Commentators have long been warning of the increasing probability of a clash between the United States and China. Particularly in the last decade, most of the pessimistic commentators have been viewing the rise of China as a peril, or even a threat, to the national interests of the United States, whereas others, more optimistic, commentators, have pointed out a chance for a world economy. The former highlight China’s maritime expansionist attitude in the South China Sea dispute as an example. The latter positively evaluate a significant potential for economic development in China’s One Belt One Road initiative. The fundamental reason for these opposing views between the pessimists and the optimists in China and the United States, among others, lies in their sense of mistrust and misunderstanding between the two countries under the status quo. This may also apply to the recent tense situations between the United States and North Korea over the rapid military nuclearization of North Korea.

International relations (IR) courses in universities normally advocate the so-called Thucydides trap as a matter of fact based on the history of international relations. They also use the notion of hegemon, in order to explain the rise and fall of a great power in the world. The world order established principally by the United States after the Second World War is the status quo in the IR’s framework, although the order is also fluidly developing. The clash of civilizations may sound inevitable after 9/11, as most of the IR
students learn in their classroom.

These ideas in an IR theory have been rarely doubted. Most of the theories and concepts are of Western origin. Moreover, media and information, including the Internet and cyberspace, are under the strong influence of the West and its culture. In many ways, the post-Cold War world may be back in a bipolar society where the United States, hegemon, is being challenged by a newly rising China. An old Chinese saying, which states ‘no mountain accepts two tigers’ (一山难容二虎) but which is often translated into English as ‘when Greek meets Greek then comes the tug of war’, may simply represent the current world situation where the United States and China are the two adversarial competitors for a hegemon.

Amitai Etzioni’s *Avoiding War with China* is a compilation of nine essays that appeared originally in various academic journals between 2011 and 2016. In these essays, Etzioni provides a multi-faceted view of the bilateral relationship between the two powers and proposes some concrete actions that the United States should take in order ‘to reduce the probability that the world will face another major war’, or ‘what the United States could do better’ (p. 2). Neither a ‘panda hugger’ nor a ‘dragon slayer’, Etzioni, a famous Israeli-American sociologist with a communitarian thought, finds himself as ‘someone who has been to war’ with ‘a strong commitment to seeking peaceful resolutions to international conflicts’ (p. 3). This experience is the driving force behind his argument for finding a way for the United States to avoid war with China. As the subtitle of the book under review, *Two Nations, One World*, represents, Etzioni seems to have assumed that the two nations should find a way to coexist peacefully on this earth.

In Chapter 1, Etzioni critically considers recent developments in the Pentagon’s approach to managing China’s rise, such as the AirSea Battle (ASB), which, due to the lack of a systematic examination by the White House and Congress, needs to be accommodated with more practical aspects of China’s military capabilities and intentions as well as its economic and social conditions. He maintains that the start of a new administration in Washington needs to take a comprehensive review of US-Sino policies, not only by the experts but also by the public, reassessing both the threat of China and the suggested response.
Referring to a typical dichotomous labelling between ‘Adversarians’ and ‘Engagers’ with regard to China’s image, Chapter 2 denounces the old image of China, which many Americans still hold as an adversary or a belligerent. After exploring military and geopolitical, economic, and ideational assessments with concrete data, Etzioni denies the superiority of China in any of these three segments as compared to the United States.

In Chapter 3, Etzioni discusses whether, and to what extent, China has been ‘aggressive’ with special reference to the definition and practical cases of acts of aggression in China’s actions and verbal statements in conflicts, such as the ones in the South China Sea and in cyberspace. His conclusion is that, because their ‘aggressive’ actions are, in reality, ‘merely assertive’ (p. 66), the United States and the international community should not misinterpret China’s intentions, thus diffusing tensions between the two powers.

Negatively answering the question of whether China is a responsible stakeholder in the international system, Chapter 4, which is based on Etzioni’s communitarian approach and his careful examination ‘against relatively high aspirational standards’ (p. 77) applied to China, identifies China as a legitimate regional power rather than a challenger for a global hegemon in the light of its history, economic conditions, and improving conduct in the international community.

With a view towards reducing tensions and making accommodations between the United States and China, Chapter 5 advocates a strategy of mutually assured restraint (MAR) by taking the following seven steps as part of these two countries’ foreign policy: (1) establishing a neutral buffer zone; (2) solving territorial disputes, such as those in the East and South China Seas; (3) military repositioning in East Asia; (4) making an explicit commitment to maintaining the status quo standing of Taiwan; (5) collaboration on space and cybersecurity; (6) developing a tangible plan for their behaviour in the event of collapse of the North Korean government; and (7) guaranteeing the flow of raw materials and energy in the region. Understating China’s possibility of becoming a global or hegemonic power, Etzioni recognizes this strategy as the way to ascertain their shared and complementary interests in the maintenance of regional peace and stability, by way of collaboration and cooperation rather than collision and conflagration in the region.
Chapter 6 critically examines the United States’ (non-)effort to integrate China into the liberal international order, whereas its government, including the Obama administration, had ‘in effect stood in the way’ of China’s responses to the demands of developing states in launching the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and ‘worked to hinder’ its integration into key international institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Etzioni concludes that a strategy of ‘aggression-limiting containment’, whose aim is to only contain the military sector and compete in economic and ideational sectors with integration in the governance of international institutions, is ‘preferable’ to that of ‘multifaceted (or all-encompassing) containment’ (pp. 112 & 115).

In Chapter 7, Etzioni opines that an American strategy of containment of China is ‘premature’ (p. 116) and costly, considering ‘China’s current military weaknesses, decelerating economic growth, and pressing domestic needs’ (p. 120).

Chapter 8 maintains that, because the Westphalian sovereignty paradigm has, particularly in the event of humanitarian interventions, faced criticism from the proponents of sovereignty as responsibility (in favour of ‘responsibility to protect’ (RtoP)) and its opponents (in favour of absolute sovereignty), both the United States and China should find interests in ‘work[ing] more effectively together’ (p. 133) to prevent transnational terrorism without committing coercive regime change and nation building.

After reviewing the recent cases in the South China Sea concerning the freedom of navigation assertions (FONA) in the light of legal and political (through liberalist and realist approaches) justifications in Chapter 9, Etzioni maintains that FONA are ‘low-profile’ (p. 137), unilateral, and assertive operations of the US Navy as part of a larger State Department program, despite its significant feature as ‘a major public good’ in the liberal international order (p. 146). His identification of FONA as ‘a relic from a more assertive, powerful, unilateral United States’ (p. 149) refutes its attitude to seek to uphold a hegemonic position through military assertions because of the risks involved in the ‘unimportant’ and ‘almost unknown’ operations for ‘this Cold War relic’ (p. 150).

Admitting that there are reasons to hold that the United States and China ‘are drifting toward war’, Etzioni finally concludes that, because ‘[b]
locking aggression’, involving the use of force, is ‘an essential part of the liberal order’ (p. 153) to which the United States should dedicate itself, the United States ‘should counter’ China’s influence with the same kind of means as public diplomacy, trade, investment and cultural exchanges, but ‘not by the use of force’ (p. 154).

In Avoiding War with China, Etzioni consistently argues for the national interests of the United States in international politics through non-military and diplomatic approaches, unless China has recourse to the use of force or threat of its use in implementing its foreign policy. His argument is largely objective and fairly balanced in terms of the observation of China’s actions, capabilities, and intentions concerning its political, economic, and military aspects. His careful analysis of other famous writers’ works has also enriched the insightful discussion, based on Etzioni’s communitarian and liberal ideas, of the core part of the book under review: that is, how to avoid war with China as a regional power and to integrate China into the current status quo created and nurtured by the strong leadership of the United States as the global hegemon. These strengths of the book under review will certainly satisfy the thirst of the readers who have already been exposed to several adversarial arguments conveyed by the dragon slayers (e.g. The Hundred Year Marathon by Michael Pillsbury, 2015) and by the panda huggers (e.g. On China by Henry Kissinger, 2012).

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that even Etzioni is not free from strong influences of the West’s viewpoints and values, although his apparent dovish and pro-China flavours in the arguments might mislead those who support Communist China and its assertive, if not aggressive, foreign policy. This is because Etzioni seems to have overlooked the fundamental historic backdrop that, as a ‘returning’ state (Kissinger) rather than as a rising state, China is not a ‘sovereign state’ in the Westphalian sense but a ‘civilization state’ with an incomparably long history, and that China does not basically play by the rules of the West such as in being a global hegemon and in relation to human rights (as demonstrated in Martin Jacques’ When China Rules the World, 2012). In other words, the United States and the West should squarely face these neglected facts without imposing their own values, ideologies, and perspectives whenever they seek to cope and coexist with China and its
globalized perspective under its One Belt One Road policy. As Etzioni admits in the book under review, in this sense, international law is open for various interpretations even though it may be shared by actors. Now that American and Western traditional values, such as freedom and the Rule of Law, are at stake with the appearance of the new administration under President Donald Trump’s inward-looking slogan, ‘America First’, the readers of *Avoiding War with China* will certainly become live witnesses in judging the credibility of Etzioni’s propositions on US-Sino relations.