip Cunningham
Independent Scholar

The Netflix serial drama “Away” tells the story of what an international journey to Mars might look like. The interplay between the characters, who represent different cultures, is a sobering mirror image of international relations on Earth — and a lesson in cooperation.

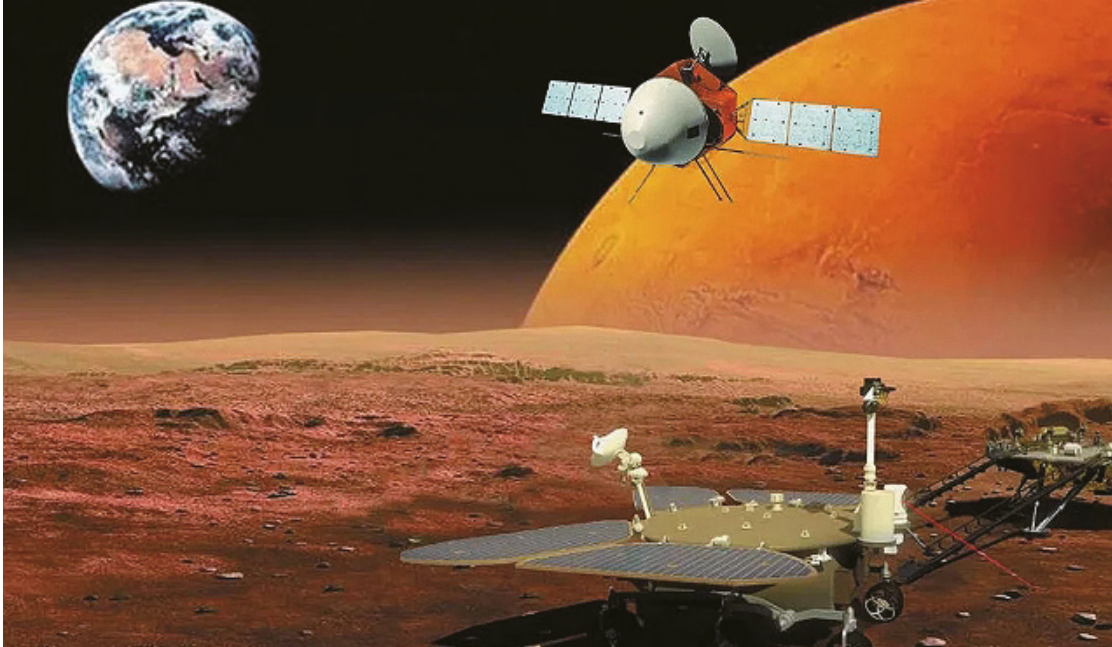
It’s hard to imagine a half-year journey to Mars, crammed into a small spacecraft, without some bickering along the way, especially if the crew has been selected for diversity, with representatives of the

United States, China, Russia, India and Africa on board.

Who’s going to be the first human in history to set foot on the red planet?



▲ The cast of Netflix’s *Away* looks so familiar.



- ▲ On July 23, 2020, China's first Mars probe, Tianwen-1, was successfully launched from Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site. "Tianwen-1" Mars exploration mission is another major space exploration project of China after the "Chang'e series" lunar exploration mission.

The Netflix serial drama "Away" is a convincing fantasy about what an international journey to Mars might look like. More important, it speaks to a vision of a future in which countries learned to get along because they had to.

Being stuck together on a small spacecraft en route to Mars drives home a point that is sometimes overlooked on our pandemic-stricken home planet: Humanity must cooperate not only to thrive but to survive.

Mars is so technically daunting a space shot and so incredibly costly that a joint mission is likely the only way to get there.

In a plot twist that hints at Hollywood's need to be a player in the profitable Chi-

na market — the story suggests that a blockbuster Mars project would be inconceivable without Chinese money.

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Score one for social realism.

Various little clashes between big civilizations run throughout the drama, some petty, others with a bigger payoff in plot terms. But there is a through-line that runs from liftoff to the first footsteps on Mars that pits the American way against the Chinese way.

It is a tribute to the world we live in, as well as a veiled criticism, that the most intractable differences in space can be traced to a rivalry between Earth's two greatest powers, the U.S. and China. But the conflict proves manageable. More important, it makes the mission better than it would have been otherwise.

The drama may start out depicting America as a nation of rugged individuals and China as a nation of blue ants bound to group behavior, but this tired cliché is challenged midway and upended at the end.

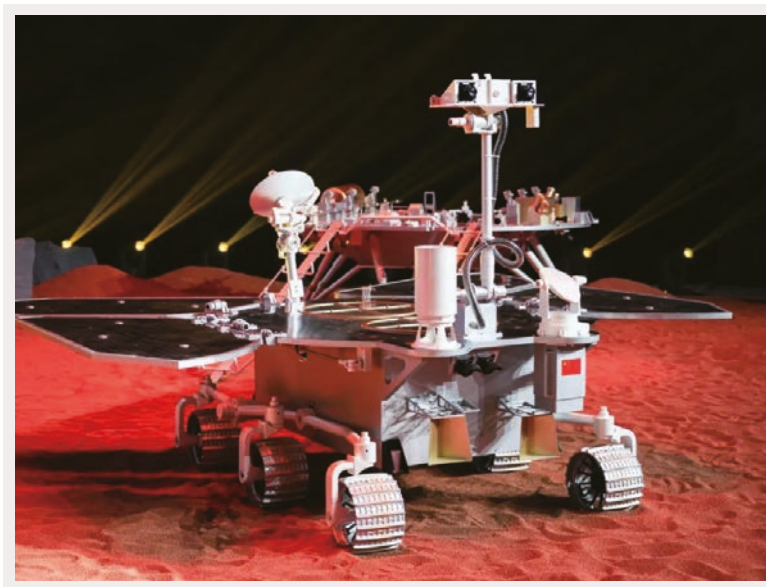
The U.S.-China dynamic injects some welcome tension into an otherwise loose, baggy drama. The machinations of the Russian cosmonaut, in particular, tend to mix it up a bit. For example, he understands the “Chinese way” better than the American does.

The film is set in the near future when women not only “hold up half the sky”

but also play a key role in exploring it. The mission commander, played by Hilary Swank, gets star billing and consequently more screen time, but her Chinese “subordinate,” played by Vivian Wu, comes close to stealing the show.

Wu's finely controlled face is a canvas capable of projecting a wide range of emotions with nary a muscle moved, expressing complexity in an understated way. What might appear at first glance to be a plain poker face, in keeping with her character's repressed individualism, manages to convey smoldering anger, epic loneliness, existential irony and cool professionalism.

The two women are poles apart in personality. The story is set up for them to serve as stand-ins for their respective cultures. Swank's Emma is emotional and individualistic to the point of selfish self-absorption, although she's tough enough when she has to be. The Chinese astronaut Yu, is cool and brooding. She



◀ The China National Space Administration unveiled details of the nation's first Mars rover, which is part of the country's first independent Mars mission Tianwen-1. The rover is 1.85 meters tall and weighs about 240 kilograms. It has six wheels and four solar panels and will be able to move at 200 meters per hour on Mars.

dutifully listens to her leader, though not without some stony doubts and disquieting indecision along the way.

There's something edifying about a space drama that reminds us quibbling earthlings that the best way forward is together.

The script has one character crying and emoting all the time, wishing she were back home with her family. The other is more stoic, making the sacrifices necessary to make the mission a success.

As such, Wu (Wu Junmei) is the secret star of the show, even if her star burns less brightly in Hollywood than superstar Swank.

As Rolling Stone magazine put it, “Whenever the story turns to Yu and the various burdens she carries as a female Chinese national, it becomes hard not to wish that she were the central figure of the drama, rather than an emotional counterweight for our actual heroine.”

“Away” is meant as entertainment, but there’s something edifying about a space drama that reminds us quibbling earthlings that the best way forward is together.



- ▲ The SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule took NASA astronauts Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken to the International Space Station when it launched on May 27, 2020, from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

The U.S. response to the pandemic has been too hampered by politics to contain the outbreak, but American scientists and their counterparts around the world have risen to the occasion with urgent research into the coronavirus, discovering its pathways of infection and developing mitigation techniques and promising vaccines.

Despite missteps and setbacks, the U.S. remains a beacon to the world (even if it is losing confidence at home) in the realm of science and higher learning.

Alas, this strength is being chipped away by the scourge of racism and the state-mandated abuse of foreigners. Aspirants to study in the U.S., especially Chinese, are increasingly subject to woefully prejudicial immigration treatment and cavalierly regarded as spies until proven otherwise.

Given the sharp retrograde turn that U.S. politics has taken of late, driven by resentment, protectionism and a desire to decouple, the beacon to the world is burning a little less bright these days.

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About China-US Focus

China-US Focus is a platform where Chinese and American thought leaders can openly express their views on the myriad issues that face the two nations.

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