

# H-Net Reviews

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**Robert G. Sutter.** *Chinese Policy Priorities and Their Implications for the United States.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. X+220 pp. \$21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8476-9853-0.

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Beginning in the mid-1990s, it was becoming evident that the Chinese governing system was not going to follow the footsteps of the now defunct Soviet Union, in spite of the Chinese Communist Party's refusal to democratize its political system and privatize its economic system. In contrast to the painful transition of Eastern European economies, the Chinese economy grew steadily. The Chinese political/social control system remained stable in spite of the numerous challenges it faced from within and abroad. Such a contrast helped to sustain research interest in answering the big question: what should be done about "China's rise to power" (p. vii)?

Out of the American international relations (IR) circles, numerous academic and policy journal articles have been published to debate whether or not it serves America's interest better to *contain* or *engage* China (1). Over the years, fewer writers have advocated containment as a strategy in dealing with China. More writers propose tactics of engagement. Robert Sutter's book also addresses this big question. His conclusion, as stated in the end of the introduction, is that the United States should avoid either "an overly solicitous or overly confrontational policy toward Beijing" (p. vii).

Sutter makes several contributions to the matter of sorting out the containment/engagement dichotomy in thinking about the management of U.S.-China relations. First, Sutter argues that domestic concerns dominate Chinese policy making agenda (Chapter 2). By implication, China does not yet have the resources (material or political) to be more engaged internationally. To IR specialists, there is not much new in such statements since foreign policy is usually viewed as an extension of do-

mestic politics. But Sutter deserves credit by bringing the same sort of reasoning to understanding foreign policy decision making in the Chinese context. For, China, before and after the Communist Party gained control of the land there, has always assumed a *special* place in the American intellectual landscape of the world.

Second, Sutter reports on China's pursuit of foreign relations with Russia (Chapter 4), Japan (Chapter 5), the Koreans and Taiwan (Chapter 6), Southeast Asia (Chapter 7), South and Central Asia (Chapter 8), and Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America (Chapter 9). Granted, these short chapters (averaging twenty pages each) can only serve as a general survey of events rather than systematic analysis. But Sutter's treatment has a point: China's pursuit of relations with the United States is part of its global diplomatic profile.

Third, Sutter's identification of the personalities, ideology (which Sutter finds to be of declining influence, p. 186), and the multiplicity of issues and institutions in the conduct of China's foreign policy serves as a useful guide to students who want to study the decision-making process of Chinese foreign policy. In the literature on Chinese foreign policy making, more efforts need to be made along similar lines (i.e., to appreciate the domestic complexities of Chinese foreign policy decision making).

The thrust of the book, then, is made up of a review of major developments in U.S.-China relations in during the first and second Clinton Administrations (Chapter 3) and deliberations on China's pursuit of its international relations on the future evolution of U.S.-China relations (Chapter 11). These two chapters point to the same con-

clusion: although the United States and China may not share long-term strategic interests, the two governments during much of the 1990s found enough of an overlap to prove to the skeptics that a containment or confrontational policy approach is unnecessary.

In some ways one can say that Sutter has attempted to do almost the impossible: dealing with virtually all the aspects of China's foreign relations and U.S.-China relations in a single, somewhat slim volume. Written in lucid language, the book is clearly not meant to become material for rigorous analysis and debate in a college classroom. Rather, each individual chapter can be nicely used as a policy briefing/advocacy paper for an Administration official or a Congressman. The book is well documented and clearly urges cool-mindedness in debates about specific policies the United States government adopts toward China.

One obvious flaw in the book is Sutter's treatment of China's handling of its relations with Taiwan together in the same chapter on Sino-Korean relations (Chapter 6). The six pages (pp. 104-109) of text devoted to discussing China-Taiwan interactions from 1995 to 1998 and the Taiwan issue in U.S.-China relations are simply insufficient to educate the reader about the importance of the matter in bilateral relations between the U.S. and China, both on a day-to-day basis and as an issue of strategic significance. It would be more illuminating to shed light on

the author's thoughts whether or not the question of Taiwan's political status in international politics is as central to a smooth development of Sino-American relations, as Chinese diplomats often claim.

Events in U.S.-China relations unfold so fast that virtually any book designed to capture their momentum quickly becomes outdated. Sutter's volume is valuable in that it provides a succinct update of developments in China's foreign relations, and U.S.-China relations, particularly in the 1993-1998 period. It deserves to be added to the reading list of students who are interested in understanding U.S.-China relations from a pragmatic point of view.

(1) As a matter of wider (than American) concern, the containment/ engagement debate goes back to the early 1990s, when Southeast Asian nations began to view China as a threat thanks to, among other things, the increased competition in the global markets brought about by China's continuing economic strength. See Denny Roy, "The 'China threat' issue: major arguments," *Asian Survey*, 36:8 (August 1996), pp. 758-771.

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