

From Balance to Imbalance: The Evolutionary Mechanism of Australia's Strategy Towards China--A Neoclassical Realist Interpretation

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Received: February 17, 2022

Accepted: March 17, 2022

Online Published: March 28, 2022

doi:10.20849/ajsss.v7i3.1031

URL: <https://doi.org/10.20849/ajsss.v7i3.1031>

Abstract

Australia and China are two important countries in the Pacific region, and Australia's strategy toward China has been changing in recent years, and the reasons behind such changes are worth considering. Using the analytical framework of neoclassical realism, with the degree of Sino-U.S. competition as the system variable and strategic preferences as the unit variable, three characteristics of Australia's policy toward China since 2000 are analyzed in turn: consistent cooperation with the United States in the military security field; a balanced strategic policy dominated until 2017; and a policy of containing China starting in late 2017. Compared with other models, the model has stronger explanatory power for the evolution of Australia's policy toward China over long time periods.

Keywords: balance, neoclassical realism, Australia, strategic choices, China

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

After entering the 21st century, especially after China's accession to the World Trade Organization, China's rapid economic development has led to great changes in the global political and economic landscape. Against this background, Australia has also shown different policies towards China. In a nutshell, Australia's policy towards China after 2000 can be divided into two phases, the first phase being the phase of balanced diplomacy and the second phase being the phase towards imbalance.

The period from 1996 to 2007, when the Howard government was in power, was a period in which the Australian government generally demonstrated a friendly attitude toward China, ushering in a new era of friendly policies toward China and laying the foundation for the policy choices of subsequent governments, in general terms, i.e. economic friendship with China and military security alliance with the US. For example, between 1996 and 2007, trade between Australia and China grew from A\$8 billion to A\$58 billion, and in 2005 a trade negotiation zone was established, making China Australia's number one trading partner. But at the same time, the Australian government has also followed the U.S. in the military and political spheres, such as openly supporting the "Taiwan independence" forces, meeting with the Dalai Lama, and cooperating closely with the U.S. and Japan in military affairs. This change helped Australia to maintain a better balance between China and the US and to maintain its own stable development, laying the foundation for win-win cooperation between China and Australia. During the financial crisis in 2008, China showed its strong economic power, which made Australia worry that more and more Chinese companies entering Australia might threaten Australia's national security, thus resulting in anti-China incidents such as the "Chinalco case" and the "Rio Tinto case". Sino-Australian relations deteriorated during this period as the Australian government strongly supported the independence of Taiwan and Xinjiang, and improved significantly during the Gillard administration from 2010 to 2013. First, the establishment of the China-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, followed by the establishment of the Prime Minister's annual dialogue mechanism, and then the continued deepening of economic and trade liberalization and the continued reduction of restrictions on Chinese companies, led to a rapid development in the level of trade and commerce between the two countries, from \$75.6 billion in 2010 to \$140 billion in 2013, and a rapid warming of relations between China and Australia. Continuing the policy of

political and economic cooperation and military security caution initiated by Howard, China and Australia established an upgrade to a comprehensive strategic partnership, with the signing of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement in 2015. But at the same time, Australia also chose to strengthen ties with Japan, supporting the lifting of Japan's ban on collective self-defense and building a front against "abnormal Chinese military developments." Australia's policy toward China remained unchanged during the early Turnbull government from 2015 to 2017, during which three rounds of annual prime ministerial meetings were held to deepen The above is the first phase of Australia's China policy. The above is the first major phase of Australia's policy toward China, in which Australia's overall economic cooperation with China was strengthened, and mutual trust in politics was enhanced along with economic cooperation, but military and security remained predominantly guarded against China.

Since the end of 2017, Australia's China policy has taken a major turn, with the Australian government following the lead of the Trump administration in promoting the China threat theory and publicly accusing "Chinese influence of interfering in Australian politics". At the same time, the Australian government enacted the Major Infrastructure Security Bill, which focuses on "water resources, ports, electricity, natural gas" and other infrastructure areas where Chinese investment accounts for a large share of the total, and conducts strict reviews and assessments, restricts Chinese companies' foreign investment, limits Huawei's 5G network from entering Australia, makes inappropriate comments about the South China Sea, and follows the U.S. warships in the The relationship between China and Australia has been brought to a freezing point by inappropriate statements about the South China Sea, following U.S. warships in the South China Sea on so-called "free navigation" and supporting "Taiwan independence". But even with the risk of an economic downturn (Australia's agricultural exports to China have been hampered), Australia has adopted a policy of total containment of China.

The above review of Australia's policy toward China since the 21st century reveals the following characteristics of Australia's policy toward China: (1) the military and security fields have always guarded against China and cooperated with the United States; (2) a generally balanced policy prevailed between 2000 and 2017; and (3) since the end of 2017, even though it is still the Turnbull government in power, it has suddenly turned to confront China.

1.2 Describe Relevant Scholarship

This paper uses the theoretical model of neoclassical realism to analyze the formation mechanism of Australia's policy toward China, therefore, it is divided into two parts in the literature review section: neoclassical realism theory and the study of Australia's policy toward China.

1.2.1 Research on Neoclassical Realism

The relevant research has gone through three stages: the stage of discussing insights and constructing theories; the stage of analyzing variables and applying theories; and the stage of integrating variables and reshaping theories. In the last decade, scholars have mainly addressed the problem of a large number of variables and generalized neoclassical realism from the perspective of induction and summary. Norrin M. Ripsman, Steven Lobell, and Jeffrey Toliver concluded that the systemic factors affecting the state are "strategic environment, threat opportunities, and system structure," and the domestic factors are "strategic culture The systemic factors that influence the state are "strategic environment, threat opportunities, and system structure" and the domestic factors are "strategic culture, domestic institutions, state-society relations, and leadership imagery". Narizny and Kevin argue that state preferences should be included as an analytical variable, otherwise reality cannot be well portrayed. In conclusion, the variables of neoclassical realism are not completely determined, but are being switched according to the understanding of different scholars and the problems analyzed, but the existing studies of previous authors provide directions for us to find the effective variables.

According to the scholars' research, this paper summarizes the analytical framework of neoclassical realism as follows. Assume that the international community is in anarchy, each state actor is concerned about its own position in the international system, the state's pursuit of security depends on the perception of the external environment, the state actor's decisions are in line with rationality and maximizes interests in the long run, and the state's foreign policy is influenced by the domestic and international environment. Taking the international system as the independent variable, the behavior of the state's foreign policy as the dependent variable, and domestic political factors as the intervening variables that bridge the factors of both variables and establish relevant links, it is important to consider both domestic and international variables in an integrated manner when analyzing policies. This paper will then use this theoretical analysis framework to analyze Australia's policy toward China.

1.2.2 Research on Australia's China Policy

Prior to 2017, Australia chose to cooperate with China economically, but chose to cooperate with the United States militarily and security-wise to contain China, a strategy that many scholars have outlined as a "hedging" strategy. Regarding the definition of hedging strategy, Guo Qingqing argues that hedging refers to "the different policy options that countries adopt to offset risks in situations of high uncertainty and risk, and that these policy options are designed to have a mutually offsetting effect.

In analyzing the causes of this policy, scholars have provided additional perspectives on the formation of Australia's policy. Mark Beeson points to the influence of ideology on Australia's strategic perceptions, Allan Gyngell and Michael Wesley point to the influence of government organizations on Australian policy, and Australian scholar Michael Wesley takes a domestic cultural perspective, analyzing the impact of traditionalism, isolationism, and internationalism on Australian policy. The Australian scholar Michael Wesley analyzes the role of traditionalism, isolationism and internationalism in influencing Australian foreign policy.

Studies on the causes of Australia's policy transition after 2017 are inconclusive and the number of studies is relatively small. The main researcher is Xu Shanpin, a researcher at the Center for East Asian Studies at Xiangtan University, who summarizes the manifestations of Australia's move from balanced diplomacy to imbalance since 2016: geopolitical considerations taking precedence over geo-economics, China-Australia partnership lagging behind the Australia-US alliance, and being more assertive and conservative than pragmatic and rational. He attributes this to the accelerating power shift between China and the United States, the dramatic widening of the power gap between China and Australia, Australia's fear of strategic abandonment by the United States, and the rise of populism and other extremist thinking within Australia. In another article, he analyzes the situation from the perspective of alliances, pointing out that Australia faces an alliance dilemma: if it emphasizes strategic autonomy, it fears being "abandoned"; if it strengthens the Australia-U.S. alliance, it fears being "implicated". When external factors change: China's rapid rise, the U.S. strategic contraction and the growing strategic competition between China and the U.S., Australia's choice to upgrade the Australia-U.S. alliance and strengthen its confrontation with China is a rational choice to alleviate the alliance dilemma. At the same time, he also argues that strategic culture has an impact on policy formulation and implementation, arguing that Australia's location on the edge of East Asia and the surviving British historical tradition have shaped Australia's strategic culture, i.e., the strategic preferences of controlling maritime lifelines, emphasizing forward defense, viewing the South Pacific as a sphere of influence, being guided by pragmatism, and insisting on alliances with Western powers, indirectly contributing to Australia's strategic suspicion of China. Li Tu, on the other hand, compares Australia's three reflective discussions on Sino-US relations from the binary dilemma of separating Australia's economic and security interests, arguing that Australia's inability to get rid of its security dependence on the US and the fact that China's economic influence has not been successfully translated into political influence are the reasons why Australia started to contain China. Chawin argues that the hedging strategy collapsed because the ruling regime was unstable and more likely to pander to the domestic community in foreign policy, which led to the collapse of the hedging strategy, and he also argues that the international situation, especially the intensification of confrontational conflicts between major powers, also led to the failure of the hedging strategy.

In summary, neoclassical realism theory is constantly enriched and improved, and the analysis of Australian policies using neoclassical realism has been much studied, which provides a reference for this paper. The innovation of this paper is that it integrates the policies of Australia in the past 20 years, and by constructing a set of theoretical models, it not only explains the causes of the balanced policies, but also points out the inherent reasons towards the imbalance, and at the same time simplifies the existing variables, reduces the complexity of the analysis, and makes the direction clearer.

1.3 State Hypotheses

Taking neoclassical realism as the approach, this paper makes the following assumptions: Australia's strategic choice in the context of Sino-US competition is influenced by both systemic and unitary elements, and Australia's strategic choice is a rational choice.

2. Method

2.1 Concept Definition

When a country faces a rising power, it usually has three ways to respond: coordination and communication, confrontation and counterbalance, or "strategic ambiguity" based on the two in between. Based on this, this paper classifies Australia's strategic policy toward China into three types: follow, contain, and balance. The three

strategic choices are then specified and explained.

Following, as opposed to balancing, is a concept proposed by Kenneth Waltz in his book *International Political Theory*, in which Waltz argues that state following and balancing are the two inevitable strategic choices for states. Although this current dichotomy of mechanical opposition is no longer relevant in the practice of international relations today, its description of follow-through still has relevance. Thus, this paper defines following as specifically referring to following as manifested by attachment to or alliance with a state.

In Waltz's interpretation, balancing is a strategic choice based on the theory of balance of power, which is essentially the same as parity, and is more akin to a strategy of seeking balance between the two powers. However, containment, as proposed in this paper, is more specific to a particular country and may be aimed at either establishing parity or simply suppressing a country's power. Thus, containment is defined as achieving control over a country's security threat by means of alliances, development of military power, and security cooperation with another country. It can be found that following and containment are two sides of the same coin, and when there is a competitive situation between two states, a third state's strategy of following one state is actually a containment strategy against the other state. In this paper, following is understood as following for China, and following for the United States is expressed as containment.

Balance, to a certain extent similar to hedging, refers to a foreign policy that gradually forms and develops in the interaction of various forces in the game, pursuing the maximization of national interests. The balance in this paper refers to the fact that, guided by the concept of pragmatic diplomacy, Australia maintains a close alliance with the militarily powerful United States on the geo-security front and a friendly partnership with China on the geo-economic front, which has a fast-growing economy and a vast market. By maintaining a strategic balance between the U.S. and China and carefully avoiding "choosing sides", the U.S. aims to obtain both security and economic prosperity.

2.2 Theoretical Perspective

Based on the analysis of existing studies, this paper argues that neoclassical realism is a valid analytical framework for explaining Australia's strategic choice mechanism.

(1) System-level elements: the degree of great power competition, divided into détente and confrontation, here refers specifically to the competitive relationship between China and the United States. The degree of great power competition is Australia's subjective perception of the competition between China and the United States, as defined by the country's security reports, the views of key government department leaders, and specific security measures and policies. This variable was chosen because the degree of great power competition plays an important influence in the policy shift of following, balancing, and containing. According to Guo Qingqing, for small and medium-sized countries, hedging behavior becomes possible only when there is no full competition among large countries. Liu Ruonan points out that inclusive competition among major powers will expand the strategic space of small and medium-sized countries, but as competition intensifies, the strategic space of countries originally pursuing a balanced strategy will be squeezed, and the difficulty or cost of maintaining a balanced strategy of major powers will rise. Liu Feng and Chen Zhirui point out that "under a strong adversarial system, the fierce competition between rising states and other major powers makes it difficult for small and medium-sized states to stay out of the way, and it is not very feasible to adopt a strategy of avoidance or alienation, and they must choose to support one of them implicitly or explicitly."

(2) Unit level element: national strategic preferences, divided into economic and security. Strategic preferences are the ranking, selection, and tendency of strategic objectives and strategic policy instruments determined by strategic culture and influenced by other factors. Ling Shengli divides "national strategic preferences into security preferences and economic preferences, with security preferences including the security goals pursued by the state and the perception of security interests. Economic preferences mainly refer to the state's need to develop economic relations with external countries or regions and its perception of economic interests." Strategic preferences were chosen because they have a greater impact on the choice of strategic policy. Ideally, a country would like to focus on economic, security, and autonomy goals at the same time, but when the current domestic and international conditions do not allow it, it will rank these goals and choose the urgent and important ones to be satisfied first, and on this basis, make rational policy choices.

2.3 Model Construction and Derivation

Based on the existing literature, a neoclassical realist analytical model is constructed using the above variables as follows.

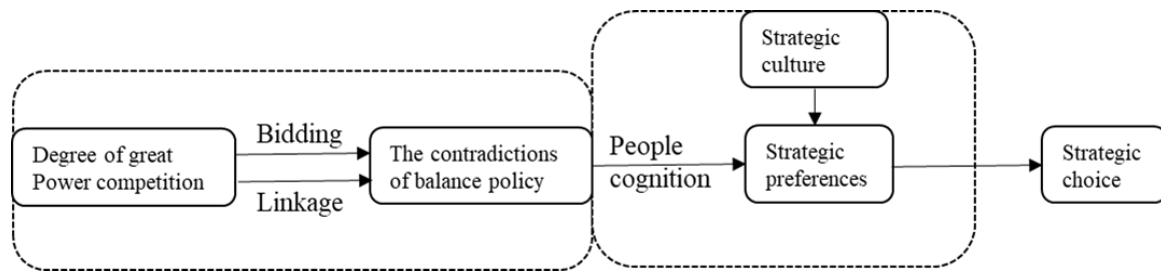


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of analysis model

In the systemic factors section, the degree of competition among the major powers can lead to increased balance policy contradictions in the form of bidding and issue linkages. In the classification in the previous section, the strategic choices of states are classified as containment, balancing, and following, where containment and following are both clearly in favor of one state, and balancing is similar to "betting on both sides" and making good relations with both sides. If the competition between the big powers increases, the big powers will try to attract the small powers to join their alliance by giving them benefits, such as economic and trade preferences, defense and security guarantees, advanced weapons, etc. For example, the U.S. and Britain will build nuclear submarines for Australia, and China will open a free trade port for Australia, so the small powers will have to choose between the two competing powers, which will make it more difficult to maintain the balance. This will make it more difficult to maintain a balanced policy. The issue of linkage refers to the fact that when the competition between the two powers starts, the competition field will be expanded, requiring the small countries to choose sides in more areas, for example, the United States uses relevant means to suppress Huawei, and Australia bans the use of Huawei 5G in the country.

When it becomes more difficult to maintain a balanced policy, the contradiction of the balanced policy is highlighted, i.e., the difficulty of "falling on both sides" at the same time is intensified, and this contradiction is reinforced by public perceptions, which affects national strategic preferences. Specifically, unlike policymakers, the public does not have foreign policy expertise and is more inclined to adopt a "highly programmatic and ideological view" of international issues. Thus, as great power rivalries intensify and the public sees the country's balancing policy as a contradiction in terms, i.e., as a threat to security if it becomes more economically engaged with China, it is difficult for the public and the media to understand the delicate balance in the balancing policy, so more people will call for a more concise and coherent policy.

Strategic culture refers to "a set of macro-strategic concepts, the basic elements of which are shared by national decision makers and on which a country's long-term strategic orientation is built." It is considered a constant in the model. Strategic culture determines strategic preferences because it contains a country's core tenets about military strategy, which in turn shape the behavior of the government, i.e., the government's strategic preferences are actually influenced by beliefs. When popular voice is strong, it can intensify or weaken a country's strategic preferences, e.g., when the population is less concerned about politics and less concerned about policy choices, the government can deviate slightly from its strategic preferences and pursue short-term interests, but because strategic culture is defined by country, every citizen will have similar strategic preferences, and when the people are more concerned about policy, the likelihood of deviating from strategic preferences likelihood decreases. Finally, strategic preferences determine strategic choices, and strategic choices are made on the basis of strategic preferences.

Based on the above analysis, the above elements are categorized and discussed below. When the unitary variables are constant, it is in Australia's interest to follow the United States to contain China if the competition between the two powers is intense; when the competition is weak, it is in its interest to adopt a balanced policy, as shown in Table 1, which indicates the benefits to Australia through -1, 0, and 1, respectively.

Table 1. Discussion of system variables

| | Containment | Balancing | Following |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Strong Competition | 1 | 0 | -1 |
| Weak Competition | -1 | 1 | -1 |

When the system variables are held constant, a follow or balance policy is beneficial to Australia if it values the economy, and a containment and balance policy is beneficial when Australia values security, and this paper argues that a balance policy can satisfy both economic and security preferences. As shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Unit variable discussion

| | Containment | Balancing | Following |
|--|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Attaches great importance to the safety | 1 | 1 | -1 |
| Attaches great importance to the economy | -1 | 1 | 1 |

Based on the above discussion and combined with the assumption that state actors are rational, the following policy choices are obtained, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Classified discussion summary

| | Strong Competition | Weak Competition |
|--|--------------------|------------------|
| Attaches great importance to the safety | Containment | Balancing |
| Attaches great importance to the economy | (nothingness) | Balancing |

The categorical discussion shows that Australia is better off choosing a balanced policy when Sino-U.S. competition is weak, better off containing China when Sino-U.S. competition is strong and security is important, and the other case is indeterminate and as will be shown later such a case does not exist.

3. Case Verification

Based on the above theoretical model, the following will apply this model and explain three characteristics of Australia's policy toward China in the context of actual practice.

3.1 Australia's Strategic Suspicion Towards China

The first feature of Australia's strategy toward China is that Australia chooses to cooperate with the United States in the military and security fields and confront China, regardless of the intense competition between the United States and China, even before 2017, Australia often engaged in military exercises with Japan, meddled in the South China Sea, and supported the "Taiwan independence" elements. This characteristic is determined by its strategic preferences and ultimately by its long-established strategic culture.

Australia was founded not long ago and historically examined as a British colony, so its strategic cultural core is similar to that of Britain, and likewise Australia's geographical location and colonial history have had an impact in shaping the local strategic culture. Specifically, first of all, Australia has a strong sense of naval power. Since Britain is a maritime civilization, focusing on maritime military power, and Australia is located in an island nation in the Pacific Ocean, most of its trade with other countries relies on sea transport, thus requiring it to have a strong navy. This was also the case, as Australia established its own navy early on, and when Britain reduced its military presence in the Pacific, Australian Liberal leader Alfred Deakin demanded an independent navy. As a result, Australia had its own small naval fleet, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN), from 1913 onwards. Secondly, Australia has a strong "imperial complex", as much of its population is British colonial and therefore retains British blood, "The Australian nation developed and evolved from British settlers and their descendants, and its formation was manifested in the localization of the Anglo-Germanic nation in Australia. The Australian nation developed and evolved on the basis of British immigrants and their descendants, and its formation manifested itself in the localization of the Anglo-Germanic nation in Australia. In terms of ethnic origin, cultural traditions, and moral standards, the Australian nation is in the same lineage as the Anglo-Jewish nation." Therefore,

Australia tends to see itself as a province of Britain and the United States, and during World War I, the Australian Prime Minister compared Australia to "a soldier" of Britain, and during World War II, the Australian Prime Minister believed that Britain, the United States, and Australia would be the "Pacific police". Again, Australia is guided by geopolitics, due to the British tradition of geopolitics on the one hand, and the geographical topography on the other, as Australia is surrounded by sea from east to west and south, with only Asia to the north. Finally, Australia has a strong security anxiety: "Despite having a distant, defensible continent and an efficient military, Australia has a deep sense of insecurity about its place in the world. One dimension of this anxiety is the widespread perception that Australia has difficulty defending its core interests on its own and must rely on the assistance of others, that is, in alliance with the United States." This security anxiety in Australia stems from two aspects: first, its alienation from Asians due to its British descent and the distance between Britain and the United States, and second, its isolation at sea and sparse population.

Under the long-term influence of the above-mentioned strategic culture, corresponding strategic preferences were formed. Firstly, it attached importance to the maritime lifeline, as it had a strong sense of naval power and most of its economic trade depended on maritime transport, it attached great importance to maritime security and freedom of navigation. Secondly, it paid attention to frontline defense and was influenced by the British Empire, accepted the idea of British and American frontline defense, actively sent troops to participate in wars that might threaten the security of the homeland, and had permanent troops in Singapore and Malaysia to prevent incoming enemies. Again, viewing the South Pacific as its sphere of influence and influenced by geopolitics, it focused its defense on the North and viewed the South Pacific as its own backyard.

With the above strategic preferences, Australia remained militarily and security dependent on the United States even in the absence of intense competition between China and the United States, for example, between 2001 and 2008. This is because under Australia's strategic preference, China's economic development, its rising power, and geopolitical threats from the north are increasing; China's assertion of sovereignty in the South China Sea may affect its ships' access to the Malacca Strait, and China's recovery of Taiwan may affect its ships' passage through the Taiwan Strait and threaten its maritime lifelines; China's trade with other South Pacific countries may affect its influence in the "backyard". Under the influence of the ideology of frontier defense, the influence of ethnographic traditions, and deep security anxiety, Australia is bound to choose to rely on Britain and the United States to ensure its security.

Therefore, through the analysis of the unit variables, this paper argues that it is the strategic culture that determines the strategic preference, and as China becomes stronger, Australia is bound to rely on the United States militarily, which is the reason for not following China in Table 3.

3.2 Choosing a Balanced Policy When the Competition Between China and the United States Is Weak

The second feature of Australia's policy toward China is that between 2000 and 2017, a balanced policy prevailed in general.

During this period, the competition between China and the US was not very intense. In the early 2000s, China accounted for 4% of the world's GDP, while the United States accounted for 30%. The huge economic gap made the conflict between the United States and China not very intense. After the outbreak of 9/11 in 2001, the U.S. shifted its focus to counter-terrorism and cooperated with China on counter-terrorism, and the U.S.-China relationship was good. After the financial crisis in 2008, although the U.S. saw China's economic recovery and began to worry about the threat from China, the U.S. also needed to rely on China to emerge from the economic crisis, so there was no large-scale conflict and confrontation between China and the U.S. at this stage.

Although there is no strong competition between China and the United States, the speed of China's economic development cannot be ignored, and after its economy surpassed that of Japan, it has become the center of economic power in Asia, and as a result, the global power pattern has quietly changed, with the international community showing a "separation" between the Asian region represented by "economic wealth" and "political power" represented by the United States and other Western countries.

In this context, Australia is dependent on the security protection of the United States on the one hand, and on the economic development of China on the other. The domestic unit variables do not have much influence on the strategic choice at this time, and it is clear from the classification discussion that when the competition between China and the United States is not intense, balance is the most rational choice, regardless of whether economic or security is important.

3.3 Choosing a Containment Policy When Sino-U.S. Competition Intensifies

The third characteristic of Australia's policy toward China is the sudden shift to confrontation with China since the end of 2017, even though the leadership did not change. If the two cases mentioned above are the unitary and systemic variables that worked separately, the third feature is the combination of both.

Beginning in late 2017, the U.S.-China rivalry intensified. As early as 2009, Clinton announced that "we are back" and started the U.S. "Asia-Pacific rebalancing" strategy, but the competition between the U.S. and China was not intense at the time, while in December 2017 the Trump administration released the U.S. National Security Strategy, which considers China as a "revisionist state" and a "strategic competitor". The U.S. and China have thus entered an era of strategic competition. The U.S. has started to compete with China in all aspects through a series of actions such as suppressing Huawei, imposing tariffs and sailing freely in the South China Sea.

As the competition between China and the U.S. intensified, the contradiction of balancing policies rose and the public's concern increased. The increased competition between China and the U.S. has made it more difficult for Australia to maintain a balanced policy, which has trickled down to the domestic community, causing the public and media to expect the government to make a clearer judgment on whether to cooperate with China or the U.S.

Due to the long-term influence of Australia's strategic culture and the impact of China's rapid economic development, Australia's security anxiety toward China is further released and its strategic preference for valuing security is further enhanced. If the Australian public may not be overly worried about the Chinese threat when the competition between China and the United States is not strong, and the government may give priority to the economy, but after the United States carries out full-scale competition with China due to the Chinese threat, Australia's strategic preference is bound to focus on security, which is determined by its long-established strategic culture, so that there will not be a situation when the system pressure increases and the emphasis on the economy appears.

With the above elements in play, Australia begins to follow the United States in containing China.

4. Conclusion

In summary, this paper first reviews Australia's policy toward China since 2000, from which three characteristics of Australia's policy toward China are summarized, followed by an explanation of this using a neoclassical realist model. This paper argues that: (1) Australia's strategic culture has made it persistently security anxious about China's development, and therefore Australia is militarily and security dependent on the United States. (2) When Sino-US competition is not strong, it is rational and feasible for Australia to choose a balanced policy. (3) When the competition between China and the United States is intense, Australia's security anxiety about China rises, further intensifying its security focus and therefore containing China's development.

The model can better explain the evolution of Australia's policy toward China in the past 20 years, and is innovative compared to current articles that only study hedging or transformation. However, there are some problems: (1) the use of strategic preferences for explanation suffers from imprecision. Strategic culture is formed over time and influences decisions in an indirect and potential way, while in short-term specific decisions, strategic culture is regarded as a constant, and therefore strategic preference is also approximated as a constant, and the extent to which the short-term sentiment of the public influences strategic preference deserves further consideration. (2) Both strategic preferences and the degree of competition between China and the United States are part of strategic perceptions, and the sensitivity of strategic perceptions affects both, so there is the problem of omitted variables.

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