Resolving the China-US Conflicts

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Theory Construction and Real-life Practice

By

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CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

PREFACE

Harvard Kennedy School Professor Graham Allison (2012) coined the term "Thucydides' trap," suggesting that there is an inevitable war between the US as a ruling power and China as a rising power. While some scholars agree, some others disagree. Still others simply emphasize that the hypothetical comparison is like putting a square peg into a round hole because both the characters and contexts are substantially different. This book enriches the existing dialogue by contributing to the discipline of intercultural communication (ICC) studies with the construction of an ICC theory testified in real-life practices of resolving US-China conflicts.

Apart from the introduction which introduces the academic background for this project, clarifies the research questions, discusses the significance of the research, and presents the outline of the entire book and the conclusion which summarizes the research findings, discusses the theoretical and practical implications, presents the limitations of the research, and makes suggestions for future research, there are four chapters whose main content is briefly summarized below:

Chapter 1
On the Construction of Indigenous Chinese Communication Theories:
An Analysis of the Cultural Roots

This chapter looks into the cultural roots in the active construction of indigenous Chinese communication theories. Theoretically guided by the paradigmatic cultural assumptions between China and the West and the Chinese cultural discourse system and research, and via qualitative content analysis, this study has found: First, there are three general categories of indigenous Chinese communication theories: (a) tapping the essence of the traditional Chinese culture embedded in terms, concepts and events, (b) visualizing and modeling the Chinese cultural factors like wind, grass, and water, and (c) integrating the advantages of Chinese and Western cultures, with each category illustrated by three representative samples. Second, the three categories are the three adopted approaches to fulfilling the three goals of the Chinese cultural discourse system and three missions of the Chinese cultural discourse research.

Chapter 2
Construction of a Water and Game Theory for Intercultural Communication

Through the theoretical lenses of cultural gaming and paradigmatic assumptions of Eastern and Western cultures, Chapter 2 explores the interrelationships between game intentions and communication strategies. Through a thematic analysis of the Chinese traditional cultural classics from the pre-Qin (221 BCE–206 BCE) to the Republic of China (1912–1949) from the Chinese Text Project, three featured themes of water including the best and the softest, carrying boats and capsizing boats, and the most violent and the strongest have emerged in correspondence to the positive zero sum, zero sum, and negative zero sum game intentions. Thus, a water and game theory for intercultural communication (WGTICC) has been constructed. The theory is applicable to managing intercultural communication barriers, esp. systematic misunderstanding between individuals from China and the West, between Chinese enterprises and their counterparts in other countries, and between China and other countries on various intercultural communication occasions.

Chapter 3
Win-Loss-Win in the US-China Game: A Cross-cultural Analysis of a TV Anchor Debate between Trish Regan and Liu Xin

Guided by the cultural game theory, WGTICC and cultural analysis model, the study of Chapter 3 has found such game intentions and communication strategies as shaming the invited counterpart vs. correcting the host calmly, turning a debate into a Q&A vs. using the Q&A as a meaningful presentation, and getting ready to listen vs. demonstrating courage, sincerity, and cogency have been adopted during the 3 rounds of debate, thus illustrating and expanding the third assumption in the water and game theory from a win-loss to a win-loss-win result. In terms of cultural roots, Fox Business News, as an example of Western media, has been shifting from objective, accurate, and fair journalism ethics to unilateralism, catalyzed by prioritizing the US interests. In contrast, the Chinese media, like CGTN, have been reshaping themselves for survival and performance employing and developing multiple online platforms while converging with social media.

Chapter 4
Thucydides' Trap and Online Readers' Reviews of Two Books on Zheng He's Voyages

This chapter analyzes 458 online readers' reviews of two books on Zheng He's seven voyages. Under the theoretical guidance of reader response criticism and via the research methods of website observation and purposive selection and textual and thematic analyses, the study of this chapter has found: influenced by such dominant Chinese cultural values as harmony, benevolence, and mutual benefits, Zheng He's voyages were nonaggressive exchanges of trade and culture, showing basically no evidence of hostile attitudes, offensive actions, or beclouded emotions of fear, hubris, and honor. Instead of supporting the trustworthiness of Thucydides' trap, the online readers' reviews call on tapping the complementary aspects between China and the United States and drawing invaluable lessons from the past for mutually-beneficial bilateral relationship.

This book is based on recently published papers in top journals, with approved content and quality and a combination of the theory construction and theory application. This book is targeting graduate students and scholars of international and intercultural communication as well as decision-makers regarding US-China relations.

INTRODUCTION

This is the introduction to the whole book, which introduces the academic background for this research project, clarifies the research questions of the four major chapters, discusses the significance of the research, and presents the structure of the entire book.

Academic Background

When the Berlin Wall collapsed in 1989 and the former Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, the Cold War which started in 1946, came an end. Among all other nations, the US found itself the only superpower in the whole world at the onset of the 21st century. However, China has been making rapid and giant strides as a rising economic superpower since the launch of its market-oriented policies in 1979. As a result of its decade-long booming economy, China's gross national product (GDP), according the BBC (2011), surpassed that of Japan in 2010, with the former recorded as $5.8 trillion and the second as $5.474 trillion in the same period. As of 2024, both the US and China share 43.2% and 34.51% of the entire world's GDP in nominal and PPP terms, respectively (*Statistics Times* 2024), which means that while China is nearing the US in terms of GDP, the US concern over its global influence has been intensified. Although still cooperating in international trade, environmental protection, cultural exchange programs, and more, the US and China are also challenged with conflicts over human rights, cybersecurity, and China's territorial sovereignty claims over the East and South China Seas. Below we clarify the academic background of this research project by reviewing the relevant literature in the following three broad categories.

History and Development of the US-China Relations

According to the website of the U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China, it was in February 1784 that the U.S. trading ship, Empress of China, made the first contact between "one of the world's newest countries" and "one of the earth's oldest civilizations," thus "forging one of the most consequential relationships in the world" (para. 1). The voyage of the trading ship was regarded as a moment "that would mark the beginning of ties between China

and the United States and the assertion of the United States' power as a
sovereign nation" (Schmidt 2017, 1). Haddad (2013) seconded Schmidt by
saying that, as a result of the voyage of the Empress of China, "Americans
in China carved out a distinctive identity for themselves… in the shadow of
the British goliath" (3). However, Wang (2013) argued, since the Empress
of China carried opium among its cargo, it suggested that the opium trade
had earlier origins and the US demonstrated its imperialistic goals in this
initial encounter with China.

Actually, in the records of the Office of the Historian of the Foreign
Service Institute associated with the U.S. Department of State, while British
merchants smuggled opium to China from India in the 19th century, the US
followed suit with opium from Persia. The official diplomatic relations
between China and the US began in 1844 after the First Opium War (1839-
1842), with "extraterritoriality for U.S. citizens in China, most favored
nation status, and a guarantee for treaty revision in twelve years" (para. 12)
based on the Treaty of Wanghia (Treaty of Peace, Amity, and Commerce
between the United States of America and the Chinese Empire). In 1867,
the Qing Government of China sent the first Chinese diplomatic mission to
the US and signed a treaty that "allowed for mostly unrestricted Chinese
migration to the United States" (para. 18). However, instead of fully
implementing the treaty, the US Congress kept passing such legal
restrictions on Chinese immigration as the Page Act in 1875, the Chinese
Exclusion Act in 1882, the Bayard-Zhang Treaty and Scott Act in 1888, and
the Geary Act in 1892.

Certainly, there were also mutually-beneficial programs of exchanges
and cooperation between the two countries, such as the United States-China
Science and Technology Cooperation (Office of Science and Technology
Cooperation Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and
Scientific Affairs of the US 2012), Agreement between the United States of
America and China in Education (Department of State of the US, 2014), and
the Economic and Trade Agreement between the Government of the United
States of America and the Government of the People's Republic of China
(The Government of the United States of America and the Government of
the People's Republic of China, 2020). In the aspects of education, Yung
Wing, a naturalized Chinese-American citizen, established the Chinese
Education Mission with approvals from both the Chinese and US
governments in 1870. Since then, groups of Chinese teenagers were sent to
the US for a comprehensive American education to be trained as future
diplomats and technical advisors. This program lasted till 1881, and during
the 11-year period, "about 120 students took part, though some choose not
to return to China" (Office of the Historian, para. 25). From 1899 to 1901,

a Boxer Uprising broke out in China, targeting all foreigners and Chinese Christian converts. After the Boxers were defeated, the foreign powers managed to force the Qing Government to pay a huge indemnity of $333 million. The US Congress issued a resolution remitting about $11 million out of $24 million to the Qing Government. The Qing Government decided to send 50-100 students annually to the US for education, and the US Department of State determined in 1908 that "the remitted funds would be used to finance this education program" (para. 39).

At the end of the First World War (1914-1918), the US intervened by curbing the Japanese plot of grabbing too much Chinese territorial sovereignty in 1915 when Japan seized China's Shandong Province from the hands of defeated Germany and issued 21 demands for more trade and territorial privileges. However, the US and Japan signed the Lansing-Ishii Agreement behind China in 1917, in which the US "reaffirmed its acknowledgement of Japan's 'special interests' in Northeast China" (para. 44). Since the outbreak of the War in Resistance against Japanese Aggression in 1937, the US supported Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Government by extending a total of $100 million credit for war supplies in 1938, sending General Claire Lee Chennault and the American Voluntary Group ("Flying Tigers") to defend China from Japan's aerial attacks in 1941, and forming wartime alliance with China against Japanese aggression in 1942. According to Scott (1959), from 1941 to 1945, China and the US were allies, with the two governments aiding each other and American soldiers living, working, and fighting together with the Chinese soldiers and civilians against the Japanese invaders with great achievements.

The US-China relations since 1949 can be divided into three main periods (Nathan and Ross 1997). The first period is containment from 1949 to 1969. After Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Government was defeated and driven to Taiwan, the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949. Since then, the US began containing new China in full scale. The second period is rapprochement from 1970 to 1979. The US was intending to obtain China's help and end the war in Vietnam, and China wanted to get the US assistance and lessen the pressure from the Soviet Union. In February 1972, the two countries signed the Shanghai Communiqué (or Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People's Republic of China) stating that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China. Although it was still unofficial, the two countries began launching economic, educational and cultural exchanges. The third period is full diplomatic relations from 1979 to 1997 (the time when the above-mentioned book was published). Since 1979, the two countries began renormalizing their full diplomatic relations by cooperating bilaterally, trilaterally and multi-laterally in a variety of

aspects. However, a series of issues concerning trading deficits, intellectual property rights protection, and human rights have been haunting the two countries.

In addition to the above three periods, we add a fourth period of cautious optimism from 1997 to the present. For decades, China's steady and rapid economic growth has upgraded China as the world's second largest economy only next to that of the US, which has been posing challenges to the US economy and global leadership so much that the US began implementing both engagement and containment towards China for some time. Since 2011, the US began increasing its containment of China with the Obama Administration "turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asian Pacific region" (Lawrence 2013, 10) in the observance of the Policy of Strategic Rebalancing to Asia-Pacific. On December 12, 2017, the Trump Administration issued the first National Security Strategy of 2017, which mentioned China 33 times as a competitor, rival, adversary and revisionist power. Thus, China has turned from a "strategic partner" into a "strategic competitor," and both the Democratic and Republic parties in the US Congress "tend to support and intensify the Administration's hard line on China, rather than moderating it" (Overhaus, Rudolf and Daniels 2020, 18). With the Biden Administration in power, which "will continue its confrontational policy towards Beijing…and mobilize the US network of alliances to contain China" (Jakóbowski 2020, para. 1), the US-China confrontations are becoming all the more complicated and intense. Thus, the US-China relations have been plummeting towards the bottom, and to make matters worse, those China-hardliners on both aisles of the US Congress automatically spare no efforts scapegoating China for their hidden political agendas.

Nevertheless, the extreme US measures towards China such as waves of unilateral import tariffs have severely affected the US interests as well. Both US businesses and think tank elites have put forward far-sighted advice against treating China as "an economic enemy or an existential national security threat" because "the fear that Beijing will replace Washington as the global leader is exaggerated" (Overhaus, Rudolf, and Daniels 2020, 19). Kissinger (2011) explicitly warned that "a strategy based on confrontation makes both the United States and China hostage to worst-case scenarios, some of which may not be in the control of either side" (547). Therefore, it is urgent for China to learn to demonstrate and persuade other countries, especially, the US to understand its genuine intention and role in a positive zero sum game instead of those in zero sum and negative zero sum games. It is also a must for the US to reconsider its so-called manifest destiny,

accustomed supremacy, and hegemonic mentality in the rapidly changing international arena.

Conflicts in the US-China Relations

Katz and McNulty (1994) defined conflict as "a situation between at least two interdependent parties that is characterized by perceived differences and that the parties evaluate as negative" (1). Since the US began treating China as a "long-term strategic competitor" in its National Security Strategy issued on December 12, 2017, the US-China conflicts have become multi-dimensional—from trade to "security-related, economic, technological and ideological dimensions" (Perthes 2020, 5-6). According to Amin (2006), one of the strategic goals of the US is "to ensure the subordination of other major states and to prevent the constitution of any regional blocs that might renegotiate the terms of globalization" (10). Actually, it was within the expectations of the Trump Adminstration to reset China as a strategic competitor by "embracing containment of China as an alternative to engagement" (Layne and Thayer 2007, 72).

Although former US President Barack Obama did not appeal to President Trump in many aspects, the latter carried on the same hardline diplomatic policies towards China. President Trump "regards superiority—and above all military dominance—as an end in itself" while "superiority is both means and end to Chinese President Xi Jinping" (Perthes 2020, 5). Maihold (2020) noted: "The presidents of China and the United States have redefined the field of foreign policy, both in the internal structures of their states and in their external relations" (39). In Washington, there is a consensus that the US engagement policy to "integrate China into the post-war international order since Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972 has failed" (Overhaus, Rudolf, and Daniels 2020, 16) and the "U.S.-Chinese cooperation appears outmoded and even naïve" (Kissinger 2012, 1).

Economically and ideologically, China's phenomenal rise to power as the world's second largest economy from a mainly agricultural society during a short period of three decades "has greatly challenged the unipolar moment" (Zaidi and Saud 2020, 1), which has "created serious problems for the US to safeguard its interests as well as the interests of its allies and maintain the all-important 'balance of power' in the region" (1). Thus, to the US, China's economic rise, on the one hand "has profited enormously from the stability and openness of the Western system," and, on the other hand, "has shaken the West's self-image of its democratic market economy as the most successful and humane system" (Hilpert 2020, 37). Just as Kissinger (2012) remarked, though "magnified by ideological predispositions…, the

ultimate aim of the American strategy is to hasten a revolution, albeit a peaceful one, that will sweep away China's one-party authoritarian state and leave a liberal democracy in its place" (2). Apparently, China has become the US's thorn in the flesh that must be dealt with.

Regarding the US-China trade issues and security concerns, although some scholars contended, "China's power is not increasing exponentially…, and China does not have revisionist or radically expansionist tendencies like pre-war Germany," yet a rising China "poses a serious threat to the global order and challenges US hegemony" (Overhaus, Rudolf, and Daniels 2020, 16). This is why the US "has to have tough, strong policies against China or they'll continue to steal millions of American jobs and trillions of American dollars" (18). This is also why the US "has been exhausting all resources on hand" to restrict Chinese foreign direct investment in sensitive and strategic areas "like 5G and artificial intelligence in order to guarantee the West's supremacy" (Zaidi and Saud 2020, 10).

Nevertheless, it is found that "so far, China has maintained that its top priority remains human in its regional infrastructural projects, such as the Belt and Road Initiative" (Zaidi and Saud 2020, 11). Chinese scholars were both optimistic and cautious, believing that China and the US are interdependent in economy. It is true that the number of short-term frictions is increasing, but cooperation is still the main stream. Wang (2009) noted that the trade conflict between the US and China is related to the political needs of the latter, which is caused by the dramatic changes of China's status in the international division of labor and the fulfillment of its WTO commitments. Cao (2020) held that the essence of the US provocation of intellectual property conflicts is to curb the rise of China, in accordance with the consistent US hegemonic concept.

The author of the present book (2010) seconded that the disputes over intellectual property rights between the US and China are caused by the national interests and needs at different stages of development. Both the US and China should avoid the "one size fits all" strong approach and adopt the golden mean of cooperation to achieve the win-win goal of the best protection of the intellectual property rights. Just as Kissinger (2012) warned, while Beijing and Washington decide "whether to move toward a genuine effort at cooperation or fall into a new version of historic patterns of international rivalry" (5), both ought to know that "a prolonged confrontation between them would alter the world economy with unsettling consequences for all" (2). Therefore, it is high time that the US and its allies began reevaluating their cherished confrontational and preemptive strategies towards countries like China.

Possible Solutions to the US-China Conflicts

Since the US-China conflicts are "spilling from political and military areas into a growing number of other spheres, including technology, finance, and education" (Congressional Research Service 2019, i), only tentative and possible solutions have been explored. Optimistically, some Western China-observers noticed that the US trade deficit had already dropped from $419.2 billion to $73.9 during the Trump Administration, and they felt assured that the US now is so powerful that its unipolar status is fundamentally incontestable. Others agreed that "today's China is no more a revolutionary power," whose behaviors "have been away from the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thoughts and have shown no historical tendency or explicit intention for territorial expansion" (Zaidi and Saud 2020, 3). To these scholars, "conditions have changed," and "the blueprints for containment drawn from Cold War strategies…do not apply to current conditions" (Kissinger 2012, 2).

Pessimistically, some Western China-observers held that "the inherent qualities within nature makes history a cyclical process of power domination and survival;" therefore, "China will be undoubtedly moving into such a phase in the coming decades" (Huntington 1991, 4) and "China, like all previous potential hegemons, [will] be strongly inclined to become a real hegemon" (Mearsheimer 2001, 400). As a result, Gompert, Cevallos, and Garafola, experts of the Rand Corporation, (2016) became confident that "China and the United States are at loggerheads over several regional disputes that could lead to military confrontation or even violence between them" (iii). In fact, they have already taken steps to assist the US government to get ready in case of a war.

In the face of the turbulent world situation with rapidly changing international order and increasing uncertainties, Li (2019) stressed that the US and China should strive to avoid cognitive differences, control differences in benign competition, and build a new type of major country relationship of "no conflict, no confrontation". After analyzing the competitive structures among China, Russia and the US, Zhao (2020) believed that the future international order could not be a unified one, but a "new East and West" system with "fragmentation" and "diversity." In a framework for the future US-China relations, State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi put forward the following proposals: 1) steering clear of red lines and avoid confrontation; 2) keeping the channels open for candid dialogues; 3) rejecting decoupling and upholding cooperation; and 4) abandoning the zero-sum mentality and standing up to shared responsibilities (Li 2020). It is clear that, unlike the decoupling orientation of the US, China suggests meeting the US halfway "to jointly promote the establishment of a

coordinated, cooperative and stable China-US relationship for the benefit of the world" (Li 2020, para. 21).

From the perspectives of game and even war in-between big powers, the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (2019) noted that "the US-China conflict goes deeper than just trade. Battle lines have been drawn in technology, education, intellectual property, infrastructure and maritime behavior;" nonetheless, "the US-China conflict has deep roots, and it is likely to be long-lasting" (2). Tellis (2020) also remarked, "the U.S. interests will not be served by treating U.S.-China competition as a zero-sum game" (40), and "if the United States is to protect its primacy in the face of continuing competition with China, it must behave like a responsible hegemonic power" (43). Actually, Kissinger (2011) highlighted the US-China relations by saying that "while the Western tradition prized the decisive clash of forces emphasizing feats of heroism, the Chinese ideal stressed subtlety, indirectness, and the patient accumulation of relative advantage" (23). To illustrate, weiqi or go (in Japanese) and chess, which are two typical intellectual games in China and the West are compared, with the former aiming at seeking relative advantage via strategic encirclement or flexible campaigns and the latter aiming at a total victory by means of single-minded confrontation. "In the end," Kissinger (2011) predicted, "history lauds not conflicts of societies but their reconciliations" (548). In summary, on the surface, the US-China conflicts resemble those between the former Soviet Union and the US during the Cold War (1945-1991) in the degree of severity. In nature, however, the conflicts between China which seeks non-alignment and the US with quite a number of allies are more like subtle games.

Concerns over the "Thucydides' Trap"

It was Harvard Kennedy School Professor Graham Allison (2012) who found that "in 11 of 15 cases since 1500 where a rising power emerged to challenge a ruling power, war occurred" (para. 7). The term "Thucydides' trap" was thus coined and applied to the US-China case in the present-day world. By coining the term, Allison was concerned whether the US and China could escape the Thucydides' Trap or not. China as a 5,000-year-oldcivilization with 1.4 billion people "is not a problem to be fixed, but a chronic condition to be managed over a generation," which demands "a depth of mutual understanding…by leaders and publics alike, than anyone has yet imagined" (Allison 2015, 6). Allison (2017) reiterated his concern about the possibility of war between the US and China. Allison notes that there are two significant factors for a war in-between big powers. The first

is a shift in the balance of power, in which the rising state gradually replaces the established one, and the second is the fear that motivates the established power to take pre-emptive measures to avoid the perceived threat. To Allison, his Thucydides' Trap offers the best lens through which to clarify the dynamics of the relationship between the US and China today.

There have been both proponents and opponents regarding the application of the "Thucydides' trap" in the US-China conflicts in particular and the US-China bilateral relations in general. To support his own argument, Allison (2017) cited the challenge posed by Germany to Britain before World War I, suggesting that there exist great similarities in the growing contest between Germany and Britain yesterday and the increasing conflict between the US and China today. While modifying the Thucydides' Trap to an economic Thucydides' Trap, Lau (2019) remarked that the major cause for the US-China trade war is the growing battle between the US and China for global economic and geo-strategic dominance. There is also the interpretation for the current tit-for-tat US-China trade war, "which brings about the notion of the economic 'Thucydides' Trap'—that a trade war could erupt when a rising economic power challenges the hegemony of the incumbent power" (Moosa 2020, 51). In addition, Bartosiak (2020) noted that the "Thucydides Trap" can be applied to the context of the US-China relations. To him, the US is becoming increasingly concerned about China's growing economic power and military capabilities, fearing that a rising China may challenge its primacy, especially the existing security architecture in the Pacific Rim. Meanwhile, China is also concerned that the US presence will "limit the legitimate growth of Chinese power and influence" (para. 8). Actually, there is a second trap in the "Thucydides' Trap. In the beginning, neither Sparta nor Athens wanted war, but their allies and vassal states managed to convince them of a so-called inevitable war. In brief, the key trigger in the "Thucydides' Trap is the excessive internal or external "reaction to the fear of losing one's power status and prospects for future development" (para. 9). Thus, it is not surprising for Allison and others to look to the Peloponnesian War because there is evidence that another power transition is going on with China "rising relative to the US in many direct and latent indicators of national power" (Desch 2022, 2).

Critically, the majority of Chinese scholars "reject the so-called metaphor from history and regard this simplistic historical analogy as the newest version of the longstanding 'China Threat Theory'" (Mo and Chen 2016, 4). History shows that it is unlikely that a rising China will start a war. China has never projected its military power as conquerors or colonialists in any country over its 5,000-year history. During the Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties, when the estimated GDP of China reached 60-70 percent of the

global total, China's navy made seven great journeys to distant lands to display the power of a Middle Kingdom while carrying out trade and cultural exchanges. Moreover, "it makes no sense for China to wage war as the world's major trading nation, and China knows well that "trade works best in a stable international environment. War is disruptive to trade, especially when China's trade embraces the whole world" (Queripel 2022, para. 3). Thus, it is found that Allison's application and the 1914/2014 analogy "anachronistic and fatalistic at best, if not outright misleading and confusing" because they "attempt to equate the situation of contemporary actors with that of key players prior to World War I regardless of contextual differences" (Chong and Hall 2014, 42).

Peters, et al. (2022) hold the idea that the "Thucydides' Trap" is ethnocentric, which "exhibits a flawed misunderstanding of China's cultural context and fails to represent a significantly useful tool as concerns the depiction of the future trajectory of the US-China relations" (1504). It is ethnocentric in that western history prioritizes a history which primarily concerns the growth of Western powers and the continuation of Western supremacy by all means. Unlike the "conflict and confrontation" style of Western thinking, the Chinese philosophical concepts of "unity of heaven and man", "Yin and Yang Dialectics", "win-win", and "a community with a shared future of mankind" explain "why China, both historically and in today's context, has chosen to 'rise peacefully'" (1504). According to Kouskouvelis (2017), the "Thucydides' Trap" is distorted for two reasons. "First, because the historic analogy used by Allison is wrong. Second, because there is no such a thing in Thucydides' text as a trap, determining outcomes. If there is a trap, this is related to wrong decision making" (para. 6). Thus, we see criticism on the incompatibility of the "Thucydides' Trap" when it is applied to the US-China case.

Furthermore, Wu (2024) found that there exists a substantial gap between the US and China in naval, aerial, and missile capabilities, which suggests that "while concerns and tensions exist, the likelihood of confrontation in the next decade remains low due to China's defensive military strategy, combined with its emphasis on economic development and peaceful rise" (1). As a result, it is emphasized that "grand strategies based upon balance of power may prove more feasible and successful than those based upon some form of power maximization for the United States to manage its rivalry with China in this century without blundering into the "Thucydides trap," simply because after all war is a choice (Desch 2022, 7).

From the above, we can see that the "Thucydides' Trap", on the one hand, won academic support as a lens to delve into historical cases with a rising power challenging a ruling one and a warning for the US to take all

necessary measures against the possible displacement of its global supremacy by China. On the other hand, the "Thucydides' Trap" contains incompatibility which lies in three aspects. First, the context is different as history is dynamic. Second, the players are not the same, and today's US and China equal no other countries in history in other parts of the world. Finally, the gap in military capacities between the US and China is substantial, and, the most important factor to be taken into consideration, is the value system of those decision-makers of military operations. Therefore, to disentangle sophisticated knots of conflict in-between the US and China, it is necessary to make a comprehensive and in-depth investigation into both the communication strategies in response to the gaming intentions of both sides and the relevant determining cultural roots so that the much-awaited predictions of the US-China relation developments can be insightfully and meaningfully made.

Research Questions

This book mainly consists of 4 chapters, and the research questions (RQ) for each chapter are as follows:

Chapter 1 On the Construction of Indigenous Chinese Communication Theories: An Analysis of the Cultural Roots:

RQ1: What are the representative indigenous Chinese communication theories based on a comprehensive review and conceptual analysis of the existent literature?

RQ2: How do the representative indigenous Chinese communication theories reveal the Chinese cultural roots?

RQ3: How do the representative indigenous Chinese communication theories contribute to the conceptual advancement of the Chinese cultural discourse system?

Chapter 2 Construction of a Water and Game Theory for Intercultural Communication:

RQ1: What are the Chinese cultural and philosophical roots for the construction of the water and game theory for intercultural communication in this study?

RQ2: What is the situation of the native ICC theory construction among Chinese scholars like and what are their strengths and weaknesses?

RQ3: How is the water and game theory constructed and how is it applicable to intercultural communication?

Chapter 3 A Cross-cultural Analysis of a Series of China-US Game Cases:

RQ1: What are the gaming intentions and communication strategies that illustrate the relevant assumptions in the water and game theory for intercultural communication?

RQ2: What are the cultural roots for the adopted gaming intentions and communication strategies in the US-China TV anchor debate case?

Chapter 4 Thucydides' Trap and Online Readers' Reviews of Two Books on Zheng He's Voyages:

RQ1: What are the emerged themes of the online readers' reviews?

RQ2: How do the online readers' reviews reveal their understanding of China's roles in the world yesterday, today, and tomorrow?

RQ3: How do the online readers' reviews shed light on an understanding of China and the Chinese people, the evaluation of the trustworthiness of Thucydides' trap, and valuable lessons for the US–China relationship?

Significance of the Research

"The China-US relations are one of the most complex and important bilateral relations in the world, the complexity and importance of which have brought about unlimited imagination and research space to the development trend of the bilateral relations" (Xie 2019, iii). Furthermore, the bilateral relations are of paramount significance to not only the two countries per se but the rest of the world as well. With the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic spreading out world-wide, blames of "China virus" and warnings of "China threat" have picked up new momentum. To add fuel to the flames, there have been increasingly intensified conflicts between China and the US from trade to politics, to high-tech, and to ideology, which seem to accelerate the steps of materializing Allison's (2012, 2015, 2017) "Thucydides' trap" hypothesis that war is inevitable between the rising power of China and established power of the US. With the Biden Administration in power, which "will continue its confrontational policy towards Beijing…and mobilize the US network of alliances to contain China" (Jakóbowski, 2020, para. 1), the China-US confrontations are becoming all the more complicated and intense. In actuality, the competitive and gaming activities between China as the biggest developing country and the US as the biggest developed country have become headline-grabbing, affecting the nerves of the rest of the world virtually on a daily basis.

The rationale of the present study lies in two aspects: On the one hand, the research findings can help addressing the urgent inquiries from those on the US side, those still hesitant to choose sides, and even those who do not want to choose sides, concerning the predictions of the China-US relation developments. Awareness of the general tendencies of the communication

strategies and gaming intentions of both China and the US may bring about the highly-needed tranquility and rationality in the interpretations of the China-US relation developments among ordinary people and decision-making process of the relevant world leaders at various levels. On the other hand, the findings can facilitate people's understanding of both the myriad of strategies in response to various kinds of gaming intentions with the Art of War soaking the Chinese blood and the US commitment to maintaining its world supremacy at any costs and, more importantly, the cultural roots for these undertakings.

Structure of the Book

Besides the introduction, which presents the academic background for this research project, the research questions of the four major chapters, the significance of the research, and the structure of the entire book, the remainder of the book contains four chapters. Chapter 1 makes a comprehensive review and conceptual analysis of a series of representative indigenous Chinese communication theories to explore their cultural roots and interpret their contributions to the conceptual advancement of the Chinese cultural discourse system. Chapter 2 traces the thematic resonances of the water image in the Chinese conventional culture so as to explore the Chinese communication strategies in the face of regular and irregular game intentions. Chapter 3 looks into the cultural roots of the communication strategies and gaming intentions in an unprecedented US–China TV anchor debate through the theoretical lenses of the cultural game theory, water and game theory for intercultural communication, and the cultural analysis model. Chapter 4 analyzes 458 online readers' reviews of two books on Zheng He's seven voyages to reveal their understanding of China's roles in the world and shed light on an understanding of China and the Chinese people, the evaluation of the trustworthiness of Thucydides' trap, and valuable lessons for the US–China bilateral relations. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the research findings, discusses the theoretical and practical implications, and puts forward suggestions for future research based on the limitations of this research project.

CHAPTER 1

ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF INDIGENOUS CHINESE COMMUNICATION THEORIES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL ROOTS

Introduction

Dominant communication theories have been constructed almost entirely by Western scholars, which are meant for readers from the West, explaining and predicting human interactions mostly in the Western contexts. However, Western universalism is "far from being a panacea and is unlikely to resolve…cultural problems that underlie the clash of civilizations" (Gu 2016, 787). For years, non-Western communication theories have been developed in response to the mainstream paradigm of Eurocentrism or the dilemma of "global paradox"—"the more globalized the world is, the more powerful its smallest players will be" (Chen 2009a, 398). Thus, there is an outcry that the discipline of communication studies needs more diversity by embracing, with open arms, non-Western lenses in perspectives, methods, and research practices.

Broadly speaking, the academia has witnessed a myriad of geo-epistemological dynamics underpinning the global commitment to reassessing Eurocentrism and the enhanced emphasis on discipline diversity and circulation of knowledge such as Afrocentricity (e.g., Asante 1980, 2001) and Asia-centricity (e.g., Chen 2004; Dissanayake 2003; Miike 2003a, 2010). Specifically speaking, Chinese scholars at home and abroad (e.g., Chen 2009a; Du 2007; Gu 2016; Jia and Ji 2018; Shao and Yao 2016, 2020; Shi 2010, 2018) have been making outstanding contributions to the indigenization of communication studies and construction of indigenous communication theories to develop a Chinese cultural discourse system based on harmonious systems of power, control, agency, and resistance in a dynamic push-pull process. "Indigenous," as defined by online Merriam-Webster dictionary, means "produced or occurring natively or naturally in a particular region or environment." By "indigenous Chinese communication

theories," we refer to communication theories produced or constructed natively in the social and cultural environments of Chinese mainland.

Since sufficient ink has been spilt in the counteracting endeavors towards the dominant Eurocentric paradigm from both the broad and narrow perspectives which are briefly described above and which will be elaborately discussed below, this chapter aims to make a comprehensive review and conceptual analysis of a series of representative indigenous Chinese communication theories to explore their cultural roots and interpret their contributions to the conceptual advancement of the Chinese cultural discourse system. To this end, the following research questions (RQ) are raised:

RQ1: What are the representative indigenous Chinese communication theories based on a comprehensive review and conceptual analysis of the existent literature?

RQ2: How do the representative indigenous Chinese communication theories reveal the Chinese cultural roots?

RQ3: How do the representative indigenous Chinese communication theories contribute to the conceptual advancement of the Chinese cultural discourse system?

Review of Literature

For the purposes of this study, the review of literature draws from and contributes to three categories of existing scholarship:

Paradigm Shifts from Eurocentrism to Afrocentricity and to Asia-centricity

There have been paradigm shifts from Eurocentrism to Afrocentricity and further to Asia-centricity in communication studies. The term "paradigm" originated from the Greek word *paradeigma*, meaning "pattern" or "a philosophical or theoretical framework of any kind" according to the online Merriam-Webster dictionary. Kuhn (1962) first popularized "paradigm" as "some accepted examples of actual scientific practice," which "provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research" (10). To Kuhn, a paradigm provides scientists or researchers with a consensus about ontological commitments, explanatory principles, and general methodology for their exemplary experiments and observations on the one hand. On the other hand, a paradigm shift may bring about a scientific revolution as "successive transition from one paradigm to another via revolution is the usual developmental pattern of mature science" (Kuhn

1970, 12). Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined a paradigm as a basic set of beliefs or worldview that guides a research action or an investigation, which consists of epistemology, ontology, methodology, and axiology. Vlăduțescu (2013) listed three communication paradigms together with their respective influential periods: the Linear-Transmission-Action Paradigm (1940-1965), the Circular-Interactional Paradigm (1965-2000), and the Variable Geometry-Constructive-Transactional Paradigm (1990-present). Influential as the paradigms are, the communication discipline still "needs internal sturdiness and external esteem" (2).

Just as Craig (1999) observed, although there are 8 traditional categories of theories: rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, socio-psychological, socio-cultural, critical, and pragmatic, "there are no common goals that unite them" (119-120). Therefore, he called for overarching meta-theoretical constitutive approaches materialized in traditions to "reconstructing communication theory for a dialogical-dialectical field" (119). To him, "the complementarities and tensions among traditions," via dialogue, can generate "a theoretical meta-discourse about communication in society" (120). This is why Eurocentrism as a paradigm has frequently attracted critical reflections or discursive reconsiderations in communication studies.

Ishii (2001) stated, the field of communication studies in the 20th century has been one-sidedly dominated by U.S. Eurocentric, individualistic, efficiency-oriented, positivistic theory and research. Therefore, "Euro-modernity might fashion its testable theories and transcendent truths" from the non-West or the Global South including Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania "as a place of parochial wisdom or reservoirs of historical, natural, and ethnographic minutiae" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012, 1). Finding that critical reflections upon other cultures provide us with a meta-level perspective to understand ourselves more deeply, Dutta and Pal (2020) emphasized the need for theorizing from the Global South.

To expand the current Eurocentric communication paradigm, Asante (1980), first proposed the concept of "Afrocentricity," which marked the birth of a new paradigm of scholarship. Asante (2001) defined Afrocentricity as a manner of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. He advocated remedying Eurocentrism in communication studies by using Africa's own cultural foundation to construct Afrocentricity. Asante (2003) was fully aware that, as a worldview, Euro-centricity turns into Eurocentrism "when it imposed its cultural particularity as universal while denying and degrading other cultural views" (61). Thus, he was redressing Eurocentrism by correcting its shortcomings and expanding it with Afrocentricity. Just as Chawane (2016) remarked, "as a cry for recognition of an African point of view and Africa's role and

contribution to world history," Afrocentricity "does not call for the replacement but correction of existing Eurocentric perspectives" (99).

As a communication paradigm, Afrocentricity has made "a revolutionary shift in thinking as a structural adjustment to black disorientation, decenteredness, and lack of agency" (Asante 2009, para. 3). The proponents have developed robust and complex theoretical and methodological frameworks for such research topics as "Afrocentricity and ancient civilization," "slavery and colonialism," "racism," and "identity". According to Pellerin (2012), operating under the umbrella of a paradigm, Afrocentricity is "the philosophical and theoretical construct in the discipline of Africana Studies where laws, generalizations, methodologies, and theories are created" (150).

To follow suit, Miike (2003a) proposed "Asia-centricity" as another communication paradigm to offer alternative interpretations of Asian cultures and communication. To him, Asian culture must be the theoretical source of Asian communication. When describing, analyzing and understanding the premise and behavior of Asian communication, Asian culture itself should be placed at the center of exploration. Eurocentrism to him "is derived from European experiences and contexts;" therefore, it should not be "framed and projected as universally applicable" (Miike 2006, 5). While it is meant to generate theory and research that can resonate thoroughly with Asian experiences, Asia-centricity does not deny the value of other non-Asia-centric perspectives on Asians, and it "rejects the hegemonic idea that non-Asian-centric theoretical standpoints are superior to Asian-centric ones" (Miike 2003b, 57). To avoid becoming hegemonic or an Asian version of ethnocentric Eurocentrism, he proposed a series of Asia-centric research objectives, content dimensions, and methodological considerations.

Asia-centricity has also received controversial feedback. Eguchi (2013) found it problematic to "conceptualize Asia as a single, fixed, and static category," and Asia is too diverse for Asia-centricity to "embrace 'multiple' Asian voices" (103). Nonetheless, "Asia-centricity is powerful to critically question the domination of Western thinking in communication theories and methods" (102). In fact, thriving theoretical extensions and empirical studies have been witnessed in such significant cultural concepts as "harmony," "reciprocity," "relationality," "circularity," and "modesty" and research fields as "Asian Studies" and "Asian Women's Studies" (Yin, 2009).

To sum up, with the introductions of "Afrocentricity" and "Asia-centricity", both Asante and Miike have successfully awakened the African and Asian people to re-evaluate Eurocentrism and obtain their own

"discourse power" or "right of speech". Dissanyake (2003) agreed by saying that "a deep understanding of Asian approaches to communication will serve to widen the field of communication and extend its discursive boundaries" (27). However, there is the caveat that any research that only highlights the regional features or ethnic color is bound to expose its one sidedness and narrowness (M. D. Gu, personal communication, June 21, 2019). Chen (2004) advised: "Only through the development and identification of sound localization…, can the Chinese communication research embrace its bright and optimistic prospects" (21). Therefore, we also insist on understanding the thoughts and behaviors of the Chinese people and constructing indigenous Chinese communication theories by focusing on their cultural values within the Chinese cultural contexts.

Chinese Cultural Roots and Communication Preferences

Scholars (e.g., Chu 1988; Jia and Ji 2018; Wang 2011) found, the Chinese traditional culture is based on Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. While Confucianism proposes positive and progressive ideas for making contributions to the society, Buddhism advocates the doctrines of reincarnation of life and death and making sacrifices for the life after death. Taoism emphasizes the notions of observing the natural laws and adopting non-actions for social progress and personal good health, thus forming the three major philosophical systems in the traditional Chinese culture (Wang, 2011).

Meanwhile, the contemporary Chinese culture is characteristic of adopting Marxism-Leninism, Maoism, and Deng Xiaoping Theory as the soul, treating the Chinese ways of life as the essence and Western science and technology for practical purposes (Jia and Ji 2018). In other words, China is now practicing socialism with Chinese characteristics, which can be illustrated with its "Economic Reform and Opening Up to the Outside World" policy since 1979 and the "One Belt, One Road" initiative since 2013. While the policy boosted China's overall economic growth, improved the nation's welfare level, and substantially integrated China into the international community, the initiative together with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has attracted 138 members in terms of countries and organizations so far. The main contributing factors lie in that the initiative consists of a core concept of win-win cooperation, three communities of building an interest community of political mutual trust, economic integration, cultural inclusion, a community of responsibility and a community of destiny and five links of policy communication, facility interconnection, smooth trade, capital finance, and sharing the same