Strategic Culture and Policy Making

Beijing Feng, University of Leicester

Weisiying, National Institute for Global Strategy, CASS

According to Christopher Hill's book *Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century*, foreign policy is briefly defined as "the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually but not exclusively a state) in international relations" (Hill, 2016, pg 4). With no doubt, the study of foreign policy is a difficult subject and it contains multi-aspects to consider when analyzing what influences such policy making. This essay will focus on how the strategic culture, which is among the multi-aspects above-mentioned, influences the decision making of policy. Before answering this question, it is important to understand that the strategic culture is different from a strategy that is considered from a cultural aspect. In fact, the concept of strategic culture is to have a balance and analyze the military, cultural, political and sociological sectors comprehensively. Sources of strategic culture includes many different angles and perspectives of interpretation, for example: geography, climate and resources, history and experience, political structure, the nature of defense organizations, myths and Symbols, transnational norms, generational change and even the role of technology etc. (Baylis, Wirtz and Gray, 2016, pg 91). This essay would like to point out the most relevant five sources and evaluate in depth in relation to the two most active and frequently mentioned states when researching in the area of International Relations: the United States and China. The four points are, respectively: firstly, the mode of thinking, which derived from states' history and culture background; secondly, the acknowledgement of identities; thirdly, the military aspect; lastly, the importance of technology. Hopefully by the end of this essay, it could eventually answer the question how strategic culture influence policy making.

Firstly, as mentioned in the introduction, one of the most important factors that affect policy making under strategic culture is the mode of thinking. The mode of thinking draws upon a certain cultural, history and knowledge backgrounds,

which leads to a certain angle of thinking or ways of thinking. The two modes of thinking between United States and China are very easy to distinguish, especially taking the example of the United States having the individualist view, while China having the collectivist view. Individualism can be shown from different aspects, for example, individualism "has to do with whether people's self-image is defined in terms of 'I' or 'We'" and "in Individualist societies people are only supposed to look after themselves and their direct family (Hofstede, 2017). In Collectivist societies people belong to "in groups" that take care of them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty." This also explains why surrender under unfavorable conditions can be understood by the citizens in the United States, since the life of an individual is most precious, and surrender is for the reason to reduce casualties (Hao, 2015). On the other hand, in East Asian countries, such as Japan etc., sacrificing themselves for the faith, the collective, or the interests of the nation, is the highest manifestation of personal values (Ouyang, 2017, pg 72). This perspective of individualism and collectivism could be derived from their historical and cultural background. For the United States, according to the "Declaration of Independence", the fundamental values for the United States are, for example: liberty, self-government, equality, individualism, diversity, and unity etc., and these are the fundamental beliefs shaped and formed from their cultural background (Office of the Historian, 2017). On the other hand for East Asian countries, mode of thinking is, to a large extent, based on the Confucius ideology, for example, the idea of "Doctrine of the Mean", and the ancient Chinese theory of "benevolent government", which is using morality to educate the neighboring nations etc. (Worrall, 2015). These ideas that were derived from the Chinese history greatly affected the Chinese statecraft, it could be seen from, for example, the belt and road initiatives (Shambaugh, 2017), the idea lead by President Xi of having "a community of shared future" or the 'Community of Common Destiny' etc. (Jacob Mardell, 2017). For the United States, since the state is built on the value of individualism, thus the idea of free markets, free trade, and unrestricted flows of capital, is to be believed that could create the greatest benefits. This idea later on formed as an ideology so called: neo-liberalism, which was greatly promoted in the 1970s to their targeted countries, such as the countries in Latin America and Asia (Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009). In short the idea of having "a

community of shared future" for China and the promotion of neo-liberalism for the United States that were affected by their mode of thinking and derived from each individual country's cultural background, value, history and knowledge, it clearly shows how the mode of thinking could affect their policy in the first place.

The second factor that affects policy making under strategic culture that this essay would like to bring up is the sense of identity. According to Samuel P. Huntington's book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, ever since the end of the Cold War, "global politics began to be reconfigured along the cultural lines" (Huntington, 2002). As the world become more and more globalized , the importance of identity and the importance of having a sense of belonging lead to a new interpretation of the world order. Huntington has divided the world into 7 or 8 civilizations that are confronting each other and pointed out ever since the end of the Cold War. The clashes between states no longer fall on ideology, but now it is on each individual's cultural or civilizations (Huntington, 2002). Having this interpretation of that future conflict will be built on different civilizations, the importance of identity and the importance of the idea of belongings became much clearer on how it could influence policy making. Identity refers, mainly, to constructing of the same characteristics to find a sense of attribution, which then form a particular sense of belonging. The issue of identity, which is mainly addressed in the field of international relations, is "who am I? Who are they?" Through different forms of exchanging information, states then form criteria of judging "identity". This then leads the state to consider who they belong to, and thus could cooperate with; and who they do not belong to, and thus to be their enemies (Bloom, 2011).   In terms of the constructivism of international relations, the state's identity shapes the national interest and directly affects the foreign behavior of a country, and this idea could be found from Holsti' *National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Holsti, 1970). In other words, the concept of identity explains the question "Who am I?", which is the fundamental starting point for decision-making to a state. Therefore, simply due to the fact that the United States and China does not share the same identity, the two country tend to clashes with different opinion and unlike. Comparing to the European Union's policy of working collectively, the United

States and China tend confront each other. This does not mean that the United States and China does not work together at all, but more or less it affects the decision making in foreign policies. Therefore, the sense of identity, derived from state's cultural, history and civilization background, once again clearly influences the policy decision-making process, or even form the fundamental starting point of such policy.

The third point to be considered is how the military aspect could affect the policy making process. Military, in this case, is different from the previous one that could be categorized into soft power, it belongs under the hard power sector and is important to take into consideration when evaluating a state's influence. The structure and role of the military in the state is what this essay would like to focus on, since the more important a states look upon military, the more influence it has. For the United States, military is definitely one of the most important reason when considering policy making, since the United States highly look upon the military aspects, which it could be seen from allying with a great amount of different countries and forming a great amount of treaties, for example NATO etc. (NATO, n.d.). In addition, the military aspect is strongly linked with the geo-political aspect as well. Taking the example of the United States and China, for the United States in order to suppresses China's influence and its rise, the United States implement island chain strategy in 1951 (Yoshihara, 2012). The island chain strategy is combined with three chains, where the "first island chain" consists the military garrisons and bases set up in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, Myanmar, India, Mongolia, South Korea etc.; the "second island chain" is taking Guam as the centre and combined with the military bases in Australia, New Zealand Malaysia, India, Afghanistan etc.; the "third island chain" involves the military base in the Hawaii Islands and so as India, Saudi Arabia and others. Although it is called island chain, the function is actually to encircle China not only on the sea, but also on the land as well (U.S. Naval Institute, 2017). As a result, ideally, the first island chain can effectively control the passage from China towards the East China Sea and the South China Sea, basically blocking China's sea areas and strengthening its surveillance on China; the second island chain prevents and controls China's attacks and

exploitation of marine resources, eventually, once again strengthens the blockade of China's maritime areas; the third island chain is conducive to consolidate the role of the previous two island chain, and completely blocked the Chinese waters, so that all three chain together will lead to the United States eventually making China loses all the superiority on the sea. Having explained the island chain strategy, it is necessary to highlight the importance of military in this situation. Imagine it is not the United States, but a weak power doing so, the result is clear that only strong nation states and only when the nation states look highly on its military could achieve such strategy, thus it is not hard to understand how the military aspect could influence policy making, especially in making foreign policies.

The last point that this essay would like to bring up is the role of technology in relation to influencing policy making, where the United States and China work as a perfect example under this source of strategic culture as well. As technology becomes more and more important to not only daily life, but also to national security and military, the United States realized that the importance of controlling the exportation of technology, not only in the area of military weapon and high-graded, precision and advanced technology, such as Satellite positioning technology, anti-ballistic missile technology, early warning technology, long-range missile technology, Aegis Combat System, warheads, etc., but also even for technologies that does not completely belong to the military aspect but could and have the potential to become military weapons, for example: space interception and development technology; glimmer night vision technology etc. In order to not "leak out" the advanced technology, there were mainly three policies that were implemented through the past few decades. Firstly, the United States banned the export of arms to China through legislation in 1949 by the United States Congress promulgating the "Export Control Act of 1949", where it called upon any exports that help to enhance the economy or military potential of communist countries and undermine the security of the United States are rejected (HISTORY, n.d.). The second policy was to establish an organization for embargo with other countries, such as Britain and France, jointly, named the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (CoCom). The CoCom

included four categories, and it the last one was specifically focused on China, where there were about 500 more item that were banned to China compared with the Soviet Union and the other Eastern European countries (Knes, n.d.). The last policy was working with its allies, Japan, Israel and European Union etc. and put pressure on its allies to carry out embargo on China. The best example for US's oppression could be seen from the cooperation that almost carried out between China and Israel. When the United States noticed that China started to engage with Israel to seeks for introduce of advanced weapons and equipment, such as early warning aircraft and UAVs, the United States exerted pressure on Israel to suspend the contract even when the contract was already signed between China and the Israel Aircraft Industry Corporation (Han, 2010). From these three policies that the United States carried out, it is not hard to see how the role of technology influenced policy making.

To conclude, from the five sources of strategic culture mentioned above, it is not hard to see how strategic culture has influenced policy making. To break it down, firstly, the mode of thinking, which derived from states' history and culture background, bring up different view towards the same situation, and thus affects the policies; secondly, the acknowledgement of identities provides a sense of belonging which then leads the policy making direction; thirdly, the role and the structure of military within a country decides that nation state's hard power, and this could leads to different solutions towards the situation, just as mentioned in that paragraph, if it is a weak state, the idea of having a chain would not even be thought of in the first place; lastly, the technology aspect also influences the decision making, since the more advanced the technology is, the more protection a nation state would give, simply due to technology directly links to national security.

Bibliography:
- Baylis, J., Wirtz, J. and Gray, C. (2016). *Strategy in the contemporary world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.91.
- Bloom, W. (2011). *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations*. Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press.

- Boas, T. and Gans-Morse, J. (2009). Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, [online] 44(2), pp.137-161. Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs12116-009-9040-5 [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Djolic, P. (2017). *The United States of America: Liberal Democracy or Liberal Oligarchy?* |. [online] Global Research - Centre for Research on Globalization. Available at: https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-united-states-of-america-liberal-democracy-or-liberal-oligarchy/5593735 [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Han, X. (2010). *American technology blockade of 50 years in China*. [online] Sina News. Available at: http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2010-07-15/180920687110.shtml [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Hao, S. (2015). *An Analysis of American Individualism Culture*. [online] https://haosuyawen.wordpress.com. Available at: https://haosuyawen.wordpress.com/2015/02/19/an-analysis-of-american-individualism-culture/ [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Hill, C. (2016). *Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century*. 2nd ed. London: PALGRAVE, p.4.
- HISTORY. (n.d.). *United States passes Export Control Act*. [online] Available at: http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/united-states-passes-export-control-act [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Hofstede, G. (2017). *National Culture*. [online] Hofstede Insights. Available at: https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture/ [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Holsti, K. (1970). National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy. *International Studies Quarterly*, [online] 14(3), p.233. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3013584?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Huntington, S. (2002). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. 1st ed. London: The Free Press, p.pg 19.
- Jacob Mardell, T. (2017). *The 'Community of Common Destiny' in Xi Jinping's New Era*. [online] The Diplomat. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/the-community-of-common-destiny-in-xi-jinpings-new-era/ [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Knes, M. (n.d.). *Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls and the Wassenaar Arrangement*. [online] Referenceforbusiness.com. Available at: http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/encyclopedia/Con-Cos/Coordinating-Committee-for-Multilateral-Export-Controls-and-the-Wassenaar-Arrangement.html [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- NATO. (n.d.). *What is NATO?*. [online] Available at: https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/#basic [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- News.bbc.co.uk. (n.d.). *BBC NEWS*. [online] Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/in_depth/china_politics/government/html/1.stm [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].

- Office of the Historian. (2018). *The Declaration of Independence, 1776.* [online] Available at: https://history.state.gov/milestones/1776-1783/declaration [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Ouyang, K. (2017). *The Chinese national spirit.* 1st ed. Springer Singapore, p.72.
- Oxford Dictionaries | English. (n.d.). *democracy.* [online] Available at: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/democracy [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Placek, K. (2012). *The Democratic Peace Theory.* [online] E-International Relations. Available at: http://www.e-ir.info/2012/02/18/the-democratic-peace-theory/ [Accessed 29 Dec. 2017].
- Shambaugh, D. (2017). *China's Soft-Power Push.* [online] Foreign Affairs. Available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-06-16/china-s-soft-power-push [Accessed 27 Dec. 2017].
- the Guardian. (2017). *Are referendums the best way to shore up our feeble democracy?.* [online] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/oct/19/are-referendums-the-best-way-to-shore-up-our-feeble-democracy [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- U.S. Naval Institute. (2018). *Defend the First Island Chain.* [online] Available at: https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2014-04/defend-first-island-chain [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Worrall, S. (2015). *Why Is Confucius Still Relevant Today? His Sound Bites Hold Up.* [online] National Geographic. Available at: https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/03/150325-confucius-china-asia-philosophy-communist-party-ngbooktalk/ [Accessed 28 Dec. 2017].
- Yoshihara, T. (2012). China's Vision of Its Seascape: The First Island Chain and Chinese Seapower. *Asian Politics & Policy*, 4(3), pp.293-314.