America’s main interests in China have been quite constant and largely consistent with China’s own interests. But the American people’s and their political representatives’ concerns about China’s current behavior and long-term intentions have waxed and waned. Since U.S.-Chinese relations were normalized two decades ago, Americans have both idealized and demonized the drive of China’s leadership to preserve social stability and perpetuate its political power by raising the Chinese people’s material living standards, the level of China’s technology, and the strength of their security forces. Rose-tinted visions of China’s early political reform have not materialized. Dire predictions of Chinese military expansion have also been discredited. Overly optimistic forecasts of profits from private U.S. investments in China remain unfulfilled. And a peaceful settlement between Taiwan and China does not appear imminent. As a result, Americans’ views of China have become increasingly sober and stable since the thawing of the cold war.

Geopolitics have become more fluid in the 1990s. America’s concerns with China’s possible use of force against Taiwan have grown more serious and occasionally acute. Americans have also focused more sharply on China’s acquisition, application, and export of strategic technologies. At the same time, popular opposition to freer trade with China in the absence of greater respect for human rights and religious freedom has grown, especially among lower-income Americans. Public opinion surveys even suggest that four out of five
Americans believe the United States should introduce environmental and labor standards into the World Trade Organization (WTO) when China joins this international rule-making and commercial dispute-settling body. Booming U.S. demand for imports from China have boosted trade deficits, reinforcing American frustrations with China’s barriers to U.S. exports and investments. Indeed, China became a main focus for protests against globalization that disrupted Seattle in November 1999.

Still, China remains the world’s most populous nation and, despite its recent slowdown, one of the fastest growing, with enormous potential for good or ill. To help realize the good and limit the ill, most Americans favor China’s joining the WTO, assuming it lives by the rules. This is not just because prospective exporters and investors see great opportunities for themselves in China’s growing market. Americans also expect China’s participation in the WTO to accelerate the reform of its economic and legal institutions; to open the door for Taiwan’s accession to the WTO and for direct, cross-straits trade links between Taiwan and China; and thus to lower political barriers to the movement of people, information, and ideas between them. Above all, they hope that China will refrain from provocative shows or coercive uses of force against its claimed compatriots on Taiwan, as when it fired missiles menacingly in the Taiwan Straits in 1996. For all these reasons, the United States will remain keenly interested in China’s political as well as economic reform, its progressive integration into the global community, and the peaceful course of its cross-straits relations.

Strategic bonds between the United States and China weakened as the cold war thawed in the late 1980s and the Soviet Union expired in the early 1990s. There was no longer any need to contain Soviet expansion. Moreover, the eruption and repression of public protests in China in 1989 renewed American revulsion toward the Chinese leadership’s harsh treatment of its critics and opponents, which had been largely dormant since the Cultural Revolution ended, Mao died, and U.S.-Chinese relations were officially “normalized” in the 1970s. The end of the cold war and China’s violent crackdown changed the climate for U.S.-Chinese relations and opened American eyes to China’s continuing lack of individual liberties and democratic practices.
Nevertheless, America’s main interests in China have been quite constant, namely peace, security, prosperity, and a healthy environment. Chinese interests in the United States have also been quite constant and largely compatible, notwithstanding sharp differences over Taiwan, strategic technology transfers, trade, and human rights. Indeed, U.S.-Chinese relations have been consistently driven by strong common interests in preventing mutually damaging wars in Asia that could involve nuclear weapons; in ensuring that Taiwan’s relations with the mainland remain peaceful; in sustaining the growth of the U.S., China, and other Asian-Pacific economies; and, in preserving natural environments that sustain healthy and productive lives.

What happens in China matters to Americans. It affects America’s prosperity. China’s growing economy is a valuable market to many workers, farmers, and businesses across America, not just to large multinational firms like Boeing, Microsoft, and Motorola, and it could become much more valuable by opening its markets further. China also affects America’s security. It could either help to stabilize or destabilize currently peaceful but sometimes tense and dangerous situations in Korea, where U.S. troops are on the front line; in the Taiwan Straits, where U.S. democratic values and strategic credibility may be at stake; and in nuclear-armed South Asia, where renewed warfare could lead to terrible consequences. It also affects America’s environment. Indeed, how China meets its rising energy needs and protects its dwindling habitats will affect the global atmosphere and currently endangered species.

China’s economic growth has slowed, while its social and environmental challenges have continued to mount. It faces difficult choices. The gains from economic liberalization have been waning. Painful institutional and political changes will be needed to sustain growth. Most immediately, political leaders will need to dismantle their counterproductive controls over the allocation of scarce capital, particularly through the state banking system. To restrain corruption, reform the tax system, and raise the revenues needed to pay for essential public works and services, China’s political leaders, lawmakers, regulators, and other officials will need to be made more openly and directly accountable to the people whose interests they claim to serve.
Yet, China’s leadership, preoccupied with preserving its own power, lacks a convincing vision of China’s future. While we do not know whether China will rise to the challenge and prosper, or stagnate and falter, Americans have a great stake in China’s successful reform. That is why they have an interest in China’s acceding to the WTO, opening it to the global economy, and strengthening its compliance with international rules and norms.

Even so, they expect potential conflicts of interests to recur. China would like the people of Taiwan to accept its view of Chinese sovereignty peacefully. But, when the people of Taiwan prepared to choose their next leader peacefully at the polls in 1996, and again in 2000, China asserted a right to impose its views on them forcefully, notwithstanding American insistence that it refrain from such violence. China also insists on its right to modernize its armed forces and to buy or sell strategic technologies, without disclosing how it does so and without conceding any allegations that it violated U.S. laws or its own treaty obligations. But Americans do not want it to acquire, deploy, or export strategic technologies that could be used against the United States or its allies in Northeast Asia, the Persian Gulf, or elsewhere.

China’s self-perpetuating, one-party dictatorship also denies people’s right to political speech, religious assembly, and labor or other organizations outside of state and party control. Openly criticizing such strict constraints on human rights will continue to be an essential expression of American ideals. Until China strengthens its property laws to meet international market standards, disputes over the intellectual, financial, and tangible property rights of Americans in China will also persist, and could rapidly escalate or proliferate.

Recent U.S. Presidents have made great efforts and had endless difficulties pursuing American interests in China. China was a source of troubles for President Clinton in 1998 and 1999. In particular, he seems to have let Chinese leaders expect more from him on Taiwan and the WTO than he was prepared to deliver. After announcing a new “strategic partnership” with China on his visit there in 1998, he neglected to reiterate America’s overriding interest in peace when he articulated the Chinese leadership’s “Three No’s” policy toward the recognition of two Chinas, support for Taiwan’s independence, and acceptance of applications by Taiwan to join international organiza-
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CONCLUSION

Great common interests and risks of serious conflicts between the United States and China will keep raising difficult new challenges. They will require new initiatives for mutually beneficial cooperation and continuous efforts to avoid potentially critical misunderstandings over unforeseeable events in Taiwan, Korea, Japan, the Persian Gulf, Yugoslavia, or elsewhere. Without doubt, sustaining China’s economic growth and reinforcing its institutional reforms though greater openness is a winning prescription for both the United States and China. To pursue this course amid unexpected difficulties, both countries will need to pay close attention to many issues, conduct frank dialogues, and participate in constructive statesmanship. Ups and downs in U.S.-Chinese relations will likely recur, but they need
not be as volatile as they have been in recent years. Assuming that the future will mirror the past, substantial changes in our situations and needs vis-à-vis each other will be unpredictable, inevitable, and hard to fathom. This puts a large premium on ensuring that there are clear communications between Chinese and Americans who are willing and able to keep the relationship on an even keel.
DISCUSSION ON JOHN DESPRES’ CHAPTER

Shuxun Chen

I think that what interests and concerns in John’s presentation is something in common and in difference between China and the United States. I basically agree with what he said in his presentation and in his outline. Both countries hope to seek to maintain a peaceful and stable security environment of the world, and wish to cooperate in limiting the potential conflicts and nuclear proliferation in Korea, South Asia, and the Persian Gulf; in protecting global environmental resources, in interdicting drug traffic; and in other areas of common interest. However, there are also many differences between China and the US, and some of them may present the obstacles to the development of the relations, and even may lead to the deterioration of the relations of the two countries, such as the Taiwan issue and the human rights issue mentioned by John.

It was an eventful year in 1999 for the Sino-U.S. relations, e.g. the Cox Report, the political donation, the bombing of the Chinese Embassy, the “State to State relations” by Li Denghui. Fortunately, China and the US finally reached the agreement on the WTO issue in November, otherwise, it should be said that it was the year that the Sino-US relation went backwards greatly. From Jiang Zemin’s visit to the US in 1997 and Clinton’s visit to China in 1998, both countries made a proposal to establish the “constructive strategic partnership relations”, then to the backward of the Sino-US relations, especially after the bombing the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in May of 1999, the relations between the two countries fell into the lowest point. Both sides are reconsidering the “constructive strategic partnership relations”, and the mutual suspicious has been increased.

Why the Sino-US relations are fluctuated greatly? I think that the difference of cultural background is one of the most important reasons. Due to the different value and ideology, the Chinese differ greatly from the Americans for the perspectives on some events and issues, e.g. the Tian’anmen event, Li Denghui’s visit to the US, human rights issue, Taiwan issue, and Tibet issue. Logically speaking, the fluctuation of the relations between the two countries should be even larger due to some serious differences, however, in the mean-
time, we have to notice the realistic elements in the Sino-US relations, such as the common interests mentioned above. Besides, China is a huge market, and the economic and trade cooperation between the two countries is mutual benefits to both sides. Thus, the Sino-US relations are relatively placid.

In the United States, generally speaking, the Administration is more realistic and advocates taking the “engagement” policy toward China, and the Congress and the media are more concerned about values and ideologies, and they prefer to take the “containment” policy toward China. When the relation is going on smoothly, the “engagement” and the “partnership” win an advantage, but whenever something happened, the “containment” is in the lead.

In 1950s and 1960s, China and the United States took each other as an enemy. At the end of 1960s, the two counties were facing a common enemy – the former Soviet Union. The leaders of the two countries made consideration from the strategic angle and decided to develop the relation between the two countries. Even though both sides had misgivings towards each other, held the completely different value and ideology, and had the superficial mutual knowledge and understanding, all differences between the two countries were laid aside for the time being in front of the threat of the Soviet Union, the other superpower of the world.

It should be recognized that, with the reform and opening-up in China and the more and more increased contacts between the two countries, the Sino-US relations have been moving straight forward and have eliminated some differences and misunderstandings, because many differences and misunderstandings were caused by the separation in the past. However, at the same time, we should also recognize the different value and ideology between the two countries, and both sides have its own interest and have its own perspectives. The threat of the Soviet Union was the “binder” of establishing and developing relations between China and the US. After the cold war, this “binder” has not existed any more, the elements of value and ideology are rising, and frictions and controversies are increasing. From the American side, the US has become the only superpower in the world, and some Americans have not broken away from the cold war thinking, especially some people from the various interest groups and the think tanks have put ideology into the position of
the first importance to deal with the international affairs. These people constantly seek for the new enemy and look upon China as the new potential rivalry based on their cold war thinking. As the victor of the cold war, the Americans practice their democratic system as a model in the world and take the ideology as the basic lever of diplomacy. They peddle their value in developing the relations with China. From the Chinese side, China has a long historic cultural tradition, in which includes the strong nationalist spirit. The quintessence of the Chinese traditional culture is amiability to be the most importance. The Chinese are not aggressive and it has been approved in the Chinese history. In more than 100 years, China was under the invasions of the foreign powers, but the Chinese remained faithful and unyielding and maintained their dignity to fight against the invaders. At present, the Chinese are very vulnerable in facing the anti-Chinese groups of the world and the American hegemonism, for example, referring to the WTO negotiation between China and the US, many Chinese people were tired with the obstacles and conditions made by the Americans and unsatisfied with the concessions made by the Chinese government. The other example is that the nationalist sentiments of the Chinese people ran high after the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was bombed by the American. Although the top leaders of the two countries met in New Zealand and China and the US reached the agreement of the WTO negotiation, the mutual misgivings and the negative feelings prevailed.

Mr. Despres raised a question in his one page outline that candid Sino-American dialogues will be needed both to discover new possibilities for mutually beneficial cooperation and to avoid harmful misunderstandings of potentially critical differences between them. China is the largest developing country, the United States is the largest developed country and the only superpower in the world. To keep a smooth relation between the two countries is a good thing not only for these two countries, but also for the whole world.

There are many differences between China and the US, e.g. value and ideology, meanwhile, there are also some common interests, that is the realistic element, e.g. the economic interests and common interests in dealing with some international issues. In order to keep a smooth relation, both sides have to do their best to eliminate the differences, or to lay the differences aside, and seek for the common interests between them. The more the common interests, and the
more smooth relations can be developed between the two countries. How can China and the US develop and keep such a smooth relation? Based on the experience in the nearly three decades after Nixon’s first visit to China, it has been proved that strengthening contacts and exchanges is the effective way to develop the relations. These contacts and exchanges include the institutional and the individual, and the institutional includes the governmental and the non-governmental. Through these contacts and exchanges, both sides are able to increase comprehensive and objective understandings to understand and forgive each other. After carefully analyzing the post-cold war situation and summing up the past experience and lessons, the Chinese government has pointed out the principles of eliminating conflict, reducing trouble, increasing understanding and strengthening cooperation to handle the international affairs and to deal with the international relations. I believe that if the US side takes the same or similar approach, the Sino-US relations will keep the development smoothly.