

RSIS Distinguished Public Lecture

"Appraising Thucydides's Trap"

by

Professor Steve Chan

Ngee Ann Kongsi Professor of International Relations, RSIS; and
College Professor of Distinction, University of Colorado, Boulder

Monday, 2 September 2019 | 3.30 – 5.00 pm | Marina Mandarin Singapore, Vanda Ballroom

PROGRAMME

2.45 pm **Registration of guests**

3.15 pm **All guests to be seated**

3.30 pm **Introductory Remarks**
Professor Ralf Emmers
Dean, RSIS, and
President's Chair in International Relations,
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

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Questions and Answers

Presentation of Memento

5.00 pm **End of event**

Dress Code: Office attire

LECTURE ABSTRACT

“Thucydides’s Trap” claims that the danger of war increases when a “rising state” approaches or overtakes a “ruling state’s” power. It offers the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta some 2,500 years ago as an analogy for understanding the cause behind rising tension between contemporary China and the U.S. How helpful is this analogy and its monocausal explanation of war? How strong is this explanation’s validity such as with respect to its designation of “rising” and “ruling” states, and its selection and interpretation of past instances of interstate power shift and war? Thucydides’s own account tells us that there are multiple, concurrent pathways to war. Human agency, especially people’s capacity to learn from the past, should be considered in addition to structural constraints. Interstate power shifts are neither necessary nor sufficient for war to occur; they represent just one of several factors creating a combination that endangers peace. In addressing contemporary Sino-American relations, we should consider how other variables such as timing, location, alliance commitments, and racial identity can mitigate or exacerbate the influence of power shifts on war occurrence.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER



Steve Chan is College Professor of Distinction at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he teaches political science. He was the recipient of the Karl W. Deutsch award given by the International Studies Association, the Distinguished Scholar award given by this Association’s Foreign Policy Section, and the Marinus Smith award in recognition of his teaching at the University of Colorado. His research interests encompass theories of international relations (such as democratic peace, power transition) and political economy (such as defence economics, developmental states, economic sanctions) with a focus on East Asia. His publications include nineteen books and about one hundred and eighty articles and chapters. His most recent books are *Thucydides’s Trap? Historical Interpretation, Logic of Inquiry, and the Future of Sino-American Relations* (University of Michigan Press, 2020); *Trust and Distrust in Sino-American Relations* (Cambria, 2017); *China’s Troubled Waters? Maritime Disputes in Theoretical Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); *Enduring Rivalries in the Asia-Pacific* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); and *Looking for Balance: China, the United States, and Power Balancing in East Asia* (Stanford University Press, 2012).

ABOUT THE S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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