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CHINA'S POLICY TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE END OF THE COLD WAR: FROM COOPERATION TO RIVALRY

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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The relevance of the stated research topic lies in the following.

First, the post-Cold War era, particularly after 2013, marked a pivotal stage in the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. China's transition to the "Chinese Dream" concept and the Belt and Road Initiative prompted Washington to shift its strategy toward Beijing from conditional engagement to comprehensive containment. Labeling China as the "primary strategic competitor" in the doctrines of Donald Trump and Joe Biden reflects the collapse of previous U.S. approaches. Analyzing U.S. hegemonistic response patterns holds immense practical significance for Beijing, as it identifies the key determinants of American policy and helps formulate strategies to secure a favorable external environment for national modernization.

Second, examining this period is essential for analyzing the destructive policy of decoupling. While Sino-U.S. economic interdependence long served as a stabilizing anchor for bilateral relations, Washington systematically initiated the subversion of these ties after 2013 through trade wars, sanctions, and export controls. Investigating the structural resilience of bilateral economic relations under geopolitical pressure enables Beijing to evaluate the costs of decoupling for the global system and to formulate robust strategies for safeguarding its national interests within global supply chains.

Third, forecasting the dynamics of bilateral ties requires a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms driving the U.S. bipartisan consensus. Between 1990 and 2025, China's positioning within U.S. strategy shifted from a "partner" to a "competitor." This consensus, which crystallized after 2013 and solidified post-2020, is rooted in the perception of China's growing power as a direct threat to American

hegemony. Discerning the true nature of this policy—whether it represents a short-term tactical maneuver or a long-term structural shift—is a prerequisite for Beijing to formulate a stable and sustainable diplomatic strategy toward the United States.

Fourth, analyzing this stage uncovers the destabilizing impact of U.S. containment on the global governance system. Washington's unilateral pressure has eroded the institutional efficacy of the WTO and the UN while fostering confrontation-oriented blocs such as AUKUS and the QUAD. In response, Beijing has deepened its strategic partnership with Russia and introduced alternative frameworks, namely the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative. Examining these processes from a Chinese perspective is essential for delineating the parameters of a equitable multipolar world order and for enabling key powers, including Russia, to formulate sovereign foreign policies amid global turbulence.

Object of research is the foreign policy of the People's Republic of China toward the United States of America and its evolution in the post-Cold War era (1991–2025), with a particular focus on the period beginning in 2013.

Subject of this research is the key directions, characteristics, and patterns of the evolution of China's policy toward the United States, particularly since 2013, as viewed through the lens of the dialectical interplay between two fundamental trends: cooperation and rivalry. The research focuses on Beijing's policy orientations, its practical actions in the areas of the economy, security, and global governance, as well as its responses to Washington's long-term containment strategy.

Purpose of this research is to identify the causes, core dimensions, and underlying regularities of the transition in China's policy toward the United States from a paradigm of predominantly pragmatic cooperation to a state of sustained strategic competition, which culminated in the structural model of bilateral interaction observed by 2025.

To achieve this goal, the following **objectives** must be addressed:

To examine the historical and doctrinal foundations of China's policy toward the United States prior to 2013 by analyzing the evolution of Beijing's strategic thinking and the legal framework of bilateral relations that laid the groundwork for subsequent transformations. Examine the main areas and mechanisms of cooperation in China's policy toward the United States from 2013 to 2025, including global governance, the economy, trade, as well as the military-political and cultural spheres, identifying their evolving roles and limitations amid growing rivalry. To identify and systematize the key areas and forms of competition in Sino-American relations from 2013 to 2025 by analyzing the rivalry in the economic, military-technical, socio-political, and cultural-ideological spheres. Based on the analysis conducted, identify the fundamental causes and driving forces behind the consolidation of Sino-American relations in a state of rivalry, and characterize Beijing's policy model as it stands in 2025 as a dialectical unity of elements of cooperation and confrontation.

The research **hypothesis** rests on the premise that the transformation of China's foreign policy toward the United States after 2013 represents a proactive, strategically autonomous course driven by China's internal modernization objectives, rather than a passive reaction to the U.S. containment strategy. Amid the transition of

bilateral relations into systemic rivalry, Beijing's policy is built upon a dialectical combination of robustly countering Washington's pressure while maintaining selective engagement in critical domains. This dynamic precludes a return to a classic Cold War model, instead forging a new framework of a managed strategic balance.

The **chronological framework of the study** spans from 1991 to the beginning of 2025, with the primary research focus centered on the post-2013 era.

The lower chronological boundary (1991) is determined by the collapse of the bipolar world order, which deprived Beijing of a vital strategic counterweight to American hegemony and necessitated the forging of direct relations with a unipolar world. Adopting a course of pragmatic engagement, China utilized economic cooperation as a catalyst for growth, marked by the 1992 signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Market Access and Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Tour" that same year. Concurrently, the Gulf War (1990–1991) fundamentally shocked Chinese military thought, initiating a profound defense reform. Consequently, a dual logic emerged within bilateral relations, combining intensive trade and economic cooperation with strategic apprehension. The 2013 baseline serves as a critical substantive marker associated with the transition of China's party and state leadership and the ascension of Xi Jinping. This stage was characterized by a qualitative transformation of Beijing's foreign policy philosophy, the proclamation of the "Chinese Dream" concept, and a shift toward a proactive diplomatic course. In turn, Washington during this period solidified its perception of China as its primary strategic competitor, triggering a steady realignment of the bilateral balance away from cooperation and toward systemic confrontation. The analysis of events prior to

2013 is thus subordinated to the task of identifying the historical prerequisites of these profound transformations. The upper chronological boundary (early 2025) marks the conclusion of the overt transition phase toward rivalry and its entrenchment as a stable, long-term structure in international politics. The 2021–2025 period (encompassing the full term of the Joe Biden administration) represented a stage of institutionalizing this confrontational course: the concept of "de-risking" supplanted "decoupling," the CHIPS and Science Act (2022) was enacted, and the AUKUS and QUAD blocs were expanded. On China's side, this phase culminated at the 20th National Congress of the CPC (2022) with the consolidation of a strategic course toward technological self-reliance and the promotion of alternative global governance frameworks, namely the Global Security Initiative and the Global Development Initiative. The conclusion of the U.S. electoral cycle in early 2025 allows for the investigation of this phase as a cohesive, completed historical stage.

The **theoretical** foundation of the dissertation rests on an integrated approach that synthesizes analytical tools from seemingly antagonistic paradigms within international relations theory. This synthesis reflects the scholarly tradition established in Chinese academia, which conceptualizes U.S. foreign policy through the critical convergence of multiple theoretical schools. The conceptual matrix of the study is organized into the following theoretical frameworks. Realism and Structural Neorealism (H. Morgenthau, K. Waltz). The tenets of classical realism are utilized to uncover the foundational motivations of both China and the United States regarding the maximization of national power. Concurrently, Kenneth Waltz's concept of international anarchy is applied to analyze the intensifying "security dilemma" and

Washington's balancing strategies, such as the formation of the AUKUS alliance. Theory of Hegemonic Stability (R. Gilpin). This framework serves to investigate the dynamics of global leadership transition amid the erosion of U.S. primacy and the concurrent rise of China. It is employed to explicate the systemic conflict surrounding the reform of established institutions like the WTO and IMF, as well as Beijing's creation of alternative structures such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Theory of Complex Interdependence (R. Keohane, J. Nye). This theory is critically re-evaluated through the lens of economic securitization and weaponization. The analytical categories of "sensitivity" and "vulnerability" are applied to evaluate how trade ties, sanctions, and supply chain competition have been transformed from channels of cooperation into the primary arena for geopolitical leverage. Classical Geopolitics (H. Mackinder, Z. Brzezinski). These concepts are integrated to conceptualize the spatial dimension of Sino-U.S. rivalry in Eurasia. China's Belt and Road Initiative is interpreted as a strategic attempt to reintegrate Halford Mackinder's "Heartland," while the core theses of Zbigniew Brzezinski's The Grand Chessboard account for the U.S. strategy aimed at preventing the emergence of a dominant Eurasian competitor.

Methodological Foundation of the Study. The study utilizes a comprehensive framework of general scientific and specialized methods tailored to the research objectives. The problem-chronological method serves as the basis for structuring the evolutionary stages of bilateral relations since 1991. This approach enables a systematic analysis of the transition from cooperation to confrontation, accounting for critical milestones such as China's accession to the WTO, the Obama administration's

"Pivot to Asia," the trade and technological confrontation under Donald Trump, and the subsequent intensification of this course by the Joe Biden administration through its "de-risking" strategy implemented since 2021. Comparative analysis is applied to contrast the foreign policy courses of the United States and China at both global and regional levels. The analysis reveals similarities in their operational toolkits (economic pressure, bloc politics, and public diplomacy) despite fundamental divergences in their strategic objectives, ideological underpinnings, and conceptual models of the world order. Functional analysis is employed to structure the multi-tiered interaction between the two states. It serves to delineate the boundaries of enduring cooperation (encompassing economics, security, ecology, humanitarian contacts, and international institutions) while localizing the areas of the most acute, systemic confrontation. The systems approach provides the foundation for examining Sino-U.S. rivalry as a key driver of transformation within the global political system. The foreign policy of both powers is investigated as an interconnected matrix of strategic decisions, determined by global shifts in the international architecture amid the formation of a multipolar world order.

Provisions submitted for defense.

1. The transformation of Sino-U.S. relations between 1991 and 2025 from limited cooperation to systemic confrontation was not an abrupt rupture but a systematic, evolutionary process. The model of "asymmetric interdependence" that emerged in the 1990s and 2000s as a result of China's economic integration into the global system implicitly contained irreconcilable structural contradictions. Chief among these were the expanding U.S. trade deficit, unresolved intellectual property

disputes, and the so-called "Taiwan question."

2. The "trade war" initiated by the Donald Trump administration in 2018 must be analyzed as the first systemic manifestation of the United States shifting from a policy of "engagement" to a strategy of long-term containment toward China. The primary objective of this policy was not so much to balance bilateral trade—as the administration formally asserted—but rather to strategically restrict China's technological and economic growth. This intent was clearly demonstrated by targeted efforts to impede the "Made in China 2025" initiative and to restructure global supply chains. This laid the foundation for a prolonged confrontation, as the underlying strategic logic was subsequently sustained, institutionalized, and deepened by the succeeding administration.

3. The technological domain has emerged as the primary arena of bilateral confrontation. The pivotal factor driving the qualitative shift from managed competition to systemic confrontation in the 2010s was the migration of the conflict's core focus from trade and economics to advanced technology. The race for dominance in critical 21st-century technologies, such as 5G, artificial intelligence, and semiconductors, became the primary driver of the Sino-U.S. conflict, a trend that found its concentrated expression in the Joe Biden administration's "small yard, high fence" strategy. While the Barack Obama administration sought to integrate China into the orbit of U.S. foreign policy through soft engagement, Donald Trump's trade policy transformed economic ties into a direct mechanism of containment. Subsequently, the imposition of unprecedented export controls on China's semiconductor industry in October 2022 marked a strategic transition from merely

slowing Chinese growth to an outright technological blockade aimed at depriving Beijing of the capacity to achieve self-reliance in critical sectors. Consequently, by 2025, technological containment had hardened into the principal instrument of geopolitical pressure levied against China.

4. Geopolitical rivalry in the Asia-Pacific region should be analyzed not merely as a conventional struggle for influence, but as a fundamental clash between two competing models of regional world order. While the U.S. strategy aims to preserve its hegemony by reinforcing the traditional "hub-and-spokes" alliance system and institutionalizing minilateral coalitions (such as AUKUS and the QUAD), China projects an alternative, network-centric model. Beijing's approach is anchored not only in geoeconomic projects like the Belt and Road Initiative but also in its own normative frameworks, such as the Global Security Initiative. This paradigm represents a structural challenge to both the U.S.-centric security architecture and its ideological dominance.

5. The United States' pivot toward strategic competition with China, initiated under the Donald Trump administration, reached its full institutionalization and systemic consolidation after 2021. During this period, the Joe Biden administration did not merely sustain its predecessor's course; it systematicized it, transitioning from unilateral measures to multilateral alliance-building backed by a broader ideological narrative. This evolution confirms that the strategic containment of China has hardened into a long-term, bipartisan consensus among the American political elite, rather than serving as a transient policy contingent on the personality of a specific president.

Analysis of the Source Base. The source base of the study comprises several distinct categories of primary documents. The analytical methodology relies on a comparative approach aimed at identifying both convergences and fundamental divergences within the strategic cultures, official narratives, and foreign policy directives of the PRC and the United States.

The most substantial category of sources consists of official documents and regulatory acts of the PRC. A meticulous analysis of these materials forms a core objective of the dissertation, providing the empirical foundation required to reconstruct Beijing's official position, its evolution, and its underlying logic. Within this category, the following classifications are prominent. Strategic planning documents, including the Constitution of the PRC and critical legislative acts. Government White Papers detailing national defense and foreign policy priorities. Official speeches and diplomatic statements issued by senior Chinese leadership.

The second category of sources, examined as a counterpoint to the Chinese stance, encompasses official documents of the United States. These include: Bipartisan and executive strategic directives, such as National Security Strategies and National Defense Strategies. Executive branch analytical assessments, most notably the U.S. Department of Defense's annual reports to Congress on China's military power. Congressional hearing materials and legislative records tracking bilateral ties.

The third category covers Sino-U.S. bilateral documents, the analysis of which exposes deeply divergent interpretations of key agreements. Principal among these are the Three Joint Communiqués (1972, 1979, and 1982), alongside contemporary bilateral memorandums and agreements.

The fourth category includes multilateral instruments, such as UN Security Council resolutions, World Trade Organization (WTO) documentation, and joint statements from regional frameworks (ASEAN, SCO).

Finally, the source base is supplemented by international media records and foreign strategic assessments, including press releases and news coverage monitoring the Sino-U.S. dynamic and security developments in the Taiwan Strait.

Literature Review. The evolution of China's policy toward the United States in the post-Cold War era, specifically the dualistic nature of their interaction, which combines cooperation and competition post-2013, occupies a central position in global Sinology. A substantial body of research on this topic has been produced by the Chinese academic school, which can be categorized into several key dimensions. Foundational Theoretical Frameworks: This group includes Yan Xuetong's concept of "moral realism"; Wang Jisi and Yuan Peng's structural analysis of "deep contradictions"; Shi Yinhong's rigorous realist assessments; Qin Yaqing's "relational theory" of international politics; and Sun Xingjie and Jin Canrong's strategic and historical approaches to global power shifts. Analysis of U.S. Presidential Administrations: Strategic transformations during the Donald Trump presidency are investigated by Wu Xinbo, Yang Jiemian, and Da Wei. The domestic political determinants of U.S. foreign policy are examined by Diao Daming, while the trajectory of the Joe Biden administration and its containment doctrines are analyzed by Wang Dong and Liu Feitao. Sectoral Dimensions of Rivalry: Economic confrontation and sanction policies are explored by Yu Yongding, He Weiwen, and Chen Wenling. Military-strategic challenges and the Taiwan question are analyzed by

Zhu Feng, Jin Yinan, and Wu Dahui, while technological competition and supply chain security are investigated by Xue Lan, Li Wei, and Fang Xingdong. Regional Dynamics: The geopolitical localization of this rivalry within Asia is addressed by scholars such as Cheng Li, He Kai, Feng Huiyun, Lin Shengli, Liew Hui Yi, Yang Yao, Zhong Jing, Li Wei, Zhang Zhexin, Lin Zhijian, and Tang Xinwei.

Within American historiography, three primary analytical approaches emerge: Realism and Conservatism: Represented by J. Mearsheimer, S. Huntington, P. Navarro, and C. Gordon, who conceptualize China's rise as an existential challenge to U.S. hegemony, frequently frames within the paradigm of the "Thucydides Trap." Liberal Institutionalism: Advanced by R.O. Keohane, J.S. Nye Jr., and G.J. Ikenberry, who provided the theoretical justification for the strategy of "engagement," aiming to integrate China into the established liberal international order. Historical-Political Systems Analysis: Exemplified by the works of J.L. Gaddis, R. Sutter, and T. Christensen, who focus on the balance of powers, as well as J.K. Fairbank, who examines Beijing's foreign policy through the lens of historical cultural continuity. Additionally, the escalation of bilateral rivalry in the early twenty-first century and the attendant risks of a "new Cold War" are meticulously documented in the research of B. Elleman, B. Gellman, D. Nakamura, M. Valencia, and P. Van Ness.

Russian historiography examines the issue through the lens of global strategic dynamics. The conceptual and theoretical foundations of Washington's foreign policy course are analyzed in the works of E.Ya. Batalov, A.D. Bogaturov, V.A. Kremenyuk, A.P. Kosov, V.P. Lukin, O.I. Rebro, V.O. Pechatnov, S.M. Samuylov, and A.I. Utkin. The impact of China's developmental experience on the geopolitical architecture of

the Asia-Pacific region is investigated by A.V. Vinogradov and Yu.M. Galenovich, while the structural evolution of the PRC's foreign policy is examined by E.N. Grachikov. Furthermore, the strategic potential of the Russia-India-China (RIC) trilateral framework is evaluated in the research of S.G. Luzyanin. The Taiwan question, serving as a critical trigger for bilateral confrontation, is analyzed in meticulous detail within the scholarship of A.V. Voloshina, I.V. Gordeeva, I.E. Denisov, Ya.V. Leksyutina, E.V. Semkina, S.M. Trush, and V.F. Urlyapov.

The contribution of this dissertation lies in its capacity to transcend the limitations of the Western "reactive" paradigm. By anchoring the analysis within a "Chinese perspective," this study conceptualizes Beijing's policy toward the United States as an autonomous process driven primarily by internal modernization and development objectives. Within this framework, U.S. foreign policy is treated not as a direct determinant, but as a necessary contextual backdrop essential for a more nuanced comprehension of China's strategic decisions.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the following dimensions.

First, the novelty is manifested in the original analytical approach, which provides a refined periodization of Sino-U.S. relations. For the first time in Russian Sinology, China's policy toward the United States in the post-Cold War era is examined through the lens of a substantiated author-defined periodization, establishing 2013 as a critical chronological and substantive baseline. In contrast to existing literature that either treats the post-Cold War era as a monolithic phase or focuses exclusively on the trade wars, this dissertation demonstrates that 2013 marked a qualitative shift in bilateral relations. Driven by a convergence of domestic

and external factors, this shift finalized the transition from the paradigm of "cooperation prevailing over differences" to a state of systemic strategic rivalry. Furthermore, unlike most studies that focus predominantly on the confrontational dimension, this work introduces a comprehensive dialectical approach. The scientific novelty is enhanced by analyzing Beijing's policy toward Washington after 2013 not as a linear abandonment of cooperation, but as a dynamic unity and struggle between two coexisting trends cooperation and competition. This study represents the first systematic attempt to contrast the enduring domains of bilateral interaction (Chapter II) with the escalating zones of confrontation (Chapter III), thereby providing a more nuanced and objective conceptualization of contemporary Chinese grand strategy.

Second, the dissertation offers a novel source-critical contribution (historiographical novelty). For the first time in Russian scholarship, specific primary Chinese documents are introduced into scientific circulation, enabling a systematic and meticulous analysis of the PRC's post-2013 policy toward the United States through Beijing's own perspective. To achieve this, a wide array of original Chinese-language sources previously overlooked in comprehensive research on this topic was utilized. These include key strategic planning documents that dictate the PRC's long-term grand strategy (such as General Secretary Xi Jinping's Report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC); pivotal position statements reflecting Beijing's tactical course (such as the "Two Lists" presented by China in Tianjin in 2021); and conceptual works by leading Chinese theorists who shape the intellectual foundations of the nation's foreign policy (such as Yan Xuetong). Consequently, this study introduces not only the primary sources themselves into scientific discourse, but also

the contemporary concepts and assessments that reflect the Chinese vision of the causes, nature, and prospects of rivalry with the United States. This approach effectively transcends the Eurocentric and Euro-Atlantic biases prevalent in Western historiography.

Third, the dissertation delivers a substantial analytical novelty. It provides the first comparative analysis of the specific mechanisms and operational practices of the PRC's policy across various dimensions of its post-2013 confrontation with the United States. This analysis extends beyond the traditional economic and military-political realms to investigate critical areas such as sanctions and counter-measures, alongside the ongoing struggle in the cultural-ideological sphere and the domain of public opinion. Consequently, this multi-layered approach reconstructs a comprehensive and holistic framework of the multidimensional nature of contemporary Sino-U.S. rivalry.

Practical significance of this research. The practical utility of the dissertation lies in the applicability of its findings for forecasting future scenarios of Sino-U.S. interaction and formulating foreign policy strategies for third parties (including the Russian Federation) amid intensifying bipolar trends in the international system. Furthermore, the empirical materials and theoretical insights can be utilized to develop advanced university curricula and specialized courses on contemporary international relations, regional security, and foreign policy analysis.

Approval of the dissertation. The core results and conclusions of the dissertation have been disseminated through 7 academic publications, comprising a total volume of 3.5 printer's sheets.

Scope and Structure of the Research. This research paper consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography.