

# Does Domestic Policy Have an Impact on Economic Relations with Other States: An Interrogation of Bilateral Relations Between USA and China – 1990s To Present

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## Abstract

This research paper explores the effects that domestic policies have on the bilateral relations between states, in this case, the bilateral trade relations between the states of China and the USA will be examined. The ramifications that domestic policies have had on the economic relationship between the two states is analysed through various presidential years. Furthermore, this research paper also briefly discusses the consequences the US-China trade war has had on the recent years.

## Introduction

Bilateral relations between the US and China have always been uncertain, even though both states have been trading since 1979 when they re-established diplomatic relations with the signing of the bilateral trade agreement. Since then, both states have benefitted from this relationship with exports/imports initially starting from 4 billion USD to exports/imports reaching 600 billion USD in 2017. According to the Library of Congress China was the US's biggest trade partner in the year 2019.<sup>1</sup> Presently China is the US's 3rd largest export partner followed by Canada and Mexico however, it still is the largest source of imports.<sup>2</sup>

This is not to say that the bilateral trade relationship between these two hegemony, which once started on equal footing, is still the same. Recent years have seen this trade relationship between the US and China being subjected to great changes, with the US importing more goods from China and exporting less to China. This trade balance between the US and China has been exacerbated immensely because of an increase in the volume of imports from China growing much more swiftly than the US exports to China. This immense trade gap between the two states has now become a cause for concern for both policymakers as well as economists in the US.<sup>3</sup> This research paper tries to investigate the impact domestic policies have on a state's economic relations more specifically, this research paper will interrogate the bilateral relations between two sovereign states that are the US and China. It will also discuss the effect of past domestic policies on bilateral trade relations between the US and China, furthermore, this investigation will be done

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<sup>1</sup>(Research Guides: U.S. Trade With China: Selected Resources: Introduction, n.d.)

<sup>2</sup>(Research Guides: U.S. Trade With China: Selected Resources: Introduction, n.d.)

<sup>3</sup>(Research Guides: U.S. Trade With China: Selected Resources: Introduction, n.d.)

by dividing the domestic policies into US presidential years. The investigation will start with Clinton years (1993-2001), Bush years (2001-2009), Trump years (2017-2021) and lastly, Biden Years (2021-Present).

### 1.2. Key Concepts Explained

First, the key concepts used in this research paper will be discussed. In this research paper, Domestic policy is perceived as a set of rules and regulations that an administrative government of a state takes that directly affects its people.<sup>4</sup>

Bilateral relations will be understood as relations between two sovereign states that recognise each other and so maintain diplomatic relations, these relations can be cultural, political or economic.<sup>5</sup> Sovereignty will be understood as the right of a state to rule itself without any outside interference.<sup>6</sup> Economic relations between states will be perceived as any financial dealings or business relationships between states.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned before, the US and China have trade ties that go back many years, but this doesn't mean that the trade relationship between these two states has always been stable. In recent years and especially during President Trump's administration the bilateral trade relationship between China and the US began deteriorating. With the former President having put multiple tariffs on China to try and bridge the imbalance in trade between the two states.<sup>8</sup> Although there could be many reasons for this increase in tariffs levied by the US on China, one of the most important is the difference in political ideologies between these two states.

### 1.3 Difference In Ideologies

The different ideologies as well as political leaderships has caused a few waves in their relationship when it comes to trade. The US as a state is wholly supportive of capitalism, whilst China is not. Although China engages in bilateral trade relations with the US it is still far from a capitalist country, this is because the CCP still retains control over the trade that takes place in China and this control over the country's trade allows the government to maintain the state's course for socialist development.<sup>9</sup>

However, this is not the only difference between the two states but is a significant one when considering their relations. It is because their ideologies are so distinct that their domestic policies also vary, and this variation in domestic policies has often led to conflicts between the two states.

## 2. Impact Of Domestic Policies On Bilateral Trade Relation Between US And China (1993-2022)

### 2.1 Clinton Administration (1993-2001)

During the initial years of President Clinton's administration his policy for economic growth underlined the importance of opening the world markets to American goods while also providing leadership on globalisation.<sup>10</sup> However, when it came to opening the global market for American goods to China, the trade relations between the two countries weren't so smooth sailing. Due to China's continuous alleged human rights (HR) violations the US' political establishment demanded a bold US stance on China's alleged infringements of human rights and so, demanded that trade be temporarily stopped until China

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<sup>4</sup>(Domestic Policy Definition: The Set of Decisions That a Government Makes Relating to Things That Directly Affect the People in. . . Learn More., 2022)

<sup>5</sup> <http://foreign.gov/vc/foreign/index.php/bilateral-relations>

<sup>6</sup>(Key Concepts, 2019)

<sup>7</sup> (Economic Relationship Definition, n.d.)

<sup>8</sup>(Research Guides: U.S. Trade With China: Selected Resources: Introduction, n.d.)

<sup>9</sup> (Lungu, 2021)

<sup>10</sup> <https://clintonwhitehouse5.archives.gov/WH/Accomplishments/eightyears-10.html>

stopped its HR violations yet the US economical establishments, and their economic interests demanded a continued enhancement in the bilateral relations between the two states. When the issue of China's transgression of HR could not be ignored further, Madeleine Albright, Secretary of state, visited China to represent the US' concerns about China's violations of HR. In what could only be assumed as an act of good faith and done in anticipation of US pressure China released a pro-egalitarian student leader, Wang Dan, a few days prior to secretary of state Albright's visit. Clinton years also saw the introduction of the "comprehensive engagement" policy. This particular policy was first introduced during the Senate Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific Affairs on March 8, 1995 by Clinton's Assistant Secretary of State, Winston Lord. the policy had only three purposes-

1. To seek all of the US' interests at appropriate levels with appropriate intensity.
2. To pursue and build joint trust and agreement in areas where US interests intersect with that of China.
3. Through negotiations shrink the areas where the ideas of the two diverge.

Though at the time trade between the US and China only constituted 2% of its total overseas trade, it was equally important since it meant the preservation of 18000 American jobs. This policy was beneficial for China as well which was aiming to get its MFN (Most Favoured Nation)<sup>11</sup> Status renewed, because the country's trade with the US accounted for 25% of its total global trade. Eventually Clinton renewed China's MFN status in 1994, when China's respect for HR was unlinked from trade and since then trade between the former and the latter only increased exponentially. Figures from 1993 reported China's surplus trade with the US amounted to 23 billion USD, which only hiked further in 1994 reaching 29.5 billion USD, only to further escalate to a humongous 40 billion USD in the year 1995. This caused concerns in the US since their trade with China had not grown to the same extent as China, this resulted in the US pressuring China to welcome increased amounts of American goods into its markets. China promised this and further assured the US that it would improve its protection records of IPR (Intellectual Property Rights), when the US saw no improvement in any even after multiple dialogues were exchanged, a frustrated US felt that China was not going to be persuaded but could only understand sanctions.

### **2.1.1 China's Domestic Policy during Clinton Years**

In the beginning of 1993, China adopted the belief of outright display of power, this it did by spending 2% percent more of its Gross National Product (GNP) on the armed forces every year. This was done under the programme of modernising its armed forces. It further brokered deals with Russia, for the disbursement of military hardware. Furthermore, in the same year, China also laid its claims on the Spratly islands causing further waves with the US, the latter having previously made it clear to China to abide by international laws and particularly the laws of the sea. The only limit to China trade imposed by Clinton was the ban on sales of Chinese-made guns in the US which had been \$100 million USD the year before. On December 11, 2001 China was officially welcomed as a WTO partner-nation. This path for China's entrance into the WTO was paved during the Clinton years due to the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000. This entrance into the WTO further allowed China to emerge as the US' second-biggest trade partner in 2006, with Canada being the US's largest trading partner.

### **2.1.2. Impact of Clinton's policies on trade and the US economy**

The Clinton administration, by opening foreign markets, provided the opportunity to American workers to be able to compete with foreign workers. Even after the administration came to an end its effects remained with 22 millions jobs having been created for Americans, inflation and unemployment at their lowest levels

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<sup>11</sup> (Most-Favored Nations (MFN) Clause: Treating Other People Equally, 2022)

and America being at the focal point of experiencing the longest economic growth in its history. Furthermore, because President Clinton paved the path for China's entry into the WTO, Chinese markets became open for US exports, tariffs imposed by China were slashed and American workers as well as companies were protected from unemployment and the latter against dumping.

## 2.2 Bush Administration (2001-2009)

After the Clinton Administration came the Bush Administration. President Bush wanted to normalise US-China relations. This became evident after President Bush's proclamation declaring China as the permanent normal trading relations (PNTR) partner of the US. However, this initial optimism failed to take into account the way in which China's economic policies would develop in the future. At the start of 2003 and for a few years after, the exchange rate of China's currency was set at virtually low levels, which gave a significant upper hand to the Chinese exporters. This competitive advantage led to the redacting of manufacturing companies in the US blue-collared communities which left many in the US unemployed and affected by Chinese exports.

Moreover, China's 2003 policy of "techno-nationalism" resulted in many foreign firms facing an array of obstacles and falling victims to unfair policies while functioning in China, foreign firms were further harmed by China's promotion and protection of Chinese competitors who were favourites of the party-state. This would harm the US economy years later but no decisive action was taken by the US at the time, this was also in part due to increasing trepidation regarding the consequences of souring US-China trade relations and what it would mean for the US and its allies.

By 2005 China had started proving itself as a formidable country and a possible threat to the US' economy generated by trade, when it surpassed the US and became the first nation to export more auto-parts than it imported. The inundation of Chinese parts only aggravated the problem of a US industry which was already suffering. This became clear when Delphi Corp. the biggest auto-parts maker in the US filed for bankruptcy in October of 2005. Even worse off were the furniture makers in the US which couldn't keep up with the influx of cheap imports from China. As a result, between the years of 2001-2005 due to the closure of 230 furniture plants in the US 55,000 jobs were lost. Due to the underappreciated exchange rate value of the Yuan many dissatisfied industry circles in the US put pressure on the Bush government to act. The Bush administration responded by formulating a strategy to persuade the IMF to use its power as the voice of the international community to reprimand countries with "mis-aligned" exchange rates, allegedly this strategy was meant to target China. However, the strategy yielded no results and was considered a debacle. In 2008 Japan was surpassed by China which became the largest holder of US treasuries (around 600 billion USD). This made the mutual dependence between Chinese and American economies evident at a time when a global economic crisis was threatening the world economy. This further fueled the already growing concerns over the imbalance in trade between the US and China. When "The Great Recession" hit the markets of the world, China became the only country to come out with an equal output in the economy than of their past year and far outstripping other foreign economies. This was done by slashing interest rates in The People's Bank of China and Beijing's spending of nearly 600 billion USD on transportation, healthcare and education.

During the Bush Administration the bilateral relation between the two countries, although rocky, remained good but it is reported that Bush's domestic economic policies were not beneficial for the country since they resulted in the addition of 6 trillion USD to the national debt because of the two wars as well as tax

cuts that were made during the administration.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3 Obama Administration (2009-2017)

When President Obama took the presidency for his first term he outlined his six main focuses he wanted to address. Out of these the most relevant three to trade and domestic policies were:

1. Controlling the costs of the US hegemony- This was a measure taken after the Bush administration had added 6 trillion USD to the national debt. During this it was decided that to maintain the US economy the nation would not go into further wars and as a result some US troops from both Iran and Afghanistan were called back. However, this strategy failed when the US intervened in Libya in 2011.
2. Resuscitate the US economy which had taken a hit during and after “The Great Recession” of 2008-2009.
3. “Rebalancing” strategy formerly known as the “Return to Asia-Pacific” strategy- This strategy entailed the US’ return and increased focus on the Asia-Pacific region especially on countries near China. Allegedly this strategy was to contain the rising threat of China as a global hegemon and world’s strongest economy.

In 2010, after a year of Obama’s administration and the end of “The Great Recession” the threat of China became more apparent to the US when China exceeded Japan as the world’s second-largest economy and furthermore overtook the US in manufacture of power generation and output.

US economic strategists were keenly aware of what implications this could have because having bigger manufacturing meant more funds for military purposes and a strong military meant a stronger nation which was a global power. It was due to this reason that the US became even more cautious of China and its trade practices.

In 2010 another strategy was formulated to control the rise of China that entailed the barring of China from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This particular agreement was signed by 12 pacific-rim countries including the US and accounts for 40% of the global economy; however, this strategy faced increasing attack from the different political spectrums in the US. As a result, the US withdrew itself from the TPP in 2017 and the agreement was never ratified and so, never came into force.

However, at the time during Obama’s administration when the strategy was first introduced China also started to advance its “Belt and Road” initiative as well as led to the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Bank, this was done to better China’s relationships with the countries in the Asia-pacific by providing them with monetary help in the form of loans.

In 2011 President Obama decided to visit China to address and discuss allegations that China was not acting in the spirit of practising free trade, one of the many stipulations it agreed to upon its entry into the WTO. Many in the US claimed that China was failing to protect IPR, restricting foreign investment and favouring local firms rather than international ones. Many lawmakers also felt that China’s manipulation of its currency also needed to be discussed, since these unfair practices undercut many foreign exports and so put America as well as other nations’ manufacturing products at an unfair disadvantage.

However, no end to these unfair trade practices was seen. As a result, in March of 2012, Japan, the EU and the US filed a “request for consultations” with China at the WTO regarding its restrictions on exporting rare earth metals, these restrictions often allegedly forced multinational companies to relocate to China thus contributing to its economy. The US along with its allies argued that this practice violated the

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<sup>12</sup>(George W. Bush Administration Policies and Impacts, 2021)

international trade norms. To this China responded by calling the investigation “unfair and rash”, while affirming that it would protect its rights.

November 2012 saw a change in leadership in China with Hu Jintao stepping down as president, the position being taken by his successor, Xi Jinping. Soon after taking the post, Jinping delivered his speech of “rejuvenation” of China, in hopes of having China rival the US as a cultural exporter.

In June of 2013, President Obama invited President Jinping to the Sunnyland Summit where both leaders promised to work to ease Sino-US relations and promised more cooperation on regional, global and bilateral issues including North Korea and Climate change. Furthermore, the countries promised a “new model of relations” with each other.

However, bilateral relations once again became rocky when the US indicted 5 Chinese Hackers with ties to the PLA on charges of stealing trade technology from the US. To this, Beijing responded by suspending its cooperation with the US-China cybersecurity working group.

Further allegations were made in China's unruly trade practices during the US-China business council in 2014. The council claimed that China had restricted investments in more than hundred industrial sectors, which included petrochemicals, agriculture and health services, while the US had restricted investment in five sectors. Increasing pressure was put on the Obama Administration to place tariffs on China's underpriced imports, it was also said that if the administration failed to do so the senators would mandate tariffs on their own. As a result, tariffs were put on Chinese textiles.

The first sparks of the still ongoing trade dispute between the US and China were seen in 2017 when the US International Trade Commission (USITC) discovered that imports of washing machines, as well as solar panels from countries such as China and South Korea, had caused damage to the business of the same in the US, where South Korea's LG and Samsung were overtaking Whirlpool an American company, as well as China's solar panels, were causing damage to the US businesses of the same field.<sup>13</sup> However, Obama's presidency came to an end before any decisive action on this could be taken. The USITC then appealed the same case to president Obama's successor President Trump.

After the Obama presidency ended in 2018 it was reported that manufacturing jobs in the US had decreased by almost 5 million since 2000, with the decline in jobs only predicted to further accelerate.

#### **2.4 Trump Administration (2017-2021)**

When the Trump administration came to power it promised China that it would support the “One-China” policy. Soon after President Trump broke the established practice of “One-China” policy by speaking to the Taiwanese President Tsai-Ing-Wen, this raised concerns about the US' commitment to the “One-China” policy. During Trump's Presidency the USITC put forward the idea of imposing “global safeguard” restrictions to the now former President Trump. In the same year two US industries were also reported to have filed respective requests for investigation under Section 201 of the Trade Act of 1974, which authorises the President to allow temporary relief from imports by raising duties on imports that come to the country, the goods, however, should have threatened domestic industries which produce similar goods. Former President Trump acted on this appeal by the USITC on January 22, 2018, when he decided to approve the global safeguard restrictions. Under these, tariffs were put on imports from both the Solar panel industry as well as the washing machine industry with the former having tariffs of \$8.5 billion and the latter \$1.8 billion.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>(Trump's Trade War Timeline: An Up-to-Date Guide, 2022)

<sup>14</sup> Trump's Trade War Timeline: An Up-to-Date Guide, 2022)

Shortly after this decision by the US, China decided to launch an investigation on US exports of Sorghum, which amounted to roughly \$ 1 billion. Although there was no direct causal relationship established between this move by China, and US' safeguard restriction many weren't convinced if this was a mere coincidence. As a result of the investigation done by China, the state imposed preliminary anti-dumping duties on US exports of Sorghum.<sup>15</sup>

However, this wasn't the end because August 14 2018 saw China's Commerce Ministry officially filing a WTO case alleging that US tariffs on Chinese imports had damaged China's trade interests.<sup>16</sup> The case came two a close in 2021 with the WTO deciding that the US had not violated any global trade rules by adopting measures limiting its imports of solar panels,<sup>17</sup> and with that, the trade war continued.

However, this trade war seemed like it would soon end when Former President Trump and China's President Xi Jinping agreed on a 90-day truce agreement on December 1 2018, with China promising to purchase a substantial amount of American goods. However, negotiations between the two states soon broke down with America increasing and imposing 200 USD billion worth of tariffs on Chinese goods. To this, China retaliated by announcing that tariffs on 60 billion USD worth of US goods would be increased starting June 1. Nonetheless, this trade war also came to a "close" when Former President Trump and President Xi Jinping agreed on a trade war truce at the G-20 summit in Japan on June 26, 2019.<sup>18</sup> This trade war which started in 2018 has still to come to a close with many now accusing it to have become a cold war between the two states. Both sides suffered losses in this trade war with many hoping that President Joe Biden would ease tension between the two states upon entering office.

### **2.5 Biden Administration (2021-Present)**

When the Biden Administration came into power the threat of China becoming the world's largest manufacturer was still looming over the US and so, instead of easing relations with China, president Biden further augmented the policies introduced by his predecessor by implementing further sanctions and strengthening the anti-China alliance.

Now, the US-China trade war has affected both countries with both states having suffered economic damages.<sup>19</sup> The 4-year- trade war has resulted in a total loss of 550 billion USD for China whereas the US has suffered a loss of USD 185 billion.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, there have been little to no signs that the Biden administration is going to change its course.<sup>21</sup>

Both states have still imposed tariffs on imports with each other with no state seeing a relief, from the aforementioned information it can be seen that differences in ideologies, as well as domestic policies, have propelled both the US and China to go into a trade war which has now become a cold war.<sup>22</sup>

### **Other states affected by the US-China trade dispute**

However, this trade war between the two states has not only had an impact on both China and the US but also has greatly affected other states as well.

While the US and China enervated their bilateral trade flow as a result of their greatly taxing each other,

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<sup>15</sup>(Trump's Trade War Timeline: An Up-to-Date Guide, 2022)

<sup>16</sup>(Trump's Trade War Timeline: An Up-to-Date Guide, 2022)

<sup>17</sup>(Reuters, 2021)

<sup>18</sup>(Mullen, 2022)

<sup>19</sup>(Huang, 2021)

<sup>20</sup>(Briefing, 2022)

<sup>21</sup>(Huang, 2021)

<sup>22</sup>(Huang, 2021)

other states strengthened their exports to the rest of the world and the US resulting in an overall increase in global trade.<sup>23</sup> It is reported that the countries which benefited the most as a result of this trade war, between the two hegemonies, were those with an amplitude of international integration.<sup>24</sup> One of the countries which benefited as a result of this trade war is France, which increased its exports to the US as well as the rest of the world as a result of the tariffs. In the data sample collected by the National Bureau of Economic Research, it was found that 19/48 bystander states saw an increase in exports as a result of the tariffs, whereas one country reported a statistically notable decrease, however, there were no statistically noteworthy impacts on the other 28 states.<sup>25</sup> It has further been reported that the US-China Trade war has allegedly resulted in a 3% global increase in trade.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

This research paper investigated the impact a state's domestic policies have on its economic/trade relations with other states more specifically, this research paper interrogated the bilateral relations between two sovereign states that are the USA and China. The research paper discussed the US-China Trade war and its timelines, it further discussed the impact of the trade war on the US and China, and it discussed the domestic as well as trade policies that resulted in this trade war. The research paper further discussed the impact of the US-China trade war on the other "bystander" states.

In conclusion, this research paper made it evident that the domestic policies of states have an immense impact on their trade relations with other states as can be seen by the US-China bilateral trade relations where as a result of their respective domestic policies both states are now influencing each other's economies and so, it can be inferred that domestic policies do have an impact on the economic relation of states.

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<sup>23</sup> (How The US-China Trade War Affected the Rest of the World, n.d.)

<sup>24</sup> (How The US-China Trade War Affected the Rest of the World, n.d.)

<sup>25</sup> (How The US-China Trade War Affected the Rest of the World, n.d.)

<sup>26</sup> (How The US-China Trade War Affected the Rest of the World, n.d.)



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