

Topic: US-China Relations – “Decoupling”

Tung Chee-hwa, the first chief executive of Hong Kong after it was returned to Chinese sovereignty and currently a vice-chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, an advisory body to the Chinese leadership, organized a two-day forum in Hong Kong where many speakers addressed the urgency of restoring China-US relations.

In his own speech, Tung rejected the argument that China and the US should “decouple”. “There are people in the US who, for one reason or another, advocate a so-called decoupling of US-China relations. They argue that China has taken too much advantage of the United States. But in the years to come, the US-China trade relationship is going to become increasingly complementary.” He noted that the US was the world’s largest supplier of oil, gas and agricultural products, while China was the world’s largest buyer of such goods.

Zhou Wenzhong, the former ambassador to Washington, D.C., said that Washington and Beijing must choose cooperation over competition, noting that cooperation “would better safeguard our own interests and bring more benefits to the world. China will not become the United States, and it will not replace the United States. There must be competition between China and the United States, but it should be a positive competition and a competition that conforms to the rules.”

Zhang Baohui, director of the Centre for Asian Pacific Studies at Lingnan University in Hong Kong, agreed that it was important for China and the US to work to build trust. “The decoupling of their economies would only destabilize bilateral relations. Even if [the US and China] are engaged in extensive strategic rivalries, economic coupling helps to limit the severity of the strategic rivalries ... Economic interdependence fosters peace and stability between states. Decoupling the two economies would, therefore, give neither side incentives to restrain its actions toward the other party. This would create dangerous dynamics for escalation of strategic rivalry and combustible scenarios for a crisis situation. Broadly speaking, decoupling the economies of the two countries would make military conflicts more likely.”

Adapted from:

Lee, Jeong-ho. “US must stop treating China as an enemy, says son of former president George HW Bush.” *South China Morning Post*, July 10, 2019.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3018077/us-must-stop-treating-china-enemy-says-son-former-president>