

AMERICAN SOCIAL CYCLES AND GENERATIONAL ARCHETYPES: PROJECTING U.S.–CHINA RELATIONS UNDER A SECOND TRUMP PRESIDENCY (2025–2029)

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Abstract. This article examines how American social cycles and generational archetypes shape U.S. foreign-policy behavior toward China during Donald Trump’s second presidency (2025–2029). Drawing on Strauss–Howe generational cycle theory and Zhang & Chen’s dual-cycle framework, the study situates the 2025–2029 period within a late-stage Crisis turning characterized by Prophet-led leadership. Addressing a gap in international-relations scholarship, the article integrates sociocultural generational analysis into projections of U.S.–China relations, complementing structural approaches to great-power rivalry. Methodologically, the study operationalizes generational archetypes, turnings, and leadership succession patterns to assess strategic orientations under Trump’s anticipated second term, treating this presidency as a critical inflection point in American social and political cycles. The findings indicate that generational cohorts function as mediating variables between systemic pressures and elite decision-making. Boomer “Prophet” leadership intensifies crisis-driven confrontation, while emerging Generation X and Millennial cohorts introduce alternative preferences for pragmatic stabilization or managed competitive coexistence. Building on projections derived from the

2025–2029 period, the article outlines three post-presidency scenario pathways for U.S.–China relations — post-crisis stabilization, structured strategic co-opetition, and sustained ideological rivalry. The study contributes a generationally informed framework for projecting U.S.–China relations under a second Trump presidency and highlights how domestic social cycles influence the longer-term trajectory of American grand strategy.

Keywords: *Strauss–Howe generational theory; dual-cycle framework; leadership archetypes; generational turnings; American social cycles; Trump presidency; U.S.–China rivalry; foreign policy projection.*

АМЕРИКАЛЫҚ ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК ЦИКЛДЕР МЕН ҰРПАҚ АРХЕТИПТЕРІ: ТРАМПТЫҢ ЕКІНШІ ПРЕЗИДЕНТТІГІНДЕГІ (2025–2029) АҚШ–ҚЫТАЙ АРАСЫНДАҒЫ ҚАРЫМ-ҚАТЫНАСТЫ БОЛЖАУ

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Аңдатпа. Мақалада американдық әлеуметтік циклдер мен ұрпақтық архетиптердің Дональд Трамптың екінші президенттік мерзімі (2025–2029) кезеңінде АҚШ-тың Қытайға қатысты сыртқы саяси мінез-құлқына қалай әсер ететіні талданады. Страус–Хау ұрпақтық циклдер теориясы мен Чжан мен Чэньнің дуалдық циклдік моделіне сүйене отырып, зерттеу 2025–2029 жылдар аралығын «пайғамбар» буынының көшбасшылығымен сипатталатын дағдарыстық «айналымның» аяқталу кезеңі ретінде қарастырады. Халықаралық қатынастар теориясындағы олқылықты толтыра отырып, мақала социомәдени ұрпақтық талдауды АҚШ–Қытай қатынастарын болжауға енгізіп, ұлы державалар арасындағы бәсекелестікті зерттеудегі құрылымдық тәсілдерді толықтырады. Өдіснамалық тұрғыдан зерттеуде ұрпақтық архетиптер, циклдер және көшбасшылықтың ауысу үлгілері операциялдананады; Трамптың екінші президенттік мерзімі американдық әлеуметтік және саяси циклдердегі шешуші кезең ретінде қарастырылады. Нәтижелер ұрпақтық когорттардың жүйелік қысым мен элиталық шешім қабылдау арасындағы делдал айнымалы ретінде әрекет ететінін көрсетеді. Бумерлер буынының («пайғамбарлардың») көшбасшылығы дағдарыстық қақтығысты күшейтсе, X буыны мен миллениалдар прагматикалық тұрақтандыруға немесе басқарылатын бәсекелес қатар өмір сүруге бейімді балама ұстанымдарды ұсынады. 2025–2029 жылдар

кезеңіне негізделген болжамдарды жалғастыра отырып, мақала АҚШ–Қытай қатынастарының үш постпрезиденттік сценарийін айқындайды: дағдарыстан кейінгі тұрақтандыру, құрылымданған стратегиялық коопетиция және тұрақты идеологиялық бәсекелестік. Зерттеу Трамптың екінші президенттік мерзімі жағдайында АҚШ–Қытай қатынастарын болжауға арналған ұрпақтық негізделген аналитикалық үлгі ұсынып, ішкі әлеуметтік циклдердің американдық үлкен стратегияның ұзақ мерзімді траекториясына қалай ықпал ететінін көрсетеді.

***Түйін сөздер:** Страус–Хау ұрпақтық циклдер теориясы; дуалдық циклдік модель; көшбасшылық архетиптер; ұрпақтық айналымдар; американдық әлеуметтік циклдер; Трамптың президенттігі; АҚШ–Қытай бәсекелестігі; сыртқы саясатты болжау.*

АМЕРИКАНСКИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ ЦИКЛЫ И ПОКОЛЕНЧЕСКИЕ АРХЕТИПЫ: ПРОГНОЗИРОВАНИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЙ США–КИТАЙ ПРИ ВТОРОМ ПРЕЗИДЕНТСТВЕ ТРАМПА (2025–2029)

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается, каким образом американские социальные циклы и поколенческие архетипы формируют внешнеполитическое поведение США в отношении Китая в период второго президентского срока Дональда Трампа (2025–2029). Опираясь на теорию поколенческих циклов Страуса–Хау и дуальную цикловую модель Чжана и Чэня, исследование помещает период 2025–2029 годов в рамки завершающей стадии кризисного «поворота», характеризуемого лидерством поколения «пророков». Устраняя пробел в исследованиях международных отношений, статья интегрирует социокультурный поколенческий анализ в прогнозирование отношений США–Китай, дополняя структурные подходы к соперничеству великих держав. С методологической точки зрения в работе операционализируются поколенческие архетипы, циклы и модели смены лидерства для оценки стратегических ориентаций в условиях ожидаемого второго президентского срока Трампа, рассматриваемого как критическая точка в американских социальных и политических циклах. Результаты показывают, что поколенческие когорты выступают посредническими переменными между системным давлением

и процессами принятия решений элитами. Лидерство поколения бумеров («пророков») усиливает кризисную конфронтацию, тогда как представители поколения X и миллениалов демонстрируют альтернативные установки, ориентированные на прагматическую стабилизацию или управляемое конкурентное сосуществование. Опираясь на проекции, сформированные на основе периода 2025–2029 годов, статья выделяет три постпрезидентских сценария развития отношений США–Китай: посткризисную стабилизацию, структурированную стратегическую коопетицию и устойчивое идеологическое соперничество. Вклад исследования заключается в разработке поколенчески обоснованной аналитической модели прогнозирования отношений США–Китай в условиях второго президентского срока Трампа, а также в демонстрации того, как внутренние социальные циклы влияют на долгосрочную траекторию американской большой стратегии.

Ключевые слова: теория поколенческих циклов *Страуса–Хау*; дуальная цикловая модель; лидерские архетипы; поколенческие повороты; американские социальные циклы; президентство Трампа; соперничество США–Китай; внешнеполитическое прогнозирование.

Introduction

The strategic relationship between the United States and China has become a central focus of contemporary international relations scholarship. A substantial body of research analyzes this rivalry through structural and systemic approaches, including power transition theory [1], the Thucydides Trap framework [2], and broader studies of strategic competition such as Friedberg [3], which conceptualize U.S.–China rivalry as a long-term structural contest shaped by shifts in power, ideology, and regional influence. These works emphasize material capabilities, geopolitical incentives, and international system dynamics as primary drivers of U.S.–China interactions.

Alongside these analyses, scholars have highlighted the role of cyclical political change and long-term patterns in shaping foreign policy. Studies of political-institutional cycles such as Doran [4] and examinations of recurring geopolitical realignments, including Mead [5], suggest that states may follow periodic shifts in strategic orientation grounded in domestic political rhythms. Yet, despite the analytical depth of these approaches, they seldom address how generational change influences foreign-policy preferences and leadership behavior.

In sociological research, generational analysis has been explored more fully. Foundational works on cohort theory provide methodological grounding for studying long-term social change, while contemporary analyses have expanded these ideas. Of particular relevance, Strauss–Howe generational cycle theory offers a conceptual framework linking generational “turnings” to recurring patterns in public expectations, political mobilization, and leadership styles. Although the theory has been critiqued for determinism and limited empirical verification — as highlighted in Van Twist & Newcombe [6] — it nevertheless provides a structured lens for analyzing intergenerational differences in elite behavior.

Recent scholarship has begun to explore how generational dynamics intersect with U.S. foreign policy. Notably, Zhang & Chen [7] develop a dual-cycle framework that integrates Strauss–Howe generational cycles with broader political-in-

stitutional shifts in American governance. Their model suggests that generational turnover may be linked to changes in strategic posture, leadership succession patterns, policy priorities, and the perceived role of the United States in global order-building. Building on these contributions, this article employs several key concepts in a specific way. “Generational archetypes” refer to the ideal-typical Strauss–Howe patterns (Prophet, Nomad, Hero, Artist) that shape characteristic leadership styles and strategic preferences [6]. “Generational turnings” denote the macro-societal phases (High, Awakening, Unraveling, Crisis) that structure political incentives and public expectations [6]. The term “Gray Champion” is used to describe an elder Prophet leader who emerges during a Crisis turning to define its direction [6]. “Strategic co-opetition” is understood here as a mode of U.S.–China interaction in which sustained geopolitical rivalry coexists with selective, institutionalized cooperation in areas of mutual benefit, consistent with proposals for “competition without catastrophe” [8]. “Scenario analysis” refers to a structured method for constructing multiple plausible long-term trajectories under uncertainty, drawing on established approaches in strategic planning [9; 10]. “Cohort theory” conceptualizes cohorts as analytically identifiable groups shaped by shared formative experiences, producing distinct behavioral patterns over time [11].

This article addresses the remaining gap in international-relations scholarship by examining how generational turnings and leadership archetypes shape U.S. foreign policy toward China from 2025 to 2040. The analysis considers both the immediate implications of Donald Trump’s second presidency (2025–2029) and the projected effects of subsequent transitions to Generation X and Millennial leadership during the 2030s. The scenario model begins with a baseline assumption of Donald Trump’s second presidency (2025–2029), which functions as the closing stage of the Prophet-led crisis within the Strauss–Howe cycle.

The purpose of this study is to assess how generational cycles influence U.S.–China relations during the 2025–2040 period and to develop scenario-based forecasts grounded in generational analysis. To achieve this objective, the article:

- (1) evaluates the applicability and limitations of generational cycle theory for international relations;
- (2) operationalizes generational archetypes as analytical variables for foreign-policy analysis;
- (3) examines the leadership orientations of U.S. presidential cohorts from 2016 through the 2030s;
- (4) constructs three long-term scenarios for U.S.–China relations based on generational dynamics and systemic strategic rivalry.

This generational approach offers an additional conceptual tool for understanding the domestic determinants of great-power competition and for evaluating how sociopolitical cycles may shape the future architecture of U.S.–China relations.

Methodology and Research Methods

This study employs a mixed methodological approach combining generational cycle theory, cohort analysis, and scenario-based strategic forecasting. The methodology integrates sociological, political, and international-relations frameworks to explain how generational turnover may influence U.S. foreign-policy behavior toward China from 2025 to 2040. The research design responds directly to the gaps identified in the Introduction, particularly the limited incorporation of generational dynamics into analyses of great-power rivalry.

Theoretical Framework

Traditional interpretations of U.S.–China rivalry rely primarily on structural theories of international relations. Power transition theory [1], the Thucydides Trap framework [2], and strategic competition analyses such as conceptualize great-power rivalry as a function of shifts in material capabilities, systemic pressures, and geopolitical incentives [3]. These approaches form the structural foundation against which this study introduces generational variables.

The primary analytical lens of the research is the Strauss–Howe generational cycle theory, which conceptualizes U.S. history as a recurring sequence of generational “turnings” shaped by sequential cohorts with distinct behavioral profiles. Although originally developed as a sociocultural theory rather than a political one, its structured model of archetypal cohorts offers analytical value for understanding leadership orientations and foreign-policy tendencies. To ensure methodological rigor, the study incorporates established critiques of the framework, particularly concerning determinism and limited empirical verification, as noted by Van Twist & Newcombe [6].

The theoretical foundation is strengthened through integration of classical cohort theory, particularly the work of Ryder [11], which defines cohorts as analytically identifiable groups shaped by shared historical experiences. Ryder’s conceptualization provides methodological justification for treating political generations as coherent units of analysis and supports the operationalization of generational variables in this study.

The research also draws upon the dual-cycle model developed by Chinese scholars Chen & Zhang [7], which links American generational succession to ideological and institutional cycles. Their approach suggests that generational turnover affects not only domestic political rhythms but also strategic orientations in U.S. foreign policy. This framework provides theoretical grounding for analyzing how generational dynamics intersect with great-power rivalry.

We recognize the limitations of such a grand theory and consider Strauss–Howe to be only a heuristic lens complementing structural IR theories (realism, constructivism), rather than a predictive model. We acknowledge that it has gained particular popularity in conservative circles (e.g., Bannon’s “Fourth Turning” rhetoric associated with Trumpism (Kaiser, 2016)), and that it can be used to justify crisis exploitation or authoritarian tendencies (“crisis demands strong leaders”). Liberal critics regard it as fatalistic and discouraging of progressive change. The theory is strongly deterministic, as it posits that history follows inevitable cycles, thereby downplaying individual agency, random events, or structural forces (such as globalization or climate change). It is also explicitly Anglo-American in its explanatory scope, rooted in Puritan history and U.S. exceptionalism. Strauss and Howe themselves note that its applicability beyond the United States is limited.

Empirical Foundation

In addition to theoretical foundations, the study incorporates empirical evidence on generational differences in American foreign-policy attitudes. Survey data from the Pew Research Center [13] demonstrate that younger cohorts — particularly Millennials and Generation Z — perceive China as a competitor but express significantly higher support for selective cooperation and multilateral engagement than older generations. These empirical patterns reinforce the analytical relevance of generational variables and justify their inclusion in scenario-based forecasting.

Operationalization of Key Concepts

To transform generational theory into an analytical tool appropriate for international relations, the study operationalizes three core concepts:

(a) Generational Archetypes

Each cohort (Prophet, Nomad, Hero, Artist) is defined according to its formative context, leadership style, and behavioral tendencies. These archetypal characteristics are treated as independent variables influencing foreign-policy preferences, including attitudes toward risk, multilateralism, crisis escalation, and institutional cooperation.

(b) Turnings

Turnings (e.g., Fourth Turning, First Turning) are operationalized as macro-political environments that shape elite incentives and public expectations. This approach corresponds to the logic of long-cycle theories such as Modelski [12], which interpret systemic geopolitical shifts through recurring temporal patterns.

(c) Leadership Generations

Presidential administrations and dominant political elites are categorized according to their generational cohort. Aligning leadership generation with turning-cycle context enables structured comparison of expected foreign-policy tendencies.

Research Design and Analytical Logic

The methodological structure consists of three sequential components:

Step 1: Generational Mapping (2016–2040)

Using cohort theory and Strauss–Howe turnings, the study maps the generational positions of U.S. leaders from 2016 through 2040. This mapping identifies expected transitions between Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial leadership and establishes the temporal basis for scenario analysis.

Step 2: Linking Generational Variables to Foreign-Policy Behavior

Drawing on psychological and political-behavioral literature—including Mead [5] and Doran [4] — the analysis identifies pathways through which generational differences shape strategic tendencies. These pathways include variations in ideological framing, crisis management approaches, risk tolerance, and preferences for unilateral versus multilateral engagement.

Step 3: Scenario-Based Forecasting

The study employs a structured scenario methodology inspired by Schoemaker [9] and Bradfield et al. [10], widely used in long-range strategic analysis. Variables used for constructing scenarios include:

- leadership generation;
- turning phase (e.g., Fourth Turning vs. First Turning);
- systemic rivalry intensity;
- domestic political polarization;
- institutional resilience.

Scenarios are not deterministic predictions but analytically plausible trajectories grounded in generational and structural conditions. This approach aligns with the forecasting principles outlined in the National Intelligence Council's Global Trends 2040 report [14].

Limitations of the Methodology

To ensure academic transparency, the study identifies several methodological constraints:

1. Generational theory's limited empirical verification, particularly regarding its predictive precision.

2. Difficulty of isolating generational effects from structural or material drivers of foreign-policy behavior.

3. Inherent uncertainty of long-term strategic forecasting, especially in contexts involving great-power rivalry.

These limitations do not diminish the heuristic value of the approach but underscore its exploratory nature. The aim is not deterministic prediction but conceptual clarification of how generational dynamics may shape long-term strategic trends in U.S.–China relations.

Results

This section presents the analytical results of the study, following the methodological structure discussed above. The findings demonstrate how generational turnover interacts with structural great-power dynamics to shape plausible trajectories of U.S.–China relations from 2025 to 2040. The results are organized into five components: (1) generational mapping of U.S. leadership; (2) archetypal foreign-policy tendencies; (3) generational profiles of recent U.S. leaders; (4) generational mechanisms influencing strategic behavior; and (5) scenario outcomes.

1. Generational Mapping of U.S. Political Leadership (2016–2040)

The first stage of analysis identifies the generational composition of U.S. leadership across the period under study. The results confirm the following sequence:

(1) Boomer (Prophet) leadership, 2016–2029

The Boomer cohort exhibits crisis-oriented and ideologically framed foreign-policy behavior, consistent with Fourth Turning dynamics. Such patterns align with confrontation-driven strategic competition observed during heightened U.S.–China tensions in the late 2010s and early 2020s.

(2) Generation X (Nomad) leadership, expected 2029–2037

The expected rise of Generation X leaders corresponds to a shift toward pragmatic, transactional, and risk-managed competition. This is consistent with findings from strategic-behavior research and observed Gen-X leadership styles in U.S. domestic politics.

(3) Millennial (Hero) leadership, expected 2037–2045

Millennials display civic and institution-building tendencies, implying potential stabilization and partial renewal of multilateral engagements. Surveys analyzed earlier (Pew [13]) show they exhibit lower hostility toward China and higher support for institutional cooperation.

This mapping provides the temporal foundation for scenario construction.

2. Generational Archetypes and Foreign-Policy Tendencies

Operationalizing Strauss–Howe generations reveals consistent archetypal preferences:

(a) Prophet (Boomer)

- ideological framing of rivalry;
- preference for unilateral action;
- greater likelihood of crisis escalation;
- skepticism toward institutional constraints.

(b) Nomad (Generation X)

- transactional, flexible approaches;
- tactical cooperation balanced with competitive posturing;
- preference for short- to medium-term strategic solutions;
- moderated ideological content.

(c) Hero (Millennial)

- emphasis on institutional mechanisms;
- support for multilateral and cooperative initiatives;
- long-term stabilization focus;
- willingness to compartmentalize confrontation and cooperation.

These tendencies form the basis for forecasting long-term foreign-policy behavior.

3. Generational Profiles of Recent U.S. Leaders

To illustrate how generational archetypes manifest in concrete foreign-policy choices, this section briefly examines four prominent U.S. leaders of recent decades: Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Barack Obama, and J. D. Vance. Their leadership styles and China policies provide empirical examples of Prophet, Artist, Nomad, and emerging Hero archetypes within the Strauss–Howe framework.

Donald Trump (Baby Boomer – Prophet). Donald Trump, born in 1946, exemplifies the Prophet archetype. His presidency (2017–2021, and hypothetically 2025–2029 in this study’s forecasting horizon) translated generational traits—moralistic framing, confrontation with perceived threats, and willingness to challenge established norms — into a sharply adversarial China policy. Trump abandoned the earlier bipartisan consensus on “engagement and hedging” and instead defined China as a principal strategic antagonist. The trade war, large-scale tariffs, sanctions against Chinese firms, and rhetorical escalation framed U.S.–China relations as an existential contest, consistent with late-crisis Prophet leadership. In generational terms, Trump’s role closely resembles the “Gray Champion” figure leading society through a Fourth Turning crisis, intensifying rivalry and narrowing the space for compromise.

Joe Biden (Silent Generation – Artist). Joe Biden (b. 1942) belongs to the Silent Generation, associated with the Artist archetype. Artists come of age during a crisis and mature in a period of relative stability, which tends to produce leaders who favor compromise, repair, and procedural order. Biden’s presidency sought to restore predictability after Trump’s disruptive term: he re-emphasized alliances, multilateral coordination, and institutional responses to China while largely preserving the tougher economic and technological line inherited from his predecessor. As Zhang and Chen [7] note, Chinese analysts classify Biden as a “literary/artist type” leader who exerts pressure on China in a more measured and coordinated fashion, preferring coalition-building and process over shock tactics. In generational terms, Biden functions as a transitional figure who manages the crisis but does not resolve the structural rivalry.

Barack Obama (Generation X – Nomad). Barack Obama (b. 1961) is often regarded as an early Gen X (Nomad) leader. His presidency (2009–2017) combined elements of engagement and competition in a pragmatic, risk-aware manner. Early in his term, Obama emphasized cooperation with China on global economic recovery and climate policy; later, as China’s assertiveness grew and domestic U.S. discontent intensified, he pivoted to a more explicit balancing strategy through the “rebalance to Asia”, WTO cases, and cyber-security measures. This adaptive, “no drama” style reflects Nomad attributes: preference for management over grand ideological projects, flexible adjustment to changing conditions, and reliance on technocratic problem-solving rather than mobilizing rhetoric. Obama’s record illustrates how a Gen X president can delay a full rupture in relations by managing the transition from engagement to strategic competition.

J. D. Vance and Emerging Millennial (Hero) Leadership. J. D. Vance (b. 1984), as a Millennial politician elevated to the national stage as a vice-presidential figure under Trump's second term in the scenario framework, illustrates the emerging Hero archetype. Millennials as a cohort have been shaped by the post-Cold War order, the war on terror, and the 2008 financial crisis. Surveys show that they tend to be more open to international cooperation and less inclined to view China as an inherent enemy, even while supporting firm responses on economic and security issues [9]. Vance's rhetoric combines economic nationalism and concern for the U.S. working class with a stated aversion to large-scale war with China. This mixture captures a central tension of Millennial Hero leadership: determination to "fix" structural vulnerabilities (such as over-dependence on Chinese supply chains) while seeking to avoid catastrophic confrontation. As Millennials move closer to national executive power in the 2030s, the configuration of such attitudes will be critical for the feasibility of the "strategic co-opetition" scenario outlined later.

Taken together, these leadership profiles empirically ground the generational typology used in this article. Trump, Biden, Obama, and Vance illustrate how archetypal patterns map onto real-world foreign-policy behavior. They also provide reference points for the scenario analysis that follows, which extrapolates from these generational tendencies to explore the 2029–2040 trajectory of U.S.–China relations.

4. Generational Mechanisms Influencing U.S.–China Strategic Behavior

Building on long-cycle theories and scenario methodology, three mechanisms were identified:

Mechanism 1: Crisis Intensification Under Prophet Leadership

Boomer-driven strategic choices align with higher escalation potential, reinforcing patterns described in structural assessments of U.S.–China military dynamics, such as Mastro [15].

Mechanism 2: Pragmatic Competition Under Nomad Leadership

Gen-X leadership is likely to blend deterrence with calibrated cooperation. This aligns with analytical models of competitive coexistence developed by Campbell & Sullivan [8], suggesting that rivalry can be moderated through selective engagement.

Mechanism 3: Managed Co-evolution Under Hero Leadership

Millennial leadership aligns with institutional rebuilding, crisis-management mechanisms, and selective cooperation. This corresponds to forecasts in strategic-stability studies conducted by RAND [16], which emphasize the potential of structured crisis-management tools to prevent escalation in bipolar competition.

These mechanisms provide the analytical bridge between generational theory and foreign-policy outcomes.

5. Scenario Outcomes for U.S.–China Relations (2029–2040)

Three analytically derived scenarios were constructed using the methodological approach outlined above. These scenarios — summarized in Table 1 — reflect the interaction between generational leadership, systemic rivalry intensity, turning-cycle dynamics, and institutional resilience. Together, they illustrate how different generational configurations may shape distinct strategic trajectories in U.S.–China relations during the 2029–2040 period.

Table 1. Generational Scenarios for U.S.–China Relations, 2029–2040

Scenario	Leadership Cohort	Archetype	Strategic Outlook	Key Features	Historical Analogy
1. Post-Crisis Stabilization	Generation X (e.g., Harris, DeSantis)	Nomad (Reactive)	Cautious management of rivalry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – selective rollback of tariffs; – diplomatic channel restoration; – de-escalation in Taiwan/SCS; – calibrated alliance coordination; – limited re-engagement in low-sensitivity trade 	1970s U.S.–USSR détente; 1972 Nixon–Mao rapprochement
2. Strategic Co-opetition	Millennials (e.g., Vance, Buttigieg)	Hero (Civic)	Managed competition + selective cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – institutionalized cooperation in green tech & health; – climate & AI governance; – strengthened multilateral mechanisms; – structured crisis-management tools; – shared leadership on global issues 	1945–1950s U.S.–Western Europe post-war order-building
3. Reactionary Recurrence	Millennials under hardline pressures (or Gen X co-opted by ideology)	Hero/Hybrid (radicalized)	Prolonged ideological and systemic conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – accelerated decoupling; – militarized rivalry (Taiwan, cyber, space); – weakening multilateral institutions; – consolidation of rival geopolitical blocs; – intensification of proxy 	1950s–80s early–mid Cold War rivalry

Source: Compiled by the authors

Interpretation of Scenario Findings

Scenario 1

Shows moderate stabilization driven by Nomad pragmatism. Competition persists but becomes more predictable.

Scenario 2

Demonstrates how Millennial leadership could institutionalize aspects of rivalry, reducing escalation risks through norm-building and cooperation.

Scenario 3

Illustrates that structural pressures can override generational predispositions, particularly during periods of heightened systemic insecurity. This matches long-cycle expectations where post-crisis reconstruction can regress if geopolitical competition intensifies.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that generational dynamics provide an analytically meaningful supplement to traditional explanations of U.S.–China rivalry. While structural theories highlight power transitions, systemic constraints, and geopolitical competition, the present analysis shows that leadership cohorts shape how these structural pressures are interpreted and acted upon. This section situates the results within broader international and regional scholarship and outlines the implications for future research.

1. Alignment with International Research

The scenario outcomes derived here correspond to established assumptions in structural-realist and long-cycle approaches, which emphasize persistent rivalry driven by material and systemic factors. At the same time, the cohort-based variation in foreign-policy trajectories — ranging from crisis escalation under Boomer leadership to managed competition under Generation X and institutionalized cooperation under Millennial leadership — suggests that domestic sociopolitical rhythms significantly shape how rivalry unfolds.

2. Relevance to Regional and Kazakhstani Scholarship

Although Central Asian scholarship has rarely applied generational or cyclical frameworks to U.S.–China relations, regional researchers have produced substantial analyses of global systemic change and China's evolving role in Eurasia. Notably, work by Murat T. Laumulin explores transformations in world politics and their implications for Central Asia [17, 18]. His monograph *Central Asia in an Era of Transformation* [17] captures structural shifts and geostrategic transformations relevant to regional dynamics. Similarly, his historiographical work *The History of Kazakhstan and Central Asia in World Oriental Studies* [18] contributes to deep understanding of regional history and geopolitical context. These studies do not address generational cycles directly, which underscores the novelty of applying generational analysis to the region. Therefore, the present research builds on the established regional scholarship and extends it by introducing cohort-based analytical variables.

3. Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Generational archetypes should be treated as mediating factors rather than deterministic predictors: they influence how leaders interpret structural constraints and strategic pressures. Under Boomer (Prophet) leadership competition tends toward escalation; Generation X (Nomad) may moderate rivalry through pragmatic management; Millennials (Hero) provide potential for institutionalized crisis-management. This triangulation refines existing models of U.S.–China relations and suggests that generational turnover may affect not just the intensity but the character and trajectory of rivalry.

4. Limitations and Prospects for Future Research

Interpretation remains subject to uncertainty, especially given unpredictable structural shocks, leadership discontinuities, or external crises. Empirical validation, comparative studies, and mixed-method research (surveys, elite interviews, quantitative indicators) are necessary to test cohort-based hypotheses. Regionally, applying generational analysis to other actors — including China, Russia, or Central Asian states — can open new research avenues.

Overall, by integrating generational variables into analyses of systemic rivalry,

this study contributes both to international scholarship and to the academic context of Central Asia, pointing to new directions for regional political-scientific research.

Conclusion

This study has examined how generational dynamics may influence the long-term evolution of U.S.–China relations between 2025 and 2040. Building on structural and geopolitical frameworks developed in earlier scholarship, the research integrates generational-cycle theory, cohort analysis, and scenario-based forecasting to offer a multidimensional perspective on strategic competition. This approach addresses the limitations of existing studies, which primarily focus on material capabilities or institutional factors while paying insufficient attention to the sociopolitical rhythms that shape foreign-policy decision-making.

The findings demonstrate that although structural pressures—economic interdependence, military balancing, and systemic rivalry—remain constant drivers of U.S.–China competition, leadership cohorts function as mediating variables that shape how these pressures are interpreted. Generational characteristics influence strategic preferences, risk tolerance, ideological framing, and the likelihood of crisis escalation or institutional engagement. The scenario outcomes developed in this study illustrate three plausible trajectories: ideological confrontation under Prophet-style Boomer leadership, pragmatic stabilization under Generation X, and institutionalized co-opetition under Millennial leadership.

The empirical leadership profiles examined in the Results section reinforce these conclusions. The contrasting approaches of Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Barack Obama, and emerging Millennial figures such as J. D. Vance demonstrate how generational archetypes manifest in concrete foreign-policy choices. These cases illustrate the pathways through which generational biases and interpretive frameworks shape the tone, tempo, and strategic orientation of U.S.–China relations, thereby validating the analytical value of incorporating generational analysis into long-term forecasting.

For Kazakhstan and the broader Central Asian scholarly context, the study provides an additional conceptual lens to complement existing geopolitical research on China's growing influence in Eurasia. While regional scholars have extensively examined China's strategic behavior, generational frameworks have not yet been applied in this field. The findings of this article therefore open a new line of inquiry, suggesting that cohort-based analysis may enrich regional assessments of great-power competition and its implications for smaller and middle powers.

The study also acknowledges inherent limitations: the difficulty of isolating generational effects from material and institutional factors, the unpredictability of domestic political developments, and the uncertainty of long-term forecasting. These constraints underscore the exploratory character of the scenarios presented rather than their predictive intent. Nonetheless, generational analysis offers a valuable conceptual tool for anticipating the political and strategic preferences of future U.S. administrations.

Future research could build on these insights by examining generational change in other major and regional powers, integrating quantitative behavioral data, or exploring how societal cycles interact with geopolitical transformations in Central Asia. Such work would deepen the theoretical and practical relevance of

generational analysis for understanding the evolving global order and the long-term trajectory of U.S.–China relations.

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