

Racism, Racial Hierarchy Ideology, and US Strategic Competition with China

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Abstract: This study examines how racism has influenced US policy toward China. It uses the narrowing power gap between China and the US, the differences in their political systems, and the impact of the evolution of US domestic affairs as independent variables. We introduce domestic racism and racial hierarchy ideology (DRRHI) and international racism and racial hierarchy ideology (IRRHI) as intervention variables. Domestically, in the face of political and social conflicts triggered by DRRHI, a tough policy toward China has become beneficial for both the US Democratic and Republican parties. Internationally, deep-rooted IRRHI hinders the US from accepting the loss of its leading position in the international system and the rise of China. To maintain the DRRHI and IRRHI, the US regards China as its major strategic competitor. Cold War thinking, whole-of-government containment policies, alliance systems, stigmatization strategies, and human rights attacks, all of which are based on DRRHI and IRRHI, remain important components of US policy toward China.

Keywords: US, China, Racism, DRRHI, IRRHI, Strategic competition

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Introduction

Racism is a critical issue in national governance in the US. The election of President Barack Obama in 2008 was once regarded as a sign that the US was becoming a “post-racial society”; however, during the Obama administration, the undercurrent of racism became more violent, the negative perception among races exacerbated, and racial relations became increasingly tense (López 2010; McDermott and Belcher 2014; Smithers 2009). After Donald Trump was elected president in 2016, racism continued to show an increasing trend; individual racism became more prevalent, and institutional racism intensified (Bobo 2017; Nacos et al. 2020; Terrill 2017). After Joe Biden was elected president in 2020, the trend of racism’s resurgence endured. Racial hate crimes and racially driven police violence occurred frequently, while racial conflicts and divisions continued to intensify. In 2024, Trump’s reelection as president, combined with his racist rhetoric and actions, intensified concerns, both domestically and internationally, regarding the resurgence of racism in the US.

US racism is not only a social problem, but also a political and governance problem. Although scholars have long paid attention to American racism and conducted extensive research, it is noteworthy that such research frequently adopts the perspective of domestic affairs and does not pay enough attention to racism’s impact on US foreign policy. However, racism is an important ideological source of US foreign policy and has a profound impact on the US view of the world order (Acharya 2022; Búzás 2021; Freeman et al. 2022), foreign policy theory (Henderson 2013; Kayaoglu 2010) and strategic culture (Greenberg 1982; Horsman 1981). In the practice of US foreign policy, racism is closely related to hegemonism, alliance behavior, and containment policies.

The US policy toward China is an important part of its foreign policy. The shift of US policy toward China to a paradigm emphasizing strategic competition, the trend of promoting strong containment and suppression, and the impact of the adjustment of US policy toward China vis-à-vis China–US relations and the world order are among the core issues discussed by international relations scholars. Why has US policy toward China shifted toward strategic competition? To date, international relations scholars have primarily explained this issue from three

perspectives, with obvious shortcomings.

The first explanation is based on changes in the power differential between China and the US. The continuous reduction in the strength gap between both countries, as well as the US expectations of China's medium- and long-term development, has strengthened the former's anxiety about its international status, which is the main motivation for the pivot of its policy toward China, emphasizing strategic competition. The theories of the Thucydides trap (Allison 2015, 2017), power transfer (Organski 1958), and offensive realism (Mearsheimer 2001) share the assumption that the rise of a great power will inevitably lead to confrontation or war between rising and established powers. However, under scrutiny, this assumption cannot be confirmed. Historically, not all established powers have engaged in military confrontations or wars. During its rise before World War I, the US did not wage war with then-world-hegemon Britain. In fact, Britain did not develop a strategy to contain the US. Moreover, Japan and Germany's resurgence after World War II did not lead to a war between them and the world hegemon, the US.

The second explanation is based on the political and socio-ideological gap between China and the US. In the process of continuously rising of China, the ideological differences between China and the US have widened, becoming an important driving force for the deterioration of China-US relations. The most concerning friction between both countries is the gradual shift from a conflict of interest to a conflict of values—or, rather, a conflict of identity. Thus, the space for compromise has been greatly reduced, while the cost of confrontation is at risk of being easily overlooked (Allison 2017; Harshe 2006; Huntington 2011; Iriye 1979; Vlahos 1991). Nonetheless, it is worth considering that during former US President Nixon's visit to China and the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US, the ideological differences between both countries were not smaller than they are today. Therefore, how can both countries overcome their ideological differences?

The third explanation is based on the effects of changes in US domestic affairs. Unprecedented resonance has emerged between the polarization of US politics and that of US policy toward China. Political polarization in the US has deepened, while the emotional and provocative

performances of both the Republican and Democratic parties on the political stage constitute a catalyst for a change in US policy toward China (Friedrichs 2022; Friedrichs and Tama 2022). American populism has reversed the value orientation of US policy toward China, and shaped the negative political and social environment of US policy toward China (Hughes 1975; Lacatus 2020; Lavin 1996). Changes in domestic political alliances in the US have defined the themes of its policy toward China and the strategic competition between both countries. However, from the perspective of domestic political effects, a question remains: Why is China regarded by the US as a strategic competitor?

Indeed, these three explanations provide an in-depth analysis of why the US introduced and promoted the paradigm of strategic competition with China. However, as previously mentioned, all three explanations have significant limitations. Therefore, in the present study, We construct a new analytical framework to explain why the US has introduced and how it promotes strategic competition with China. The core of this analytical framework aims to consider the relative narrowing of the power gap between China and the US, the ideological differences between them, and changes in US domestic politics as independent variables, while introducing domestic racism and racial hierarchy ideology (DRRHI) and international racism and racial hierarchy ideology (IRRHI) as intervening variables.

The introduction of DRRHI and IRRHI as intervening variables into the study of China–US relations will aid in the analysis of key issues that have been insufficiently addressed in the literature. First, China’s proposal to build a new type of great-power relationship between China and the US—marked by mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation—is an innovative idea that breaks away from the traditional perspective on the relationship between established and rising powers. Why does the US government ignore this possibility by adhering to a Cold War rationale? Second, how can we understand the irrational phenomenon of US strategic competition with China, evidenced by the reckless antagonistic behavior of the Trump administration through its policy toward China, the export control behavior (which had a significant negative impact on the American economy) issued by the Biden administration, and the US government’s continuous stigmatization of China, which lacks a factual basis? Third, as the US government

emphasizes the need to maintain the stability of China–US relations and avoid conflict and confrontation, while it simultaneously continues to damage China’s core interests, how can we understand this logical contradiction?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. After presenting the analytic framework of DRRHI, IRRHI, and US policy toward China (Section 2), we analyze the relationship between DRRHI and the hardline American political elites’ approach to China (Section 3), as well as the relationship between IRRHI and the US view of China as a major threat (Section 4). Subsequently, we explore the policy promotion of DRRHI and IRRHI’s transformation into the paradigm of strategic competition with China (Section 5). Finally, Section 6 concludes the article.

DRRHI, IRRHI, and US policy toward China: an analytic framework

Racism is the belief that humans are divided into distinct hereditary groups that are innately different in their social behaviors and mental capacities and can therefore be ranked as superior or inferior (Marger 2000, 27). The belief in innate differences among ethnic groups is used to justify the unequal distribution of society’s rewards. From this perspective, the placing of groups within a social hierarchy is seen as “natural”. This racist ideology promotes an ethnic status quo in which one group dominates a society’s economy, polity, and other key institutions, and thus receives the greatest share of society’s wealth and power (Marger 2000, 28).

The concept of racial hierarchy strongly influences US foreign policy. This concept is particularly attractive because it provides a readily available and useful way to navigate the world. Anglo-Saxonism occupies a central position in the American conceptual structure of the racial hierarchy. From this perspective, according to standards such as advanced industry, strong military power, international influence, and control, Anglo-Saxons should be at the highest level of the racial ladder, without any comparison. They are in such an outstanding position that they point to a path toward unprecedented world peace and prosperity.

Faced with the narrowing power gap between China and the US, the



Fig. 1. The mechanism through which DRIRH and IRIRH work.

X1 represents the narrowing of the power gap between China and the US. X2 represents the ideological differences between them. X3 represents the polarization of US domestic politics. Y1 represents the policy consequences of DRRHI. Y2 represents the policy consequences of IRRHI.

latter could choose to coexist in competition and cooperation; however, why does it choose comprehensive strategic competition with the former? Faced with the ideological differences between both countries, the US could prioritize respect; therefore, why does it choose to construct a narrative of “democracy vs. authoritarianism”? Faced with the division of domestic political elites and the division of the public, the US can choose multiple ways to respond; therefore, why does it choose to shape China into a strategic competitor to bridge domestic political differences? This study argues that this is because DRRHI and IRRHI played crucial roles in the formation of US policy toward China, as shown in Figure 1.

US strategic competition with China is the result of maintaining both DRRHI and IRRHI. In the US, at the domestic level, a national policy of strategic competition with China is seen as necessary to expand the white working class’s employment, increase its income, and prevent its decline in status, thereby becoming an important tool for political elites to mobilize voters. At the international level, US strategic competition with China is seen as a reasonable path to prevent further narrowing of the power gap between China and the US, as well as to maintain the dominant position of Anglo-Saxon culture and American values. In terms of goal orientation, the strategic competition between the US and China aims to maintain the economic, military, geopolitical, and cultural hierarchies of Anglo-Saxonism.

In this study, we intentionally construct an analytic framework for how DRRHI and IRRHI affect the development and change of US policy toward China. On the one hand, US strategic competition with China is a response to the domestic political conflicts caused by DRRHI, which not only transfers domestic contradictions but also provides legitimacy for foreign policy. On the other hand, US strategic competition with China is a response to the great power game triggered by the IRRHI, which

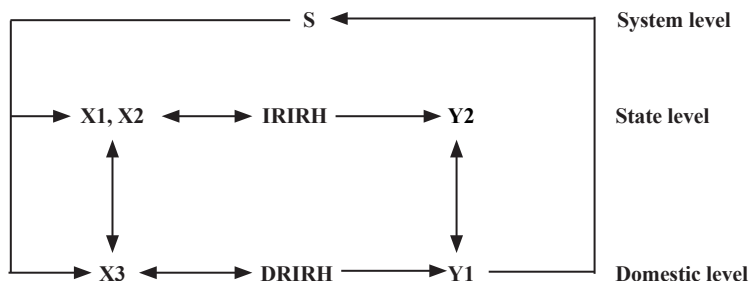


Fig. 2. The nexus among DRRHI, IRRHI, and US policy toward China

aims to maintain white centralism in the international stage and the US hegemonic position. The analytical framework is illustrated in Figure 2.

Maintaining a racial hierarchy is one of the core motivation for the US strategic competition with China. This paradigm serves the racial hierarchy centered on white people internally, and the racial hierarchy centered on the US externally. The promotion of the policy of transforming DRRHI and IRRHI into the paradigm of strategic competition with China has triggered a new conflict between racism and anti-racism in China–US relations.

DRRHI and hardline US political elites' approach to China

Foreign policy is the continuation of internal affairs. Meanwhile, racism has long existed in US society and is a persistent disease in national governance. It has had a profound impact on all aspects of political, economic, social, and cultural development in the US. Its outbreak is characterized by periodicity. The current resurgence of racism in the US is the result of the convergence of historical and practical factors. The strong challenge of ethnic minorities in the white-centered racial hierarchy is the root of the resurgence of racism and has become an important motivation for the US to turn its policy toward China to strategic competition.

US DRRHI and its disintegration process

The US comprises multiple ethnic groups, each of which has a moderately clear definition and identity. According to the US Census Bureau, the basic ethnic groups in America can be divided into whites, Hispanic-Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hawaii and Pacific Islanders, Indians, Alaska Aborigines, and other ethnic groups. Various ethnic groups have gradually formed relatively fixed ethnic stratification systems during long-term interactions. From the perspective of the hierarchical structure, ethnic groups in the US can be divided into three levels, with the top level comprising white Protestants from various countries (Marger 2000, 151). The middle layer includes white Catholics, Jews, and most Asians from all countries. For them, ethnic stratification continues to play a role in distributing social remuneration and it affects their social life (Marger 2000, 151). The lowest level comprises African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, American Indians, and some Asian-Americans (Marger 2000, 151).

The US ethnic stratification system and each ethnic group's relative position within the system are of great significance to the survival and development of each group and continue to determine various aspects of their social life. Over the last century, the hierarchical system of ethnic groups has remained mostly stable. Although the gap between ethnic groups has decreased, the hierarchical order has not changed substantially. The different statuses of different ethnic groups within the hierarchical system of ethnic groups determine their ability to control social resources. Because white people have been at the center of the system for a long time, they have dominated the development of the economic foundation and superstructure of US national governance. In the US current political, economic, social, and cultural systems, white people control most high-level positions and decision-making processes. Especially in the political system, white people dominate resource allocation, rule-making, and discourse power in the legislative, judicial, and administrative systems at both the federal and local levels. Simultaneously, elite white groups, especially non-Hispanic whites, are committed to building an ideology aimed at maintaining the rationality and legitimacy of the current US ethnic stratification system for the long-term practice of national governance. Therefore, the key issues of ethnic relations and the elimination of racial discrimination and prejudice in the

US center around unfairness between white and non-white people across political, economic, social, and cultural systems, as well as institutional design and policymaking, aiming to reduce such unfairness.

It is noteworthy that the US ethnic stratification system has been strongly challenged by ethnic minorities in recent years, which is directly reflected in the expansion of ethnic minorities' population size, their improvement in economic and social status, and the enhancement of their ability to control social resources. This change strongly has impacted the dominant position of white Americans in national governance.

First, a change in ethnic minorities' population size means that their survival and development require more political, economic, and social resources. For example, in the political system, awareness of ethnic minorities' participation in politics has continuously improved, and their achievements have been remarkable. An increasing number of ethnic minorities have become political elites and have entered senior positions at the federal and local levels. Taking the US Congress as an example, from the 110th Congress to the 117th Congress, the number of African-American members rose from 43 to 61, accounting for 11.3% of the total membership; the number of Hispanic-American members rose from 30 to 52, accounting for 9.6% of the total membership; and the number of Asian-American members rose from 9 to 21, accounting for 3.9% of the total number of parliamentarians (Amer 2016; Manning 2022). In 2008, Barack Obama became the first minority president in the history of the US, an event that is regarded as a milestone for the US regarding the crossing of racial barriers.

Second, the cultural (values, concepts, and belief systems), language (ethnic minorities' adaptability and use of English), and religious structures of American ethnic minorities have an increasing impact on the value, cultural, and national identities of white Americans. Consequently, right-wing conservatives argue that there is a crisis of identity in American society (Huntington 2005). The emphasis on ethnic characteristics and the prevalence of multiculturalism has led to the gradual Balkanization of the US. From this perspective, American historical and cultural traditions face unprecedented challenges (Fukuyama 2018; Lilla 2017; Wiarda 2014).

Third, in addition to ethnic minorities' increasing impact on the US internal affairs, right-wing conservatives posit that the US diplomatic

system has lost control of the initiatives of ethnic minorities to a certain extent, and the occurrence and development of transnational relations of ethnic minorities and the corresponding political actions have damaged US interests. The core views of right-wing US conservatives may be summarized as follows: ethnic minority interest groups often put the interests of ethnic groups or home countries above those of the US; the transnational relations of ethnic minorities and their corresponding political behaviors have shaken the foundation of the American democratic value system; ethnic minorities may become spokespersons for the interests of foreign or hostile governments; ethnic minorities have caused the interruption of US foreign policy; in some cases, ethnic minorities have become obstacles to the reform of US foreign policy; some ethnic minority interest groups are too powerful; ethnic minorities may involve America in external conflicts without threatening its national interests; when an ethnic group's transnational political behavior and US policies have a significant impact on the interests of ethnic group's home country, the home country's government will intervene in US affairs (Haney and Vanderbush 1999; Huntington 1997; Mearsheimer and Walt 2006; Shain and Barth 2003).

Objectively, right-wing US conservatives do not deny that ethnic minorities should participate in the process of national governance and agree that ethnic minorities' interests should be expressed and that they should gain some influence; however, right-wing conservatives argue that ethnic minorities' influence has become too strong. Based on dissatisfaction with ethnic minorities' growing influence in the national governance system, right-wing conservatives posit that the US founding fathers have provided a safeguard mechanism for the rights of minorities because of their concern about the occurrence of a "tyranny of the majority"; however, in reality, the "tyranny of the minority" is constantly occurring in all matters of national governance. Overall, the US national governance system is developing beyond its control. From this perspective, right-wing conservatives are deeply convinced of the superiority of the white race and believe that the construction of the American national governance system must fundamentally rely on a material and ideological system dominated by white people. The interest demands of ethnic minorities can be expressed, but the limits of the expression and realization of interest demands depend on

whether the white-dominated political system can provide sufficient conditions for this. Therefore, the resurgence of racism and xenophobia in the US is rooted in right-wing conservatives' fear of the prospect of ethnic minorities and whites gaining equal status; this has led to a confrontational response to the expectation that the "dominance-subordination" relationship between whites and ethnic minorities will be subverted.

Racialization of partisan rivalry and US domestic political conflicts

First, a new wave of "voter repression" has emerged from US DRRHI. More than 30 years after the end of the Cold War, the US demographic makeup has undergone major and irreversible changes: the continuous expansion of the ethnic minority population and its proportion in the total population, as well as the continuous reduction of the white population and its proportion in the total population. The first disruptive impact of this demographic change is the shift in the basic strength of voters of both parties in the US. Judging from the voting data of 11 American presidential elections between 1984 and 2024, ethnic minorities generally tend to support the Democratic Party, while Republicans have never won more than half of the votes of Hispanic-, African-, and Asian-Americans. In the medium and long term, although the trend of ethnic minorities shifting to the Republican Party has been obvious since 2016, it has not reached the critical point of restructuring party-voter alliances. As a core voter base of the Democratic Party, ethnic minorities will continue to be maintained for a long time. The voter pillar of the Republican Party remains to comprise white Americans, while demographic change is extremely detrimental to the construction of a Republican voter base.

Based on demographic changes' profound impact on the two-party election system, after the presidential election and the census in 2020, the Republican Party has been trying to curb the impact of the expansion of ethnic minority populations on the election situation of the party through unfair electoral reform and redistricting, which constitutes a new round of voter repression against ethnic minority groups. In terms of electoral reform, Republican-led states have raised the threshold of identification for voter registration and voting through legislation and have added

conditions for the use of mail ballots. These measures have caused many African and Hispanic voters to encounter new obstacles to election participation. In terms of redistricting, the Republican Party has used gerrymandering to break up or concentrate the minority population and dilute the influence of minority voters as much as possible.

The obvious reason for the Republican Party to promote voter repression is the consideration of the maximization of electoral interests; however, the fundamental reason for this is the disregard for ethnic minorities' voting rights and electoral representation, fueled by racist ideology; that is, the voting rights and electoral representation of ethnic minorities are being ignored or sacrificed for racial and political interests. The US Voting Rights Act of 1965 stipulates that if a state has a record of discrimination against voters, it must obtain approval from the US Department of Justice before it can change the state constituency boundary map or state election law; nevertheless, the US Supreme Court abolished this restriction in the *Shelby County v. Holder* Case in 2013. Former US President Barack Obama believed that this judgment overturned a complete and effective political mechanism established by American society century to eliminate racial discrimination and ensure fair voting. On the anniversary of the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in 2021, Vice President Kamala Harris said that in the past decade, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was destroyed by the ruling of the America's Supreme Court, which constituted an attack on the voting rights and electoral representation of ethnic minorities (The White House 2021). The voter repression system promoted by the Republican Party became a crucial factor in the 2024 presidential election.

Second, DRRHI impacted the Biden administration's electoral reform agenda. In sharp contrast to the Republican Party's push for voter repression, after the Biden administration took office, the Democratic Party launched a new round of voting rights reforms, aiming to broaden ethnic minorities' voting channels and improve their voting rates through federal legislation. The Biden administration and the Democratic Party advocated for three bills: the For the People Act, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, and the Freedom to Vote Act. In terms of content, all three bills involve the reform of voter suppression in American electoral politics, including prohibiting states from putting forward notarization requirements for mail ballots, prohibiting states

from setting valid reasons for absentee ballots, requiring states to issue mail ballot application forms to all voters in advance, and requiring states to arrange for at least 15 days during the early voting period.

The Republican and Democratic parties have no consensus on the three bills' legislative processes. These bills were pushed by single-party factionalism of the Democratic Party, which the Republicans unanimously blocked. The Republican Party believes that the electoral reform plan of the Biden administration and the Democratic Party is an illegal deprivation of legislative power in state elections that will lead to the proliferation of electoral fraud. Ted Cruz, a Republican federal senator, criticized the plan of the Biden administration, arguing that the Democratic Party was entirely motivated by electoral political interests. The For the People Act and John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act broke through in the US House of Representatives, with a weak majority of Democrats, but it stagnated in the Senate. Similar to the legislative process of the above two bills, the Freedom to Vote Act could not enter the debate process in the Senate because of the obstruction by Republican senators.

Biden called the legislation of electoral reform passed by the Republican-led state "Jim Crow Laws 2.0" and criticized the Republicans' obstruction of the Democratic legislative process of electoral reform as a new advocacy of racial segregation. Although Biden's reprimand of the Republican Party remains to be discussed, the electoral reforms pushed by the Biden administration and the Democratic Party have been severely hindered. On the one hand, this reflects that although the US demographic makeup has undergone major changes, white people retain a dominant position in the country's rule-making and political discourse, while many US political elites have acquiesced to the influence of white centralism on American electoral politics. This also reflects white conservatives and far-right groups' anxieties regarding ethnic minorities' political influence.

Third, DRRHI has ignited a cultural war in US electoral politics. Since the Trump administration, the influence of DRRHI in US electoral politics has become increasingly prominent. Extreme right-wing forces in the US believe that "all people are born unequal", which highly overlaps with racism in subject and concept, arguing that white people are better than ethnic minorities in both physical and social attributes. The "white genocide" movement and "great replacement" theory posit

that due to the expansion of ethnic minorities' population minorities and the improvement of their socio-economic status, as well as the "forced assimilation" of white people, the white race is going extinct. White supremacists often claim that white people must act to prevent this; otherwise, the white race will disappear from the earth. The white supremacy organization Patriot Front claims to represent the interests of the "real people", employing the slogan "reclaim America".

The confluence of racism and populism in the US is obvious. From the Freud incident in 2020 to the Buffalo shooting in 2022, the fact that anti-Asian hate crimes have remained high since the Biden administration came into power, as well as the fierce confrontation between racism and anti-racism forces, all directly or indirectly leading to cultural war, has become an important factor in US electoral politics. After the US Supreme Court overturned the ruling of *Roe v. Wade*, the US public showed a polarized reaction, which became a crucial factor affecting election. It is noteworthy that, rooted in concerns surrounding the continuous decline of the white population in the US, white supremacist forces comprised an important group supporting the overthrow of *Roe v. Wade*.

In addition, an important phenomenon accompanying the Biden administration's policy of racial equality was the extreme trend of thought and practice of anti-racism in the US, which manifested in the considerable influence of critical race theory. Critical race theory was originally a product of anti-racism but some of its more controversial views have caused strong resistance from conservatives. Critical race theory posits that race is the basic entry point to one's worldview and that the US political, legal, and cultural systems are created by white people to perpetuate racism and racial oppression and enhance their own advantages. Critical race theory establishes that the US existing social order must be rebuilt to root out racism and achieve racial equality. Critical race theory became a hot-button issue in the 2022 midterm elections and the 2024 presidential election in the US. Republican-led states made every effort to prohibit the teaching of critical race theory in the education system through legislation, while the Democratic Party denounced the position of the Republican Party as racist dog-whistle politics. Critical race theory has an important impact on the party orientation of US swing and conservative voters. The Republican Party

has criticized the theory as an important means of political mobilization and has achieved favorable results in its election situation.

Maintaining DRRHI and hardline US political elites' approach to China

DRRHI exists systematically throughout the US. It has many supporters among the US political elite and the public and has a significant impact on national governance. Currently, American racism is on an upward cycle. Accordingly, the forces of racism are becoming increasingly active and continue to exacerbate racial inequality, hatred, and divisions. Simultaneously, DRRHI, as an important factor embedded in the US democratic system, has a prominent impact on US politics in the medium and long term. From an institutional perspective, DRRHI has always been a major problem faced by the US democratic system, as it is difficult to solve. Racism's resurgence is the result of the US democratic system's difficulty in adapting to changes in demography and ethnic relations. Further, it has caused US democratic politics to face various new dilemmas.

US Racism's resurgence has led to increasingly active racist forces in the political elite and the public, thus emphasizing the dominant position of white people and daring to violate political correctness. An increasing number of people with racist and conservative ideologies have been elected as political figures through the electoral system. The interaction between racist forces in the political elite and racist forces in the public has led to an increase in discrimination against Asian-Americans in US society, as well as an increase in negative perceptions and unfriendly political positions toward China.

Anti-China remarks and behaviors have proven helpful for



Fig. 3. The nexus between DRRHI and US political elites' hardline approach to China

Republicans to expand their votes. For instance, the Republican Party claimed that China had led to the failure of the US in low-income areas dominated by white people, which allowed them to reap many votes. Meanwhile, the policy Florida SB 264 seeks to prevent Chinese citizens from purchasing land in Florida (Axelbank and Turner 2023). In voting against the legislation, Florida House Minority Leader Fentrice Driskell, a Tampa Democrat and an attorney, called the bill “overly broad” and warned that it could result in lawsuits by “veering into the area of national origin discrimination” (Axelbank and Turner 2023). Coincidentally, the Democrats have taken a radical stance in responding to China-related issues. The Democratic political elite did this, on the one hand, to win votes and, on the other hand, to shift domestic contradictions. Specifically, the Democratic Party’s establishment hoped to win Republicans’ support in domestic legislation in areas such as infrastructure, research, and employment by adopting a tough stance on policies toward China. Simultaneously, American political elites are also shifting domestic conflicts by “being tough” on China.

IRRHI and the construction of China as “major threat”

IRRHI and threat perception

IRRHI is rooted in the Judeo-Christian civilizational tradition. The Judeo-Christian civilizational tradition imbues US thinking and foreign policy with a messianic undercurrent; it informs the idea that the US is an exceptional nation—indeed, one blessed by the Almighty (Firestein 2022). IRRHI harbors the idealistic cognitive bigotry of white centralism. White centralism posits that the US and its alliance with Anglo-Saxon culture are the nucleus of the international community and that the US is superior to other countries, seeking absolute dominance of the international order through hegemonism. Simultaneously, IRRHI establishes that Anglo-Saxon culture and the values it advocates are universal. From this perspective the US is a “city on a hill”, boasting that it has the mission of promoting its values worldwide. For a long time, IRRHI has been a crucial factor affecting US foreign policy, hidden in plain sight. The US has maintained a hierarchical international order by establishing a leading international system. However, with the

significant increase in the power of non-Western countries, the relative decline in the power of Western countries and the profound change in the power comparison of major powers, the US intention to monopolize the dominant power of the international order is no longer realistic. In this case, the US began to advocate the maintenance of “rule-based international order”. The essence of this goal is to maintain white-led unilateralism and power politics under new time and space conditions.

IRRHI is extremely sensitive to forces that can challenge the US international status. IRRHI’s tone in US foreign policy is twofold: one is affirmative, and the other is negative. The affirmative tone of the IRRHI is mostly aimed at Western countries that share more common interests than non-Western countries and similar cultural values with the US. If these countries do not constitute obstacles to the US global strategy or are conducive to its national interests, the US comments are favorable. IRRHI’s negative tone is mostly directed against developing countries, especially when they resolutely defend their national interests and thus become obstacles to US hegemony. Accordingly, the US has done almost everything in its power to vilify these countries.

IRRHI’s negative tone is itself twofold: one is rooted in “ignorance theory” and the other in “threat theory”. The former generally targets underdeveloped countries or ethnic groups, while the latter targets countries or ethnic groups with certain strengths. Regardless of countries’ characteristics, as long as they conflict with the US interests and are not willing to submit to its hegemony, IRRHI against these countries will favor threat theory. Within this context, the main strategy of threat theory is to wantonly exaggerate the military strength, economic competitiveness, and alienated cultural values of such countries, thereby influencing international and domestic public opinion with the idea that these countries or nations threaten global security, plunder wealth, and



Fig. 4. Nexus between IRRHI and the US regarding China as a strategic competitor

challenge the “human nature” of freedom, justice, and civilization.

IRRH and the “new China threat”

During the Cold War, the US foreign policy was mainly based on its judgment of the Soviet Union, which posited that it could spread communism worldwide and never become a partner of the US; thus, it had to be contained. After the end of the Cold War, some US strategists argued that if the US engaged with China, China could become a friendly actor, even a “responsible stakeholder” or a strategic partner of the US. This “engagement policy” became the cornerstone of the US efforts to change China.

Many US presidents (from Richard Nixon to Barack Obama) have worked to engage China through diplomacy, trade, scientific cooperation, and educational and cultural exchanges (Friedberg 2012). Since the mid-1990s, successive administrations have taken steps to maintain a favorable power balance in East Asia (Friedberg 2012). As China has grown stronger, the US has bolstered its own military capabilities in the region, enhanced its strategic cooperation with traditional allies, and built new partnerships with other countries that share its concerns, such as India and Singapore (Friedberg 2012). However, with the emergence of a new round of “the China threat”, the once-dominant “engagement policy” has been put into question and a “containment” strategy toward China has taken its place. In the eyes of some US elites (those who, for a generation, have favored short-term profits with China [Axelbank and Turner 2023]), the US prior policy toward China was a “strategic mistake” and the US did not pay enough attention to the risks posed by China. Some US elites argue that economic integration did not stop China from expanding its military ambitions in the region (The White House 2023). Against this backdrop, the US is facing the historic challenge of China reshaping Asia and the rest of the world. From this perspective, China is a strategic competitor that is even more dangerous than the Soviet Union. This doctrine advocates for adopting a tough policy toward China, regardless of the resulting bureaucratic disputes and departmental competition, thereby demonstrating fear, anxiety, and unhealthy attitudes toward China’s development.

The new round of the “China threat” in the US involves numerous

disciplines, not only economics, politics, and military theory but also spreading to all aspects of social life and international exchanges. Terms such as “economic threat”, “ideological threat”, “Belt and Road threat”, “cyberspace threat”, “military threat”, and so on have emerged within this context, almost to the point of becoming all-encompassing (Axelbank and Turner 2023; The White House 2023).

IRRHI and the definition of China as strategic competitor

The definition of China as a strategic competitor began with the Trump administration. The December 2017 National Security Strategy plainly described China as a “revisionist” power that “seeks to displace the US in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor”. From the perspective of the Biden administration, China harbors the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the current international order in favor of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit, even as the US remains committed to managing the competition responsibly (The White House 2022). China is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do so (The White House 2022). The 2023 State of the Union address highlighted that the Biden administration planned to invest in US innovation and industries that will define the future that China intends to dominate, invest in alliances and work with allies to protect advanced technologies, and modernize the American military to safeguard stability and deter aggression (The White House 2023).

The prevailing, militaristic conception of “national security” is steeped in IRRHI and perpetuates white supremacy. The racism-militarism paradigm is a worldview widely shared among US policymakers and much of the public, arising from a largely unacknowledged doctrine of white supremacy and the necessity of using violence to uphold it. This paradigm establishes a rigid race-based hierarchy that values white people more highly than any other ethnic group at home or abroad. It embraces militarism as the most effective mechanism for guaranteeing the ordering of society and the world. US–China relations are currently in a precarious state due to accumulating differences in interests and values. Therefore, US–China competition has both intensified and diversified.

The US 2022 National Defense Strategy asserts that defense priorities include defending the homeland, pacing the growing multi-domain threat posed by China, and deterring aggression, while being prepared to prevail in conflict if necessary, prioritizing China's challenge in the Indo-Pacific region (US Department of Defense 2022). The US Department of Defense will act urgently to sustain and strengthen deterrence, with China being the most consequential strategic competitor and pacing challenge for the department (US Department of Defense 2022). US House Republicans and Democrats joined forces and voted overwhelmingly in favor of a new committee to examine US strategic competition with China after House Speaker Kevin McCarthy declared on the House floor that neither the Republicans nor the Democrats would trust China anymore.

DRRHI, IRRHI and US strategic competition with China

Reflecting on the relationships between major countries, DRRHI and IRRHI in the US policy toward China are increasingly prominent, which has a significant negative impact on China–US relations. Influenced by racism and a dualistic thinking paradigm, the US distinguishes between “self” and “other” in its relationship with the world. The US has always regarded China as the “other” and intended to shape China with a condescending posture in their interactions, attempting to make China develop in the way that America expects. With the shifting power differential between China and the US, DRRHI and IRRHI have become important ideological sources of the US containment policy toward China. During the Trump and Biden administrations, racism's impact on US policy toward China was evinced in the following aspects.

US DRRHI and IRRHI: from recessive to explicit

2016 was the watershed for the re-expression of US DRRHI and IRRHI. Influenced by the resurgence of DRRHI, the Trump administration promoted nationalism, populism, isolationism, and unilateralism under the slogan “America First”. One key feature of the Trump administration's foreign policy is that it does not recognize the deep development of the world's multipolarity, treats international

cooperation negatively, and seeks the US withdrawal from multilateral agreements and organizations. It has successively withdrawn from organizations with broad international representation such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization; the Global Compact on Migration; the United Nations Human Rights Council; and the World Health Organization. The interaction between the Trump administration and the World Health Organization during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that the US does not respect the international system and uses it when it is favorable for the US and abandons it when it is not. Consequently, the credit of the US government has shrunk significantly. Simultaneously, under the impact of IRRHI, US foreign policy began to pay more attention to force, deterrence, and coercion. After announcing its withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the US announced its withdrawal from the Treaty on Open Sides during the pandemic period, thereafter restarting nuclear testing in a relaxed manner, taking an important step back in maintaining the peace and stability of the international community.

During the Biden administration, US IRRHI continued to develop, while value diplomacy and alliance systems were the main carriers for the Biden administration to practice IRRHI. The Biden administration posited that the alliance is the largest asset of the US and that US foreign policy must be rooted in American-style democratic values (US Department of State 2021). In practice, the Biden administration demarcated the boundary with ideology, regarded the Western democratic system as the foundation of the international order, and regarded common values as the link of the alliance system. The Summit for Democracy, led by the Biden Administration, intended to draw a line via American-style democracy and provoke a dispute between political systems and ideology in the international community. Underlying this effort is Western-style arrogance and prejudice against other civilizations. The Build Back Better World initiative put forward by the Biden administration also had distinctive characteristics of value diplomacy, reflecting the Biden administration's intention to seize rule rulemaking and discourse power in infrastructure construction, climate change response, digital technology development, global health governance, and other fields.

The stigmatization of China during the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 is a common enemy to all humankind; thus, it behooved the international community to unite efforts to combat the pandemic. However, the US, as one of the main actors of the international community, not only failed to rise up to the responsibilities of a great power but also allowed DRRHI and IRRHI to play their part, constantly politicizing the pandemic and continuously stigmatizing and attacking China. During the COVID-19, US DRRHI and IRRHI toward China were typically reflected in the stigmatization of China by some US scholars, media, politicians, and the US government. Walter Russell Mead, professor at Bard College and researcher of Hudson Institute, published the article “China is the real sick man of Asia” in the Wall Street Journal. Moreover, former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and Republican Senator Ted Cruz frequently slandered and attacked China during the pandemic. The Senate Committee of the US Republican Party issued a memorandum suggesting that Republican candidates in the 2020 campaign should actively pressure China to solve the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2020, the Republican Attorney Generals of 17 states sent a letter to the leadership of the US Senate and House of Representatives, threatening that China should be held responsible for the losses and damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, Republican Congresspeople put forward over 10 anti-China bills related to the pandemic, attempting to pass legislation or amend the 1976 Foreign Sovereign Immunity Act, paving the way for false accusations of abuse. Since then, the Biden administration continued to stigmatize China on the issue of COVID-19 traceability, reflecting a strong bias.

Cold War thought toward China and whole-of-government containment policies

US DRRHI and IRRHI are linked to the search to control power politically, the dominance of white people over other ethnic groups, the portrayal of competing ethnic groups as potential dangers, and suppress other civilizations or cultures while vigorously defending their own. During the Trump administration, Kiron Skinner, the former director of policy planning of the US State of Department, characterized the China–US competition as a “clash of civilizations”, the essence of which is Cold

War thinking and racism. The Trump administration clearly positioned China as the US most important strategic competitor. Moreover, the 2017 US National Security Strategy called for strategic competition with China. Since then, US competition with China has expanded rapidly in all directions, with an unprecedented range of coverage and strengths. The Biden administration aligned with the basic orientation of the Trump administration's policy toward China, regarding China as the US main strategic competitor, advocated for dealing with China from a position of strength, and comprehensively suppressed China in the fields of economy, politics, security, science, and technology.

DRRHI and IRRHI have led the US to view maintaining white centrism in the international system as vital. Compared with the defense of white centrism, other matters are secondary, which has led to the Biden administration prioritizing security interests over economic ones in its policy toward China. To curb China's rise, it is willing to sacrifice its own economic interests. The US, Britain, and Australia's trilateral security cooperation mechanism (AUKUS) promoted by the Biden administration is a small and exclusive group of countries belonging to Anglo-Saxon culture. The US, Britain, and Australia, for their own geopolitical interests and ignoring the concerns of the international community, have insisted on announcing a cooperation plan for nuclear submarines and have also coerced the secretariat of the International Atomic Energy Agency to endorse its safety measures. This act not only poses the serious risk of nuclear proliferation, fosters an arms race, and undermines peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region but also constitutes a bad precedent and may engender terrible consequences for the world. Kurt Campbell, the coordinator of Indo-Pacific Affairs of the US National Security Council, clarified that AUKUS was more aimed at China than at technology sharing (RT 2021). The confluence of racism and nationalism in the US is obvious. Accordingly, racism has aligned with the trend of populism. The Biden Administration's policy toward China is not only affected by the IRRHI deeply embedded in the ideological system of US political elites but also has a corresponding social ideological basis.

Conclusion

To date, international relations scholars have categorized the reasons for the US shift toward strategic competition with China along three axes: the continuous narrowing of the power gap between China and the US, the differences in their political systems and ideologies, and the impact of the evolution of US internal affairs. These three axes have clear explanatory power; however, as mentioned earlier, each has obvious shortcomings. These deficiencies are reflected not only in the inability of these three interpretations to conform to the historical development of China–US relations but also in their inability to effectively analyze several new phenomena that have emerged in China–US relations. The reason for these deficiencies is that the existing analyses in the field of international relations ignore racial factors. Therefore, it is important to improve the analytical framework of the US strategic competition with China.

This study considers the continuous narrowing of the power gap between China and the US, the differences in their political systems and ideologies, and the impact of the evolution of US domestic affairs as independent variables. We introduce DRRHI and IRRHI as intervention variables and establish a new analytical framework to explain the motives and processes of the US strategic competition with China.

At the domestic level, DRRHI is in a process of change, from quantitative to qualitative, and has become an important domestic ideological root of the US strategic competition with China. To maintain DRRHI, racist forces and some conservatives began striving for greater political power, leading to an expanding division between political parties and voters. In polarized US politics, a strong policy toward China is a powerful weapon for Republicans to win votes and a pragmatic path for Democrats to compromise with Republicans, promote domestic legislation, and harvest votes. Meanwhile, in the face of domestic conflicts triggered by DRRHI, a tough policy toward China has become an effective way for both parties in the US to shift domestic conflicts and has become a source of legitimacy for US foreign policy.

At the international level, with the changing balance of power between the West and the rest of the world, IRRHI is also in the process of deconstruction and is also an important international ideological

root of the US strategic competition with China. Faced with the fact that the power gap between China and the US is constantly narrowing and the differences in political systems and ideologies between the two countries, the US has various coping options and can seek new ways to coexist with China through competition and cooperation. However, the deep-rooted IRRHI makes it difficult for the US to accept the loss of its position as the leader of the international system, and it will not willingly accept the rise of a major power of a radically different race. As the main force in maintaining IRRHI, the US regards China as its main strategic competitor, which is not only the result of changes in the international system structure but also the result of IRRHI as an intervention variable.

The introduction of DRRHI and IRRHI as intervention variables has helped explain several key issues that have not been clearly explained by international relations scholars. First, the US has been unwilling to accept China's proposed concept of a new type of great power relationship between both countries. One key reason for this is that DRRHI and IRRHI do not accept the possibility that the US could lose its leading position in the international system. Second, due to DRRHI's and IRRHI's commitment to maintaining white centrism at the domestic and international levels, the practice of prioritizing security interests and sacrificing economic interests to promote strategic competition with China has emerged in US policy. Third, DRRHI and IRRHI are rooted in pragmatism, paranoia, and opportunism, which has led the US to form the perception that China and the US cannot face conflict based on rational considerations, on the one hand, and frequently challenge China's bottom line, on the other hand. The influence of DRRHI and IRRHI on US policy toward China is gradually increasing. Cold War thinking, whole-of-government containment policies, alliance systems, stigmatization strategies, and human rights attacks, all of which are based on DRRHI and IRRHI, have become and will continue to be important components of US policy toward China.

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种族主义、种族等级意识形态与美国对华战略竞争

摘要：本研究探讨了种族主义如何影响了美国对华政策。研究以中国与美国之间不断缩小的实力差距、两国政治制度的差异以及美国国内事务演变的影响作为自变量。我们引入了国内种族主义和种族等级意识形态(Domestic Racism and Racial Hierarchy Ideology, DRRHI)和国际种族主义和种族等级意识形态(International Racism and Racial Hierarchy Ideology, IRRHI)作为干预变量。在国内，面对由DRRHI引发的政治和社会冲突，对华强硬政策已成为美国民主党和共和党双方的共同诉求。在国际上，根深蒂固的IRRHI阻碍了美国接受自己在国际体系中领导地位的丧失以及中国的崛起。为维持DRRHI和IRRHI，美国将中国视为其主要战略竞争对手。基于DRRHI和IRRHI的冷战思维、全政府遏制政策、联盟体系、污名化策略和人权攻击等，仍是美国对华政策的重要组成部分。

关键词：美国、中国、种族主义、DRRHI、IRRHI、战略竞争

인종 차별, 인종 위계 이데올로기, 미국의 중국과의 전략적 경쟁

초록 : 본 연구에서는 인종차별이 미국의 대중국 정책에 어떠한 영향을 미쳤는지 살펴보았다. 중국과 미국 간 힘의 격차 감소, 정치 시스템의 차이, 미국 국내 문제의 변화에 따른 영향 등을 독립변수로 설정하였다. 국내 인종주의 및 인종 위계 이데올로기(DRRHI)와 국제 인종주의 및 인종 위계 이데올로기(IRRHI)를 중재변수로 설정했다. 미국 국내적으로 DRRHI에 의한 정치·사회적 갈등에 직면한 상황에서 강경한 대중국 정책은 미국 민주당과 공화당 모두에게 득이 되었다. 국제적으로 뿌리 깊은 IRRHI는 미국이 국제 체제에서 선도적 지위를 상실하였으며 중국이 부상하는 상황을 받아들이는 것을 방해한다. 미국은 DRRHI와 IRRHI를 유지하고자 중국을 주요 전략적 경쟁국으로 간주하고 있는 것이다. 냉전적 사고, 범정부적 봉쇄 정책, 동맹 체제, 낙인 전략, 인권 공격 등은 모두 DRRHI와 IRRHI에 기반한 것이며, 미국의 대중국 정책에 있어 여전히 중요한 요소다.

주요어 : 미국, 중국, 인종 차별, DRRHI, IRRHI, 전략적 경쟁

人種主義、人種階層イデオロギー、米国の対中戦略競争

概要：本研究では、人種主義が米国の対中政策にどのような影響を与えたかを検証する。中国と米国のパワーギャップの縮小、政治体制の違い、米国内政の進化の影響を独立変数とした。国内人種主義と人種階層イデオロギー (DRRHI) および、国際人種主義と人種階層イデオロギー (IRRHI) を介入変数として導入した。国内的には、DRRHIに端を発した政治的・社会的対立に直面した対中強硬政策は、米国の民主・共和両党にとって有益なものとなった。国際的には、根深いIRRHIが、米国が国際システムにおける主導的地位の喪失と中国の台頭を受け入れることを妨げている。DRRHIおよびIRRHIを維持するため、米国は中国を主要な戦略的競争相手とみなしている。冷戦思考、政府全体による封じ込め政策、同盟システム、汚名戦略、人権攻撃、これらはすべてDRRHIとIRRHIに基づいており、米国の対中政策の重要な構成要素であり続けている。

キーワード：米国、中国、人種主義、DRRHI、IRRHI、戦略的競争