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14. ABSTRACT
Power transition theories provide a framework to view the movement of power from one state to another as states rise and fall within the international order. The theories are essential tools because they help assess whether or not the transition will result in peace or war. Although multiple power transition theories exist, they focus on post-World War I and Cold War era variables and do not account for the rise of international organizations and the importance of key decision-makers in the modern world. One influential political scientist, Dr. Zhiqun Zhu, states that he has developed a new model that bridges that gap. While promising, international relations experts have never critiqued Dr. Zhu's theory to confirm its validity. In addition, due to his prolific writing and involvement in U.S.-China relations, Dr. Zhu has the potential to influence U.S. leadership and, if his theory is flawed, he may lead them to make decisions detrimental to U.S. strategic interests throughout the world. Subsequently, Dr. Zhu's theory requires testing to confirm it provides a modern and comprehensive framework before its assessment of the U.S.-China relationship is accepted.

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United States; China; Power Transition; Zhiqun Zhu; Kenneth Waltz; Organski; Anglo-German Relations; US-China War; dominant power; international order

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Power Transition and United States-China Relations

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Thesis: Power transition theories provide a framework to view the movement of power from one state to another as states rise and fall within the international order. The theories are essential tools because they help assess whether or not the transition will result in peace or war. Although multiple power transition theories exist, they focus on post-World War I and Cold War era variables and do not account for the rise of international organizations and the importance of key decision-makers in the modern world. One influential political scientist, Dr. Zhiqun Zhu, states that he has developed a new model that bridges that gap. While promising, international relations experts have never critiqued Dr. Zhu's theory to confirm its validity. In addition, due to his prolific writing and involvement in U.S.-China relations, Dr. Zhu has the potential to influence U.S. leadership and, if his theory is flawed, he may lead them to make decisions detrimental to U.S. strategic interests throughout the world. Subsequently, Dr. Zhu's theory requires testing to confirm it provides a modern and comprehensive framework before its assessment of the U.S.-China relationship is accepted.

Discussion: The U.S. and China are slowly yet progressively approaching a rare and potentially catastrophic event: power transition. Unless significant changes occur, China will surpass the United States in multiple power-defining areas within the next two decades. This change is already creating a power transition period that, as history shows, presents a high likelihood of war. Employing a modern and comprehensive theory to evaluate the progression of this relationship is vitally important to the U.S.

While multiple power transition theories exist that account for the "conditions, factors and circumstances present only during a power transition"¹ or the influence of certain decision-makers, they were created during the Cold War and do not account for the complexities of the contemporary world. A modern theory must be able to account for power transition factors as well as the role of societies, states leaders and international community within the current global environment. One new theory, however, may have bridged that gap.

Dr. Zhiqun Zhu, a prolific writer on U.S.-China relations, has combined relevant concepts from two preeminent power transition theorists and added additional perspectives to create what he declares is a more accurate and relevant theory. When Zhu applied his theory to the current U.S.-China relationship, it predicted the states were on a path towards a peaceful power transition. While Zhu's assessment is comforting, U.S. leaders should not accept his theory because a third party never critiqued it to confirm its validity. In addition, due to his prolific writing and involvement in U.S.-China relations, Zhu has the potential to influence U.S. policymakers and military leaders. Until his theory is critiqued and validated, there is a danger that Zhu could influence U.S. leaders to make decisions based on a flawed theory, and the results could be disastrous for U.S. strategic interests. Thus, a third party should critique Dr. Zhu's theory by applying it to a previous power transition that ended in war, and ensure it is comprehensive enough to

consider new factors of the modern international environment. Failure to conduct a thorough evaluation risks damage to U.S. interests and influence in the Asia-Pacific region and, in the worst case scenario, may result in a large-scale war with China that could escalate into a third world war.

Conclusion: Dr. Zhu's theory is more comprehensive and relevant than the previous power transition theories. It provides an advanced, multi-layered framework that accounts for the variables specific to power transitions, as well as the importance that state societies, leadership and the international community play in the transition process. While Zhu's theory is the most modern model, it has shortfalls; it does not account for efforts by the dissatisfied challenger to destabilize the dominant power's allies and alliances. Despite its shortfalls, Zhu's theory is sufficient to evaluate the U.S.-China relationship in the short-term. For the long-term, however, the theory should be improved and expand by international relations experts to ensure all transition variables are considered and acted upon. Failure to expand and apply Zhu's theory limits U.S. leaders' abilities to properly evaluate the current power transition and may lead them to make strategic errors that could undermine U.S. power and influence in the Asia-Pacific region and throughout the world.

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INTRODUCTION

In the closing days of World War II, while Europe, China, and Japan were in ruins, the United States (U.S.) rose to become world's dominant power. Since that time, it has influenced the entire globe through its economics, culture, language, and through the international organizations it created. Even while the U.S. faced the Soviet Union during the Cold War, it was clear that the U.S. and its allies were more powerful than the Soviet Union and its allies, and this lack of power parity helped maintain peace. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. gained additional strength relative to the international community and reached a position of general incontestability. Times are changing, however. A new rival has been steadily rising from poverty, dysfunction, and corruption: China.

China's rise from the 1970s until the present day has been extraordinary. While U.S. *absolute* power continues to rise in relation to the international community, its *relative* power compared to China is decreasing, and strong indications exist that China will reach industrial, economic, and military parity with the U.S. within the next decade.²

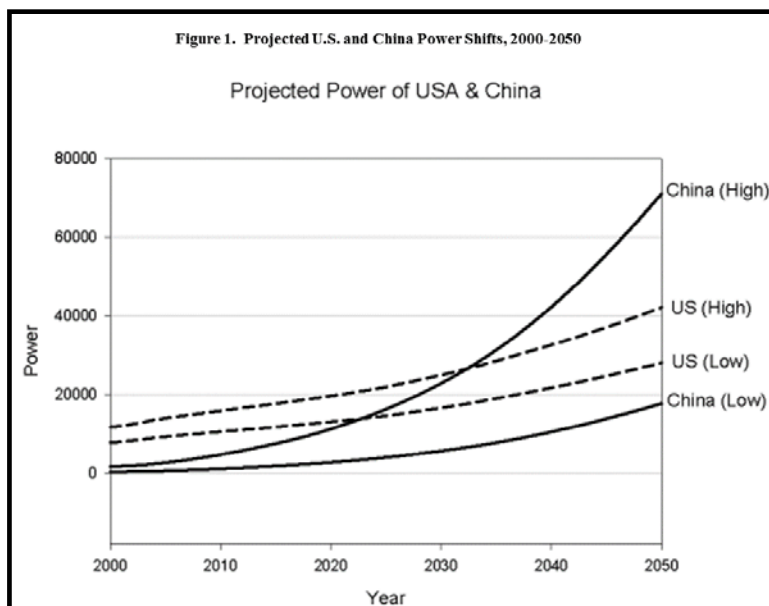


Figure 1 shows an example of predicted U.S. and China power progression from 2000 to 2050.³ Although China continues to assert that it does not desire to be a regional, let alone global,

hegemony,⁴ its aggressive military, diplomatic and political actions indicate its true intention: it is, in fact, seeking to be the dominant power in the Asia-Pacific region. China's threat to the status quo is already creating tension in the South and East China Seas, and this tension may result in tactical miscalculations that could compel the U.S. and China into conflict and ultimately spark a third world war.

The U.S.-China relationship is vitally important to the peace and stability of the international community. Subsequently, this relationship requires a credible power transition theory capable of determining whether the states are maintaining a peaceful progression, or are heading towards war. While many conflict theories exist, most do not account for the complexities that are only present during power transitions (dissatisfied challenger and power parity), and the role of key decision-makers in deterring, or encouraging, great powers into conflict within the modern environment. One theorist, however, believes he has found a solution.

Dr. Zhiqun Zhu has developed a new, more complex theory that he believes can accurately predict power transitions. Zhu's theory is a hybrid of previous power transition models and it assesses that the U.S.-China relationship is heading towards peace. While "peace" is a welcome assessment, the concern with Zhu's theory is that a second party never confirmed its validity. And, while the lack of validation may not be as important for a lesser known theorist, Zhu is a prolific writer and lecturer on U.S.-China relations, and he has the potential to influence U.S. leaders. If his theory is incorrect, it could cause disastrous results for the U.S.

Zhu is the son of Chinese immigrants and was educated at Shanghai University (B.A.), Indiana State University (M.A.) and the University of South Carolina (Ph.D.).

Zhu has written, contributed to, or edited 18 books on Chinese politics and foreign policy. He has also written dozens of articles for journals such as the *Global Economic Review*, *Journal of International and Area Studies*, *Journal of Asia-Pacific Affairs*, *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, and *Yale Journal of International Affairs*. In addition, Zhu authored 22 papers to support international relations conferences in the U.S. and China. In the early 1990s, Zhu served as the Chief Assistant to Consul for Press and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Consulate General in Shanghai, and he later served as the Secretary for International Cooperation, Shanghai International Studies University in China.⁵ Dr. Zhu is the recipient of several research fellowships, including a “visiting fellowship to the East Asian Institute at National University of Singapore, a POSCO fellowship at the East-West Center in Hawaii, and a Korea Foundation/Freeman Foundation research fellowship to Korea.”⁶ He frequently commentates on Chinese and East Asian affairs, and more than a dozen media sources, including CNN, have interviewed him.⁷ In short, Zhu is an expert on U.S.-China relations and his opinions may influence U.S., as well as Chinese and international, leaders.

To resolve this concern – Zhu’s potential to influence U.S. leaders with an unproven model – a detailed evaluation of his theory against a previous power transition war is necessary to assess its validity. If it is successful, then U.S. policy makers and military leaders should cautiously employ it to monitor the current U.S.-China relationship. If it fails, however, U.S. leaders should demand the development of a new model capable of evaluating modern power transitions. The validity of Zhu’s model and its potential impact on U.S. decision-makers cannot be left to chance: it must be validated to ensure U.S. leaders are making the best decisions for the U.S.

THE COMPLEXITIES AND DANGERS OF POWER TRANSITIONS

History proves that power transition periods are prone to conflict. Since the 16th Century, 12 of 16 power transitions have resulted in large-scale wars.⁸ While power transition wars are rare, they are highly consequential and produce significantly more carnage than local or regional conflicts. This is because power transition wars transpire between the most powerful states in the world, and those states possess the resources to support enormous, modern armies for extended periods of time. In addition, those great powers can also compel other states into the conflict, creating a large-scale war with both sides brandishing the most modern and devastating weapons of war available.

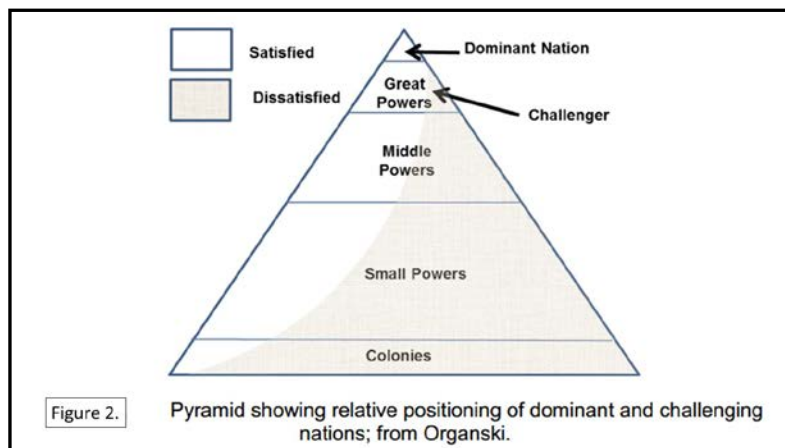
Modern and comprehensive theories are required to evaluate power transitions to determine if they will result in peace or conflict. These theories can provide two benefits. First, the theory will inform the states and the international community whether or not the states are moving towards peace or war. Second, the state that best understands the progression will have an advantage over the other state; it can take actions within the international community to show its benevolence and bring the states back on a peaceful path, or it can prepare for war in advance of its opponent to gain the benefits of preparation time and surprise. While no theory can guarantee an accurate prediction of war or peace, a modern and comprehensive theory will reduce the amount of unknown variables and, if consistently applied, will provide leadership with an improved tool for assessing power transitions. In addition, although “Black Swans” (unpredicted and highly consequential events) may still occur, the more that U.S. leaders understand power

transitions, the more likely they will make decisions that are beneficial to U.S. interests and influence.

U.S. leadership requires power transition theories capable of accounting for the unique variables that only occur during power transitions, as well as the influences of key state and international decision-makers. This task is not easy; it requires a modern, comprehensive, and verified power transition theory to frame it in the correct manner. Prior to exploring power transition theories, a common understanding of a few critical international relations concepts must first be established.

International Order and State Power

To fully understand power transition theories, it is first necessary to understand the concepts of international order, power, and disparity. According to AFK Organski – a leading power transition theorist – the international order consists of five categories:



dominant power, great powers, middle powers, small powers, and colonies (now referred to as commonwealths, and annexed or unincorporated

territories). Figure 2 illustrates these categories.⁹ At the top of the hierarchy is the dominant power, currently the U.S. The dominant power controls the majority of the benefits and privileges, and generally leads the direction of the entire international order “under rules that benefit its allies and satisfies their national aspirations.”¹⁰ However, the

dominant power cannot rule alone; it must have the support of the majority of the great powers, many of whom helped create the status quo because they desired the benefits it would provide to them. Also, not every great power is satisfied with the status quo and a dissatisfied great power (challenger) may seek to change it if it determines it's powerful enough to contest the dominate power (power parity). Great powers currently include China, Germany/European Union, Japan, and Russia.¹¹

The next level is the middle powers, the majority of whom are also generally satisfied and support the status quo. Brazil, France, and Mexico are a few of the states classified as middle powers.¹² The bottom levels are comprised of the small and colonial powers, many of whom do not support the status quo but are too weak to change it. Small powers currently include most of the Central and South American states, and most of Africa. Colonial states include the unincorporated territories of American Samoa and Puerto Rico.

While “power and satisfaction do not go hand in hand,” the higher a state is within the international order, the more likely it is to support the status quo.¹³ However, when a great power rises and establishes itself as a challenger, the potential for large-scale conflict increases as the challenger's power approaches parity with the dominant power.¹⁴

Understanding the definition of “power” is essential to appreciate the importance of its transfer from one state to another. Power transition theorists define power as the ability of one state to impose its will (through force, threat, or appeal) upon an opponent to persuade it to comply with its demands.¹⁵ Three essential components determine a state's power: population, economic productivity, and an efficient government (one

capable of integrating and mobilizing the population and industry to support domestic and foreign policies.)¹⁶ The capacity, efficiency, and integration of these three components determines a state's position in the international order; a state lacking in any of these components is unlikely to become a great power, let alone the dominant power.

It is important to note that the power transitions theories reviewed for this paper do not consider the military as an essential component of state power. This is because the other three components (population, economic productivity, and governance) create and shape a state's military, and it would not exist without them. So while the state military can support a state's will through force or threat of force, it is only an apparatus of the state and is not an essential component of state power.

Population is the first essential component that determines a state's power.¹⁷ The population provides the people who can work and fight in support of state goals. Although a large population does not equate to great power status (many weak states have large populations) it is a prerequisite, and a state is unlikely to attain great power standing without it. In addition, to achieve great power status, a state requires an educated and trained large population than can harness the power of machinery and new technology to improve agricultural, industrial, and military efficiencies in direct support of the state and in support of private enterprises within the states. Of the three components required for great power status, population is the most difficult to control (in terms of numbers and mobilization) and is the "least susceptible to rapid change."¹⁸

Economic productivity is the second essential concept of power. A state's gross domestic product (GDP) and GDP per capita are the leading indicators of this concept.¹⁹ Economic productivity enables state controlled and private industry to build

infrastructure, develop and sustain military forces, educate and train its population, and support social services.²⁰ Without strong economic productivity in relation to its regional neighbors and the international community, a state is unlikely to become a great power.

Location, geography, climate, natural resources, and access to navigable waters all influence economic productivity. However, these factors do not necessarily correlate to economic success; many resource rich states with access to navigable water ways struggle to support their people, while other states possess a massive economy, despite a relative dearth of resources. The Democratic Republic of Congo and Japan, respectively, are two relevant examples. To generate significant economic productivity, a state must mobilize and enable its trained and educated population to use the state's organic natural resources, and import other resources as needed, to create products or services that are valuable to the state and the international community. This requires state leaders with vision, power, and efficiency.

The third and most important essential power component is an efficient government. An efficient government is the only entity that can unite the state's population and economic productivity and focus them upon the achievement of state goals. The government sets domestic and foreign policies, and if the state is becoming a great power, the government is a key decision-maker as to whether or not the state accepts the international status quo or attempts to change it, risking war in the process. Without an efficient government – democratic, totalitarian, or another – a state can never achieve great power status because it cannot mobilize the capabilities and capacity of its population and industry and focus them towards a common cause.²¹

The model, then, is that for a state to become a great power it must possess a large, proficient population, significant economic productivity, and an efficient government capable of integrating the population and economics on domestic and foreign goals. In the present day, when nearly all states have industrialized to one degree or another and populations are increasing at record numbers, states like Britain and Portugal – previous great powers, now constrained by their population size – are unlikely to ever again reach the status of a great power, let alone a dominant power. On the opposite end of the spectrum, however, a few former “small powers” endowed with large populations are taking steps to improve their economic productivity and governmental efficiencies and may progress to the status of great powers. India and Brazil, both former colonies, are in this category and they have the potential to be great powers by the end of the 21st century.^{22 23}

There is only one consistency to international order: states will rise, states will fall, and no state is a dominant power forever. As states rise and fall, and power shifts, the chance for conflict increases. Therefore, policy makers and military leadership must employ modern and comprehensive frameworks to evaluate the transition and shape their decision-making on its assessments.

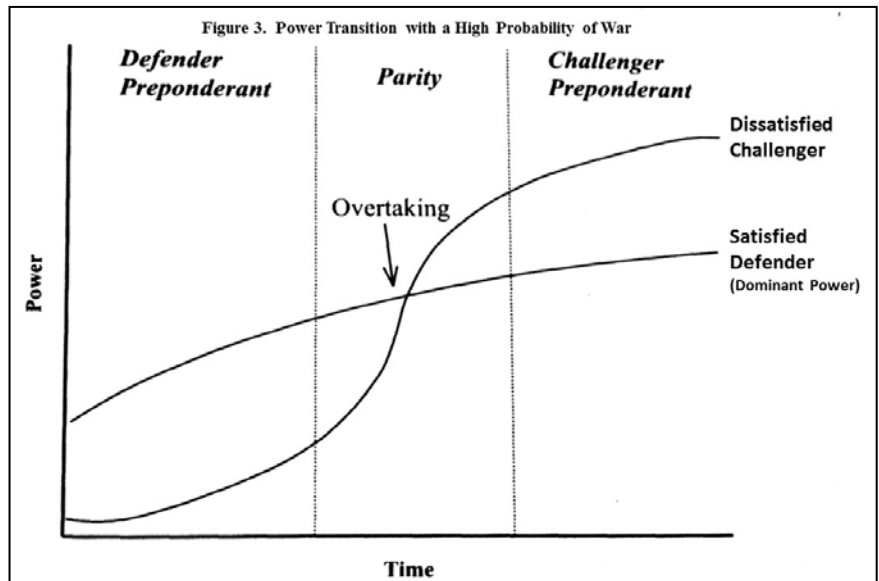
POWER TRANSITION THEORIES

Power transition theories attempt to identify and analyze the variables specific to transitions and the roles that state leaders, societies, and the international community play in the progression of a power transition. Since the 1950s, multiple influential theorists developed models to explain the reasons for the First and Second World Wars, as well as

attempted to predict the possibility of future wars among dominant and great powers. These theorists believed that if they could understand the variables specific to power transitions, and the choices made by key decision-makers, then perhaps those variables could be influenced to prevent another large-scale power transition war.

A.F.K. Organski was among the first to isolate the root causes of the rare, yet devastating, power-transition wars in his seminal 1959 Power Transition Theory.²⁴ His theory – the first based on a hierarchical, rather than anarchic, system – remains among the most accurate method to predict the possibility of future wars among dominant and great powers.²⁵ The following hypothesis summarizes Organski’s theory: *If a rising state (challenger) is dissatisfied with the international order (established by the dominant power and its allies) and desires to change the status quo, then war is likely to occur once the challenger achieves near parity with the dominant power. If, however, the challenger is satisfied with the status quo and does not seek to drastically change it, then a peaceful transition of power is likely to occur.*²⁶

Figure 3 illustrates a power transition situation in which the challenger is dissatisfied with the status quo. It is when the challenger nears parity with the dominant power that a high probability of war surfaces.²⁷



The fact that, since the mid-1800s, no large scale war has occurred while the dominant power and its allies maintained the preponderance of power supports Organski's theory.²⁸ It is only when a power parity – i.e., a balance of power – emerges between a dissatisfied challenger and the dominant power that the chance for war increases from 0 percent to 50 percent or greater.²⁹

Although Organski's theory remains germane, it is concentrated on dissatisfaction with the status quo and power parity, and it does not include the many attributes of man and mankind that may precipitate war.³⁰ Any power transition theory that dismisses the importance of human actions from within the belligerent states, or the international community, is insufficient to predict an occurrence of war. It is not enough that conditions for war emerge during a power transition; man or mankind must consciously decide to pursue war for it to occur and those decisions require close observation.

American political scientist and theoretician Kenneth Waltz diverged from Organski's theory by focusing on the decisions of societies, state leadership, and the international community within an anarchic world. Waltz was a realist and suggested every state would seek to improve its position among the global balance of power, regardless of its effects upon other states. Waltz declared that “the root of all evil is man, and thus he himself is the root cause of the specific evil, war.”³¹

To comprehend the determinants for war, Waltz proposed it was necessary to understand three separate categories, all of which could precipitate conflict. Waltz labeled these categories as “images” and identified them as the following: human behavior, internal structure of the states, and international anarchy.³² These images provide a unique framework for an observer to view the causes of international conflict at

“individual, domestic and systemic levels.”³³ His theory suggests that the causes of every war are due to the desires of an individual or the desires of a states and, because the international community is anarchic, no overarching international organization can (possibly) prevent them from pursuing their desired courses of action.³⁴ The following hypothesis summarizes Waltz’s theory: *States will attack or defend based on the passions of the elite few who lead the state (and the others that influence the few) to obtain benefits that will improve the state’s position, and there is no overarching entity that can effectively prevent a war from happening if one or more states wants it to occur.*

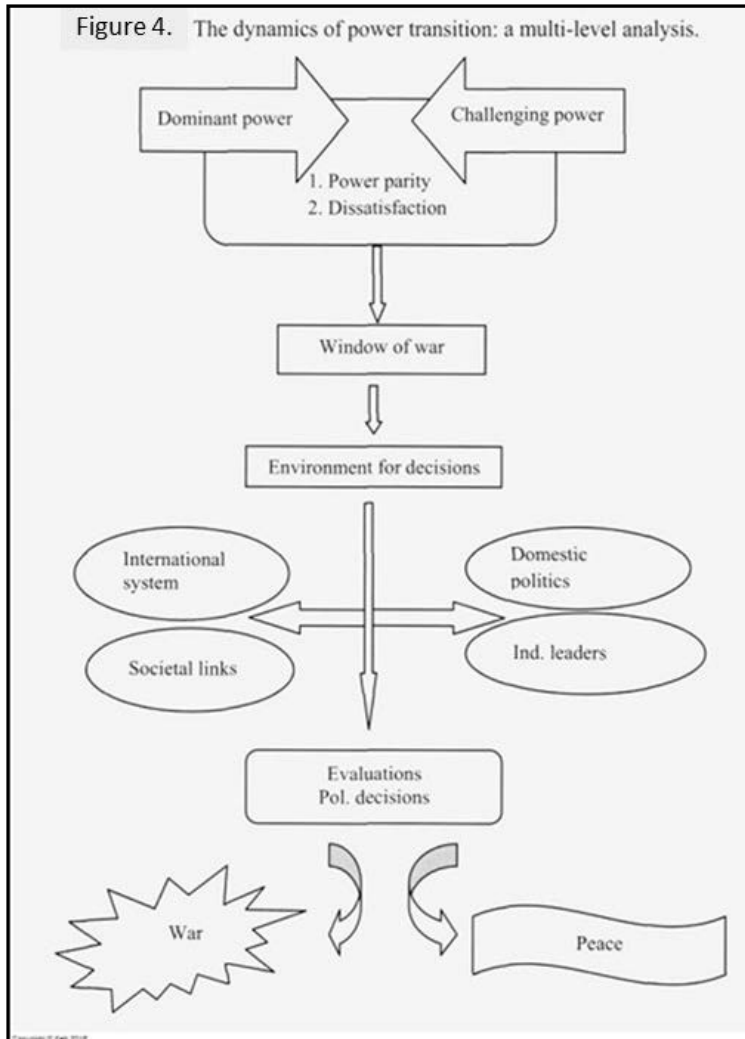
While Waltz’s theory accounts for the criticality of man and mankind’s decision-making in an anarchic system, it does not explain the propensity for states to engage in large-scale war when faced with the uncertainty that accompanies a power transition period (i.e., challenger and power parity). In addition, his theory does not account for the relative degradation of global anarchy due to increasingly powerful international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and the Association of South East Asian Nations. While these transnational organizations are not omnipotent entities, they can shape the attitudes and behaviors of other states – via monetary assistance, mediation, sanctions, and other means – to maintain order and compliance with international norms.

Although Organski’s and Waltz’s theories remain important foundational models for conflict analysis, their usefulness has decreased in relation to the alleged decline of the western world, rise of transnational organizations, and increased interdependence due to globalization. The new international environment requires a modified power transition theory that accounts for the variables identified in previous models, as well as the

influences of globalization and a strengthened international community. One power transition theorist may have developed a solution.

Dr. Zhu's Power Transition Theory: Dr. Zhiqun Zhu evaluated multiple power transition theories to determine if they were capable of predicting conflict in the 21st century.³⁵ Zhu believed Organski's theory, based on an historic-structure model, identified the basic foundations necessary for conflict (power parity and a dissatisfied challenger), but that it was inadequate because it "reduced state leaders from policy makers to passive keepers(s) of the international structure rather than an agent capable of influencing and even changing the outcome of power transition."^{36 37} Additionally, while Waltz focused on the human and governmental variables that may precipitate war, he did not consider the rare *casus belli* that only occur during power transition periods: dissatisfied challenger and power parity. Zhu recognized the strengths and weaknesses of these important theories and endeavored to create a theory capable of more accurately predicting a power transition conflict in the 21st century.

In 2005, Zhu published his new power transition theory – a hybrid of Organski's and Waltz's key concepts, with much of Zhu's own original insight.³⁸ Zhu's theory is an agent-structure model and focuses decision-making within and between the involved states' societies, politics, leaders, and the international environment.³⁹ While Zhu recognized that power parity and the dissatisfaction of a challenging power are "necessary conditions for wars associated with power transition," he also stated, "If the government, the public, and the top leaders in both the dominant power and the challenging power have positive evaluations of their relationship in a friendly international system, power transition will end in peace."⁴⁰



According to Zhu's theory, while challenger dissatisfaction and power parity are necessary conditions for war, they are not the preeminent concerns. Society, domestic politics, state leadership, and the international community are the preeminent concerns that contribute to a peaceful or violent transition of power. Figure 4 illustrates Zhu's theory.

To improve the utility

of his model, Zhu divided his theory into five sub-hypotheses (SH):⁴¹

SH1 – International System: The further a rising power is incorporated into the international system, the less likely it is to challenge the status quo.

SH2 – Domestic politics: The more that a rising power respects dominant power's vital interests, the less likely it is to be perceived and treated as a threat by the dominant power.

SH3 – Domestic Politics: The more the dominant power respects and accommodates a challenger's vital interests, the less likely the challenger is to become dissatisfied with the international order and its relations to the dominant power.

SH4 – Societal links: The more extensive and strong links the societies have, the less likely there is to be war between them.

SH5 – Individual Leaders: The more committed national leaders are to a stable, bilateral relationship, the less likely there is to be war between the two powers.

Based on his theory, Zhu assesses that a power transition from the United States to China will be peaceful, and he has published many documents to support this belief.⁴² While Zhu's theory appears more comprehensive and modern than previous power transition models – and his assessment is comforting – a third party has never critiqued it to determine if it is an effective model. The lack of critique should be of concern for U.S. and international leaders because Zhu is a prominent author and lecturer on U.S.-China relations and he has the potential to influence U.S. leaders. Thus, a third party must critique Zhu's theory to determine if it is an effective model, or if it is an unsuitable tool that may cause the U.S. leaders to make flawed decisions that could ultimately undermine U.S. power and influence in the Asia-Pacific regions, or, in a worst case scenario, lead to armed conflict with China that could escalate into a third world war.

EVALUATING DR. ZHU'S THEORY WITH THE PRE-WWI ANGLO-GERMAN RELATIONSHIP

This section examines Zhu's theory by testing each of its sub-hypotheses against the Anglo-German relationship prior to WWI. This case is especially applicable because the relationship between the dominant power (Britain) and the dissatisfied challenger (Germany) has many similarities with the current U.S.-China relationship. In addition, the Anglo-German relationship ended in war; thus, it provides an example of the critical decisions that societies, domestic politicians, state leaders, and the international community made, or failed to make, that precipitated war.

A common understanding of the pre-WWI Anglo-German relationship is necessary prior to applying Zhu's theory. To support this requirement, the subsequent sections will progress in the following manner:

- Review of the Dominant Power and the Rising Challenger
- Vital and Irreconcilable Interests
- Key Decision-Makers

Following those sections, the data will be applied to Zhu's theory to determine if it is modern and comprehensive enough to evaluate power transitions in the 21st century.

The Dominant Power: At the end of the 19th century, Britain was the world's dominant power. It ruled the largest empire in history, spreading across 12 million square miles, and controlling nearly one-quarter of the world's population.⁴³ In 1890, Britain's naval fleet (679,000 tons) was nearly equivalent to the combined navies of Germany, France, and Russia, and its per capita level of industrialization, relative shares of exports, and urbanization were the highest in the world.⁴⁴ Although Britain had a relatively small indigenous population (37.4 mil) when compared to the other continental

powers, it was the most industrialized and had an efficient government that could focus Britain's – and its colonies – natural resources upon its domestic and foreign goals.⁴⁵ Britain truly was the “workshop of the world.”⁴⁶ Nothing, however, can last forever, and as the turn of the century approached and the new century dawned, Britain was already in decline relative to a new arrival on the European continent: Germany.

The Rising Challenger: Recently united into one state, in 1890 Germany had a population of 49.2 million, per capita industrialization approximately one-quarter that of Britain, and controlled approximately 8.5 percent of the world's exports.⁴⁷ Compared to the other European states, it was a middle-to-great power. However, Germany had an efficient government, and a well-educated and increasingly urbanized population capable of rapidly industrializing the new state.⁴⁸ By 1900, Germany's population increased to 56 million (15 million more than Britain), its per capita industrialization increased to 50 percent of Britain's, and its relative share of world manufacturing was approximately 70 percent of Britain's.⁴⁹ As 1914 approached, Germany's population grew to 70 million (20 million more than Britain), per capita industrialization increased to 85 percent of Britain's numbers, and its overall shares of relative output exceeded Britain's. In addition, by 1913, Germany's output of steel and iron were more than the combined output of Britain, France, and Russia,⁵⁰ and its coal production was more than the combined output of Austria-Hungary, France, and Russia, and almost matched Britain's 292 million tons.⁵¹ Moreover, Germany became the world's leading producer and supplier of chemicals, optics, and electronics.⁵²

By nearly all measures, between 1900 and 1913, Germany emerged as Europe's most powerful state.⁵³ This newfound wealth enabled Germany to outpace all other

European nations in the development of its navy, industry, and infrastructure and made Germany stronger than the combination of any other two European states. Consequently, Germany's rise polarized the European powers and created two camps: those aligned with Germany (Austria-Hungary, Italy, and Romania), and those aligned against it (Britain, France, and Russia). This polarization reduced the potential for compromise and nearly guaranteed that if a conflict arose – regardless of the reasons or the states involved – it would force the entire European Theater into conflict as each power would be required to honor its alliances. While Britain and Germany were the last states to declare war against each other in WWI, their failure to resolve conflicting vital interests set the conditions for war: all that was needed was a spark to set the world ablaze.

Irreconcilable Vital Interests: The next section reviews Britain's and Germany's four vital interests (economics, naval power, colonialism, and status quo) from 1890 to 1914. These interests may have been reconcilable if the states were not close geographical neighbors. However, they were close, separated by only 204 nautical miles, and their strategic sea lines of communication intersected in the North Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. This immediacy of location resulted in close scrutiny of every action and increased perceptions of threat by both states, whether the actions were menacing or not. The failure of Britain and Germany to reconcile their vital interests created an environment of heightened suspicion and cynicism, and ensured the unrelenting deterioration of their relationship.

Vital Interest 1 – Economics: Germany's rapidly expanding economy was the root cause for the deterioration of the Anglo-German relationship.⁵⁴ German industry –

supported by a skilled, disciplined, large population and the newest technology – greatly improved the German economy and provided it with the money to build naval fleets, establish colonies, increase infrastructure (especially factories, roads and railroads), and later, to rapidly modernize and expand its ground forces. In addition, Germany's expanding economy slowed the growth of other dominant/great power economies, specifically Britain's.

Britain had been the major shareholder of world GDP for more than a century. Its strong economy enabled it to become the dominant power and endowed it with strong nationalism and pride in its accomplishments. However, the strain of the Long Depression and the continuing loss of global market shares to Germany – as well as the United States and Japan – impacted Britain's social fabric and morale. Despite the facts that Britain's economy was still growing (albeit slowly) and its people had one of the highest per capita GDPs, as well as one of the lowest tax rates, a paranoia was growing at the prospect of Britain losing its position as the world's number one power.⁵⁵ This paranoia affected the decision-making of British societies, domestic politicians and state leaders as they struggled to comprehend their changing positions.⁵⁶ It also caused the British decision-makers to focus more effort on limiting Germany's rise, rather than seeking solutions that would benefit both states.

Vital Interest 2 – Naval Power: Although the economic shift was the primary cause of the breakdown in the Anglo-German relationship, the disagreement over naval power was the most significant irritant. The British had been the master of the seas for 200 years and had nearly always benefitted from a larger, more capable fleet than their adversaries. Yet that superiority gap, much to British fears, was quickly disappearing as

Germany rapidly expanded its own naval fleet after 1898 to keep in line with its growing colonial ambitions and requisite need to access foreign markets.⁵⁷

Recognizing the significant advantages Germany possessed in terms of money and manufacturing capabilities, Britain began engaging Germany as early as 1901 to establish naval arms limitations treaties. While Britain publicly stated it was attempting to maintain peace in Europe, it was also driven by its desire to maintain the status quo (British naval dominance) and lessen the pressure on its already strained budget.

Germany's press used the scenario to portray Britain as a weak military power and emphasized the fact that Britain only offered the treaty after it had launched multiple new Dreadnaught battleships, which gave Britain a distinct advantage over Germany's naval fleet, and which Germany could not overcome if it signed the treaty.⁵⁸ In multiple meetings between the Kaiser and Edward VII of England in 1906 and 1907, Britain again pressed for naval arms limitation treaties with Germany, but to no avail. Germany's increasing disregard for Britain's vital interests was emphasized in 1907 when Chancellor von Bulow declared that Germany would build its own battleships, and the Kaiser stated in August 1908 that Germany would rather "go to war" than speak again about naval treaties.⁵⁹

Britain's failure to secure a naval limitation treaty with Germany intensified the arms race and served as a cornerstone for "all sorts of quarrels" within the British government and Navy Department as they attempted to balance fleet requirements with other military and civilian concerns.⁶⁰ Britain was in a difficult predicament because supremacy at sea was the "lifeblood of her existence": any threat to the fleet was a threat to Britain's survival⁶¹ and the idea of simply continuing to increase Britain's defense

budget until it was capable of supporting all land and naval contingencies was “financially impossible.”⁶² In 1909, again attempting to influence Germany to reduce its naval efforts, Britain resolutely told Germany it must preserve “the standard and proportion of the British navy to those of the European countries to which has been upheld by successive British government(s),” to which German leaders replied that they alone would determine the size of the German fleet and they would not be accountable to any foreign government for their decisions.⁶³

The naval arms race continued until 1912, when Germany assessed a war was likely and began shifting money from naval production towards the expansion of its ground forces.⁶⁴ By that time, however, Germany had advanced from the sixth most powerful navy in the world to the second; only Britain was stronger.⁶⁵ Regardless of how naval interactions played out during WWI, no other disagreement pushed Britain and Germany more decisively towards war than the competition over naval power.

Vital Interest 3 – Colonies: Colonies were essential to Britain’s survival; it could not survive as a great power, let alone a dominant power, without them. While Germany did not initially desire colonies, the impact of the Long Depression (which reduced European demand for Germany’s increasing productivity) and nationalism drove Germany to seek colonies where it could sell its products, as well as obtain labor, raw material and living space for Germany’s people. The colonies would also support the naval operations required to protect Germany’s sea lines of communications between the Fatherland and overseas markets as it expanded its presence throughout the world.⁶⁶ In addition, and perhaps more importantly for the Kaiser, the colonies would prove that

Germany was no longer a weak conglomerate of unified principalities; it truly was an Empire and its influence should be acknowledged and respected throughout the world.

Britain, instead of accepting Germany's colonial ambitions and its need to protect them, began to increase its own territorial possessions.⁶⁷ When questioned about British expansion, which the Germans saw as a move to limit its own colonial ambitions (especially regarding Samoa, China and the Portuguese colonies⁶⁸), the British Foreign Secretary stated that Britain was only seeking new colonies that were "deemed essential to the safety or welfare of some other neighboring possession."⁶⁹ Since Britain already owned more colonies than any other state and in more areas, it appeared both ludicrous and unfair to the Germans and drove Bismarck to declare, "That is the entire world?!"⁷⁰

When Germany's expansionist ambitions are viewed through Britain's lenses, it is easy to understand Britain's concerns: Britain saw Germany's desire for colonies as unnecessary because Germany was large state, possessed substantial natural resources, and had access to multiple water ways that made it a great power even without colonies. For Britain, however, its colonies were essential and it could not survive without them. Although the differing opinion on colonies was unlikely to instigate conflict by itself, it was another irritant that significantly contributed to the ruin of the Anglo-German relationship.

Vital Interest 4 – Status Quo: Britain could not maintain its empire if the status quo changed, and Germany could not achieve its full potential if it remained the same. Although a few exceptions existed (the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire key among them), Britain desired few changes to the international order, while Germany desired many. Britain's failure to adjust the status quo to accommodate Germany's rise was a

major factor in Germany assessing that the only way it could achieve change was through conflict.

Britain's and Germany's vital interests were interwoven and complicated. In addition, their close proximity and overlapping lines of communications fostered paranoia and mistrust in both states. While the decision-makers may not have consciously pressed their states towards war, their failure to reconcile their vital interests would guarantee that war was the inevitable outcome.

Key Decision-Makers: The next section reviews the influence that the international community, state leaders, domestic politicians, and societies had on the Anglo-German relationship as 1914 approached. These crucial factors determined whether or not the states progressed towards war or peace, and whether or not the international community took steps to encourage the states towards violent or nonviolent resolutions.

International Community: Following Napoleon's defeat in 1814, the victorious European powers and the new French leaders conferred in a series of meetings known as the Congress of Vienna. The Congress, which sought to establish peace on the European continent, redrew borders and fashioned agreements (not laws) to create a balance of power intended to deter the ambitions of the great powers and maintain peace on the continent.⁷¹ While the framework of the Congress did maintain stability for four decades, it began eroding during the European Democratic Revolutions of 1848,⁷² the Crimean War in 1853-1856, and the impact of the Long Depression of 1873-1879.⁷³ The framework was ultimately destroyed, however, following Germany's Wars of Unification from 1864 to 1871 (where it decisively defeated the Danes, Austrians, and French) and its

rapid rise thereafter. By 1890, Europe was no longer “in balance” but was devolving into a series of shifting alliances as each great power sought its own advantages within the increasingly anarchic framework.

Among the great powers in the late 1800s, disdain and mistrust towards Germany grew increasingly widespread. France, still fuming over its defeat to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War, had grave concerns about Germany’s new found economic and military strength. In addition, France found itself increasingly isolated following the establishment of the Triple Alliance in 1882, which joined Germany with France’s historical enemy, Austria-Hungary, as well as Italy.⁷⁴ France sought alliances of its own to counter Germany’s increasing influence, but they came years later and only after the other great powers recognized Germany’s threat to their own state’s interests.

Due to its ambitions in Central Asia and the Sub-Continent, Russia felt threatened more by Britain than by Germany. In 1887, Russia signed the secret “Reinsurance Treaty” with Germany which guaranteed Russia would remain neutral if France attacked Germany, and Germany would remain neutral if Austria-Hungary attacked Russia.⁷⁵ Although the treaty reinvigorated Russian-German relations, it only lasted a short period; when it was up for renewal in 1890, Kaiser Wilhelm II rejected it. The Kaiser’s refusal to renew the Treaty made Russia question German intentions and ultimately drove Russia into ratifying the Franco-Russian Alliance (Entente) of 1894, which created an equivalent alliance opposed to Germany’s own Triple Alliance, and created a temporary stabilizing effect within Europe. That stability, however, did not last long; by 1900, Germany’s economy, navy, and ground capabilities were expanding much faster than the combined

rates of France and Russia,⁷⁶ forcing the balance of power to shift, once again, in Germany's favor.

State Leaders: Britain's leadership recognized the threat of Germany's rise to the British Empire, especially Germany's naval and colonial goals. Although Britain did seek arms limitations treaties with Germany starting in 1901, Germany rejected them all. By 1904, Britain assessed that it could not stand in isolation against the German threat: Germany already fielded the world's most powerful army and was preparing to develop the world's most powerful navy. This directly threatened Britain's survival, so it reluctantly decided that it, too, must choose sides. Britain engaged in a series of agreements with France that resolved multiple colonial disputes and ended more than 1,000 years of conflict between the two states. The agreement the two countries signed in 1904, the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale, did not bind each state to come to the other's aid in war; however, it did create a partnership that made military assistance more likely.

Germany immediately tested the Entente in the 1905 Moroccan Crisis by encouraging the Sultan of Morocco to oppose French colonialism and to do so by war, supported by Germany, if necessary.⁷⁷ While the crisis was ultimately diffused and Morocco remained a French colony, it did produce three significant effects: it indicated to the world that Germany opposed the status quo and was willing to go to war to change it, it strengthened the Anglo-French relationship, and it untimely drove Britain to sign a treaty with Russia (the Anglo-Russian Entente Cordiale of 1907) that further polarized Germany and the Triple Alliance from the rest of the international community.⁷⁸

German actions from 1890 to 1913 forced the nations it had hoped to remain divided (Britain, France and Russia) into an alliance that eventually surrounded Germany. Germany's desire – especially under Bismarck – was to guarantee Germany would not face threats on two, or more, fronts. Although Bismarck was highly successful due to his use of *Realpolitik* diplomacy and his personal charisma, upon his dismissal Germany's foreign efforts took a decided change. Its new leaders, increasingly erratic and aggressive, relied on threats and coercion in pursuit of their desired endstates. This change in foreign policy did not suit Britain, France, and Russia, who were accustomed to their positions within the status quo, and drove them to unite with one another to create the Triple Entente. Thus, while Germany sought to prevent a situation where it faced more than one enemy at any given time, its leaders' unpredictable and antagonistic foreign policies ensured it had three potential enemies threatening its frontiers and ultimately reduced Germany's options to subordination or war.

Domestic Politics: Britain's Parliament and Germany's Reichstag were drastically different government entities and faced dramatically different challenges from their own populations. Parliament, via the House of Commons, consisted of democratically elected representatives who generally managed through peaceful, procedural methods to support the will of British people and its leadership. Internal struggle and divisions certainly existed, but Britain's mature government generally managed them with professionalism and reason. However, Germany's Reichstag was much more complicated; the Monarchy and the Junker ruling elite loosely controlled it, but they faced significant opposition from workers unions and the Catholic Center, which caused inconsistent decision-making among Germany's leadership as it tried to appease

the major political parties. These struggles blurred Germany's short- and long-term strategic goals, reducing the government's efficiency in both creating and executing strategy. The difficulties within the Reichstag pushed Germany towards conflict as the ruling elite concluded that war was the best option to persuade politicians to put their political differences aside and put their full backing behind the Kaiser and his ministers.⁷⁹

German politicians also faced multiple threats from their own population. The Kaiser and the Junker ruling elite wanted to maintain their current positions and were reluctant to initiate any significant democratic reforms. However, as the population became more educated and urbanized, it increasingly demanded democratic reforms. This situation created a dilemma for the Kaiser and the government as they considered the possibility of war. Their debate focused on whether or not a war would unite the nation by putting aside social reforms in favor of state goal or cause a major upheaval in which the population would demand a democratic republic. The German leadership finally gambled that war would unite Germany, and so from 1897 its pursuit of *Weltpolitik* became increasingly aggressive to unite political parties and the greater population behind the monarchy.⁸⁰

Britain's domestic politics also became increasingly complicated from 1890 to 1914. Britain had been a global power for nearly 200 years and the dominant power for more than 100. Until the late 1800s, British politics focused on social programs, imperialism, productivity, and maintaining the status quo (e.g., British superiority on the waves, market access, and the balance of power among the continental states). By the early 1900s, however, the British population was becoming increasingly conservative and nationalistic due to the changing international environment and their perceived loss of

power within it. This prompted the population to elect increasingly conservative and anti-German politicians who promised to defend Britain's position in the world.

Although pro-German elements did exist in British Parliament, and pro-British elements were in the German Reichstag, they were few and were diminishing at a rapid rate. By 1906, the growing antagonism in Anglo-German relations ran so deep that the influence of a single politician would not have made a significant difference.⁸¹ By 1914, the ongoing antagonism made it clear that opportunities for peace had already slipped past, and if a vital national interest was violated, the likely recourse was war.⁸²

Societies: Germany and Britain had deep familial, cultural, religious, military, and business ties that extended over many centuries. Unlike other European states, these two had never fought against each other, and Britain's monarchy were direct descendants of the German House of Hanover.⁸³ These societies viewed each other with mutual respect: Germany upon Britain for the massive empire it commanded; and Britain upon Germany for its rapid improvement and its leading efforts in the fields of philosophy, technology, and precision manufacturing. Those feelings began to transform, however, as each state perceived its changing position in the 20th Century world.

Anti-German emotions first surfaced in Britain following the Franco-German War in 1870-71. Britain was shocked by Germany's rapid victory over France and there were some elements who feared Britain may become Germany's next "victim".⁸⁴ Anti-German sentiment increased in 1896 following the disclosure of Kaiser Wilhelm's congratulatory note to President Krueger of the Transvaal (Boers) for their success over the British in the Jameson Raid.⁸⁵ This resulted in the first published calls for war against Germany. Relations quickly soured, however, following the Kaiser's own

inflammatory statements to the Daily Telegraph newspaper 1908, in which he attempted to defend Germany's colonial actions, but instead alienated Britain, France, Russia, Holland and Japan due to his frantic and irrational statements.⁸⁶

Germany's usurpation of Britain as the most successful economic power in Europe also increased anti-German sentiment. This transition of economic dominance led the German people to become more confident, assertive, and aggressive in their dealings with the British and other European powers. The British, on the other hand, experienced a period of self-doubt and low morale; the dominant position they held for more than 200 years was coming to an end.⁸⁷ It also made the British people question their own prospects as Germany accumulated more jobs and developed increasingly advanced technologies, which further advanced Germany's position over Britain.

As the political situation deteriorated, the people and the populations of both states became increasingly conservative, nationalistic and suspicious of the other's actions.⁸⁸ This condition proved self-defeating: as the peoples' beliefs shifted to the right, the government power in both states also shifted to the right, giving increased power to the imperialists and conservatives who were more likely to seek solutions through conflict rather than through diplomacy and compromise.

Testing the sub-hypotheses (SH): Now that a basic understanding of the Anglo-German relationship from 1890 to 1914 has been established, the following section of this paper will test Zhu's sub-hypotheses.

SH1: International Community: *The further a rising power is incorporated into the international system, the less likely it is to challenge the status quo.* Results: The European community was not accommodating to Germany's rise due its own fears and

ambitions, as well as Germany's provocative actions and rhetoric. The lack of accommodation, confirmed by the Triple Entente and other actions to resist Germany's rise, made it clear to Germany that its influence and actions were not welcome. Germany assessed that its options to change the status quo had been whittled down to one option: war.

SH2: Domestic Politics: *The more that a rising power respects the dominant power's vital interests, the less likely it is to be perceived and treated as a threat by the dominant power.* Results: Germany did not respect Britain's vital interests. Although Germany did not have any ill will towards Britain in the early 1900s, its desire to develop a powerful navy was the primary irritant to the Anglo-German relations as it threatened Britain's survival, and yet was not critical to Germany. In Britain's view, a superior navy was a strategic requirement, while Germany's naval ambitions were seen as a mere hobby. In Germany's view, however, it deserved a grand fleet for three reasons: it had the economic might to build it; the fleet would be used to build and protect its own empire; and a grand fleet was a symbol of power and prestige that Germany's leadership desired to possess, regardless of how it was viewed by the dominant power.

SH3: Domestic Politics: *The more the dominant power respects and accommodates a challenger's vital interests, the less likely the challenger is to become dissatisfied with the international order and its relations to the dominant power.* Results: Britain did not accommodate three of Germany's four vital interests (economy, naval power, colonies, and changes to the status quo). While Britain reluctantly accepted the economic transition (it could do little to change it; benefits could be gained from Germany's rise; and Britain was still the financial, insurance, and entrepreneurial capital

of the world), it did not respect nor accommodate Germany's expanding naval power, colonial ambition, or changes to the status quo. Britain refused to acquiesce its power and influence to Germany and took many steps to prevent and delay, rather than accommodate, Germany's vital interests.

SH4: Societal links: *The more extensive and strong links the societies have, the less likely there is to be war between them.* Result: Despite centuries of close social ties, sentiments between the two states progressively deteriorated after observing the rhetoric, actions, and counter-actions of each other. This reaction was not immediate; it took time and significant efforts to encourage the societies to look upon each other as enemies. Fueled by state leadership and the conservative press, propaganda transformed the societies' views of one another so that when conflict arose, framing the other as a menacing enemy was simple and effective.

SH5: State leaders: *The more committed national leaders are to a stable, bilateral relationship, the less likely there is to be war between the two powers.* Result: British leaders did not take genuine efforts to develop a relationship with Germany. Although Britain did pursue multiple agreements to reduce tensions, their real purpose was to maintain the status quo and limit Germany's ability to oppose British naval dominance. Britain's leadership treated Germany not as a peer, but as a lower-class state, and therefore these efforts made Germany believe that it could only find the respect and empire it deserved through military force. Britain's determination to maintain the status quo, regardless of its effects on Germany's vital interests, prevented any development of a stable, bilateral relationship.

Germany also did not seek an open relationship with Britain. Germany's leaders, especially after Bismarck, were erratic and inflammatory. They instigated Britain, and most of the international community, to view Germany's actions with suspicion and resulted in anti-German sentiment throughout much of Europe. Germany's lack of transparency and failure to recognize Britain's vital interests (especially naval supremacy) prevented the development of any meaningful relationship with Britain.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Zhu's theory accurately predicted that Britain and Germany would engage in war. The theory accounted for the dissatisfied challenger and power parity, as well as the impact the key influencers had on the progression of the states towards war. All sub-hypotheses support the idea that, unless key decision-makers pursued choices to reconcile vital interests, war would be the inevitable result. Although this study focused on different aspects of the pre-WWI Anglo-German relationship, these results closely match Zhu's own assessment and strengthen the validity of his theory.⁸⁹

Zhu's theory is more modern and comprehensive than previous models. While Organski identified the prerequisites for power transition conflicts (dissatisfied challenger and power parity), and Waltz identified the importance that societies, leaders, and the international community played in determining the path towards war or peace, Zhu is the first to combine and expand these concepts to create an improved power transition theory. However, Zhu's theory does have shortfalls.

Zhu's theory does not include a sub-hypothesis that accounts for the actions of a rising challenger to threaten a dominant power's alliances and partnerships. These actions may include the challenger's efforts to expand diplomatic, information, military,

and economic ties with the dominant power's allies. These efforts could cause the allies to question their ties to the dominant power and prevent them from honoring their commitments to the dominant power in the future. Neither does Zhu include a sub-hypothesis that accounts for a rising challengers' efforts to contest the dominant power's allies directly. These actions may include increased aggressiveness over territorial and economic disputes or other actions that could negatively impact the state's livelihood. Subsequently, these actions may limit the ally's effectiveness if a conflict arises between the dominant power and the dissatisfied challenger.

To overcome the shortfalls of the theory, Zhu or other theorists could expand the theory to include an additional sub-hypothesis. A possible draft hypothesis is as follow: *The more that a rising power respects a dominant power's allies and alliances, the less likely it is to be perceived and treated as a threat by the dominant power.* This additional sub-hypothesis would supplement the originals by recognizing the importance that allies and alliances play in the modern world and would make Zhu's theory more comprehensive and relevant to the 21st Century international environment.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. and China are at a perilous crossroads. Based on current assessments, China may usurp the U.S. to become the world's dominant power within the next decade. This situation may lead to conflict which could quickly escalate into a worldwide conflagration because power transitions are prone to large-scale war. To lessen the likelihood of conflict, U.S. leaders should be equipped with the most modern and comprehensive power transitions theories available so they can monitor the situation and

apply influence as needed to drive the progression towards peace. To aid in this evaluation, a modern and comprehensive power transition theory is required to account for the variables that exist only during transitions, as well as for the complex decision-making of societies, state leaders, and the international community.

Dr. Zhu's theory is the most modern and comprehensive to date, and U.S. leaders should use it as a tool to evaluate the current U.S.-China relationship. However, Zhu's theory is not perfect and it has gaps that require resolution. Failure to improve and apply an updated theory may result in the development of flawed domestic and foreign policies that damage U.S. prestige and influence throughout the world. This cannot be allowed. International relations theorists should continue to improve Zhu's theory to ensure U.S. leaders are armed with the best power transition theory available. While "black swans" may still occur, the more that U.S. leaders understand a power transition, the better they can make decisions that are beneficial to U.S. power and prestige. This cannot be left to chance: there is simply too much at stake.

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