Sul Global, 7 (1): 04-34, 2026

SELECTIVE CONTESTATION OR SYSTEMIC WAR? SATISFACTION, CAPABILITIES, AND THE SINO-AMERICAN POWER TRANSITION

Bruno Hendler
Professor de Relações Internacionais da UFRGS. E-mail: bruno.hendler@ufrgs.br

Gabriela Tamiris Rosa Corrêa
Doutoranda em Economia Política Internacional (PEPI-UFRJ).

Vitória Assunção Kulmann Cleveston
Graduanda em Relações Internacionais (UFRGS).

Introduction

China´s rise is the core geopolitical process of the 21st century, both in terms of material capabilities and systemic governance. The rapid narrowing gap between US and China and the occurrence of the trade and technology war have sparked debate on the structural pressures that might lead to conflict, frequently framed under the "Thucydides Trap" (ALLISON, 2017). For Power Transition Theory (PTT), however, material redistribution is only one of the explanatory elements for war, as the rising power's satisfaction with the rules of the prevailing order is also crucial. According to Organski (1968) dissatisfaction increases as the ascending power reaches material parity with the dominant one .

However, the contemporary transition presents a counterintuitive scenario. Instead of acting as the guarantor of the global order, the United States has adopted a posture of institutional isolation and revisionism on multilateral commitments. The country has withdrawn from dozens of international institutions and reduced funding under the rationale that the prevailing system promotes globalist interests at the expense of US priorities. The Secretary of State himself, Marco Rubio, stated that the liberal international order has been unfair to the US (LITTLE, 2026; WALDENBERG, 2026; WARD; VOLCOVICI, 2026), indicating a dominant state's dissatisfaction with the order that it built and shaped.

Thus, this article proposes a two-dimensional model to analyze the contemporary transition, disaggregating material capabilities and satisfaction between the dominant power and the rising power. We argue that material parity, accompanied by the "transitional friction" generated by mutual threat perceptions, produces trajectories ranging from systemic contestation to peaceful transition. Although the model considers both actors, the focus falls on Chinese satisfaction, a critical variable for the current transition: facing a dominant power that abdicates its role as guarantor, the challenger's posture may determine whether the order moves toward collapse, reform or preservation.

Our findings show that while China and the United States are converging toward material parity, this shift is asymmetric. China holds an advantage in real-economy output and capital formation, whereas the US maintains dominance in global finance and military power. This narrowing material gap has not led to a linear rise in Chinese dissatisfaction. Instead of seeking systemic subversion, Beijing adopts a strategy of selective contestation. In the norms and identity sphere, China remains largely satisfied or neutral, using speeches to defend core principles like sovereignty and the UN system. On the other hand, dissatisfaction remains concentrated in the international political economy, but China's response leans heavily toward institutional reform and, increasingly since 2017, the introduction of its own parallel concepts and initiatives.

This study is organized into three main steps: (1) first, an analysis and refinement of PTT; (2) second, the measurement of Sino-American material parity in the twenty-first century; and (3) third, a quanti-qualitative analysis of China's speeches at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) between 2001-2024 to determine whether its discursive patterns signal satisfaction, systemic

subversion, or selective contestation. The UNGA serves as a primary forum for expressing international opinion, where states articulate positions, evaluate institutions, and project influence (JANKIN; BATURO; DASANDI, 2025). The timeframe for this analysis begins in 2001 - the year of China's accession to the World Trade Organization - marking both a pivotal moment in its integration into the liberal order and a baseline period of higher potential satisfaction with the international system.

The Theory of the Transition of Power: premises, advances and gaps

Organski's (1968) book *World Politics* goes unnoticed by a large part of International Relations textbooks. Overshadowed by Morgenthau's classical realism and, later, by Waltz's structural realism at the height of the Cold War, PTT introduced theoretical-methodological advances that influence our understanding of contemporary US-China competition. PTT differs from realism (which focuses on stability through the balance of power) by emphasizing the transition movement and the circumstances that lead to systemic war, rather than conditions of equilibrium. Its central problem lies in the probability of systemic war amid the rise of a challenging power, since, as Chan (2008) summarizes, conflict becomes imminent when the rising power reaches or surpasses the prevailing leader. Below, we present the premises of this approach:

(i) Definition and measurement of power: Organski (1968, p. 112) defines power as "the ability to influence the behavior of others in accordance with one's own interests" converging with the realist views of Morgenthau and Waltz. The author lists natural elements (geography, resources, and population) and social elements (economic, political, and national moral development) as components of national power - defined in contemporary versions as mobilizable manpower, economic productivity, and political system effectiveness (TAMMEN et al., 2000). PTT's proposal consists of measuring capabilities that estimate the probability of future conflicts, going beyond performance in past confrontations. This engagement with quantitative methods, consolidated in *The War Ledger* (ORGANSKI; KUGLER, 1980), aligns closely with the *Composite Index of National Capability (CINC),* created in 1972, which measures a country's percentage share of the world total across six major indicators: a) iron and steel production; b) primary energy consumption; c) military expenditure; d) military personnel; e) total population; and f) urban population.

(ii) Mobility in the hierarchy of power: Organski (1968) proposes a stage-based view of history, a common approach among authors of his time. For him, the rise of emerging powers requires "transitional power growth," characterized by demographic, industrial, and political-bureaucratic transformations that result in greater urbanization and state capacity for the efficient allocation of resources. The asymmetry between mature and transitioning powers would explain potential conflicts, such as the Cold War between the US and USSR, and the Anglo-German tension that culminated in World War I. States, therefore, do not move according to balance of power or automatic alignments (bandwagoning), as realism predicts, but according to differentials in industrialization and their impacts on the redistribution of systemic power. Although classical indicators are insufficient for analyzing power in the twenty-first century, PTT's contribution lies in its method: "transitional friction" (ALLISON, 2017) - the systemic stress generated by the perception of threat - between established and emerging powers is a historical pattern that demands empirical analysis.

(iii) Transition of power as an object of study: Transition becomes an object of analysis when the reduction of asymmetry in power indicators culminates in "transitional friction". This concept derives not only from the tendency toward parity, but from the perception of threat generated in both actors. The dominant state tends to act preemptively, labeling the emerging power as revisionist. The emerging power, in turn, perceives the leader as an obstacle to its rise, attributing to it adjectives such as imperialist or interventionist.

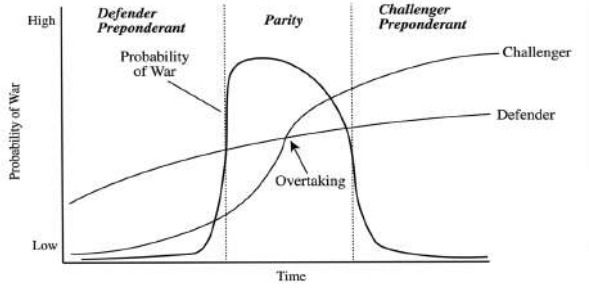
(iv) Outcomes of the transition of power: A transition can culminate in transitional war or in coexistence via negotiated transition. In the first

scenario, transitional friction establishes a "bullying-paranoia" cycle [1](WOMACK, 2006), in which the dominant state undermines the challenger's rise, and the challenger develops a growing perception of containment. In the second, the transition is mediated by the accommodation of expectations and mutual concessions, avoiding large-scale confrontation.

(v) The degree of satisfaction with the international order: Satisfaction with the system is, in theory, directly proportional to the position occupied in the hierarchy of countries. Organski (1968, p. 112) defines the concept as the "moment when nations are satisfied with the present order and its rules, because they understand it to be the best chance they have of achieving their goals". One criticism of classical PTT lies in its fusion of the dominant power with the international order, which tends to attribute full satisfaction to it. Contemporary versions admit gray zones mediated by bilateral relations, alliances, economic interdependence, and shared values (TAMMEN et al., 2017): the dominant power is not necessarily a defender of the status quo, nor is the emerging power necessarily a challenger, especially if its rise occurs within the rules of the system (CHAN, 2008). Thus, PTT's fundamental contribution lies in emphasizing the centrality of satisfaction to systemic stability, even though its empirical delimitation remains a challenge.

(vi) Conditions for the outbreak of transitional war: Based on the foregoing, it can be seen that transitional war requires two necessary conditions: the reduction of asymmetry in capabilities, which generates transitional friction, and a tendency toward dissatisfaction in at least one of the actors. In purely material terms, the probability of conflict increases as asymmetry decreases, remaining elevated even after overtaking, as shown in Figure 1.

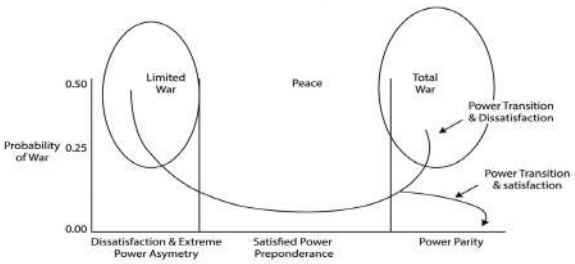
Figure 1. The timing of the war (considering only material capabilities)



Source: TAMMEN (2000, p. 28).

Furthermore, PTT distinguishes two types of conflict according to who initiates it and the correlation of forces: limited or preventive war, triggered by the dominant power in contexts of dissatisfaction combined with extreme power asymmetry, aimed at halting the competitor's rise; and total or systemic war, resulting from dissatisfaction combined with parity of capabilities, tending to be initiated by the emerging power which, upon perceiving itself materially capable of confronting the leadership, seeks to reorder its position within the international system. Figure 2 below illustrates this dynamic.

Figure 2. Conditions for Limited War and Total War



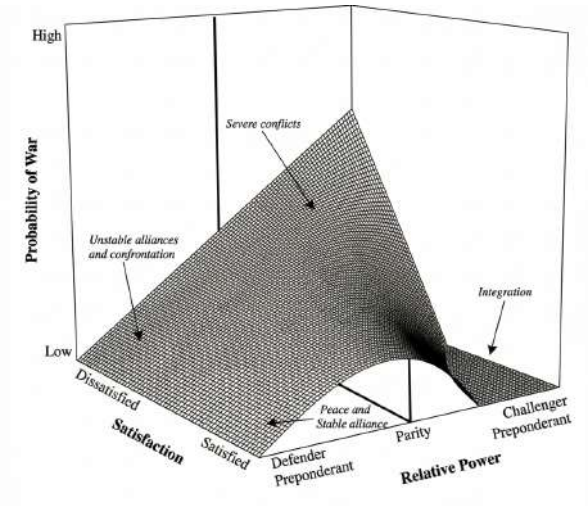
Source: TAMMEN; KUGLER; LEMKE (2017, p. 30).

The integration of power capabilities and degrees of satisfaction allows the probability of

[1] A concept from Brantly Womack's Asymmetry Theory, mobilized here to understand PTT's "transitional friction": the narrowing of capabilities intensifies perceptions of threat on both sides. The dominant power tends toward imposition ("bullying"), and the rising power reacts with heightened perceptions of threat ("paranoia"), generating a vicious cycle of mutual mistrust. The connection between Asymmetry Theory and PTT is not drawn by Womack himself, since his model emphasizes stable relations between asymmetric poles of power, whereas PTT focuses on the study of transition between two poles. Nevertheless, we consider this dialogue valid, since the bullying-paranoia dynamic can be applied to cases of power transition.

war to be measured under fundamental premises: (1) the closer the parity of power, the greater the chance of conflict; (2) the risk of war rises as the actors' dissatisfaction with the bilateral relationship or with the system increases; (3) war becomes even more likely when dissatisfaction persists after the overtaking in capabilities, a stage in which the emerging power (now dominant) faces the challenge of integrating its former competitor through a negotiated peace, at the risk of raising the potential for confrontation. In this context, the intermediate probability of war corresponds to the scenario in which both the preponderant and emerging powers are dissatisfied and in a balance of power, while the high-probability scenario occurs when the challenger assumes primacy and the former leader remains dissatisfied or unable to accommodate itself to the new order. The chart below shows this scenario.

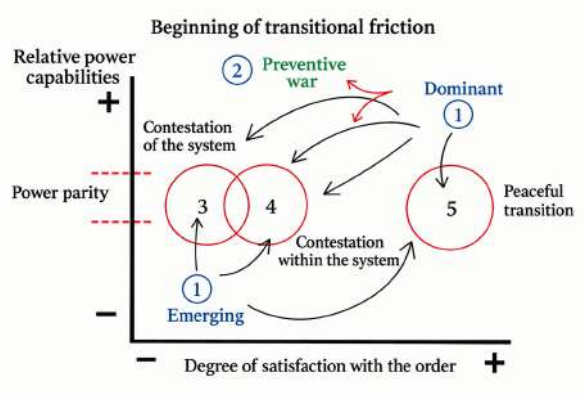
Figure 3. The evolution of the probability of conflict in the transition of power



Source: TAMMEN (2000, p. 26).

However, this diagram presents a gap in that it does not distinguish the individual degrees of satisfaction of the emerging power and the dominant power, treating satisfaction as a variable of the relationship between them. In other words, the image points to the difference in relative power between the dominant and emerging powers (capabilities), but not to the difference in their degree of satisfaction (that is, in their wills and their desire to maintain or contest the order). In light of this limitation, we propose a model that distinguishes the dominant and emerging powers also in terms of their respective degrees of satisfaction, as shown in the image below.

Figure 4. Transition scenarios considering relative power capacities and the degree of individual satisfaction with order



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Figure 4 details the dynamic interaction between capabilities and satisfaction, allowing visualization of the actors' trajectory as power asymmetry decreases. In the initial stage, represented by **Points 1**, the difference in capabilities is at its maximum: the dominant state occupies the top of the hierarchy with full satisfaction, while the emerging power sits at the bottom in both power and satisfaction. **Point 2** indicates the moment when the dominant power, perceiving the threat to its primacy, shifts toward the pole of dissatisfaction and uses its material superiority to attempt a preventive war against the challenger. As asymmetry decreases, the cost of initiating conflict rises and the system enters a dynamic of trifurcating possibilities. From this point, we propose three scenarios (**Points 3, 4, and 5**) based on ideal types of transition that have already occurred in the international system, ranging between total contestation of the system (3), contestation within the order (4), and negotiated peaceful transition (5).

1. Peaceful and negotiated transition (Point 5): Exemplified by the relationship between England and the United States (1870-1945), this scenario is characterized by a negotiated transition, driven by coalitions against common enemies, shared values, economic interdependence, or the absence of a clash

between their primary interests. The pattern of this transition is the opposite of the "bullying-paranoia" dynamic: the dominant state accepts a secondary position while preserving significant gains, without obstructing the challenger's rise, while the emerging power makes concessions and accepts a gradual transition in order to avoid acute friction.

2. Contestation and revisionism in the system (Point 4): Exemplified by Germany's relations with England and Russia (1870-1914), this intermediate case occurs when the reduction of asymmetry in capabilities encourages the emerging power to seek a leading role and influence in shaping the system, without intending its complete subversion. The dominant power (compelled to recognize the challenger's new status) oscillates between movements of accommodation and containment, generating a spiral of mistrust that, in the Anglo-German case, culminated in a naval arms race and inter-industrial competition; in the eastern scenario, it manifested itself in support for regional actors in the Balkans - such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire (backed by Germany) and Serbia (backed by Russia) - resulting in rigid alliances that served as the spark for World War I.

Wilhelm II's Weltpolitik illustrates the pursuit of "a place in the sun" among the colonial powers without contesting the legitimacy of the prevailing order. Elements such as the dynastic ties between European royal families and their shared aversion to progressive ideologies suggested that geopolitical management could mitigate diplomatic friction and accommodate colonial ambitions through negotiation. However, the escalation in perceptions of mutual threat strained the system and overwhelmed its mechanisms of concertation, culminating in the triggering of alliances and the subsequent systemic conflict.

3. Challenge and Revisionism of the System (Point 3): Represented by Nazi Germany's relations with England and the USSR (1933-1945), this is the most extreme case of transitional friction. Germany's trajectory was characterized by a dual contestation of the order: a geopolitical revisionism directed at the center of the system, culminating in total war, and a frontal ideological combat against the liberal order and Soviet socialism. Unlike the German Empire, which competed for positions in the neocolonial race without questioning its logic, the Nazi regime sought the complete subversion of the system.

This contestation reflects the maximum degree of dissatisfaction on the part of the emerging power, dragging the dominant powers toward the same pole of extreme dissatisfaction. While historical records suggest that World War I was seen as an avoidable diplomatic conflict (ALLISON, 2017), the same does not apply to the second world conflict. The Nazi rationale was not aimed at "a place in the sun" within the club of great empires, but at the conquest of the established powers' home territories. This acute movement of contestation made accommodation impossible and forced England to shift toward the pole of dissatisfaction, aligning itself with the USSR and seeking US support to preserve the order.

The duration of the transition constitutes a central variable in PTT, as illustrated below. We argue that **contestation of the system** tends to have a shorter duration due to the convergence between power parity and extreme dissatisfaction on both sides. In this scenario, conflict broke out after less than a decade of aggressive revisionism by Nazi Germany. In contrast, **contestation within the system extended** over a few decades before culminating in war, since the perception of mutual threat oscillated at moderate levels of dissatisfaction. Finally, the **peaceful transition** between the US and England lasted around 75 years, since the trajectory toward parity was not accompanied by perceptions of mutual threat, making the outbreak of.

Figure 5. Duration of power transition, by type



Source: Prepared by the authors.

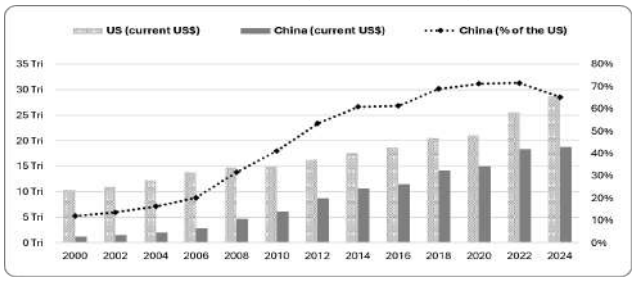
One of the main criticisms of PTT lies in the fact that its premises derive from cases predating the nuclear era. Indeed, nuclear weapons offer a shortcut to maximizing capabilities, transcending traditional factors such as demographics and industrialization. However, in dyads of nuclear asymmetry (in which only the dominant power holds such weapons, for example), the theory remains useful for explaining nuclear races for parity and the leader's preventive actions, as exemplified by the [2]Israel-Iran relationship. In dyads where both actors possess nuclear weapons, total war ceases to be a plausible outcome, given that the risk of mutual destruction discourages levels of dissatisfaction that would lead to subversion of the system through nuclear war. In this context, attention shifts to scenarios of contestation within the system (via proxy conflicts) or peaceful, negotiated transition.

Both trajectories tend to be longer than a total war. However, contestation within the system tends to be faster, since proxy wars accentuate the decline of the dominant power and the rise of the challenger. We propose interpreting the contemporary transition in light of the model developed here, with primary focus on the degree of satisfaction of the challenging state. This choice is justified by two complementary reasons. First, according to the logic of trifurcation, the nature of the transition (negotiated coexistence, contestation of the system, or systemic subversion) is conditioned, in the first instance, by the emerging power's orientation toward the order. Second, at a moment when the US shows growing reluctance to act as guarantor of the multilateral system, withdrawing from international institutions and signaling distrust toward the very order it built, the challenger's posture becomes the critical variable in determining whether the order moves toward reform or collapse. By measuring China's positioning in the UNGA General Debate (2001-2024), we seek to identify whether the country is signaling accommodation or whether the system is moving toward critical transitional friction. Before that, we analyze the trajectory of parity in Sino-American material capabilities.

Transition Trends in Sino-US Material Capabilities

For PTT, when the challenger reaches material parity with the dominant state, transitional friction is created, under which the order tends to be contested. In this section, we analyze the evolution of Sino-American capabilities in the twenty-first century, based on three material dimensions: economic, financial, and military. Our aim is to map the areas in which China has established parity (or overtaking) and where US leadership remains resilient, providing the empirical basis for the subsequent analysis of China's degree of satisfaction with the international order.

Chart 1. GDP (Current US$)



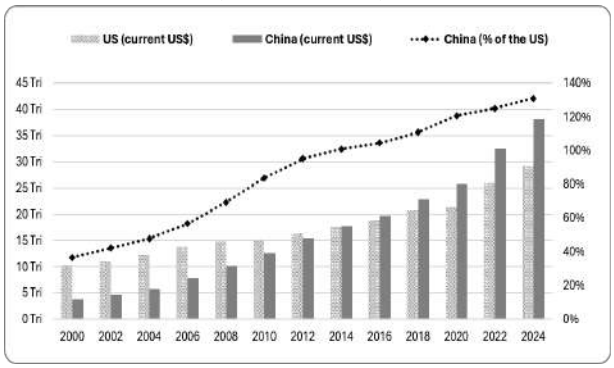
Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the WORLD BANK [2026a].

The trajectory of GDP in the current US$ reveals accelerated convergence, with China growing at a faster pace than the United States. Between 2000 and 2021, China's GDP jumped from US$1.2 to US$18.2 trillion, representing 78.07% of the US economy (which stood at US$23.3 trillion) - a movement driven by China's reorientation toward innovation-led growth after the 2008 crisis. The process of accelerated parity was accompanied by growing perceptions of threat on the part of the dominant power. This perception was formalized in official rhetoric, as

[2] The Twelve-Day War (in June 2025, between Israel and Iran) and the war initiated in February 2026 by Israel and the US against Iran, still without a clear outcome, are conflicts that can be characterized as "preventive wars." This is because, at least in the discourse of the countries that initiated them (Israel and the US), there is a clear element of urgency to halt an alleged Iranian nuclear program and to contain Iran's growing influence in the Middle East.

exemplified by John Ratcliffe, Director of National Intelligence, who argued in an article published in 2020 that China constitutes the "greatest threat to America today, and the greatest threat to democracy and freedom world-wide since World War II" (RATCLIFFE, 2020).

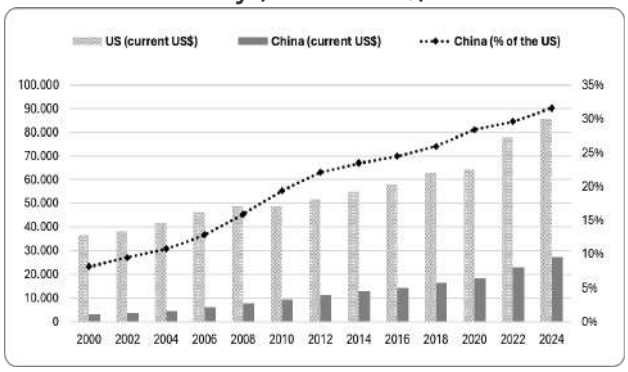
Chart 2. GDP at Purchasing Power Parity (Current US$)



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the WORLD BANK [2026b].

In terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) - that is, adjusting GDP to local prices and reflecting real purchasing power in each economy - the convergence trajectory was even faster. China overtook the United States in 2014 (US$17.7 trillion versus US$17.6 trillion) and, in 2024, represented 130.86% of the US economy (US$38.1 trillion versus US$29.1 trillion), compared to just 36.3% in 2000.

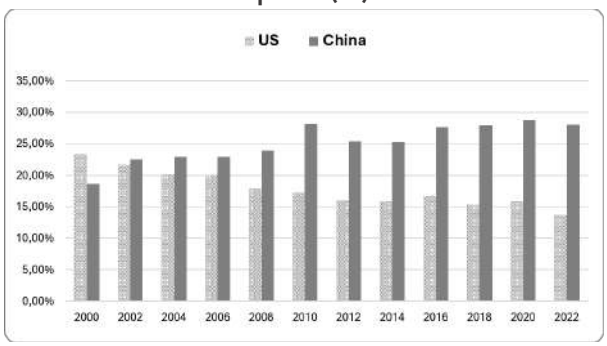
Chart 3. GDP per Capita at Purchasing Power Parity (Current US$)



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the WORLD BANK [2026c].

GDP per capita in PPP contrasts with the convergence trajectory observed in the previous charts. Although China raised its share from 8.16% in 2000 to 31.59% in 2024 (US$27.1 thousand versus US$85.8 thousand) of US GDP, driven by deliberate endogenous growth policies that lifted 800 million people out of poverty since the 1970s (WORLD BANK, 2022), the absolute gap remains large due to the size of China's population. In this sense, rapid population aging is becoming a latent concern for the Chinese Communist Party, requiring even greater leaps in productivity and technological innovation to offset the shrinking workforce and sustain the growth trajectory (IHU, 2019).

Chart 4. Domestic Value Added from High-Tech Industries as a Percentage of Total Exports (%)[3]



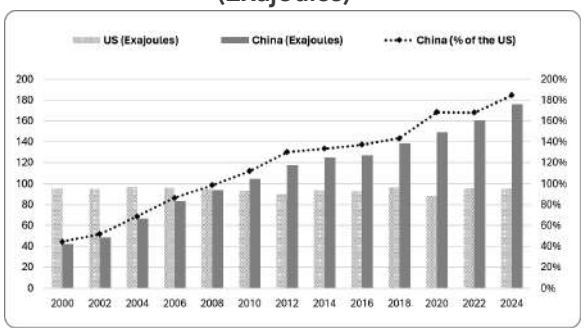
Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the OECD [2026a, 2026b].

The analysis of domestic high-tech value added in exports reveals a reversal in the global production hierarchy. In 2000, the US led with 23.32%, compared to 18.68% for China. By 2002, China had overtaken the United States (22.46% versus 21.68%), and since then the trajectories have diverged sharply: in 2022, China reached 28.05% while the US fell back to 13.70%. This indicates that China succeeded in converting its manufacturing base into an innovation platform in strategic sectors (pharmaceuticals, electronics,

[3] The chart uses the OECD (2016) taxonomy based on R&D intensity. High-technology sectors comprise: manufacture of computer equipment, electronic and optical products, and electrical equipment; manufacture of railway equipment, aircraft, military vehicles, and other transport equipment; and manufacture of chemical and pharmaceutical products (MORCEIRO, 2019). The indicator was calculated as the ratio between the sum of domestic value added in exports of these sectors and total gross national exports.

and aircraft), making the capacity to add domestic technological value the main battleground of the Sino-American transition, as argued by Accioly Filho (2025).

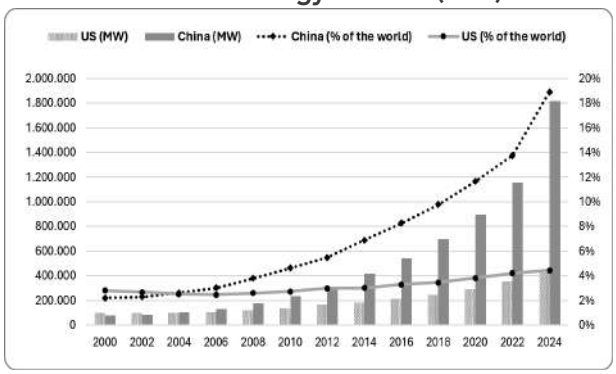
Chart 5. Primary Energy Consumption (Exajoules)[4]



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the ENERGY INSTITUTE [2026].

In the energy sector, China took the lead in primary energy consumption starting in 2009, consolidating its overtaking in the following decades. In 2024, it consumed 176.3 exajoules (184.6% of the US level, at 95.5 exajoules), representing 27.7% of the world total compared to 15% for the US. The fact that the indicator includes renewables is analytically relevant: it reflects not only high economic activity, but also China's pursuit of mitigating external energy dependence and leadership in clean energy infrastructure.

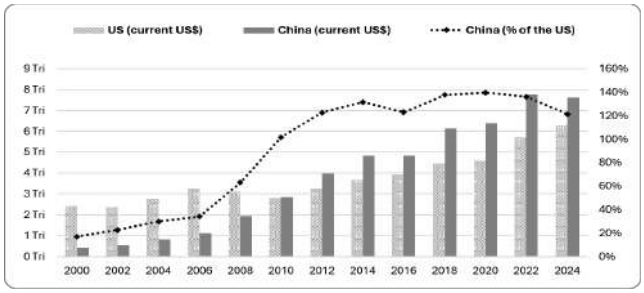
Chart 6. Installed electrical capacity from renewable energy sources (MW)



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the IRENA [2026].

The analysis of installed electrical capacity from renewable energy reveals one of the sectors in which China holds a strategic advantage. In 2004, it surpassed the US for the first time, and in 2024 it reached 1.8 million MW (424% of US capacity), representing 18.9% of the world total, compared to 4.45% for the US. From the perspective of transitional friction, this disparity is significant as it signals a progressive reduction in the emerging power's energy vulnerability, mitigating external pressure points and leading the clean energy technological frontier. China's 15th Five-Year Plan places self-sufficiency as a priority, with energy supply being one of its elements. The expectation is to increase energy production capacity by 16–20% by 2030, focusing mainly on renewables (GREEN; PARKER, 2026).

Chart 7. Gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) (current U.S. dollars)



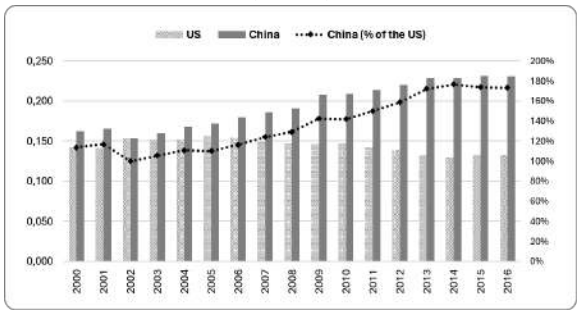
Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the WORLD BANK [2026d].

Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) reveals China's deliberate strategy of prioritizing real investment (in machinery, equipment, industrial facilities, civil construction, and infrastructure) to expand productive capacity. In 2000, Chinese GFCF represented only 16.96% of the US figure. The turning point occurred in 2010, when China overtook the US, and by 2024 its GFCF represented 121% of the American figure (US$7.6 trillion compared to US$6.2 trillion). Moreover, the average investment rate exceeding 40% of GDP over the past two decades contrasts with the US average of 21% (WORLD BANK, 2026e), reflecting distinct accumulation models: while the US is oriented toward consumption and productivity, China (as a rising power) adopts a

[4] Primary energy comprises traded fuels, including renewables used for electricity generation (ENERGY INSTITUTE, 2026).

model focused on industrial expansion and long-term productive resilience (SCHUTTE, 2021).

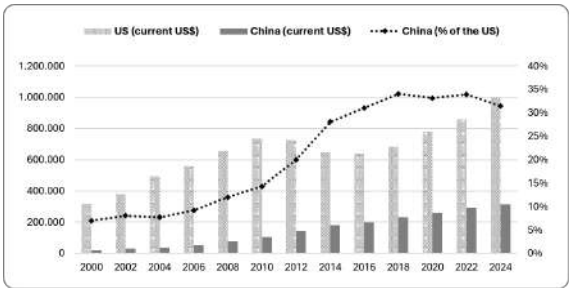
Chart 8. Composite National Capability Index (CINC)



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the COW [2026].

The Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) indicates that China already surpassed the US in gross material capability in 2000 (113.7%), widening this advantage to 173.7% by 2016 (the last available year). However, the indicator should be interpreted with caution: because it is based on variables such as population, military personnel, energy consumption, and steel production (capability metrics typical of the 20th century), the CINC tends to inflate the power of continental-sized countries. Thus, although the data show Chinese superiority in gross terms and mobilization potential, they may mask a qualitative and technological gap that can sometimes favor the US in terms of power-projection efficiency (WORLD POPULATION REVIEW, 2026).

Chart 9. Military expenditures (in millions of current U.S. dollars)



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the SIPRI [2026].

In military spending, China has progressively reduced the asymmetry relative to the US: from 6.95% of the US total in 2000 to 31.45% in 2024 (US$313.6 billion compared to US$997.3 billion). This consistent growth suggests a direct relationship between China's economic advancement and the buildup of its military capabilities. However, in absolute terms, the US remains the power that invests the most in the military sphere, while China accounts for less than a third of US spending (31.45%).

The dispute over global primacy is synthesized by Corrêa (2023), based on indicators that express the share held by China and the US in the bilateral sum of each variable. The analysis covers the economic, financial, military, and soft power dimensions across two time frames: P1 (2008 or nearby years) and P2 (2022 or nearby years). The following synthesis integrates these findings, complemented by the methodological expansion of Hendler and Corrêa (2023) for specific military indicators, with the previously detailed variables omitted.

Table 1. Relative Sino-American military capabilities (P1 and P2) – % of the bilateral total[5]

	P1		P2	
INDICATOR	**USA**	**CHINA**	**USA**	**CHINA**
Military personnel (2008 and 2019)	1,5 million **34,80%**	2,8 million **65,20%**	1,3 million **35,38%**	2,5 million **64,62%**
Number of nuclear warheads (2008 and 2022)	5.273 **95,73%**	235 **4,27%**	3.708 **91,38%**	350 **8,62%**
Number of satellites in orbit (2008 and 2022)	184 **90,64%**	19 **9,36%**	3.449 **86,44%**	541 **13,56%**
Defense budget for research, development, testing, and acquisition (RDT&A) (2008 and 2019)	US$ 76,54 bi **87%**	US$ 11,44 bi **13%**	US$ 92,63 bi **78,75%**	US$ 25 bi **21,25%**
Weapons exported (2008 and 2019)	7.144 **92,17%**	607 **7,83%**	10.888 **87,29%**	1.585 **12,71%**
Land maneuver power (2008 and 2019)	56.225 **74,39%**	19.360 **25,61%**	17.197 **46,59%**	19.716 **53,41%**
Land firepower (2008 and 2019)	7.811 **30,28%**	17.984 **69,72%**	6.594 **41,29%**	9.376 **58,71%**
Sea control (2008 and 2019)	459 **55,10%**	374 **44,90%**	377 **60,51%**	246 **39,49%**
Neval firepower (2008 and 2019)	7.712 **98,77%**	96 **1,23%**	9.322 **82,86%**	1.928 **17,14%**
Sea denial (2008 and 2019)	71 **53,38%**	62 **46,62%**	67 **53,17%**	59 **46,83%**
Air fighters (2008 and 2019)	2.847 **60,72%**	1.842 **39,28%**	1.602 **39,38%**	2.466 **60,62%**
Air firepower (2008 and 2019)	107 **96,40%**	4 **3,60%**	244 **92,78%**	19 **7,22%**

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from HENDLER; CORRÊA (2024).

The table above reveals a selective reduction in Sino-American asymmetry between P1 (2008) and P2 (2019/2022). In the land theater, through tanks, infantry combat vehicles, and anti-tank systems, China converted its position in Maneuver Power (from 25.61% to 53.41% of the bilateral total) and consolidated leadership in Firepower via artillery (58.71%). In the maritime theater, US Sea Control (60.51%) - underpinned by superiority in aircraft carriers and destroyers - and naval Firepower (82.86% of vertical launch systems) stand in contrast to a Chinese Sea Denial position that is nearly on par in submarines (46.83%). In the air theater, when filtering the Air Force's combat-capable aircraft inventory, China leads (60.62%), while the US dominates Firepower via drones (92.78%). Furthermore, the US retains superiority in nuclear warheads (91.38%), satellites in orbit (86.44%), and arms exports (87.29%). Thus, China's advances may challenge the dominant power's primacy at the regional level, but do not reverse the asymmetry at the global level.

[5] The air, maritime, and land indicators were constructed based on the Military Balance (IISS). In the land theater, Maneuver Power aggregates tanks, combat vehicles, armored transport vehicles, and anti-tank infrastructure; Firepower sums artillery and surface-to-air missiles. In the air theater, Fighters sums combat aircraft and attack helicopters; air Firepower corresponds to combat drones. In the maritime theater, Sea Control aggregates aircraft carriers, destroyers, frigates, mine vessels, amphibious ships, and other vessels; maritime Firepower corresponds to vertical launch systems; and Sea Denial refers to submarines. The values represent each country's share of the bilateral total. For full details, see Hendler and Corrêa (2024).

Table 2. Sino-American Financial Capacities (P1 and P2) -% of the Bilateral Total

	T1		T2	
INDICATOR	**USA**	**CHINA**	**USA**	**CHINA**
Relative share of the dollar and the renminbi in the bilateral stock of international reserves (2008 and 2020)	32% (world) **100% (bilateral)**	0% (world) **0% (bilateral)**	59% (world) **96,25% (bilateral)**	2,30% (world) **3,75% (bilateral)**
Relative share of the dollar and the renminbi in global foreign exchange market turnover (2010 and 2022)	85% (world) **98,84% (bilateral)**	1% (world) **1,16% (bilateral)**	88% (world) **92,63% (bilateral)**	7% (world) **7,37% (bilateral)**
Relative share as a global payments currency (2012 and 2022)	33,34% (world) **98,32% (bilateral)**	0,57% (world) **1,68% (bilateral)**	42,05% (world) **95,18% (bilateral)**	2,13% (world) **4,82% (bilateral)**
Relative net FDI (foreign direct investment) outflows (2008 and 2020)	US$ 343,5 billion **85,83%**	US$ 56,7 billion **14,17%**	US$ 271,7 billion **63,87%**	US$ 153,7 billion **36,13%**

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from HENDLER; CORRÊA (2023).

The analysis of financial capabilities in P1 and P2 reveals that, although China has expanded its influence, the international financial system remains under US structural power. In the monetary sphere, the renminbi went from having no presence as a reserve currency in 2008 to 3.75% of the bilateral sum in 2020, raising its share of the foreign exchange market to 7.37% - a significant advance, but still far from the dollar, which dominates 95.18% of bilateral global payments and 96.25% of international reserves. China's progress is more pronounced in net FDI outflows, which jumped from 14.17% to 36.13% of the bilateral sum, driven by strategies such as the Going Global Policy and the Belt and Road Initiative[6]. The transition in the financial pillar is therefore the slowest: dollar hegemony grants the US a political autonomy and sanctioning capacity that China has not yet managed to overcome, which Torres (2022) terms the "dollar bomb", an instrument of structural power that other powers cannot replicate in the short term.

Overall, the analysis reveals a multidimensional and asymmetric rise: China is consolidating itself as a dynamic pole in the real economy, with superiority in GDP at PPP, GFCF, energy consumption, and the technological sophistication of exports, as well as showing growth in the land and air theaters. The US, for its part, retains primacy in military assets (nuclear, space, and drones) and the centrality of the dollar, which grants it financial sanctioning capacity and coercive projection that China has not yet managed to surpass. This balanced scenario allows us to infer that the US and China are situated in the horizontal band of power parity, indicated on the Y-axis of Figure 4. Accordingly, in the next section, we seek to assess whether this material rise of China is accompanied by growing dissatisfaction with the prevailing order.

[6] The *Going Global Policy* (zou chuqu), launched in the early 2000s, was China's strategy to encourage the internationalization of state-owned and private enterprises through outward foreign direct investment, seeking access to natural resources, technology, and new markets. The *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)*, announced by Xi Jinping in 2013, expanded this movement by proposing a network of infrastructure, trade, and financing connecting China to more than 150 countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America, establishing itself as China's principal instrument of external economic projection in the 21st century.

The analysis of financial capabilities in P1 and P2 reveals that, although China has expanded its influence, the international financial system remains under US structural power. In the monetary sphere, the renminbi went from having no presence as a reserve currency in 2008 to 3.75% of the bilateral sum in 2020, raising its share of the foreign exchange market to 7.37% - a significant advance, but still far from the dollar, which dominates 95.18% of bilateral global payments and 96.25% of international reserves. China's progress is more pronounced in net FDI outflows, which jumped from 14.17% to 36.13% of the bilateral sum, driven by strategies such as the Going Global Policy and the Belt and Road Initiative[7]. The transition in the financial pillar is therefore the slowest: dollar hegemony grants the US a political autonomy and sanctioning capacity that China has not yet managed to overcome, which Torres (2022) terms the "dollar bomb", an instrument of structural power that other powers cannot replicate in the short term.

Overall, the analysis reveals a multidimensional and asymmetric rise: China is consolidating itself as a dynamic pole in the real economy, with superiority in GDP at PPP, GFCF, energy consumption, and the technological sophistication of exports, as well as showing growth in the land and air theaters. The US, for its part, retains primacy in military assets (nuclear, space, and drones) and the centrality of the dollar, which grants it financial sanctioning capacity and coercive projection that China has not yet managed to surpass. This balanced scenario allows us to infer that the US and China are situated in the horizontal band of power parity, indicated on the Y-axis of Figure 4. Accordingly, in the next section, we seek to assess whether this material rise of China is accompanied by growing dissatisfaction with the prevailing order.

Operationalizing Chinese (dis)satisfaction with the international order

Methodological strategy

Measuring the degree of satisfaction is one of the methodological challenges of Power Transition Theory. We propose operationalizing it through the analysis of China's official speeches at the UNGA General Debate between 2001 and 2024 - a forum recognized as a channel for international opinion, in which countries state positions, criticize or praise institutions, and seek to persuade other states (JANKIN; BATURO; DASANDI, 2025). The timeframe begins in 2001, the year China joined the World Trade Organization, a milestone in the deepening of China's integration into the liberal order and a period of presumed greater potential satisfaction with the system. The speeches were collected primarily from the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, 2002, 2005-2024), complemented by the United Nations General Assembly's webcast archive and digital library for the sessions not published in the Chinese repository (UNITED NATIONS, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2008).

We combined qualitative content analysis with quantitative aggregation of the resulting codes. Corpus preparation involved text extraction and standardization; the qualitative stage consisted of segmenting and coding substantive passages; and the quantitative stage consisted of aggregating categories and calculating their absolute and relative frequencies across the three periods. The periodization adopted is justified on the basis of three phases consistent with Chinese foreign policy: **(1) 2001 to 2008**, a period of integration into and adaptation to the new world order, marked by WTO accession and the promotion of guiding ideas such as "peaceful development" and "multilateral

[7] The *Going Global Policy* (zou chuqu), launched in the early 2000s, was China's strategy to encourage the internationalization of state-owned and private enterprises through outward foreign direct investment, seeking access to natural resources, technology, and new markets. The *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),* announced by Xi Jinping in 2013, expanded this movement by proposing a network of infrastructure, trade, and financing connecting China to more than 150 countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America, establishing itself as China's principal instrument of external economic projection in the 21st century.

cooperation"; **(2) 2009 to 2016,** the post-2008 crisis period, when Beijing adopted clearer activism in favor of global governance reforms and a more pronounced economic and diplomatic projection through the Belt and Road Initiative; **(3) 2017 to 2024**, a context of escalating strategic rivalry between China and the United States, with clearer disputes in trade and technology, (indirect, though still present) antagonism in conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, and a leading role in creating institutional alternatives to the international liberal order.

These phases should not be understood as rigid historical ruptures or as assumptions about the content of Chinese discourse. Rather, they provide analytically comparable windows situated in distinct international contexts. Whether Chinese orientation and discursive action actually differ across these phases is treated as an empirical question and assessed through the coding procedure described as follows. To convert the textual corpus of speeches into structured analytical data, we established a multi-step methodology for selecting, segmenting, and coding the texts. (1) First, we built a preliminary coding scheme (codebook) and tested it on a sample of three speeches: 2001, 2009, and 2017. Selecting the first speech of each timeframe allowed us to capture variation across periods while maintaining analytical symmetry. Rather than extracting final findings, this pilot test aimed to refine our thematic categories and ensure consistency before coding the full corpus. Our category design combined theory and evidence. Deductively, we drew from Power Transition Theory to define core orientations toward the international order (such as support, dissatisfaction, reform, or the creation of alternative arrangements). Inductively, we refined these categories based on recurring themes identified during the initial reading of the pilot speeches.

The (2) second step of the methodology consisted of defining these analytical dimensions and categories. Based on this refinement, each passage was coded along three distinct dimensions. First, the thematic object identifies the policy issue addressed, divided into **four mutually exclusive clusters:** (a) International Norms, Principles, Identity and Vision of the Global Community; (b) International Institutions, Cooperation and Global Governance; (c) International Security, Geopolitics and Systemic Tensions; (d) International Political Economy, Trade, Finance and Development. Second, **orientation toward the order** captures the evaluation expressed regarding the existing system, categorized as (a) satisfied (legitimizing or defending current rules and institutions), (b) dissatisfied (identifying injustices, representation deficits, or the need for change), or (c) neutral (stating principles or diagnoses without evaluating the order's adequacy). Third, **discursive action** reflects what the statement seeks to accomplish, classified as (a) defense (preserving existing structures), (b) reform (altering rules within the current architecture), (c) proposition (introducing concepts or mechanisms beyond existing structures), or (d) critique (denouncing problems without detailing an institutional transformation).

The (3) third and final step comprised the complete processing, segmentation, and coding of the speeches. All speeches across the analyzed periods were examined from start to finish to avoid selective sampling. However, to convert continuous text into structured analytical data, each speech was systematically divided into substantive passages, defined here as any text fragment expressing a self-contained position on international norms, institutions, practices, or proposals. Segmentation was determined by conceptual coherence rather than rigid grammatical boundaries such as individual sentences or paragraphs. Consequently, a single paragraph containing two distinct arguments was split into two passages, whereas several consecutive sentences expressing the same core idea were merged. To isolate meaningful political positions on the international order, purely protocolary greetings, historical descriptions, and factual background statements lacking evaluative content were systematically excluded from the dataset. This process yielded a final corpus of 360 substantive units of analysis. We used ChatGPT to assist in gathering the speeches and generating an initial baseline classification of these passages. To ensure research integrity and analytical rigor, all machine-generated classifications were subsequently reviewed, verified, and manually corrected and adjusted by the authors.

Therefore, each selected substantive passage was coded along the three distinct dimensions described: (a) thematic cluster; (b) orientation toward the order; and (c) discursive action. During the pilot phase, several coding rules were refined to improve internal consistency. To prevent double counting, each substantive passage was assigned to a single thematic cluster based on its primary focus. Following this pilot stage, the coding rules and category definitions were frozen before analyzing the remaining 21 speeches, thereby reducing the risk of ex post adjustments to fit emerging findings. To ensure scientific transparency, the complete coding tables for the 2001, 2009, and 2017 pilot passages are provided.

Table 3. Pilot Phase Coding: Full Three-Dimensional Classification (2001)

ID	SUBSTANTIVE PASSAGE (ANALYTICAL PARAPHRASE)	CLUSTER	ORIENTATION	DISCURSIVE ACTION
2001-P01	Dialogue and international cooperation are portrayed as increasingly important features of world affairs.	C2 - Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Satisfied	Defense
2001-P02	The Millennium Declaration is treated as a legitimate framework for international action.	C2 - Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Satisfied	Defense
2001-P03	The international community remains far from achieving collectively established peace and development objectives.	C2 - Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Dissatisfied	Critique
2001-P04	International terrorism requires a coordinated international response.	C3 - Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2001-P05	UN resolutions and established principles should guide settlement of the Middle East conflict.	C3 - Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2001-P06	The Security Council should play a stronger role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.	C3 - Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2001-P07	Afghanistan's sovereignty and the right of its people to determine their political future must be preserved.	C1 - Norms / Identity / Vision	Satisfied	Defense
2001-P08	Developed countries should assume greater responsibility for global development.	C4 - International Political Economy	Dissatisfied	Reform
2001-P09	Globalization should be managed so that its benefits are broadly shared and adverse effects reduced.	C4 - International Political Economy	Dissatisfied	Reform

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 4. Pilot Phase Coding: Full Three-Dimensional Classification (2009)

ID	SUBSTANTIVE PASSAGE - ANALYTICAL PARAPHRASE	CLUSTER	ORIENTATION	DISCURSIVE ACTION
2009-P01	Multilateralism and more democratic international relations are portrayed as positive tendencies.	C2 - Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Satisfied	Defense
2009-P02	The international financial crisis has aggravated unemployment, poverty and global development imbalances.	C4 - International Political Economy	Dissatisfied	Critique
2009-P03	Contemporary security challenges require joint and comprehensive responses.	C3 - Security / Geopolitics	Neutral	Proposition
2009-P04	Security should rest on mutual trust, mutual benefit and coordination rather than zero-sum thinking.	C3 - Security / Geopolitics	Dissatisfied	Proposition
2009-P05	International disputes should be addressed according to the UN Charter and peaceful-settlement principles.	C3 - Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2009-P06	The UN should retain an important role in maintaining international security.	C3 - Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2009-P07	Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation should be strengthened through existing international cooperation.	C3 - Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2009-P08	A just international economic order requires meaningful participation by developing countries.	C4 - International Political Economy	Dissatisfied	Reform
2009-P09	Globalization should produce more balanced development and more broadly shared benefits.	C4 - International Political Economy	Dissatisfied	Reform
2009-P10	International financial institutions should provide more resources to developing countries.	C4 - International Political Economy	Dissatisfied	Reform
2009-P11	Developing countries should gain greater representation and voice in international financial governance.	C4 - International Political Economy	Dissatisfied	Reform
2009-P12	Protectionism should be resisted and the multilateral trade regime preserved.	C4 - International Political Economy	Satisfied	Defense
2009-P13	Developed countries should open markets, fulfill aid commitments and provide debt relief.	C4 - International Political Economy	Dissatisfied	
2009-P14	Countries should retain autonomy to choose their own development paths and social systems.	C1 - Norms / Identity / Vision	Satisfied	Defense

2009-P15	Global problems require stronger international cooperation.	C2 - Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Satisfied	Defense
2009-P16	Existing multilateral mechanisms should remain central to international climate governance.	C2 - Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Satisfied	Defense
2009-P17	Different civilizations, social systems and values should be respected.	C1 - Norms / Identity / Vision	Neutral	Proposition
2009-P18	Different civilizations and development models should coexist and learn from each other.	C1 - Norms / Identity / Vision	Neutral	Proposition
2009-P19	Peaceful development and win-win interaction are presented as principles for China's international relations.	C1 - Norms / Identity / Vision	Neutral	Proposition
2009-P20	China supports existing international financial institutions and financial stabilization efforts.	C4 - International Political Economy	Satisfied	Defense
2009-P21	Regional monetary and financial cooperation should be further developed.	C4 - International Political Economy	Satisfied	Defense
2009-P22	A harmonious world of enduring peace and common prosperity is advanced as a vision of international order.	C1 - Norms / Identity / Vision	Neutral	Proposition

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 5. Pilot Phase Coding: Full Three-Dimensional Classification (2017)

ID	SUBSTANTIVE PASSAGE - ANALYTICAL PARAPHRASE	CLUSTER	ORIENTATION	DISCURSIVE ACTION
2017-P01	The UN is credited with major contributions to international peace through collective security.	C3 - Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2017-P02	The UN is credited with advancing global development through collective agendas and coordination.	C2 -Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Satisfied	Defense
2017-P03	The ideals underlying the UN-centered order have not yet been fully achieved.	C2 -Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Dissatisfied	Critique
2017-P04	Humanity faces normative choices between peace and war, openness and isolation, unity and division.	C1 -Norms / Identity / Vision	Neutral	Proposition
2017-P05	A new type of international relations based on win-win cooperation is proposed.	C1 -Norms / Identity / Vision	Neutral	Proposition
2017-P06	A community with a shared future for mankind is advanced as a vision for global order.	C1 -Norms / Identity / Vision	Neutral	Proposition

2017-P07	China's vision of global order is explicitly presented as compatible with the purposes of the United Nations.	C1 -Norms / Identity / Vision	Satisfied	Defense
2017-P08	The UN should remain the central guardian of world peace and collective security.	C3 -Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2017-P09	Dialogue should replace confrontation and partnership should replace alliance politics.	C3 -Security / Geopolitics	Dissatisfied	Proposition
2017-P10	Terrorism should be addressed through law, without double standards, and through internationally coordinated responses.	C3 -Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2017-P11	Political dialogue and negotiation should remain the principal means for resolving conflicts.	C3 -Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2017-P12	The UN should remain the principal mechanism for conflict prevention and mediation.	C3 -Security / Geopolitics	Satisfied	Defense
2017-P13	Security concerns on the Korean Peninsula should be addressed through negotiation rather than confrontation.	C3 -Security / Geopolitics	Neutral	Proposition
2017-P14	The 2030 Agenda should remain a central international development framework.	C4 -International Political Economy	Satisfied	Defense
2017-P15	North-South cooperation should remain central to development while being supplemented by South-South cooperation.	C4 -International Political Economy	Satisfied	Reform
2017-P16	Existing multilateral agreements and differentiated responsibilities should guide international climate governance.	C2 -Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Satisfied	Defense
2017-P17	An open global economy and trade and investment liberalization should be maintained.	C4 -International Political Economy	Satisfied	Defense
2017-P18	Global governance should become more democratic, rules-based and equitable.	C2 -Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Dissatisfied	Reform
2017-P19	All states should enjoy equal participation in international rule-making and global affairs.	C2 -Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Dissatisfied	Reform
2017-P20	International institutions should better reflect changes in global power and the interests of the majority of states.	C2 -Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Dissatisfied	Reform
2017-P21	International law should apply equally and the UN Charter should remain a foundation of international order.	C1 -Norms / Identity / Vision	Satisfied	Defense

2017-P22	Globalization should not operate according to winner-takes-all or law-of-the-jungle principles.	C4 -International Political Economy	Dissatisfied	Critique
2017-P23	Globalization should be rebalanced toward consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits.	C4 -International Political Economy	Dissatisfied	Reform
2017-P24	Civilizational diversity should be respected and protected.	C1 -Norms / Identity / Vision	Neutral	Proposition
2017-P25	Different political systems and development paths should coexist and learn from each other.	C1 -Norms / Identity / Vision	Neutral	Proposition
2017-P26	The Belt and Road is presented as a new mechanism for promoting development and connectivity.	C4 -International Political Economy	Neutral	Proposition
2017-P27	China portrays itself as a defender of multilateralism and the central role of the United Nations.	C2 -Institutions / Cooperation / Governance	Satisfied	Defense

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Following the pilot phase, this analytical method was applied across the complete sequence of speeches from 2001 to 2024. In total, 360 substantive passages were identified and categorized across the corpus. Once the 24 UNGA sessions were coded, the resulting data were aggregated by historical phase. For each period, we calculated both the absolute and relative frequencies of the orientation and discursive action categories, as well as their specific combinations. Relative frequencies were computed by dividing the number of passages in a given category by the total number of substantive passages identified within that period. Shift dynamics between phases were expressed in percentage points, allowing for a precise comparison of changes in discursive composition regardless of variations in the absolute volume of passages across sessions.

Table 6. Distribution of Coded Substantive Passages by Period

PERIOD	YEARS	SPEECHES	SUBSTANTIVE PASSAGES CODED	AVERAGE PASSAGES PER SPEECH
P1	2001-2008	8	103	12.88
P2	2009-2016	8	122	15.25
P3	2017-2024	8	135	16.88

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Although the three periods contain the same number of speeches, the number of substantive passages identified varies across them (103, 122, and 135, respectively). For this reason, relative frequencies, rather than absolute frequencies, constitute the main basis for the longitudinal comparison of discourse composition. Thus, the absolute frequency of a given type of passage (whether in terms of clusters, orientation, or discursive action) is divided by 103 if it falls within the first period, by 122 if in the second period, and by 135 if in the third period.

Analysis of Chinese (dis)satisfaction with the international order

We begin the analysis with the relative frequency of passages reflecting the orientation of Chinese discourse, as shown in Table 7 below. The first finding is the significant growth in neutral passages, which rose from 12.6% in P1 to roughly 23%-24% in P2 and P3. The second is the decline in the overall frequency of both satisfied and dissatisfied passages, dropping from 40% to 36% and from 46% to 40%, respectively. Another relevant finding is that while China exhibited a slightly more dissatisfied than satisfied stance in

P1 and P3, this relationship reversed during the intermediate phase (P2). This variation challenges the premise of Power Transition Theory that a rising power becomes increasingly revisionist as it moves up the power hierarchy.

Table 7. Orientation of Chinese Discursive Passages by Period

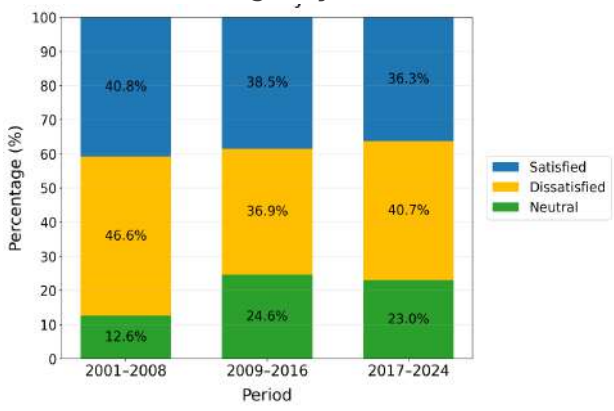
ORIENTATION	P1 N	P1 %	P2 N	P2 %	P3 N	P3 %	Δ P1–P3 (PP)
Satisfied	42	40,8%	47	38,5%	49	36,3%	-4,5
Dissatisfied	48	46,6%	45	36,9%	55	40,7%	-5,9
Neutral	13	12,6%	30	24,6%	31	23,0%	10,3
Total	**103**	**100,0%**	**122**	**100,0%**	**135**	**100,0%**	

Source: Prepared by the authors.

These empirical patterns provide nuanced insights into mainstream interpretations of PTT. In Organski's (1968) formulation, material parity and satisfaction with the status quo are treated as two distinct, independent variables (i.e. power accumulation does not mechanically generate dissatisfaction). However, deterministic extensions of PTT and contemporary debate often assume an implicit alignment between rising material capacity and growing revisionism. Our data empirically reinforce Organski's original conceptual separation while highlighting the non-linear nature of Chinese discourse positioning.

First, the trajectory of Chinese dissatisfaction - which peaked at 46.6% in P1 when China was materialistically weaker, declined in P2, and only partially rose again in P3 (40.7%) - demonstrates that material growth has not produced a steady increase in systemic opposition. Second, the rise in neutral passages reveals a dual diplomatic approach that standard binary models miss. First: neutral discourse often serves as a platform for introducing China's own concepts and global initiatives (such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, and the vision of a "community with a shared future for mankind"). Instead of directly challenging existing rules, these ideas build a parallel normative space alongside established multilateral bodies. Second: by avoiding overly critical language, Beijing tries to reduce friction and avoid raising unnecessary alarm among established powers. This posture can be interpreted as a minimization of systemic tension, while preserving room for negotiation. Consequently, Chinese behavior is better understood not through a rigid binary of status quo versus revisionism, but, as we shall see, as a calibrated combination of institutional defense, targeted reform, and selective normative expansion in a growingly balanced tone between satisfied, dissatisfied and neutral approaches. The chart below illustrates these relative frequencies, highlighting the rise in neutral statements despite remaining below the other two categories.

Chart 10. Orientation of Chinese Discursive Passages by Period



Source: Prepared by the authors.

The discursive action data (Table 8) show that both defense of the international order and calls for reform decreased over time. Defense was the most frequent action in P1 (38.8%), but dropped in P2 (37.7%) and P3 (31.9%). Similarly, reform references fell from 30.1% in P1 to 25.4% in P2 and 23.0% in P3. Critiques of the order remained around 13-14% in P1 and P3, with a slight drop to 8.2% in P2. The main change in Table 8 is the growth of propositional statements, which rose from 17.5% in P1 up to 31.1% in P3 (+13.6 percentage points).

Linked to the higher share of neutral statements in P3 shown earlier, this trend indicates a change in China's approach. Instead of focusing only on defending existing institutions or requesting reforms, Beijing has increasingly proposed new frameworks. China's push to create the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO) recently illustrates this approach. By setting up new institutions in emerging arenas, China goes beyond defending the status quo or critiquing existing rules, aiming instead to establish new norms and institutions in some fields of global governance.

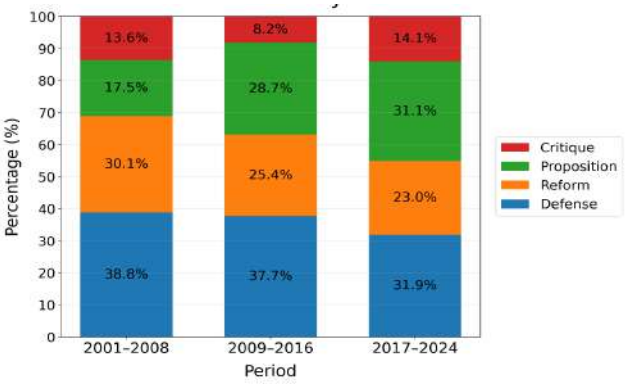
Table 8. Distribution of Discursive Actions Across Periods

DISCURSIVE ACTION	P1 N	P1 %	P2 N	P2 %	P3 N	P3 %	Δ P1–P3 (PP)
Defense	40	38,8%	46	37,7%	43	31,9%	-7,0
Reform	31	30,1%	31	25,4%	31	23,0%	-7,1
Proposition	18	17,5%	35	28,7%	42	31,1%	13,6
Critique	14	13,6%	10	8,2%	19	14,1%	0,5
Total	**103**	**100,0%**	**122**	**100,0%**	**135**	**100,0%**	

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The chart below illustrates the trends shown in Table 8, highlighting the increase in propositional statements, the steady rate of critiques, and the decline in passages focused on defending or reforming the international order.

Chart 11. Distribution of Discursive Actions Across Periods



Source: Prepared by the authors.

The main finding from this initial analysis is that China does not follow the traditional trajectory predicted by PTT, as it does not directly contest the order. Instead, what it does is "rule-shaping without systemic rejection", that is, engaging in the game to modify some of its underlying rules. The table below cross-tabulates orientation and discursive action, sorted by the percentage-point change from P1 to P3. The data highlight three main trends: first, the increase in propositional actions, driven mainly by neutral statements and, to a lesser extent, dissatisfied ones; second, the decline in satisfied statements aimed at defending the order; and third, the continued prevalence of dissatisfied statements linked to critique or reform.

Table 9. Cross-Tabulation of Orientation and Discursive Action Across Periods

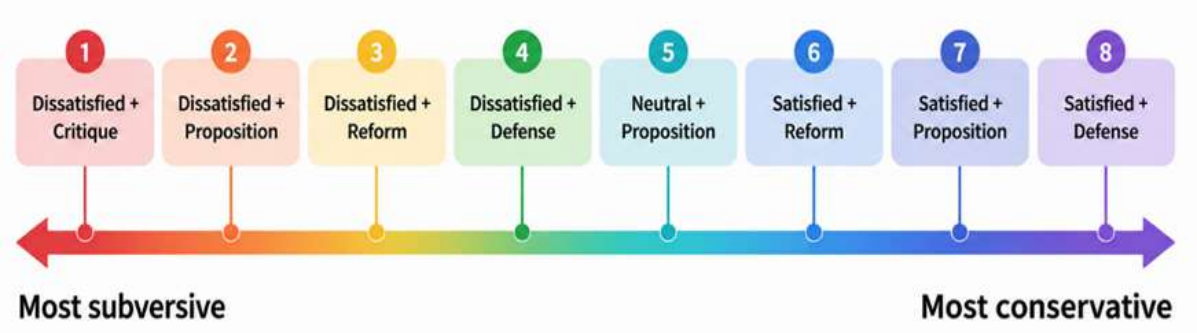
ORIENTATION + ACTION	P1 N	P1 %	P2 N	P2 %	P3 N	P3 %	Δ P1–P3 (PP)
Neutral + Proposition	13	12,6%	30	24,6%	31	23,0%	10,3
Dissatisfied + Proposition	5	4,9%	5	4,1%	10	7,4%	2,6
Satisfied + Reform	2	1,9%	1	0,8%	6	4,4%	2,5
Satisfied + Proposition	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	1	0,7%	0,7

Dissatisfied + Defense	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	1	0,7%	0,7
Dissatisfied + Critique	14	13,6%	10	8,2%	19	14,1%	0,5
Satisfied + Defense	40	38,8%	46	37,7%	42	31,1%	-7,7
Dissatisfied + Reform	29	28,2%	30	24,6%	25	18,5%	-9,6
Total	**103**	**100,0%**	**122**	**100,0%**	**135**	**100,0%**	

Source: Prepared by the authors.
Note: The remaining combinations do not appear in the table because there were no occurrences.

In order to conceptualize how these combinations reflect different degrees of engagement with the international order, Figure 6 maps the eight observed pairs along a continuous spectrum. This continuum ranges from positions of direct systemic contestation ("most subversive", led by dissatisfaction combined with critique or proposition) to positions aimed at maintaining existing arrangements ("most conservative", defined by satisfaction combined with defense).

Figure 6. Spectrum of Discursive Orientation and Action Combinations in Relation to the International Order

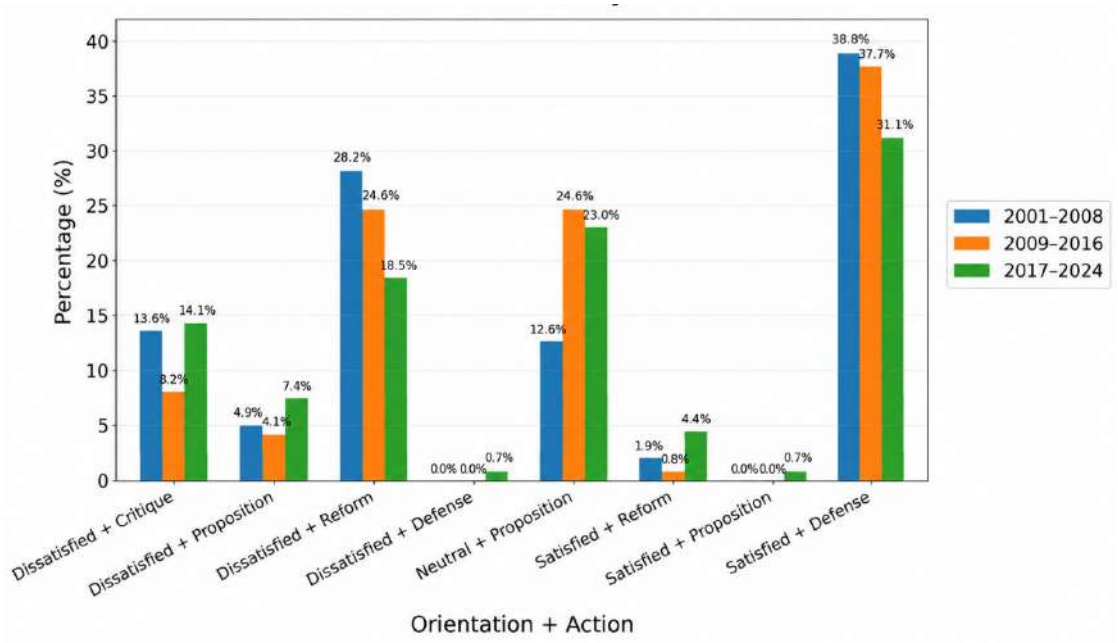


Source: Prepared by the authors.

As illustrated in Figure 6, the combinations are arranged along a continuum according to their degree of contestation, moving from the most subversive positions on the left to the most conservative on the right. The first three categories (positions 1-3) form a contestatory core where dissatisfaction drives active challenges to the status quo through critique, alternative propositions, or demands for reform, with intensity decreasing across the sequence. Position 4 (Dissatisfied + Defense) occupies a transitional boundary: although driven by dissatisfaction, its discursive action is defensive rather than transformative, reflecting a legalist effort to protect established multilateral rules against perceived violations (ex.: China expressing dissatisfaction with the conduct of Western powers while defending UN rules against unilateralism). At the center, position 5 (Neutral + Proposition) represents an intermediate pragmatic stance that introduces new initiatives without taking a stance on existing norms. Finally, the right side of the spectrum (positions 6-8) gathers conservative combinations where satisfaction aligns with reform, proposition, or defense.

Through this progression, the model demonstrates that Chinese diplomatic discourse is not concentrated at the subversive pole, remaining instead anchored in status-quo defense (Satisfied + Defense, position 8) and pragmatic innovation (Neutral + Proposition, position 5).

Chart 11. Orientation and Discursive Action Combinations Across Periods



Source: Prepared by the authors.

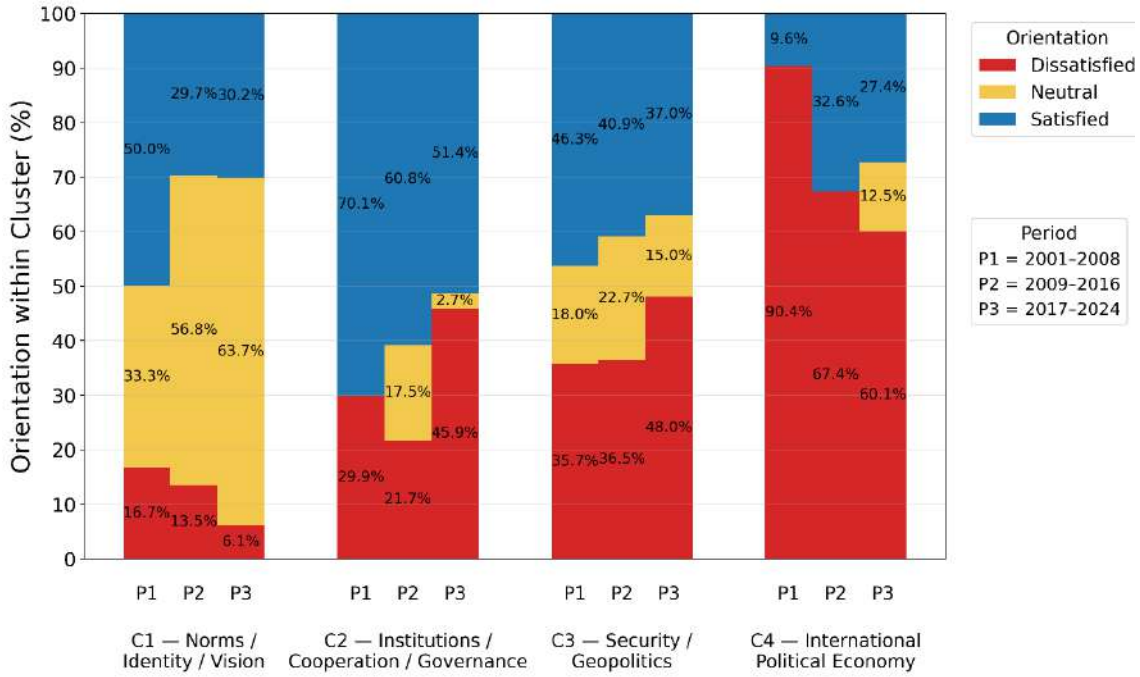
What does the data in Chart 11 reveal? Overall, Chinese foreign policy shows greater continuity than rupture since the beginning of the 21st century, as variations both within and between categories remain gradual. Within the dissatisfaction bloc, China focuses more on reforming existing institutions and redistributing gains than on radical alternatives or direct critiques. For example, a 2024 statement notes that "global governance should become more just and equitable and better reflect changes in the international distribution of power". Thus, while the combination of dissatisfaction and reform declined over time, the data show that Chinese revisionism is far softer than PTT predicts.

Developments at the conservative end of the spectrum reinforce this pattern. Although the combination of satisfaction and defense dropped by 7.7 percentage points between P1 and P3, it remains the largest single category, accounting for about a third of all analyzed passages (128 out of 360). A 2022 excerpt illustrates this stance by directly defending a core principle of international law: "the UN-centered international system and the basic norms of international relations should be upheld".

Finally, the central category shows how China approaches change. Beijing frequently introduces new initiatives, but does so through neutral language rather than explicit critique or defense of the status quo. For instance, a 2019 speech says that: "a community with a shared future for mankind is presented as China's answer to mounting global risks". Here, China introduces new concepts without directly criticizing the existing order.

Therefore, Chinese foreign policy operates through three coexisting logics of selective contestation: preserving core components of the international order, seeking selective reforms where it perceives asymmetry, and building new concepts and proposals without explicitly delegitimizing existing institutions. We now move on to cross-tabulating the types of orientation with the four thematic clusters

Chart 12. Discursive Orientation Toward the Order by Thematic Cluster



Source: Prepared by the authors.

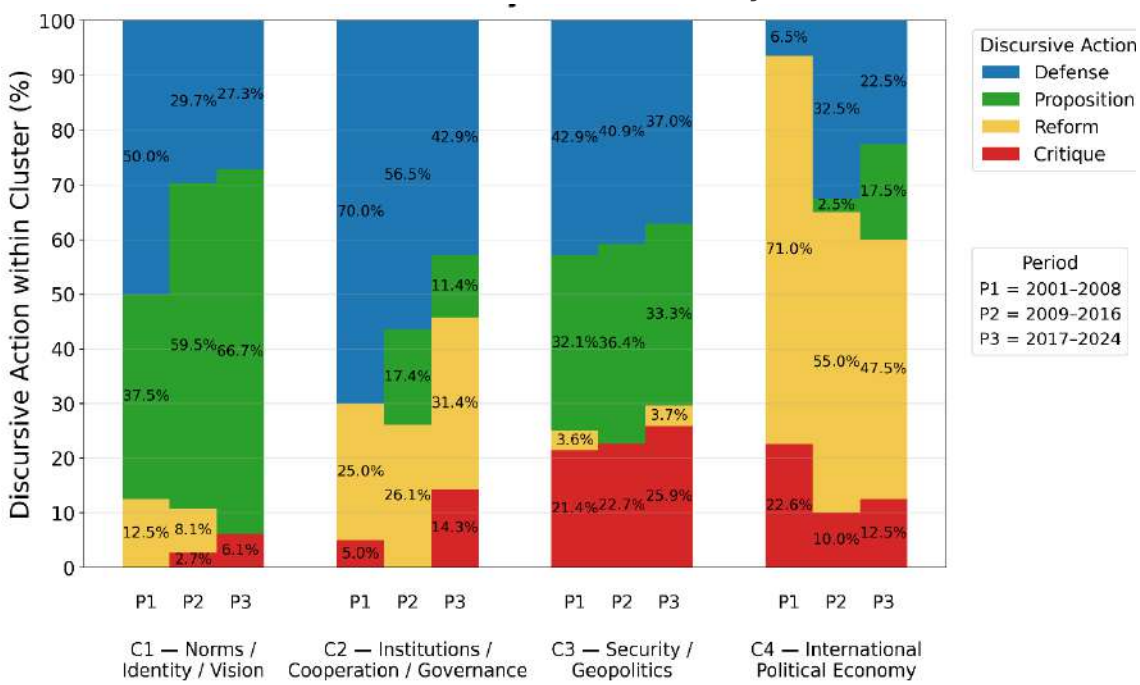
The data in Chart 12 show that Chinese diplomatic discourse varies across thematic areas, reflecting a strategy of selective contestation. China maintains a more moderate stance on normative and institutional topics (Clusters 1 and 2). However, Cluster 2 displays a marked surge in dissatisfaction after 2017 (rising from 21.7% in P2 to 45.9% in P3), highlighting growing frustration with multilateral governance and its capacity to manage global crises. Cluster 3 (Security and Geopolitics) follows a similar upward trajectory of dissatisfaction, reaching 48.0% in P3 amidst escalating geopolitical tensions.

In contrast, Cluster 4 (International Political Economy) represents the main driver of Chinese dissatisfaction. It is the only thematic area where dissatisfied statements consistently form a majority across all three periods. Although dissatisfaction in Cluster 4 declined from 90.4% in P1 to 60.1% in P3, these figures confirm that Chinese revisionism is most concentrated in the economic sphere.

In sum, the empirical distribution reveals a clear division in Chinese rhetoric: persistent dissatisfaction focused on international political economy, alongside a recent shift toward sharper discontent in security and governance, while normative issues remain dominated by neutral, pragmatic language.

Finally, the chart below cross-tabulates the clusters with China's discursive actions.

Chart 13. Discursive Action Toward the Order by Thematic Cluster



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Chart 13 shows variations in how Chinese discursive actions are distributed across thematic clusters over time. In Cluster 1 (Norms, Identity, and Vision), propositional discourse plays a central role, expanding from 37.5% in P1 to 66.7% in P3. This concentration of constructive language gives Chinese normative engagement a pragmatic character. A 2002 statement illustrates this approach by noting that "civilizational diversity should be respected rather than subjected to cultural uniformity or confrontation", which was later complemented by a 2024 statement emphasizing that "global initiatives on development, security and civilization are presented as complementary Chinese contributions rather than replacements for the UN-centered order".

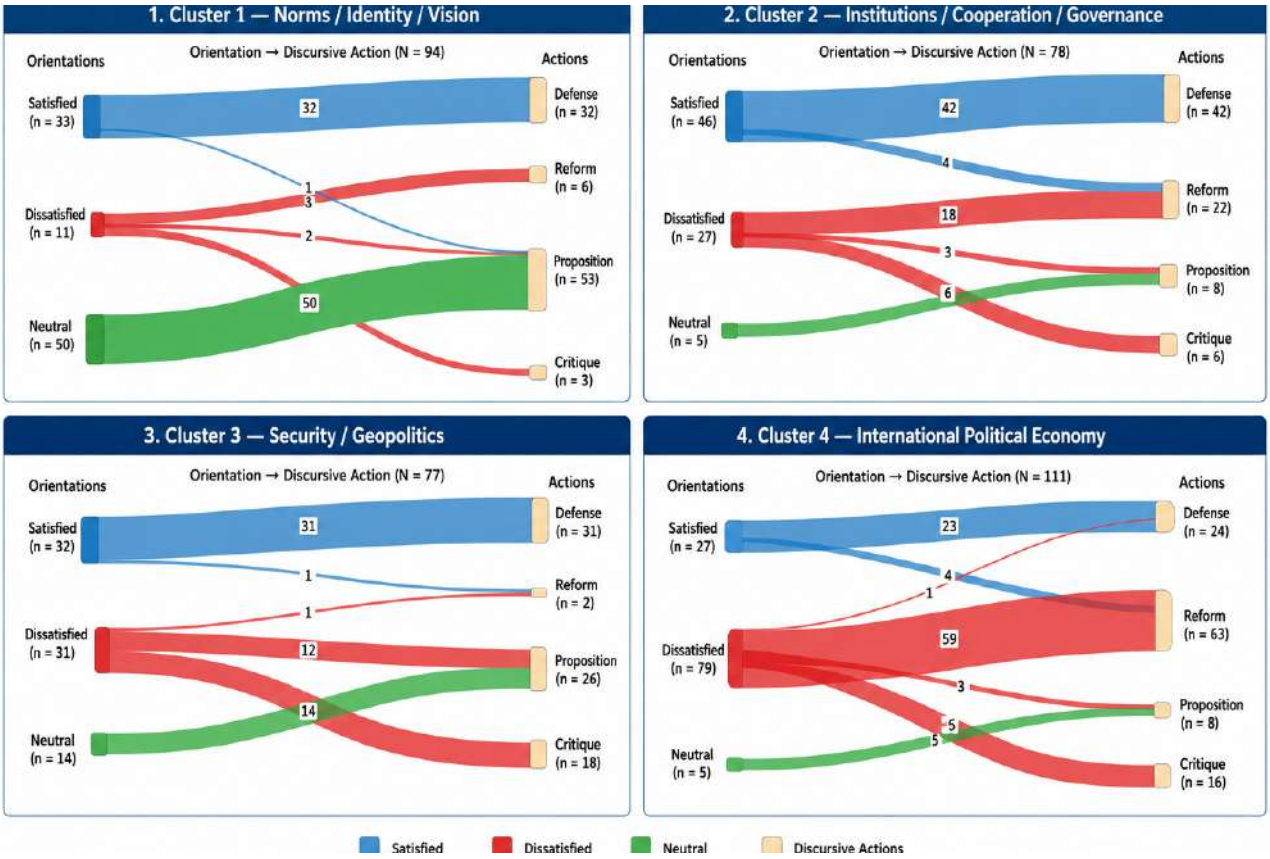
At the same time, defensive rhetoric remains a pillar across the corpus, particularly in Cluster 3 (Security and Geopolitics), where it has remained remarkably stable over time, oscillating around 40%. Statements in this category frequently defend established multilateral mechanisms, as illustrated by a 2017 speech noting that "the UN is credited with major contributions to international peace through collective security". Conversely, in Cluster 2 (Institutions, Cooperation, and Governance), while defensive language was initially dominant, it declined from 70.0% in P1 to 42.9% in P3 as calls for reform and critiques increased. Nevertheless, defending the central role of UN institutions remains a recurring theme, exemplified by a 2015 passage declaring that "the United Nations should remain the most universal, representative and authoritative international organization".

Finally, Cluster 4 (International Political Economy) stands out as the primary site for reform demands, a pattern established well before the 2008 financial crisis. In P1, demands for reform accounted for 71.0% of occurrences in this cluster, exemplified by a 2005 passage arguing that "economic globalization should generate win-win outcomes and shared prosperity rather than benefit only a small number of countries". However, in P3, demands for reform dropped to 47.5%, as propositional actions gained ground, rising from 0% in P1 and 2.5% in P2 to 17.5% in P3. This shift indicates that Beijing has increasingly complemented its long-standing demands for financial and economic rebalancing (like the 2017 call for globalization to be "rebalanced toward consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits") with proactive initiatives. This evolution

is illustrated by a 2023 statement emphasizing that "the Global Development Initiative seeks to restore development as a central priority of international cooperation". Instead of pursuing systemic rejection, China combines demands for economic inclusion with proposals aimed at benefiting the Global South.

The Sankey diagrams below turn the data discussed into a more visual language. As we can see, there are different patterns for each cluster. The periodization was unified for these charts, so the reader may have a broader sense of China's posture in the whole period of 2001-2024 and see which clusters are more or less revisionists.

Chart 14. Chinese Discursive Orientations and Actions Across Thematic Clusters, 2001-2024



Source: Prepared by the authors.

The combined data from Charts 12, 13 and 14 reveals that in the normative sphere (Cluster 1), where neutral instances dominate orientation (63.7% in P3), there is a predominance of normative rule-shaping speeches (proposition achieved 66.7% in P3). Furthermore, the Sankey chart indicates that all neutral passages (50) culminated in propositions and that nearly all satisfied passages (32 out of 33) culminated in defense of the order. This shows a strategy of proposing new concepts without asserting that the existing order is illegitimate.

In institutions, cooperation, and governance (Cluster 2), China seems satisfied with the order, although in a decreasing proportion. Beijing seems to defend the centrality of the UN and existing institutions even as dissatisfaction (45.9%) and demands for reform grow in P3. The Sankey chart shows that in the overall period there is a high predominance of satisfied + defense intersection (42) and a smaller but relevant intersection of dissatisfaction + reform (18).

In security and geopolitics (Cluster 3), there is a higher degree of dissatisfaction (48.0% in P3) and critique than in Clusters 1 and 2, expressed mainly through condemnation on zero-

sum thinking, Cold War mentalities, hegemonism, and alliances. The Sankey chart indicates a more fragmented pattern in the overall period: the satisfied + defense combination is still the highest (31), but propositions appear in 26 passages (coming from neutral (14) and dissatisfied (12) stances) and dissatisfied + critical passages intersect in other 14 cases.

In the international political economy (Cluster 4), China shows its highest level of dissatisfaction. Dissatisfied statements remain consistently high across all three periods, starting at 90.4% in P1, dropping to 67.4% in P2, and reaching 60.1% in P3. Although reform remains the dominant approach in this cluster, its share changed across the three periods. Demands for reform accounted for a striking 71.0% of statements in P1, before dropping to 55.0% in P2 and 47.5% in P3. This decline occurred because demands for reform were increasingly accompanied by new proposals, which grew from 0.0% in P1 and 2.5% in P2 to 17.5% in P3. Between P2 and P3, direct critiques also increased slightly, rising by 2.5 percentage points from 10.0% to 12.5%. Over the same time, defensive language dropped from 32.5% in P2 to 22.5% in P3. The Sankey chart confirms the overall pattern: dissatisfied + reform intersect in 59 cases, dissatisfied + critique in 16 and satisfied + defense in 23. Ultimately, the domain in which China expresses the greatest dissatisfaction is also the domain where its preferred response remains overwhelmingly reformist, rather than subversive.

Concluding Remarks

This article advanced Power Transition Theory discussions by proposing a two-dimensional framework that disaggregates material capabilities and satisfaction levels for both the dominant power and the challenger. While classic PTT treats the hegemon as an inherently satisfied guarantor, the contemporary transition presents a distinct dynamic in which the dominant power itself expresses growing discontent with multilateral rules. Although our framework accounts for both actors, this study focused on operationalizing Chinese satisfaction to assess whether the challenger's posture leans toward systemic subversion, gradual reform or conservative stance. This choice is justified by two reasons. First, under the logic of our model, the nature of the transition (whether it moves toward negotiated coexistence, contestation within the system, or systemic subversion) is conditioned primarily by the emerging power's orientation toward the order. Second, at a moment when the US shows growing reluctance to act as the guarantor of the multilateral system by withdrawing from international institutions, the challenger's posture becomes the critical variable determining whether the order moves toward reform or collapse.

Empirical data on material capabilities shows that the Sino-American transition is multidimensional and asymmetric. China holds a clear advantage in real-economy indicators, such as GDP at purchasing power parity (PPP), gross fixed capital formation (GFCF), primary energy consumption, renewable energy capacity, and high-tech export value added. The United States, on the other hand, retains its structural primacy in the international financial system (underpinned by the global role of the dollar) as well as in advanced military assets, space infrastructure, and power projection. Overall, these trends locate both powers within a range of material parity, creating the structural conditions for transitional friction.

Regarding the rising power's orientation toward the international order, our empirical findings indicate that China is neither a subversive nor a conservative actor. Instead, Beijing adopts a cautious reformist posture in different shades of gray. In the international political economy field, China maintains a predominantly dissatisfied stance; however, rather than escalating into open critique, its discursive strategy relies heavily on reformist demand and, increasingly in P3, propositional initiatives. In geopolitical/security and institutional/cooperation arenas, we find an intermediate position in which dissatisfaction passages grew from P1 to P3, but instead of blatant criticism, they are mostly permeated by defense, proposition and some criticism in geopolitics/security and by defense and reformism in institutional/cooperation. And in the norms/identity sphere China is predominantly satisfied or neutral, using this stance to promote its own vocabulary on international relations,

given the high proportion of propositional passages in this topic.

Even though the US and China are converging to a zone of power parity, Beijing seems to be operating as a non-revisionist rising power. It is clear that speeches in the UNGA do not reflect the material reality in perfect terms and that there is a big difference between what a country says and what a country does. But it is also clear that official statements should not be ignored as part of power politics and as a reflection of specific historical periods. Therefore, the finding on China's speech pattern is a relevant contribution for understanding the nature and the impacts of its rise as a great power.

References

ACCIOLY FILHO, Lauro. 2025. A Batalha Tecnológica entre Estados Unidos e China. **Le Monde Diplomatique**. https://diplomatique.org.br/a-batalha-tecnologica-entre-estados-unidos-e-china/. Accessed: 15 abr. 2026.

ALLISON, Graham. 2017. **Destined for War***:* can America and China escape Thucydide's Trap? Boston: Houfhtn Mifflin Harcourt.

CHAN, Steve. 2008. **China, the U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory: A critique**. Nova York: Routledge.

CORRÊA, Gabriela T. R. 2023. Da crise dos subprimes à pandemia de Covid-19: China e Estados Unidos nas novas dinâmicas globais *de poder.* Dissertação (Mestrado) - Programa de Pós-Graduação em Relações Internacionais (PPGRI), Universidade Federal de Santa Maria.

COW. 2026. National Material Capabilities (v6.0): NMC_Documentation 6.0.zip. **Correlates of War.** https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/national-material-capabilities/. Accessed: 26 mar. 2026.

ENERGY INSTITUTE. 2026. **Statistical Review of World Energy**. https://www.energyinst.org/statistical-review. Accessed: 26 mar. 2026.

GREEN, Erik; PARKER, Olivia. 2026. China's 15th Five-Year Plan. **International Institute for Strategic Studies.** https://www.iiss.org/2026/03/chinas-15th-five-year-plan/. Accessed: 16 abr. 2026.

HENDLER, Bruno; CORRÊA, Gabriela T. R. 2024. O dragão e a águia: transformações na distribuição relativa do poder militar sino-americano (2007-2019). **Revista da Escola de Guerra Naval**, v. 30, n. 2, p. 377-414.

IHU. 2019. População da China: bônus demográfico e envelhecimento. **Instituto Humanitas Unisinos.** https://ihu.unisinos.br/populacao-da-china-bonus-demografico-e-envelhecimento. Accessed: 15 abr. 2026.

IRENA. 2026. **Electricity Installed Capacity (MW), Total Renewable**. https://www.irena.org/Data/Capacity-and-Generation/Country-Rankings. Accessed: 14 abr. 2026.

JANKIN, Slava; BATURO, Alexander; DASANDI, Niheer. 2025. Words to unite nations: the complete United Nations General Debate Corpus, 1946-present. **Journal of Peace Research**, v. 62, n. 4, p. 1339-1351.

LITTLE, Allan. 2026. Trump's grand plan to reshape the world order leaves Europe with a difficult choice to make. **BBC News**. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c041n3ng03no. Accessed: 20 abr. 2026.

MORCEIRO, Paulo C. 2019. Nova Classificação de Intensidade Tecnológica da OCDE e a Posição do Brasil. **Informações FIPE.**

OCDE. 2026a. Domestic value added in gross exports (US dollar, Millions). **Trade in value-added database.** https://data-explorer.oecd.org/domestic-value-added-in-gross-exports. Accessed: 24 mar. 2026.

OCDE. 2026b. Gross exports (US dollar, Millions). **Trade in value-added database**. https://data-explorer.oecd.org/gross-exports. Accessed: 24 mar. 2026.

ORGANSKI, Abramo F. K. 1968. **World Politics**. 2 ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 529 p.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2002. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Tang Jiaxuan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the**

General Debate of the 57th Session of the UN General Assembly. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11339661.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2005. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Li Zhaoxing, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the General Debate of the 60th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11339788.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2006. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Li Zhaoxing, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the General Debate of the 61st Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11339857.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2007. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Yang Jiechi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the General Debate of the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11339930.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2009. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Hu Jintao, President of the People's Republic of China, at the General Debate of the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly**. https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11340113.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2010. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council, at the General Debate of the 65th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11340212.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2011. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Yang Jiechi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the General Debate of the 66th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11340348.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2012. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Yang Jiechi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the General Debate of the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zy/jj/diaodao_665718/mn/202406/t20240606_11378078.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2013. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the General Debate of the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11340627.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2014. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the General Debate of the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11340780.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2015. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the General Debate of the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11340955.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2016. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, At the General Debate of The 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/gjhdq_665435/3376_665447/3432_664920/3435_664926/202406/t20240612_11427809.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2017. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Speech by Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, At the General Debate of The 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11341189.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2018. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Wang Yi, State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the General Debate of the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/gjhdq_665435/3376_665447/3432_664920/3434_664924/202406/t20240612_11426035.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2019. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Wang Yi, State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the General Debate of the 74th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb/zzjg_663340/gjs_665170/gjsxw_665172/202406/t20240606_11402137.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2020. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the General Debate of the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11341451.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2021. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the General Debate of the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zy/jj/GDI_140002/xw/202109/t20210922_9580006.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2022. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Wang Yi, State Councilor and Foreign Minister of The People's Republic of China, At the General Debate of the 77th Session of The United Nations General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg_663340/gjs_665170/gjsxw_665172/202209/t20220925_10771160.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2023. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Han Zheng, Vice President of the People's Republic of China, at the General Debate of the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11341766.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA. 2024. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. **Building on Past Achievements and Forging Ahead Together Toward a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind.** https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjbzhd/202409/t20240929_11499995.html. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

RATCLIFFE, John. 2020. China Is National Security Threat No. 1. **WSJ Opinion.** https://www.wsj.com/opinion/china-is-national-security-threat-no-1-11607019599?mod=hp_opin_pos_1. Accessed: 15 set. 2026.

SCHUTTE, Giorgio R. 2021. The challenge to US hegemony and the "Gilpin Dilemma". **Rev. Bras. Polít. Int.,** v. 64, n. 1.

SIPRI. 2026. Military expenditure by country, in millions of US$, Current US$. **SIPRI Military Expenditure Database**. https://milex.sipri.org/sipri. Acesso em 22 mar. 2026.

TAMMEN, Ronald L. et al. 2000. **Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century.** Chatham House Publishers.

TAMMEN, Ronald L.; KUGLER, Jacek; LEMKE, Douglas. 2017. Foundations of Power Transition Theory. In HANNAH, Erin (ed.). **Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics,** New York.

TORRES, Ernani T. 2022. A bomba dólar: sanções monetárias e desglobalização da Rússia. *Carta Capital*. https://www.cartacapital.com.br/a-bomba-dolar-sancoes-monetarias-e-desglobalizacao-da-russia/. Accessed: 12 set. 2025.

UNITED NATIONS. 2001. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Tang Jiaxuan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, at the General Debate of the 56th Session.** https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/458293. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

UNITED NATIONS. 2003. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Li Zhaoxing, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, at the General Debate of the 58th Session**. https://www.un.org/webcast/ga/58/statements/chineng030924.htm. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

UNITED NATIONS. 2004. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Li Zhaoxing, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, at the General Debate of the 59th Session.** https://www.un.org/webcast/ga/59/statements/chieng040927.pdf. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

UNITED NATIONS. 2008. **Statement by H.E. Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, at the General Debate of the 63rd Session.** https://www.un.org/en/ga/63/generaldebate/china.shtml. Accessed: 20 mar. 2026.

WALDENBERG, Samantha. 2026. Trump retira EUA de mais de 60 organizações internacionais, diz Casa Branca. **CNN Brasil**. https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/internacional/trump-retira-eua-de-mais-de-60-organizacoes-internacionais-diz-casa-branca/. Accessed: 20 abr. 2026.

WARD, Jasper; VOLCOVICI, Valerie. 2026. Administração Trump retira EUA de 66 organizações internacionais. **Agência Brasil**. https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/internacional/noticia/2026-01/administracao-trump-retira-eua-de-66-organizacoes-internacionais. Accessed: 20 abr. 2026.

WOMACK, Brantly. 2006. **The Politics of Asymmetry.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

WORLD BANK. 2022. **Lifting 800 Million People Out of Poverty -** New Report Looks at Lessons from China's Experience. https://www.worldbank.org/lifting-800-million-people-out-of-poverty-new-report-looks-at-lessons-from-china-s-experience. Accessed: 15 abr. 2026.

WORLD BANK. 2026a. **GDP (current US$).** https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD. Accessed: 24 mar. 2026.

WORLD BANK. 2026b. **GDP, PPP (current international $).** https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.PP.CD. Accessed: 24 mar. 2026.

WORLD BANK. 2026c. **GDP per capita, PPP (current international $).** https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD. Accessed: 24 mar. 2026.

WORLD BANK. 2026d. **Gross capital formation (current US$).** https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.GDI.TOTL.CD. Accessed: 27 mar. 2026.

WORLD BANK. 2026e. **Gross capital formation (% of GDP).** https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.GDI.TOTL.ZS. Accessed: 27 mar. 2026.

Abstract

When does a power transition lead to war? According to Power Transition Theory (PTT), the outcome depends not only on material capabilities, but also on the rising power's degree of satisfaction with the prevailing order. This article extends PTT by proposing a two-dimensional model that disaggregates satisfaction and capabilities for each actor, introducing transitional friction as the causal mechanism driving systemic war. Applying this framework to the US-China transition, we measure the relative capabilities of both powers and evaluate, by the content analysis methodology, Chinese satisfaction through its UN General Assembly speeches (2001-2024), categorizing textual passages according to topics, orientation toward the order and discursive action. The findings reveal that China adopts a rule-shaping without systemic rejection posture, that is, a moderate and reformist foreign policy, avoiding either subversive/revisionist or conservative stances and pointing toward competitive coexistence rather than systemic conflict.

Keywords: China; United States; Systemic War; Global Order; Power Transition.