

# The Performance and Logic of the Rapid Adjustment of Sino-US Relations after the Coronavirus Outbreak

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**Abstract:** The Sino-US trade friction in 2018 caused an uproar in the country. Whether it is the unification of the political consensus of the two parties in the United States on China in the first half of 2020, the intensified decoupling between China and the United States from economic and trade, finance, and cultural exchanges, or the strengthening of the United States' technological blockade against China, it can be seen that China and the United States has accelerated in stages. The window period for the improvement of Sino-US relations in the future is shrinking. China must actively respond to it, stick to the bottom line thinking, and maintain strategic determination.

## 1. Changes in Sino-US Relations after the Coronavirus Outbreak

First of all, the epidemic has catalyzed the reorganization of international power, and the power gap between China and Western countries has further narrowed. In terms of Sino-US economic and trade, the spread of the global coronavirus outbreak has promoted the further "decoupling" of the Chinese and US economies, and the existing division of labor and trade systems in the global value chain have deviated from the original track, which has forced a passive adjustment of the regional production and trade network system.<sup>①</sup> What is even more worrying is the "subjective" tearing of the industrial chain by international actors. The economic protectionism under the pretext of "national security" has gradually made it possible for China and the United States to act as "parallel" industrial chains, countering the trend of globalization. Although scholars from all walks of life have expressed their views on the world after the epidemic, most of them are only generalized, so as to compare the progress of Sino-US relations. Speed to do a quantitative or qualitative analysis is the value of this article.

## 2. The Coronavirus Outbreak Catalyzed the Conflict Between China and the United States

Starting in 2018, it took two years for China and the United States to conclude the first phase of the economic and trade agreement between China and the United States in a difficult tug-of-war. But a sudden coronavirus disrupted the original rhythm between China and the United States. The Sino-U.S. relationship, which might have continued to be at a stalemate, broke out within six months of conflicts that would have taken several years to digest.

The issue of decoupling has been repeatedly debated by all walks of life during the Sino-US trade friction in 2018, and now it seems to be a question of speed. If the U.S. National Security Council and the State Department are typical of China's hawks, then the Treasury Department and the National Economic Commission are much more relaxed in comparison. But now this situation is also beginning to change. In May, the Ministry of Finance withdrew its opposition and instead recommended that Federal Workers' Pensions not invest in the Chinese market.<sup>②</sup> It can be seen from this that when the economic exchanges once regarded as "ballast stone" by China have also begun

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<sup>①</sup>Zhang Jie. The impact of COVID-19 epidemic on Sino-US economic and trade relations and countermeasures [J]. *Asia-Pacific Economic Review*, 2020(02):5-11+149.

<sup>②</sup> Josh Rogin :COVID-19 has brought Trump's warring China factions together,[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/COVID-19-has-brought-trumps-warring-china-factions-together/2020/05/21/4df38fee-9b9f-11ea-ac72-3841fcc9b35f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/COVID-19-has-brought-trumps-warring-china-factions-together/2020/05/21/4df38fee-9b9f-11ea-ac72-3841fcc9b35f_story.html)

to be "decoupled" by the US government.

Since the trade war, China and the United States have been stigmatizing. The US "Entity List" was released by the Bank for International Settlements in February 1997 to limit the activities of entities that run counter to the interests of US national security and foreign policy.<sup>①</sup> Therefore, the list of entities can be regarded as the highest-level blacklist in the United States.

### **3. The Logic behind the Accelerated Deterioration of Sino-US Conflicts**

After the founding of China in 1949, Sino-U.S. relations have been in a complex process of competition and cooperation. When the two sides were at their worst, they were enemies of each other, and when they were at their best, they could achieve quasi-ally relations, but they never became true allies. There are reasons for the chronic illness of the Taiwan issue, as well as China's non-alignment policy and deep-rooted ideological differences between the two sides.

The relationship between the two parties can basically be divided into five stages from 1972, 1989, 2001, and 2018.

Between the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and Nixon's visit to China in 1972, the relationship between the two sides was basically an enemy-state relationship. The two sides did not establish diplomatic relations, and they met on the Korean battlefield. The contradictions between the two sides on Taiwan and the Indo-China Peninsula were deeply rooted.

Since Kissinger's secret visit in 1971 and Nixon's official visit to China in 1972, the next 17 years was the best time in Sino-US relations. The two sides were in a quasi-ally-state relationship for the sake of fighting the Soviet Union together. After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States in 1979, the 1980s Known as the honeymoon period between China and the United States, but with the political turmoil in 1989 and the drastic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in 1991, the largest political foundation for Sino-US cooperation collapsed, and the relationship between the two sides took a turn for the worse.

From 1989 to 2001, many structural contradictions between China and the United States that were concealed due to the joint fight against the Soviet Union began to emerge. The MFN incident, the Yinhe incident, the 96 Taiwan Strait crisis, and the bombing of the embassy caused the Sino-US confliction in a spiral upward way. The collision incident in the South China Sea between China and the United States in April reached a peak of confliction between the two sides.

From 2001 to 2018, due to the sudden 9/11 incident, the United States successively launched the Afghanistan War and the Iraq War, which opened the curtain of global anti-war, and for United States, China's position quickly changed from "a potential international competitor" to ""Partners with Weaknesses". During this period, the main force of the United States was used for counter-terrorism. Even after the Obama administration began to shift its energy to the Asia-Pacific region and launched an Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy, the consensus on counter-terrorism as the government's top priority has not changed.

Since 2018, with the new Trump administration coming to power, the country's primary task has changed from counter-terrorism to "response to competition among major powers." Therefore, the Sino-US trade war that began in April 18 is a sign of Sino-US relations.

#### **3.1 The Coronavirus Became A Booster for the Two Parties to Be Tough on China**

On May 29, 2020, Trump's Twitter post "CHINA!", the meaning is self-evident. The United States imposed sanctions on China not only because China "stole" US intellectual property rights and "stole" American jobs, but also because China should take the responsibility for the "mistakes" of the coronavirus outbreak! When being tough on China becomes politically correct, as politico revealed above, even the "democratic party's weakness against China" will become an attack. In other words, regardless of whether it is the consensus of the two parties to be tough on China, or based on the general election tone or voter mentality, the coronavirus superimposed on the general election has become a booster for the two parties to be tough on China.

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<sup>①</sup><https://www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/policy-guidance/lists-of-parties-of-concern/entity-list>

### **3.2 The Economic Gap Between China and the United States Is Narrowing Faster**

The growth of China's relative strength is already a recognized fact, but if we look closely at how much the gap between China and the United States is and when is the turning point, GDP is a good measurement tool, even if it does not represent all. The social shutdown caused by the epidemic has a huge impact on the world economy. According to the forecast of the IMF's "World Economic Outlook", world economic output will fall by 3% in 2020, of which the US economy will shrink by 6.1% throughout the year, while the Chinese economy will only grow by 1.2%.<sup>①</sup> Historical experience tells us that the United States has relentlessly suppressed every competitor trying to catch up. Now China has not only broken through the historical limit of the strength of the Soviet Union and Japan, but also may further reduce its relationship with the United States in the future. The gap even accelerated the process in 2020 due to a national pandemic.

### **3.3 The Pandemic Further Highlights the Differences Between the Chinese and American Systems**

What makes Westerners secretly surprised is the competition of systems. The coronavirus is a fair test. It goes up to the British Prime Minister and down to the people in the slums. The virus attacks everyone indiscriminately. But between China and the United States, the policy trajectory is almost 180 degrees different. Among them is not only the difference between the government's consideration of "economy or life", but also the huge contrast between system and political capabilities. With an order from the Communist Party of China, the government's strong organizational power has enabled other large cities in Hubei Province to be closed, and tens of thousands of nurses can be mobilized to support Wuhan, and a large emergency hospital can be built within ten days. But in contrast to the Trump administration, the democratic wrangling and the inefficiency of the government's governance capabilities forced states to "fight for themselves." The lack of ventilators made states have to compete for orders for ventilators from China. The lack of virus detection capabilities has caused the epidemic to intensify under the premise that the United States has not searched for infected people.

When the "collectivism" spirit of the Chinese makes the vast majority of Chinese people wear masks and stay at home, the Americans are calling for freedom and human rights. While the Chinese government would rather sacrifice the economy to prevent the spread of the virus, some factories in the United States started construction without authorization. The coronavirus outbreak is a mirror, reflecting a silhouette of the social system and government capabilities. If the competition between China Model and Western systems in the past is still in the stage of controversy, then the sharp contrast between the death toll of more than 180,000 in the United States and the death toll of only more than 8,000 in China can vaguely draw some conclusions.

The Chinese government's powerful in mobilization and penetration capabilities is both fear and loathe the West. In terms of ideology, they have automatically equated all centralized governments with "evil". So the lockdown in China is to imprison people, while the lockdown in Italy is an effort to curb the spread of the coronavirus. Such an obvious double standard is not only the difference of interests after dividing the "enemy and us", but also a deep-rooted prejudice against China.

What is even more frustrating for the United States is that it failed to make China a member of the Western model by pinning its hopes on the "engagement" policy. Instead of changing, China has stepped out of the "Chinese model." The "China model" has not only become stronger, but it has also overshadowed the trivial and rigid political reality of the West. Regarding this situation, the best way to solve the problem in the West is to not recognize the premise, that is, to stigmatize China's fight against the epidemic in all directions, the theory of concealment in the early stage of the epidemic, the theory of inaction in the early stage of the epidemic, the theory of deliberate leakage by China, and the Wuhan experiment. The theory of leaks of the office, the theory of falsification of epidemic data, the theory of China's aid to expand its influence, the theory of China's atonement, and even the theory of China's compensation. The West led by the United States has

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<sup>①</sup> IMF, World Economic Outlook, <https://www.imf.org/zh/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/04/14/weo-april-2020>

carried out false narratives in all directions, stigmatizing China and politicizing the epidemic. The consideration is to undermine the premise of the proposition that "China's fight against the epidemic is far superior to the West and to highlight its institutional advantages.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The coronavirus is like a magic mirror, nowhere to hide the good and evil among people. It is also like a magnifying glass, making the good much more better and the bad much more worse. In international relations, countries that are already friendly to each other assisted each other in this global disaster and reciprocated, such as China, Japan and South Korea's group warming, and China's rescue operations in Italy, Norway, and African countries. But at the same time, the relationship between the two countries, which is already deteriorating, will be further hit, such as China and the United States. Whether it is the United States privately changing the name of the virus to "Chinese virus" or "Wuhan virus", it has always questioned China's protest behavior and data. China-US relations did not support each other because of the coming common crisis, but worsened.

Whether it is the unification of the political consensus of the two parties in the United States on China in the first half of 2020, the intensified decoupling between China and the United States from economic and trade, finance, and cultural exchanges, or the strengthening of the United States' technological blockade against China, it can be seen that China and the United States After the coronavirus outbreak, the contradiction has accelerated in stages. Behind this is the rise of anti-China sentiment in the US society, the accelerated shrinking of China and the United States, and the diametrically opposed measures taken by China and the United States in the fight against the epidemic have highlighted the entrenched differences in the political systems of the two countries.

According to the coronavirus outbreak has made 2020, It still can be said that China is in a period of historical opportunity. Can this time window be grasped for the national rejuvenation of the Chinese nation? Obvious it has a decisive answer.

It can also be imagined that the tense Sino-US relations will be a normalization situation in the future. This is not only a competition among major powers, but also a competition among institutional models. The trade friction in 2018 reminds us of the trade friction between the United States and Japan in the 1980s, while the political friction after the coronavirus outbreak reminds us of the US-Soviet Cold War that lasted for half a century. Although the current Sino-US confrontation has no similar experience in history to learn from, there is no doubt that this will be an anxious marathon.

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