



## Aware of China's Rise, Worried Americans Still Prefer to Engage

On the eve of the Beijing Olympics, a new national survey by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs has found that Americans now clearly perceive China as a rising global power, with profound consequences for the United States. A large minority of Americans (43%) think the development of China as a world power is a “critical threat” to the vital interests of the United States. But a large majority of Americans (64%) oppose active efforts to limit China’s rise, instead favoring friendly cooperation and engagement.

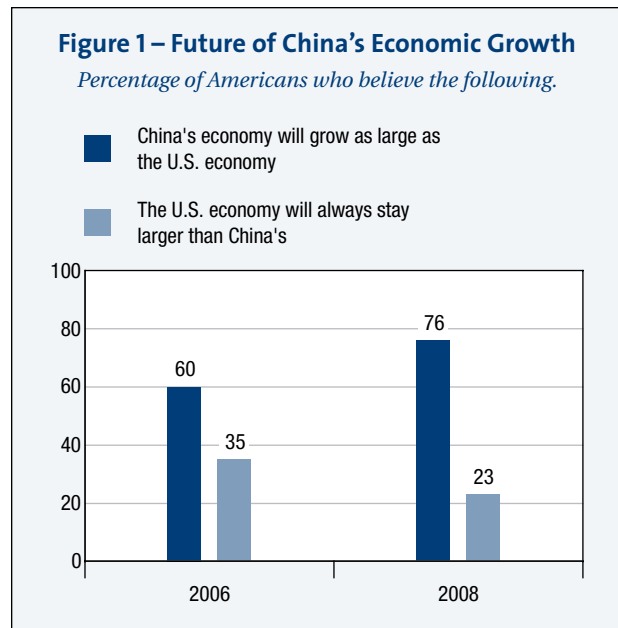
### Awareness of the Rise of China

The survey shows that there has been a sharp rise in the proportion of Americans who believe that China’s economy will someday grow to be as large as the U.S. economy. Three-quarters of Americans (76%) now foresee this, up from 60 percent two years ago (see Figure 1). More broadly, two-thirds (65%) now reject the idea that over the next fifty years the United States will continue to be the world’s leading power, saying instead that “another nation” (presumably China) will become as powerful or will surpass the United States.

Already Americans see China as the second most influential country in the world after the United States. Ratings of China’s influence have now surpassed those of Great Britain and Japan as well as the European Union, Russia, and all other countries the survey inquired about. In terms of importance to the United States, China is consid-

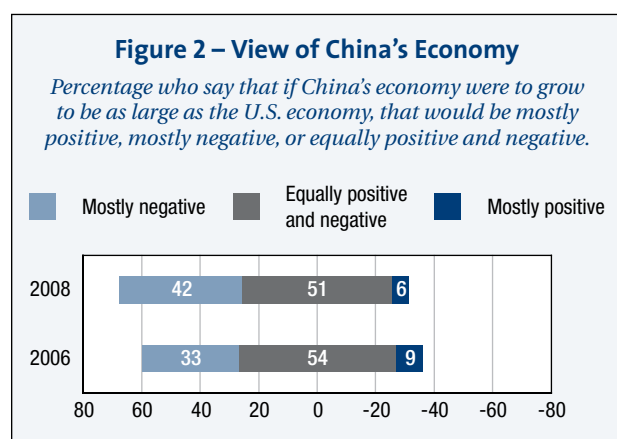
ered “very important” by 52 percent of Americans, with only Canada (53%) and Britain (60%) perceived as “very important” by more Americans.

Many more Americans are also now aware of the huge trade imbalances between the United States and China. Asked whether the United States loans more money to China or whether China loans more money to the United States, a plurality (40%) for the first time now correctly responds that China loans more to the United States, with 34 percent believing the opposite is true. Two years ago only one-quarter of Americans (24%) were aware of this fact.



## Economic and Geopolitical Concerns

Americans are worried about China's rise, especially about the economic implications. Reactions to the idea of China's economy growing as large as the U.S. economy tilt toward apprehension, with 42 percent saying this would be "mostly negative" and only 6 percent saying "mostly positive." Fifty-one percent say this development would be equally positive and negative (see Figure 2). A rising proportion of Americans (38%, up from 32% in 2006) see economic competition from low-wage countries as a critical threat.



Trade with China stands at the center of these worries. Fully two-thirds of Americans (67%) now say that China practices "unfair trade." This is up significantly (9 percentage points) since 2006. China is the only one of six major trading partners that a majority of Americans now see as an unfair trader. This may partly reflect publicity about unsafe Chinese imports, but the results of past Chicago Council surveys suggest that charges of unfairness are often leveled at any country that is seen as competing vigorously with the United States in world markets.

Geopolitical worries are less intense but still substantial. A rather large minority of Americans (40%) see the development of China as a world power as a "critical threat" to the vital interests of the United States in the next ten years. This figure has edged up a bit since 2006, but it remains substantially lower than in the 1990s when this num-

ber was over 50 percent. It is also lower than the level of many other perceived threats, from terrorism and energy disruptions to global warming. In the context of questions about Japan's world role, two-thirds of Americans (66%) agree with the argument that "with China's growing military power and the threat from North Korea," Japan needs to be freer to project its military power in the region.

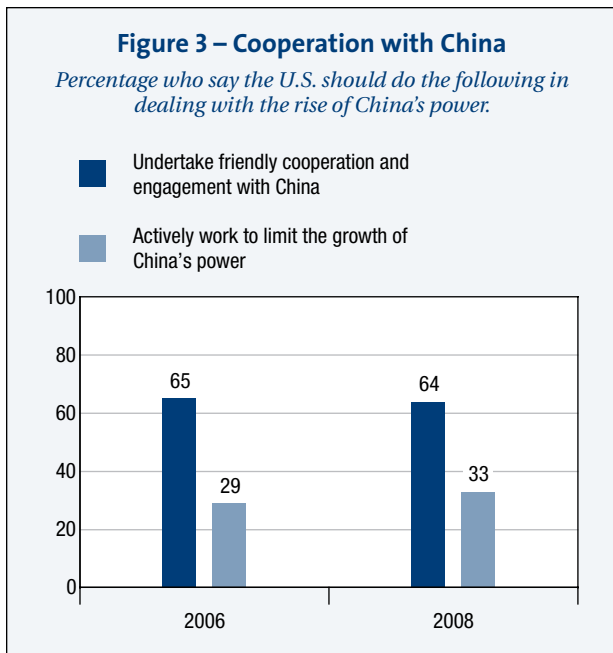
## Measured Policy Responses

Despite these worries, large majorities of Americans reject any drastic policy response. Asked whether the United States should "actively work" to limit the growth of China's power or whether it should undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with China, a nearly two-to-one majority (64% to 33%) chooses cooperation and engagement, nearly unchanged since 2006 (see Figure 3).

Overall feelings toward China are not cold or hostile, but remain fairly cool. On a 0 to 100 scale of feelings, where 50 is neutral, China receives an average of 41. This is no lower than two years ago and not very different from feelings toward most other Asian countries. Notably, India and especially Japan receive higher average scores, at 47 and 59, respectively.

Few Americans display any interest in military confrontation with China. When asked about a variety of circumstances that might justify using U.S. troops in other parts of the world, only 32 percent favor using U.S. troops if China invaded Taiwan. This is about the same proportion as has favored such troop use over the last decade and the lowest level of support for any of the six scenarios asked about. Only 19 percent of Americans see a confrontation between mainland China and Taiwan as being a critical threat to the vital interests of the United States.

Yet there is sentiment in favor of balancing Chinese power in Asia, especially through Japan, a highly esteemed country that Americans see as very important to the vital interests of the United States. A majority of Americans (54% to 42%) say



that the United States and Japan should work together to limit the rise of Chinese power in the years ahead.

On the economic front, Americans appear wary of giving China any advantages. There is little support (34%) for making greater economic sacrifices than China or India in a new climate change treaty. A small majority (52%) opposes providing technological and financial aid to help China and India limit the growth of greenhouse gas emissions (48% are in favor).

All in all, Americans are somewhat worried about the rise of China. But the worries are chiefly economic, and they support measured policy responses. Most Americans continue to seek a friendly and cooperative relationship with China.

## Methodology

The survey in the United States was conducted by Knowledge Networks (KN), a polling, social science, and market research firm in Menlo Park, California. The survey was conducted between July 3 and July 15, 2008, with a total sample of 1,505 American adults who had been randomly selected from KN's respondent panel and answered questions on screens in their own homes. Some questions were given to the entire sample population and others were given to a random two-thirds. The margin of sampling error is between plus or minus 2.5 percentage points and plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

The survey was fielded using a randomly selected sample of KN's large-scale, nationwide research panel. This panel is itself randomly selected from the national population of households with telephones. These households are subsequently provided Internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus the sample is not limited to those in the population who already have Internet access). The distribution of the sample in the Web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the U.S. population eighteen years of age or older on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc. To reduce the effects of any nonresponse and noncoverage bias in panel estimates, a post-stratification raking adjustment is applied using demographic distributions from the most recent data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The post-stratification variables include age, race, gender, Hispanic ethnicity, and education. This weighting adjustment is applied prior to the selection of any client sample from KnowledgePanel<sup>SM</sup>. These weights constitute the starting weights for any client survey selected from the panel.

Once the study data are returned from the field, the final qualified respondent data are subjected to an additional post-stratification process to adjust for any nonresponse and noncoverage as a result of the study-specific sample design. The primary purpose of this post-stratification adjust-

ment is to reduce the sampling variance for any characteristics highly correlated with the representative study population's demographic and geographic totals (these are referred to as the population benchmarks). This adjustment also helps reduce bias due to survey nonresponse.

The panel is recruited using stratified random digit dialing (RDD) telephone sampling. RDD provides a nonzero probability of selection for every U.S. household with a telephone. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Web access and an Internet appliance (if necessary), which uses a telephone line to connect to the Internet and uses the television as a monitor. For more information concerning the methodology of the U.S. sample, please visit the KN Web site at [www.knowledgenetworks.com](http://www.knowledgenetworks.com).

## Acknowledgments

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, founded in 1922 as The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, is a leading independent, nonpartisan organization committed to influencing the discourse on global issues through contributions to opinion and policy formation, leadership dialogue, and

public learning. The Chicago Council brings the world to Chicago by hosting public programs and private events featuring world leaders and experts with diverse views on a wide range of global topics. Through task forces, conferences, studies, and leadership dialogue, the Council brings Chicago's ideas and opinions to the world.

Christopher Whitney, now former executive director for studies at the Chicago Council, and Gregory Holyk, project consultant for the 2008 public opinion study, served as project directors. Silvia Veltcheva, program officer at The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, managed all aspects of the project. Other contributors included Marshall Bouton, Rachel Bronson, Catherine Hug, Steven Kull, and Benjamin I. Page.

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The Chicago Council will also release in fall 2008 a longer report that more fully examines the survey results. Both reports will be available on the Internet at [www.thechicagocouncil.org](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org).