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Graham T. Allison (2017) *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?*

- **Thucydides' Trap:** the structural pressures created when a rising power challenges a current predominant power
    - 12 out of 16 times this has happened in history, great power war has resulted (75% base rate)
    - E.g., it's often the case that the rising power wants the respect, status, and privileges that it feels should be accorded to it as a peer power, while the current power sees the rising power's actions taken to attain these things as aggressive, threatening, misguided, and/or against its national interest
        - More generally, the rising power feels excited, confident, optimistic, deserving/entitled, powerful, and possibly resentful at the current power for having set things up in its own favor, while the current power feels threatened, insecure, and perhaps like the rising power lacks gratitude for its fostering the international system that has allowed the rising power to flourish
            - "It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this inspired in Sparta that made war inevitable" — Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*
            - Eg around the turn of the 20th C, the rapidly ascending Germany didn't want to make its way in a British world: it wanted to reshape the world such that, among other things, Britain was not the unequaled and unchallenged #1
        - This is the case with China: Xi Jinping essentially wants to make China great again, and many Chinese citizens feels similarly
            - Important to understand Chinese history to see where they're coming from
                - For most of history, China was one of the foremost countries in the world; it was a political, cultural, economic, and intellectual hegemon in East Asia, with the polities in present-day Tibet, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan recognizing this in various ways (eg by paying them tribute, acknowledging their political ascendency, basing their cultures on that of China). Historically, the Chinese have referred to China as 'the Middle Kingdom', which means between Heaven and Earth - Chinese view of China as the most civilised polity. Common strains of Chinese exceptionalism throughout Chinese history and continuing in the present

        - As the East Asian hegemon, China often tried to preserve the centripetal structure (with China at the centre) through diplomatic/economic means, using physical force as a last resort
        - Beginning very roughly around 1800, China began to be dominated (economically and militarily, among other things) by imperial powers, first by Western powers (see eg the Opium Wars; see also entry on Early Modern Era in *Sapiens* notes) and then by Japan in WWII. This was a period of foreign domination, exploitation, and intervention and internal political turmoil and instability, culminating with the Chinese Civil War (1927-49), which the communists won. Chinese refer to 1849-1949 as the Century of Humiliation. Then, Maoist China was a disaster (eg Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution).
        - China has really only began putting its feet back under itself c. 1980, after around two centuries of disaster, but it sees this period, correctly, as a historical anomaly, and wishes to see itself back in its historically regular position as a regional hegemon with all the privileges, international respect, wealth, and power this implies, and does not want to be second to any country in the world (in economic, military, scientific, or cultural terms)
- This often comes up wrt changing or maintaining international institutions, and we see this with China
    - Eg China doesn't like that the US has exclusive veto privileges in the IMF; more generally, the Bretton Woods institutions were largely crafted by the US, and reflect the interests of the US and its allies (they were also explicitly constructed to combat the USSR)
        - China does not want to buy into the international system crafted post WWII by the US and its allies, which has as its ideal a group of democracies with market-based economies operating in a rules- and norms-based system. It wants a new international system that it has an active hand in creating, and this is already what it's doing
    - Eg China has sometimes chosen, significantly, to form new international orgs rather than buy into the existing Westerns ones tilted in the interest of the US and its allies, eg its Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (in opposition to the World Bank)

and BRICS, which welcomed Russia post its invasion of Ukraine after the G8, in contrast, expelled Russia and became the G7

- Rise of China
    - China's rise is not overhyped - on a vast swath of factors (eg PPP (which many take to be a better indicator of relative economic power than GDP), infrastructure construction, STEM graduation and performance, computer and pharma manufacturing), China is already ahead of the US
    - Corporate espionage, intellectual property theft, etc haS been a part of China's strategy and has, by some estimates, cost US firms hundreds of billions of dollars
    - China's Belt and Road Initiative: 1.4 trillion USD investment into a huge 60+ country infrastructure project in Eurasia and states bordering the Indian Ocean to diplomatically and economically link them
        - Part of/an example of China economically "swallowing up" neighboring states; allows China to project greater power abroad
    - Through its huge economic sway, China over the past several decades has "sucked up" nearby states (eg because of the huge purchasing demand of its econ) and can, and has, use(d) this effectively as an international bargaining tool
    - China's expansions into the South China Sea are giving it, and will continue to give it, greater sway over the SE Asian states and their economies and perhaps, eventually, Australia
    - Part of Jinping's plan is increasing, and playing to, nationalist and patriotic sentiment while cementing the power, status, legitimacy, and stability of the CPC
        - The CPC's legitimacy rests, in the eyes of many Chinese citizens, on its ability to maintain the economic growth of recent decades; many don't buy into traditional communist ideology
        - Contemporary China features a blend of market capitalism; centralised, state-run market control; Chinese philosophy, esp. Confucianism; some communist/Marxist strains, even if this is often rhetorical/aesthetic; and Chinese nationalism and exceptionalism
        - Jinping has also reorganized China's military so that it is loyal to the CPC (as opposed to the generals), in addition to vastly bulking it up and modernised it

- Important aspects of Chinese thought/outlook
    - Chinese exceptionalism—see note above on the 'Middle Kingdom'
    - Confucian ideals
        - "Harmony through hierarchy"

        - Internally, historically, the Chinese emperor at the top; now, the CPC
        - In international affairs: with other states paying deference, in various ways, to China
        - Confucius's first maxim: know thy place
        - Individual is subordinate to family and society, which is subordinate to the state
    - Legitimacy of the state rests on its efficacy, not the consent of the governed. Big/powerful central government is good as long as it accomplishes its ends, and, historically, a strong central government has often upheld stability, whereas periods with weak central governments have often featured infighting, warring warlords, poverty, chaos
    - Sun Tzu: "the greatest victory is that which requires no battle"
        - China would rather win by accumulating strategic advantages (not just military—see e.g. Belt and Road Initiative) that make its dominance unquestionable than by a short, to-the-point war or battle
    - Long term both in historical memory and orientation towards the future: amenable to playing the long game, often through relatively indirect/subtle means when compared to those commonly employed in the West
    - China—both historically and presently—is not proselytising in the sense that it does not seek to persuade or convert other polities to its ways of life/thought. Instead it seeks to help/improve them through example. (Cf. USA/the contemporary Western framework of rights, free markets, democracy, etc that purports to be universal and optimal)

- Biggest flashpoints with China/most likely routes to war
    - Taiwan
    - South China Sea (eg a collision with an American or Japanese vessel)
    - North Korea (eg regime collapse, South Korea goes in to maintain order)

- Misc notes on historical trends/IR concepts
    - Historically, GDP has been strongly correlated with ability to influence international affairs
    - When states fail to act in their own national interests, it is often a result of a compromise between opposing factions being reached within the state's domestic politics
    - Recall from the psych literature that we tend to understand our own motives as generally good, but are more likely to interpret others' as bad

        - This is also true in IR: sometimes it's happened that one state's doing something defensively, or at least without the intention of doing it for the sake of aggressive expansion, is perceived as another as an aggressive/threatening
            - Recall classic IR problem of distinguishing offensive from defensive weapons and actions
    - Unlike nuclear weapons, which are not "use it or lose it" when facing opponents with secure second strike capacities, some offensive cyber technology may be use it or lose it, because a state that conducts a first strike cyberattack against another may be able to KO the receiving state's return attack capability
    - NATO was originally formed post-WWII to "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down"
    - Acquiescing to a rising power—even making a series of concessions that, in the short term, aren't in the national interest—isn't always a bad play in the long run
        - E.g. at the beginning of the 20th century, the UK made a series of concessions and acquiesced to American ascendency, and then, over the course of the 20th century, the US fought two world wars beside the UK and the two states developed theIR 'special relationship,' which endures today

Key Takeaways

Thucydides' Trap: the structural pressures created when a rising power challenges a current predominant power

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Chinese history

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