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The Competitive Strategy of the United States Towards China From the Perspective of Moral Realism: A Case Study of China-U.S. Competition Under the Biden Administration

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Abstract: This paper employs moral realism to investigate the underlying causes of competitive China-U.S. relations, aiming to enhance comprehension and management of global power transition phenomena under contemporary China-U.S. rivalry. As the world's most consequential bilateral relationship, the evolving dynamics between China and the United States critically shape international patterns, warranting substantial scholarly attention. Building upon the core tenets and analytical framework of moral realism, this paper integrates empirical evidence and policy practices from the Biden administration to conduct a causal analysis of US competitive strategies towards China through dual lenses: comprehensive national power and political leadership capabilities. The findings reveal two primary determinants: First, the relative decline in US comprehensive national power directly motivates the Biden administration's continuation of competitive policies. This manifests through insufficient regional military influence, decelerating economic growth with diminishing capacity to sustain global economic development, coercive promotion of cultural hegemony, and waning political leadership in global governance. Second, the administration's pronounced political gaming capabilities significantly contribute to its competitive strategic orientation, characterized by Biden's "Artist" personal attributes and the dominant state's embodiment of "Proactive Leadership" traits. Current developments indicate a worrying metamorphosis of China-U.S. competition into irrational and adversarial interactions. In response, China should proactively assume major power responsibilities by strengthening political leadership, maintaining strategic composure against US maximum pressure tactics, and safeguarding national interests through the principle of "fostering unity through constructive struggle". This approach provides China's distinctive solution for advancing global peace and development in the new era, while navigating the complexities of power transition dynamics.

Keywords: Moral Realism; China-U.S. Relations; Biden Administration; Strategic Competition

1. Introduction

Competition is one of the fundamental forms of interstate relations. Following the 2008 financial crisis, the U.S. economy has shown signs of relative decline. Since the Trump administration took office in 2017, competition has become the dominant form of China-U.S. relations. As China narrows the gap with the United States in terms of comprehensive national strength—encompassing economic, military, cultural, and political dimensions—its moral influence has grown globally. Strategic competition with China has become a bipartisan consensus in the United States. The Biden administration views China as the only strategic competitor with both the capability and the intent to challenge the international order, labeling China as the “most serious geopolitical challenge”. The next decade is deemed the “decisive decade” for strategic competition with China, during which the U.S. aims to leverage its geopolitical and technological advantages. The administration is committed to building “One Body and Four Wings” framework for “competing to win”, using competition as the primary objective and employing cooperation, confrontation, investment, and alliances as policy tools to secure victory.

David Shambaugh describes the U.S. and China as “entangled giants”, representing the most complex bilateral relationship in the world. Understanding the underlying complexities of this relationship is crucial. To better understand the reasons behind the U.S. government’s competitive policies toward China, this paper uses the Biden administration as a case study, applying the theoretical framework and analytical model of Moral Realism to provide a detailed discussion and comparative analysis from the perspectives of comprehensive national strength and political leadership types.

2. The Background and Core Concepts of Moral Realism

2.1 Realistic Background of Moral Realism

With the acceleration of globalization, the international order and international relations have undergone profound changes. Western-centric international relations theories often struggle to address new situations and problems, such as explaining why “imperial overstretch” leads to the decline of great powers or why the Thucydides Trap is inevitable in great power politics. However, these theories fail to explain China’s peaceful rise under the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind. Against this backdrop, Moral Realism emerged as a new theoretical perspective to explain the changing international political landscape in the context of “profound changes unseen in a century”.

Moral Realism was initially proposed by Zhang Feng, an associate professor at the Australian National University, who combined Western realist international relations theory with traditional Chinese moral concepts. Yan Xuetong, Dean of the Institute of Modern International Relations at Tsinghua University, systematically elaborated on Moral Realism in his book “The Transfer of World Power”. Moral Realism integrates the realist emphasis on power and interests with traditional Chinese moral considerations, drawing on the political determinism of pre-Qin philosophers.

2.2 The Main Content and Core Views of Moral Realism

The core issue of Moral Realism is how a rising power can replace the current dominant power, which is the principle of world power transfer. Just as its name implies, Moral Realism places great emphasis on the role of “morality” in interstate relations, which is reflected in a country’s foreign policies and actions. Morality enhances a nation’s political leadership, and Moral Realism argues that the key to a rising power surpassing the dominant power lies in the improvement of its political leadership. The sustained rapid growth of a country’s comprehensive national strength is determined by its political leadership. Moral realism offers China a politically oriented strategy, which is a strategy of national rejuvenation centered on continuous political reform.

Moral Realism adheres to the principles of “power politics” and “interests come first”. As a branch of realism, it inherits and develops the classical realist concept of “power”. In analyzing state behavior, it continues to focus on power, strength, and interests. Moral realism believes that “power” is the most important part of national interests and the goal of a country’s foreign policy. It can be divided into four categories: political, security, economic, and cultural. “Strength” defines national interests and is also a tool for achieving national interests. It includes both a country’s “hard power” and “soft power”. Its components can be divided into four categories: political, cultural, military, and economic. Among them, politics is the operational strength, while the others are resource-based strengths. As shown in Figure 1, operational strength and resource-based strength are the two major factors in this multiplicative formula. Political strength is one factor, while military, economic, and cultural strengths together form another factor. Therefore, political strength plays a more decisive role in comprehensive national power compared to the other three types of strength, and the relative increase in political strength has a stronger effect on the improvement of comprehensive national power.

Figure 1: The Relationship Among the Elements of CP

$$CC = \underbrace{(M + E + C)}_{RBP} * \underbrace{P}_{OP}$$

HP
 SP
 CC = (M + E + C) * P
 RBP
 OP

PS, CP = Comprehensive capability
 M = Military Strength
 E = Economic Strength
 C = Cultural Strength
 P = Political Strength
 HP = Hard Power
 SP = Soft Power
 RBP = Resource-Based Power
 OP = Operational Power

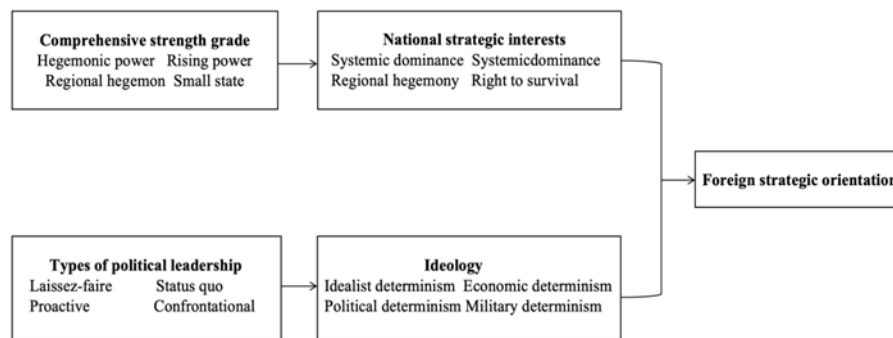
Source: Xu etong, Y. (2019). *Leadership and the rise of great powers* (Vol.1). Princeton University Press.

In addition to the core views of traditional realism, moral realism believes that morality has an important impact on national strength. Morality here is not an abstract moral concept but a set of behavioral norms closely linked to national interests. Adhering to moral behavior can enhance a country's soft power, improve its international image and influence, and thereby indirectly strengthen its comprehensive national power. It argues that "being moral" is an important condition for dominant or rising powers to maintain their status and sustain the international order. At the same time, it believes that moral principles can both enhance or weaken the legitimacy of a country's power and can play a role in strengthening or reducing a country's comprehensive national power to a certain extent. For example, a country that upholds fairness and justice in international affairs, respects the sovereignty of other countries, and actively fulfills its international responsibilities and obligations will attract more countries to cooperate with it and gain more international support. This can help it gain a favorable position in international competition to a certain extent. Conversely, actions that violate morality may provoke international resentment and resistance, weaken a country's soft power, and may even lead to the loss of hard power, such as losses due to international sanctions and military confrontation resulting from launching unjust wars. However, moral realism believes that the role of morality is not absolute or unconditional. The role of morality is based on a country having basic security guarantees and relatively strong material strength.

3. Analytical Framework: The Perspective and Logic of Moral Realism

History has shown that international politics is a process of continuous power transfer, and moral realism attempts to explain the common logic behind it. Moral realism introduces two important variables: "political leadership" and "international strategic credibility". Although the research perspective is on how China rises, it essentially explores and analyzes the transfer of international dominance.

Moral realism takes national interests as the starting point and combines a country's comprehensive national power (including hard power such as politics, economy, military, and culture, as well as soft power such as international image and reputation) with moral factors to analyze behaviors and interactions in international relations. When assessing state behavior, it not only focuses on the use of material power but also examines whether the behavior complies with international moral norms. From the analytical framework, this theory regards the international system as an interactive system composed of numerous countries. Each country pursues the maximization of its own interests while being constrained by international moral rules and influenced by the actions of other countries. In this framework, the behavior of great powers plays a crucial role in setting examples, and their adherence to or violation of morality can trigger a chain reaction within the international system, affecting the stability and evolution of the entire international order.

Figure 2: The Relationship Diagram Affecting a Country's Orientation of Foreign Strategy

Source: Xueting, Y. (2019). *Leadership and the rise of great powers* (Vol.1). Princeton University Press.

The core logic of moral realism in analyzing a country's foreign policy choices is very concise. That is, a country's foreign policy is determined by two elements: the country's objective national strategic interests and its ideological concepts regarding the ranking and methods of realizing these interests. National strategic interests and ideological concepts are determined by the country's comprehensive national power and type of political leadership, respectively. Moral realists believe that the reason for the transfer of dominance is that the political leadership of the originally weaker country begins to surpass that of the stronger country. The strength of a country's political leadership depends on its type of political leadership.

In terms of comprehensive national power, there are four categories: dominant powers, rising powers, regional powers, and small powers. Dominant powers are countries that hold a dominant position in the existing international system and lead the global order. Rising powers are those whose strength is gradually narrowing compared to dominant powers and actually share dominance with them. These two types of countries both pursue systemic dominance in their strategic interests, such as pre-World War I Britain and Germany. Regional powers are those that have relative influence and dominance in a certain region but are also affected by external great powers. They pursue regional dominance as their strategic interest, such as contemporary Japan and India. Small powers are those that do not dominate regional affairs in a sub-region and prioritize the pursuit of survival rights, such as Switzerland.

In terms of political leadership types (the core collective level of a country's decision-making rather than individuals), there are four types: passive, conservative, proactive, and combative. Passive leadership believes in governance through non-action and is a conceptual determinist, adopting a strategy of avoiding difficulties, such as the Chamberlain government in the UK. Conservative leadership advocates maintaining the status quo and regards the economy as the highest interest in the absence of security threats. It is an economic determinist and actively engages in economic cooperation strategies, such as the second-generation central leadership collective of the Communist Party of China with Comrade Deng Xiaoping at its core. Proactive leadership believes in the power of human effort, focuses on the construction of political leadership capabilities, and is a political determinist. It implements a strategy of friendly alliances, such as the Clinton administration in the United States.

Combative leadership values the power of strength and military force, is a military determinist, and is willing to adopt a strategy of military expansion, such as the Truman administration in the United States.

Different types of political leadership affect whether a country values its strategic credibility in the international arena. Passive and combative governments do not care about international strategic credibility. Conservative ones tend to maintain their strategic credibility at a lower cost, while proactive ones place the most emphasis on enhancing their country's strategic credibility. A country's level of international credibility helps it change the existing international landscape, establish new international orders and norms, and maintain an international order is more important than establishing a new one.

4. Reasons for the Biden Administration's Competitive Policies Toward China

Based on the above discussion of the main content and analytical framework of moral realism, this paper holds that the United States under the Biden administration is still a dominant power in comprehensive national power and a proactive government in terms of political leadership type. In October 2022, the Biden administration's National Defense Strategy report identified China as "the most significant strategic competitor for the United States in the coming decades", stating that "China is challenging the future of the international order and the United States' position in the world". It is the only country with the intention and the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to reshape regional and global orders. The faster the rise of the rising power China, the greater the pushback pressure from the international system and therefore the Biden administration of the United States must adopt corresponding foreign strategies to guard against or contain China's rise.

4.1 Changes in U.S. Comprehensive National Strength Require the Biden Administration to Continue Competitive Policies Toward China

The comprehensive national power of the United States is still on a relative decline during the Biden administration, with the gap with China gradually narrowing, but it still maintains its position as the world's hegemony and dominates the global order, not an absolute decline. The comprehensive decline theory argues that the United States is a declining hegemony, and the common decline of the economic, military, cultural, and political factors of U.S. hegemony is an important manifestation of the decline of the United States.

4.1.1 From a Military Perspective, During the Biden Administration, the United States Has Continuously Increased Its Defense Spending to Address the Insufficiency of Its Regional Influence and to Strengthen Its Alliance Relationships to Counterbalance China's Development.

According to current dollar calculations, U.S. military expenditure increased from \$753,897 million in 2021 to \$820,263 million in 2023, accounting for 13.4% of total spending, with an estimated increase to \$988,661 million by 2029. Conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Palestine issue, and the South China Sea situation have all affected the United States' military "nerves". To maintain its interests and influence in various regions globally, the United States has had to gradually

increase its military spending. However, the rising military budget has not kept pace with economic growth and has also led to domestic fiscal deficits and debt crises in the United States.

China, which pursues a defensive policy, has gradually enhanced its military capabilities. The U.S. Department of Defense's 2024 China Military and Security Development Report acknowledges China's leading position in hypersonic weapons, integrated air defense systems, and both military and civilian shipbuilding. China's dependence on imports is expected to decrease. Meanwhile, by 2023, China had become the world's fourth-largest arms exporter, with exports including a variety of systems such as drones, portable air defense missiles, submarines, surface warships, air defense systems, and fighter jets.

The Biden administration has inherited the basic strategy of the previous Trump administration in the field of military security to better counter China's "threat". On the one hand, Biden has shifted the global military strategy and focus of military power to the Pacific region. On the other hand, it actively deploys the "Indo-Pacific Strategy", hoping to use the "5-4-3-2" alliance partner formation (Strengthen the Five Eyes Alliance, Promote the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Cobble together the AUKUS trilateral security partnership, and tighten bilateral military alliances) to advance the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" and maintain U.S. hegemony.

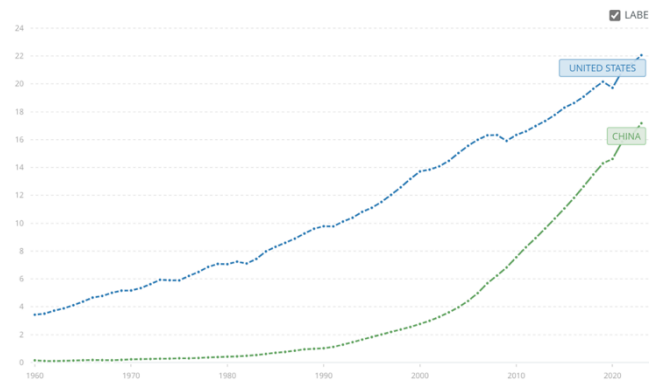
4.1.2 From an Economic Standpoint, Economic Growth Has Slowed During the Biden Administration. The United States' Contribution to and Role as a Driving Force in Global Economic Development Have Been Insufficient. In Response to China's Economic Development, the U.S. Has Targeted China's Economic Weaknesses in an Attempt to Impede Its Economic Progress.

The United States' share of global GDP was around 30% in 1960 and currently accounts for about 20% of the world's total. The Biden administration has implemented "Bidenomics", stimulating economic recovery through large-scale fiscal support measures and the Federal Reserve's quantitative easing monetary policy. The implementation of policies such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act has improved the national transportation network to some extent and created jobs, but it has also led to inflation rates soaring to the highest levels in decades, significantly increasing the cost of living for the public and weakening the positive effects of economic policies. Compared to 2021, the overall price level for U.S. residents has increased by 19.4%, real weekly wages have shrunk by 4.1%, and the national debt has risen from \$27.8 trillion when Biden took office to the current \$34.2 trillion.

China's economic strength has gradually narrowed compared to the United States (see Figure 3). In 2023, China's GDP accounted for 18% of the global total, and its economic size has far exceeded that of Japan and other developed economies. As the world's second-largest economy, China has upgraded its industrial structure, enhanced its capacity for scientific and technological innovation, and continuously expanded its international trade, occupying a key position in the global supply chain. In international economic and trade cooperation, China adheres to the principle of "balancing morality and interests", emphasizing fairness and justice in economic development. Through the Belt and Road

Initiative, China has deepened economic cooperation with other countries, helping them achieve sustainable economic development. China has also made significant progress in frontier areas such as artificial intelligence, new energy, and 5G technology.

Figure 3: The Proportion of China's and the United States' GDP Relative to Global GDP From 1960 to 2023 (Adjusted for Inflation Using Constant 2015 U.S. Dollars)



Source: World bank.

The Biden administration has implemented a “selective decoupling” economic policy toward China, establishing a “small yard, high fence” strategy. On one front, it obstructs China’s advancement in cutting-edge technologies by suppressing and blocking Chinese tech companies under the guise of human rights and dual-use concerns. On another front, it seeks to reduce U.S. reliance on Chinese products to diminish China's trade leverage and global influence. In 2021, President Biden signed an executive order mandating supply chain reviews for critical products including electric vehicle batteries and semiconductor chips, while increasing fiscal expenditures to accelerate the reduction of U.S. dependence on Chinese supply chains.

4.1.3 From a cultural aspect, American culture still occupies a dominant position in the global cultural landscape. The Biden administration has placed emphasis on exporting American values and has pursued a form of “cultural hegemony” to counter the rising cultural soft power of China and other countries.

Biden stresses that the United States needs to exert “the power of example,” reaffirms the “American greatness thesis” and the “world lighthouse thesis,” and strengthens the democratic foundation of the United States to provide guidance for other countries. It integrates ideology into the formulation of policies in trade, technology, security, and development assistance, providing an ideological basis for the United States to promote “competitive multilateralism.” Biden aims to restore U.S. dominance over international mechanisms and rules through a “community of democratic nations,” including establishing a rules system in line with Western values in industries and technologies such as 5G and artificial intelligence.

The 5th Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China set the cultural development goal for 2035—to build a strong cultural nation. This is a significant measure for China to enhance its national cultural soft power and an important step to realize the great national rejuvenation. China actively undertakes international events such as the Winter Olympics, World Military Games, and G20 summits to expand its international influence. Short video culture frequently goes viral overseas. China's cultural industry has grown significantly, and its cultural soft power competition has become increasingly strong. For example, in terms of the number of scientific journal articles published, China exceeded the United States in 2016 with a total of 426,165.3 articles, compared to the United States' 408,985.3 articles.

The competition between the Biden administration and China in culture is not only a confrontation of ideology and values but also a contest of information dissemination and international cultural exchange. By strengthening its own cultural soft power and restricting China's cultural output, the United States frequently uses “human rights” and “democracy” to suppress Chinese culture. It utilizes mainstream American media and social media platforms to spread negative reports about Chinese policies, shape a negative image of China, and funds some international news organizations and non-governmental organizations to support their investigations and reporting on China. Thus, it forms a global public opinion environment unfavorable to China. The United States attempts to dominate this global cultural competition.

4.1.4 Politically, the Decline of US Political Leadership in the World Under the Biden Administration Has Determined that the Comprehensive Strength of the US will Inevitably Decline and the Foundation of the Old International System and Order will be Shaken.

The enhancement of China's political leadership is manifested in several aspects, including strengthening international cooperation and economic ties through the Belt and Road Initiative, playing a greater role in global governance, actively participating in international organizations and multilateral mechanisms, and promoting the resolution of global issues such as climate change. In foreign policy, China emphasizes “the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness”, focusing on establishing friendly and cooperative relations with neighboring countries and other countries around the world and preventing and reducing regional conflicts. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, China demonstrated strong organizational and mobilization capabilities through rapid epidemic prevention measures and providing medical assistance to other countries, further enhancing its international influence and leadership.

The differences in political leadership between China and the United States determine the changes in the international landscape. The relative decline in the United States' political leadership and the rise in China's political leadership together shape a more complex and dynamic international landscape. The decline in U.S. political leadership affects its moral standards. Allies of the United States have lowered their trust and reliability in it, recognizing that the security guarantees the United States can provide are

insufficient. This leads to the gradual collapse of the international political landscape based on the U.S. alliance system. Meanwhile, the rise in China's political leadership gradually changes the world's leadership type, building international norms centered on emerging countries and a broad range of developing countries. Ultimately, the international system is changed under the influence of these two aspects.

In summary, The dominant power, the United States, is showing relative decline in its resource-based capabilities, namely military, economic, and cultural strengths. In terms of operational capabilities, specifically political power, the United States under the Biden administration has not witnessed a corresponding increase or recovery in its political leadership. Both are impacted by the rising power China, with the gap gradually narrowing. According to the comprehensive national power formula: $CC = (M + E + C) * P$, it can be concluded that the United States' comprehensive national power has declined. The United States, as a dominant power under the Biden administration, pursues systemic dominance as its national strategic interest. The decline in U.S. comprehensive national power, coupled with the rise in China's comprehensive national power, forces the Biden administration to continue the competitive strategies of its predecessors to comprehensively contain China's development in pursuit of national strategic interests.

4.2 The Political Leadership Collective Under the Biden Administration Possesses Strong Political Bargaining Capabilities

4.2.1 Biden's Personal Character Traits Help Integrate Domestic and International Forces

American scholars William Strauss and Neil Howe proposed the theory of American social cycles and generational cycles, arguing that each generation of Americans has a unique generational character mark. Based on their birth years, they can be roughly divided into four archetypes: "Prophet", "Nomad", "Hero", and "Artist". Generational cycles reflect the changes in the ideological and psychological states of individuals in society, influenced by specific social and cultural contexts. Individuals shape the entire nation and society with their thoughts and concepts, causing the development and evolution of the nation and society to also exhibit generational cycle patterns, that is, the cyclical changes of American society. Biden, born in 1942, is a representative of the "Artist" archetype and a member of the establishment political elite, known as a "hesitant leader". Therefore, he is more sensitive to social conflicts, advocates actively improving domestic order and institutions to stabilize the existing order, and has a natural leadership quality. The Silent Generation can effectively manage conflicts, make short-term compromises for long-term progress, and unite different voices to make the institutions and organizations they lead more successful than before the crisis.

Therefore, domestically, Biden is adept at easing political contradictions between the two parties, improving inter-party relations, and deepening cooperation. Unlike the Trump and Obama administrations, the Biden administration has seen a less polarized relationship between the two parties.

He managed to push through the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act in Congress within just half a year, which fully demonstrates that the atmosphere of bipartisan cooperation during the Biden administration is better than that of the Trump and Obama administrations. In terms of alliance relations, Biden values and repairs the existing alliance system in the context of the fragmentation of the transatlantic partnership and actively builds a new alliance system in the Indo-Pacific region to counter new “enemies”.

Regarding China-U.S. relations, although Biden has stated that the United States will engage in “extremely fierce” competition with China, he does not advocate a complete disconnection between the United States and China as the Trump administration did. Instead, he has repeatedly expressed a desire to avoid conflict and war in competition. He sets boundaries for U.S. strategic competition with China, actively utilizes existing U.S. advantages, dominance over international rules, and the alliance system to regulate and hinder China's development. He hopes that China will exist within the U.S.-led international system in accordance with principles prioritizing U.S. interests, with a strong potential for aggression.

4.2.2 The Rising Power China’s “Conservative Leadership” Cannot Alleviate the Systemic Pressure and Contradictions Between the Dominant Power United States’ “Proactive Leadership”

The basic characteristics of government leadership have been outlined earlier, so a detailed analysis of the characteristics under the leadership types of China and the United States will not be repeated here. As the gap between China and the United States narrows, the Biden administration is deeply concerned about the impact of China on the existing international system. China should hold an economic determinist view, for example, that “economic and trade relations are the ballast stone of China-U.S. relations”, believing that the structural pressure between China and the United States stems from conflicts of economic interests. It tends to adopt an economic cooperation strategy to ease the tensions between China and the United States. However, the Biden administration, as a proactive leader, believes that China’s development has broken through the United States’ defense and that China's influence is a natural extension from an external country. China’s economic cooperation strategy cannot alleviate the strategic competition and security pressure perceived by the United States. Therefore, the Biden administration must actively adopt an alliance strategy to counter China’s growing development.

In summary, Biden’s preference or aptitude for stabilizing the existing international order through alliances coincides with the need for the Biden administration’s leadership characteristics to contain the development of rising powers. This enhances the political bargaining capabilities of the United States under the Biden administration against China.

5. Conclusion

In the era of economic globalization and the digital economy, the international landscape has become increasingly complex and volatile, with non-traditional security issues growing in prominence

while traditional power politics and coercive means are gradually diminishing in significance within international relations. Moral realism, building upon realist foundations, skillfully incorporates China's traditional ethical perspectives, offering a novel analytical lens for studying the peaceful rise of emerging powers. The competition between China and the United States is not merely a contest of material strength but rather a profound competition in political leadership capacity and moral standing. The difficulty for the United States in maintaining its current liberal hegemony appears superficially as a shift in international power dynamics caused by China's rise, but fundamentally stems from the widening gap in political leadership capabilities between the two nations.

Strengthening comprehensive capabilities constitutes a crucial prerequisite for China's response to China-U.S. strategic competition. Moral realism emphasizes that national power serves as the material foundation for international authority. Currently, the United States' weaponization of tariffs in its trade war against China reflects an abnormal state of bilateral competition-adversarial and non-rational in nature. Confronting American containment in trade and technology, China must implement a multidimensional breakthrough strategy. In economic domains, this requires deepening institutional cooperation under the China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, activating productivity synergies within RCEP regions, and reinforcing strategic alignment with the African Continental Free Trade Area. Regarding technological innovation, focused efforts should target critical "chokepoint" technologies through the new-type national mobilization system, achieving breakthrough advancements in frontier fields such as quantum computing prototypes, all-solid-state batteries, and high-temperature superconducting materials.

As an ascending power, China should proactively explore the dialectical integration of capability enhancement with ethical responsibility in international engagement. On the global stage, China must pursue "rightful authority" grounded in both material strength and normative principles, distinct from hegemonic aspirations. Regarding geopolitical conflicts, China should exercise major power responsibility through active mediation among disputing parties, injecting stabilizing forces into regional tensions. Concurrently, sustained expansion of humanitarian assistance to impoverished and conflict-affected regions remains imperative, encompassing medical support, food security initiatives, and infrastructure development. Crucially, China should uphold the principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefit. Leading digital Silk Road standardization efforts, advancing BRICS New Development Bank expansion, and establishing climate change South-South cooperation funds - thereby delivering high-quality global public goods that align with evolving multilateral demands.

China must uphold the principle of "fostering unity through constructive struggle", proactively managing crises and mitigating conflicts with the United States while safeguarding national interests and strategic autonomy. A dual-track approach through official and non-governmental channels should ensure accurate information transmission to prevent strategic miscalculations. In competition-manageable domains, China should maintain cooperative windows with the United States to cultivate

strategic trust through practical collaboration. However, on issues concerning national sovereignty, security, and developmental interests, China must resolutely defend its core interests with strategic composure, resisting coercion from American maximalist pressure tactics.

The essence of China-U.S. strategic competition lies in the power rebalancing process during the international system's transitional phase. China must neither succumb to the historical cycle of hegemonic transition nor retreat into strategic isolationism. The imperative lies in synergizing hard and soft power development to achieve dynamic equilibrium between advancing China's core interests and shaping an emerging international order. This strategic pathway not only determines the trajectory of great power rivalry but more fundamentally constitutes China's distinctive response to the epochal challenge of realizing peaceful development - a solution that transcends Western-centric historical paradigms through innovative integration of capability building with normative contributions.

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Author Contributions

Xueming Li: Writing, Original draft, Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis. Xinyu Wang: Conceptualization, Writing-review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Data curation. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Availability of Data and Materials

The data on which the study is based were accessed from a repository and are available for downloading through the following link.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/historical-tables/>

<https://data.worldbank.org.cn/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?end=2023&locations=USCN&start=1960&view=chart>

<https://www.bidenomics.com/cost-of-living/>

<https://data.worldbank.org.cn/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?end=2023&locations=USCN&start=1960&view=chart>

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to report regarding the present study.

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