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Reading The Tea Leaves: The Media And Sino-American Rapprochement, 1963-1972

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**READING THE TEA LEAVES:
THE MEDIA AND SINO-AMERICAN RAPPROCHEMENT, 1963-1972**

by

GUOLIN YI

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2013

MAJOR: HISTORY

Approved by:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Youju Yi and Lanying Zhao, my siseter Fenglin Yi, and my wife Lin Zhang.

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I am sincerely and heartily grateful to my advisor Melvin Small, who has lighted my way through the graduate study at Wayne State. I am sure this dissertation would not have been possible without his quality guidance, warm encouragement, and conscientious editing. I would also like to thank other members of my dissertation committee: Professors Alex Day, Aaron Retish, Liette Gidlow, and Yumin Sheng for their helpful suggestions. It is also my great pleasure to thank Professors Denver Brunsman (now at George Washington University) and Sandra VanBurkleo, whose friendliness and encouragement meant a lot to me, especially when I started my life at Wayne. While writing my dissertation, I have benefited from conversations with Robert Ross from Boston College and Odd Arne Westad from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Notes about Chinese Names and Places	vi
List of Abbreviations	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: The Depoliticization of the China Issue: 1963-1966	26
Chapter 3: The Cultural Revolution as a Watershed: 1966-1968.....	64
Chapter 4: The Sino-Soviet Crisis: “Danger and Opportunity” in 1969	107
Chapter 5: From Warsaw to Beijing: The “Intricate Minuet”: 1970-1971.....	142
Chapter 6: Preparing for the Show in Beijing: 1971-1972	183
Chapter 7: Conclusion	228
Bibliography	237
Abstract.....	261
Autobiographical Statement	263

NOTES ABOUT CHINESE NAMES AND PLACES

All Chinese names and places throughout the text are rendered in the Pinyin system of transliteration, except where they occur in different forms in quotations. As with the tradition in East Asia, the family name generally goes before the given name for Chinese people, except for those who have adopted English names. For terms that had been widely accepted, such as Chiang Kai-shek and Canton, I put their English equivalents in brackets after their Pinyin spellings.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPSV	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CWIHP	Cold War International History Project
FRUS	Foreign Relations of the United States
GLF	Great Leap Forward
JFK	John Fitzgerald Kennedy
LBJ	Lyndon Baines Johnson
NSC	National Security Council
<i>NYT</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
<i>PD</i>	<i>People's Daily</i>
PRC	People's Republic of China
<i>RN</i>	<i>Reference News</i>
UN	United Nations
<i>WP</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>

Chapter 1: Introduction

The U.S.-China rapprochement of 1972 is regarded as one of the most important events of the Cold War. In a self-congratulatory tone, Richard Nixon claims that it was “the most dramatic geopolitical event since World War II.” Historians like Chen Jian and David Wilson consider it, along with the Sino-Soviet border clashes, as “two of the most important events in the international history of the Cold War.”¹ Thus far, scholars of the Sino-American rapprochement have examined the Cold War international setting, domestic politics, and the policy-making of the two governments. With most of the works focusing on the political aspect, we know more and more about diplomacy and triangulation. However, we still know very little about how people in the two countries came to learn about the change in relations and how each nation prepared its people for the dramatic rapprochement.

Historiographical Survey

During the first decade after Nixon’s visit to China, American scholars who studied the Sino-American rapprochement generally employed the “realistic approach” that emphasized the balance of power among Washington, Moscow, and Beijing. These scholars explained the Sino-American thaw in light of the change in the international environment such as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the eruption of Sino-Soviet border clashes in 1969 in particular. They argued that Beijing’s fear of becoming the “next Czechoslovakia” compelled it to seek reconciliation with Washington as a way to counterbalance the Soviet threat.² Due to

¹ Richard Nixon, *The Real War* (New York: Warner Books, 1980), 134; Chen Jian, Introduction to “All under Heaven Is Great Chaos: Beijing, the Sino-Soviet Border Clashes, and the Turn toward Sino-American Rapprochement, 1968-69,” ed. Chen Jian and David Wilson, *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Working Paper No.11* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998), 155.

² Harold C. Hinton, *Peking-Washington: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United States* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1976), 28; A. Doak Barnett, *China Policy: Old Problems and New Challenge* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1977), 2-3; Allen S. Whiting, *China and the United States, What Next?* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1976); John King Fairbank, *The United States and China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 457.

their lack of first-hand sources, especially those from China, these scholars used inferential reasoning in explaining policy-making in both governments. Their speculations about policy-making in China were based on the American perspective.

In the 1980s, under the influence of Warren Cohen, a reformist movement occurred in the study of China in the United States. Younger scholars began to criticize Sinologists of the first generation, such as Barnett and Fairbank, for being Western-centric and proposed the “Sino-centric approach.” Cohen’s *America’s Response to China* was a direct counter-approach to Fairbank’s “impact-response” theory, which argued that the modern history of China was a response to Western impact.³ As a typical example of the Sino-centric approach, John Garver evaluates the Sino-American rapprochement in terms of the “subtle political considerations” of Chinese leaders. Pointing out that China was different from Eastern Europe, he especially attacks the “next Czechoslovakia” thesis. He questions the importance of military deterrence and claims that Mao and Zhou “looked to China itself to provide its main strategic deterrent,” calling it “flattering” for Americans to imagine that Beijing “looked to Soviet apprehensions of American disapproval to prevent a Soviet attack against China.”⁴

In the 1990s, many Chinese official documents were declassified, such as the manuscripts of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, their writings on foreign policies, and their detailed chronological records.⁵ These newly available materials have shed new light on the decision-

³ Warren Cohen, *America’s Response to China: An Interpretative History of Sino-American Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1971). For more about the impact-response theory and its critics, see Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁴ John W. Garver, *China’s Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968-1971* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), 1, 149-55.

⁵ Document Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, ed., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Manuscripts of Mao Zedong since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China], vol. 13 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998); Li Ping and Ma Zhisun, eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1898-1976* [a Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai, 1898-1976] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997); Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China and Document Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, eds., *Mao Zedong*

making in Beijing. Chinese scholars, with Party historians included, elaborated on how sagacious Mao and Zhou were in their reading of international affairs, how adroitly they handled the signals from the Nixon administration, and how they responded with subtlety. They gave the impression that the Americans were more anxious than the Chinese in seeking rapprochement.⁶

After the formal normalization of Sino-American relations in 1979, several Chinese students entered American universities for doctoral studies. Because of their bilingual capability, they were able to read both American and Chinese declassified documents as well as the memoirs of important participants in Sino-American rapprochement. Zhai Qiang examines China's involvement in the Vietnam War. Xia Yafeng reveals the importance of Sino-American ambassadorial talks in communicating their genuine intentions to avoid dramatic confrontations. In his study of Mao's impact on China's Cold War experience, Chen Jian argues that geopolitical reasons were not sufficient to explain the complicated reasons for Mao's decision to reconcile with Washington. Emphasizing Mao's ideology of "continuous revolution," Chen argues that Mao initiated a major breakthrough in China's foreign relations to serve his domestic needs of "boosting his declining reputation while enhancing the Chinese support for Mao's communist state." Chen does not explain how Mao reconciled his "continuous revolution" ideology with the decision to accommodate with the "most dangerous enemy of world revolution."⁷ These scholars

waijiao wenxuan [Selected Works of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe and shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1994); Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and Document Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, eds., *Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan* [Selected Works of Zhou Enlai on Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1990).

⁶ Gong Li, *Kuayue honggou: 1969-1979 nian zhongmei guanxi de yanbian* [Bridging the Chasm: The Evolution of Sino-American Relations, 1969-1979] (Zhengzhou, China: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1992); Qian Jiang, *Pingpong waijiao muhou* [Behind Ping-Pong Diplomacy] (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 1997); and Yang Kuisong, "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement," *Cold War History* vol.1, no.1 (August 2000); Gong Li, "Chinese Decision Making and the Thawing of U.S.-China Relations," and Zhang Baijia, "The Changing International Scene and Chinese Policy toward the United States, 1954-1970," in *Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973*, eds. Robert Ross and Jiang Changbin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁷ Zhai Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Xia Yafeng, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington:

have only briefly mentioned how Beijing prepared for Nixon's visit in the official circle, but they fail to consider how the Chinese government educated the general public through the media.

Among the more recent works on Sino-American rapprochement, Michael Lumbers has done an extraordinary study on the bridge-building efforts of the Johnson administration. He argues that a large part of the foundation for Nixon to start the China initiatives had been laid during the administration of Lyndon Johnson, whose inactivity during the Cultural Revolution even had merits because it did not push Sino-American relations to a worse situation. Margaret MacMillan's *Nixon and Mao* recounts the interactions between leaders of the two countries and does a particularly nice job on the public-relations aspect of the Nixon trip. But her narrative is limited to 1971-1972 with scant attention to the evolution of Sino-American relations in the 1960s. Taking advantage of the Nixon tapes, Chris Tudda reveals more insights about decision-making in the White House. He finds that Nixon and Kissinger, instead of employing "linkage diplomacy," "compartmentalized" Vietnam and China policies and delinked them from each other. However, his argument that the Nixon administration did not intentionally play the China card against the Soviet Union until after Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in 1971 is open to debate.⁸ Nixon and Kissinger would probably not agree with him.

The change in U.S. domestic politics is another important theme in the study of Sino-American rapprochement. Rosemary Foot, for example, focuses on the establishment of "domestic consensus" of the 1960s based on a broad understanding that China could not be ignored and would be better dealt with directly because it was no longer as menacing as had been

Indiana University Press, 2006); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 239, 270-1.

⁸ Michael Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain: Tentative Bridge-Building to China During the Johnson Years* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2008), 202, and Lumbers, "'Staying out of This Chinese Muddle': The Johnson Administration's Response to the Cultural Revolution." *Diplomatic History* vol. 31, no. 2 (April 2007): 259-94; Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: the Week that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007), 150-2; Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 206-7.

thought to be the case in the 1950s. She deals with the persistent efforts of several officials in pushing for a reconsideration of the China policy, such as James Thomson Jr., Roger Hilsman, Robert Komer, Edward Rice, Chester Bowles, and Edwin Reischauer, who were mostly senior-level bureaucrats specialized in China, along with legislators such as the Kennedys and Mike Mansfield (D-MN).⁹

Evelyn Goh, Foot's student at Oxford, uses "discursive analysis" to look at the rapprochement through the evolving but at the same time competing images of China in the official as well as academic discourses, which shifted China from a "red menace" to "troubled modernizer and resurgent power" to a "tacit ally." Similar to Foot, she argues that "the 1960s revisionist discourse constituted an important legacy for the Nixon administration's eventual rapprochement with China and they helped to forge a significant internal official consensus on, and to prepare public opinion for, the need to improve relations with China."¹⁰ One problem with Goh is that she pays little attention to the media, which constituted very important carriers of those discourses.

The domestic consensus concerns not only domestic politics, but also public opinion. Based on the analysis of public polls, Leonard A. Kusnitz does not accept the concept of a "Nixon Turnaround." In his opinion, the "mind blowing" statement by the *Washington Post* in response to Nixon's announcement of his China trip simply "shows a neglect of the very real prior moves the president had made toward China and the way opinion reacted to these

⁹ Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: US Relations with China since 1949* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1995), 18. See also Foot, "Redefinitions: The Domestic Context of America's China Policy in the 1960s," in Ross and Jiang, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, 264-75. For Congress and Sino-American relations, see Xu Guangqiu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship, 1949-1979* (Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: From "Red Menace" to "Tacit Ally"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11-13, 262.

actions.”¹¹ Steven Mosher also argues that American academics provided Nixon with a “ready-made image of the New China, stamped with the scholarly seal of approval, which he in turn could sell to the American people.”¹²

Examinations of domestic politics and public opinion have enabled scholars to see the Sino-American thaw as a result of gradual change and to trace its foundation to a much earlier period. Nonetheless, as important influencers of public opinion, the media in both countries have not been systematically studied. Chang Tsan-Kuo, a student of communication, does look at the relationship between the press and America’s China policy by using statistics and polls, which demonstrates how the image of China and Sino-American relations evolved between 1949 and 1984. However, I do not agree with his argument that the press was only a “surrogate” for policy makers rather than independent voices for alternative views.¹³ I believe that the U.S. media did make an independent contribution to the reconciliation between the two countries. His work lacks a historical context, and more importantly, a perspective from the Chinese media.

Between what happens in the political world and people’s formation of their views there is a link to which few scholars pay attention. That is, how people learned about the developments of Sino-American relations through the media, or how the media transmitted the political information to the public. Harold Lasswell describes media transmission as a process involving “who says what to whom through which medium with what effects.”¹⁴ The media effects concern not only the incident and the audiences, but also what happened in the transmission

¹¹ Leonard A. Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: America’s China Policy, 1949-1979* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984), 132-7.

¹² Steven W. Mosher, *China Misperceived: American Illusion and Chinese Reality* (New York: BasicBooks, 1990), 139.

¹³ Chang Tsan-Kuo, *The Press and China Policy: The Illusion of Sino-American Relations, 1950-1984* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1993), 247.

¹⁴ Harold D. Lasswell, “The Structure and Function of Communication in Society,” in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, ed. Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 84.

process. Therefore, what people know about an incident does not necessarily mirror what actually happened. I am interested in how the media in both countries covered Sino-American relations at different time periods. While most other scholars use the media as tools or purveyors of government policies in studying the Sino-American rapprochement, I take the media themselves as my objects of study. My focus is not so much on “why” Sino-American rapprochement could happen, but on “how” it came about in the media.

Significance & Research Questions

The media are important for studying U.S.-China reconciliation for several reasons. As the chief means by which the public gathers information about current issues, the media had a large impact on the public. Here “the public” refers to those who demonstrate an interest in a particular issue or in politics in general.¹⁵ Instead of reporting the information “objectively,” media transmit information to the public through a subjective process of selectivity, placement, images, and opinions. They can prioritize issues that the editors or publishers think are more important and suppress stories or opinions that they do not like. In their coverage, they may use symbols or images that have particular effects. Even for the same political event, different media may pick different emphases and come up with dramatically different interpretations. Therefore, the media’s representation of events relating to the two countries influenced their audiences’ perception of Sino-American relations.

Media affected public officials “indirectly,” through their impact on opinion registered in polls, and indirectly, through official media monitor’s “impressionistic evaluations” of a story or a newscast.¹⁶ Their influence on public opinion is best reflected in their ability to set the agenda.

¹⁵ Melvin Small, *Covering Dissent: The Media and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 7. See also John C. Pierce, Kathleen M. Beatty, and Paul R. Hagner, *The Dynamics of American Public Opinion: Patterns and Processes* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1982), 97, 13.

¹⁶ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 10.

Bernard Cohen, one of the earliest scholars who study the relationship between the press and U.S. foreign policy, claims that the press is not only a “purveyor of information and opinion,” but also has agenda-setting functions. As he argues, the press may not be successful in telling people “what to think,” but it is generally successful in telling the audience “what to think about.”¹⁷

Cohen made the claim at a time when newspapers were the dominant channel through which people learned about current issues. Since the 1960s, television has replaced newspapers as the dominant medium. The development of television consolidated the media’s power to set agendas for political issues. In terms of foreign policy, media could place an issue or region on the U.S. foreign policy agenda that was not already there or move an issue or country presently on the agenda to a higher level of policy consideration. As Jimmy Carter once said, sometimes a particular event “may not warrant preeminent consideration, but because of the high publicity assigned to it, the government officials, including the President, are almost forced to deal with it in preference to other items that might warrant more attention.”¹⁸ In another example, as the Johnson administration faced increasing criticisms for its rigid China policy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk grudgingly complained about how the media kept focusing on the question of China’s admission to the UN while not giving, in his words, “adequate reproaches” to its policies in Southeast Asia.¹⁹

Media could also function as cultural institutions that reflect and influence the political culture of a certain period. As David L. Altheide argues, “history speaks through the media in use. And conversely, the media in use during a historical epoch help shape that epoch.”

¹⁷ Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 5, 13, 259.

¹⁸ Patrick O’Heffernan, *Mass Media and American Foreign Policy: Inside Perspectives on Global Journalism and the Foreign Policy Process* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1991), 45-46.

¹⁹ Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 67.

According to him, besides the traditional approach of finding evidence of “political/ideological infusion into the media process,” we can also look at the media as “cultural items” that contributed to the “values, beliefs, meanings, and symbols that define our social world.”²⁰ The linguistic as well as visual symbols and the discourse in the media created a unique culture that reflected and influenced Sino-American relations. When relations between Beijing and Washington were frozen, the U.S. media insisted on using “Red China” or “Communist China” in referring to the regime on the mainland. With the thaw in relations, they dropped “Red” and “Communist” and even started using the People’s Republic of China. In the Chinese media on the other hand, the rhetoric that the American “imperialists” were the “most dangerous enemy to people all over the world” also gradually gave way to “heroic” or “friendly” Americans.

My study is important because it deals with a monumental geopolitical event during a crucial period when the two countries were going through great transformations in their domestic politics and foreign policies. By using a multinational perspective that involves not only China and the United States, but also the Soviet Union and Vietnam, it enriches the study of Sino-American rapprochement through the lenses of the media, an understudied but vital institution that reflected and influenced the two publics’ perception of the relations. It not only readdresses the issue of the government-media relationship in the United States, but also maps out the development of Beijing’s approach to the United States and reveals how it communicated its foreign policy to its own people.

This dissertation seeks answers to the following questions: How did the media in both countries cover the events that showed change in relations? What role(s) did the media in both countries play in the Sino-American rapprochement? In other words, I want to see how the media in both countries dealt with the prospect of a thaw in relations. Did the U.S. media pick up the

²⁰ David L. Altheide, *Media Power* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), 13-27.

clues in the various events? Could a reader of the Chinese press see the revolutionary change in relations coming, especially in the late sixties as the Soviet Union replaced the United States as public enemy number one?

Differences between the U.S. and Chinese Media

This is a study of “what” was in the media to evaluate their possible influence on public opinion. Before I explain the research method, it is important to note the differences between the American media and the Chinese media. First, the U.S. government does not have much direct control over the media, except that radio and TV stations are federally licensed. Under the protection of the First Amendment, the media have a relatively freer hand in news reporting and editing. Also, the influence between the American media and foreign policy makers is mutual, which means whereas the government may try to affect the media through public announcements and selective leaking, the media’s prioritized coverage of certain news and their editorial positions might force the government to respond and address those issues.²¹

In China, on the other hand, to serve its “totalitarian ideology,” the Communist Party controls the media through its Propaganda Department and uses them to make known its policy direction and to manipulate public opinion.²² This influence is one-way from the government to the media. Directors of the Xinhua News Agency and chief editors of the *People’s Daily* enjoyed high status within the Party and were heavily involved in its policy-making. A typical example is Wu Lenxi, who headed both Xinhua and the *People’s Daily* from 1957 to 1966 and regularly attended the meetings of the Politburo even though he was not a member.²³ Moreover, Mao kept a tight control of the propaganda machines by appointing people he trusted to lead them. Besides

²¹ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 17, 13.

²² Yu Xinlu, “The Role of Chinese Media During the Cultural Revolution (1965-1969).” (Ph.D. Diss.: Ohio University, 2001), 28-31.

²³ Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan: 1956-1966 zhongsu guanxi huiyilu* [Ten Years of Polemics: A Memoir of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1956-1966] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999), 236.

Wu, Hu Qiaomu, who headed Xinhua in 1949, and Chen Boda, who controlled the *People's Daily* and *Red Flag* during the Cultural Revolution, had all been loyal to Mao because of their previous service as his personal secretaries.²⁴

Mao's control of the Propaganda Department and the media in Beijing faltered after he stepped back to the "second line" in late 1960 due to the disastrous Great Leap Forward (GLF) and left State Chairman Liu Shaoqi, Premier Zhou Enlai, and Party Secretary Deng Xiaoping in charge of the policies of the CCP.²⁵ The situation was especially true in 1965, when Mao failed to have the *People's Daily* and other major Chinese newspapers reprint an article in the Shanghai-based *Wenhui Bao* (Wenhui Daily) that attacked *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, a historical play authored by Wu Han, the deputy mayor of Beijing. It was the article that sparked the Cultural Revolution.²⁶

Despite the divisions within the Party in the early 1960s, there were no great differences on foreign policy, particularly on U.S. policy, among Chinese leaders. The divisions were mostly confined in domestic policy, such as how to evaluate the GLF and how to fix the problems it caused.²⁷ Moreover, when the Cultural Revolution started in May 1966, one of the first things Mao did was to seize control of the *People's Daily* and replace Wu Lengxi with Chen Boda.²⁸

²⁴ Alastair Johnston and Robert Ross, *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 127; Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31.

²⁵ Won Ho Chang, *Mass Media in China: the History and the Future* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 40-41.

²⁶ Though the *People's Daily* reprinted the article later, it placed it in a column "academic debate" and later published several editorials repudiating Yao's article. See *People's Daily* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1965-1966) (hereafter as *PD*), November 30, 1965, 5; December 15, 1965, 5; December 25, 1965, 5; January 19, 1966, 5.

²⁷ Harry Harding, "The Chinese State in Crisis," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 15: *The People's Republic, Part 2: Revolutions within the Chinese Revolution 1966-1982*, eds. Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 113.

²⁸ Ma Jisen, *Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004), 15.

Therefore, we can assume that, during most of the time under study, the Chinese media spoke for the Party, the government, and the country.²⁹

Another difference is that information in the American media is more explicit because this country's political and journalist culture requires open and straightforward articulation. In China, by contrast, the government might deliver political or diplomatic messages with extreme subtlety. For example, when Zhou Enlai arranged for Edgar Snow to stand next to Mao on the Tiananmen balcony on the October Day national celebration in 1970 and had their photo published later, U.S. officials as well as journalists did not realize that it was a message from Beijing that it wanted to do business with Washington. Moreover, in an authoritarian state like China, the government often makes propagandistic statements in the media that did not reflect its actual policy. Mao and Zhou Enlai admitted that they usually "fire empty cannons."³⁰ Therefore, it is more difficult to understand the implications between the lines reading the Chinese media. I would be reading the tea leaves so to speak.

Print Media Versus Electronic Media

It is worthwhile to note that different forms of media have their own strengths in news reporting. During the time under study, U.S. newspapers and magazines reach far fewer audiences than the nightly newscasts, had much more space to elaborate a story, relied more on words and language than pictures, and offered far more opinions through editorials and

²⁹ Yu, "The Role of Chinese Media During the Cultural Revolution," 30.

³⁰ In his interview with Snow on January 9, 1965, Mao told Snow, "Wherever there is revolution, we issue a statement and hold rallies to show support... We like to fire empty cannons, but we don't send troops." See *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan*, 558. During his second trip to Beijing in October 1971, Kissinger noticed several anti-American slogans on the city walls. When he asked Zhou Enlai about those slogans, Zhou said that was just "firing empty cannon." See *FRUS 1969-1976 Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), Document 163: "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon," October 29, 1971. All documents from the U.S. Department of State's *FRUS* series are henceforth cited in the format *Title* and Document number. All are accessible at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>.

columns.³¹ As a visual medium, television is better at presenting events that are “accessible to camera and action.” Like radio, it is an “instant” source that reduces the audiences’ chance to “check and edit information” before it goes on the air and increases the risk of error or misinterpretation.³²

Although television networks are potentially more powerful than newspapers in influencing the ordinary people, students of journalism generally agreed on the importance of elite newspapers in setting the agenda. Most newspaper editors and television producers relied heavily on the *Times* and the *Post*, the wire services, a few morning columnists, and more generally, the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* to decide what was newsworthy. That is why Russ Braley argues that television seldom “discovers” or “initiates” news; it “magnifies” news that others have discovered. Later on, even though television networks became independent gatherers of news, they were limited by time constraints that left them with only about 90 seconds for each story in a 22-minute “news hole” on their 30-minute nightly programs.³³ They did not have enough space to elaborate on the background, significance and response relevant to a certain story. For this reason, some correspondents called nightly news a “headline service” that provided an outline of the day’s events. From these “headlines,” one could pick and choose and follow his interests for more information in the newspapers. According to Philip L. Geyelin, the editorial page editor of the *Washington Post* from 1968 to 1979, while television news

³¹ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 16.

³² Altheide, *Media Power*, 19; David Broder, *Behind the Front Page: A Candid Look at How the News Is Made* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 144-5.

³³ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 16-7; Russ Braley, *Bad News: The Foreign Policy of The “New York Times”* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1984), 570; Clarence Jones, *Winning with the News Media: A Self-Defense Manual When You’re the Story* (Tampa, FL: Video Consultants, 1996), 340-1; John Vivian, *The Media of Mass Communication* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001), 242.

“bombards” viewers with a “shifting series of illusions and deceptive appearances,” newspapers tidy things up, examine them so that the stories could make sense.³⁴

Moreover, the most influential members of the public including policy makers relied more on the prestige newspapers for serious news than on television, which presented short stories in “sensational packages that lacked context.” Therefore, the importance of television in influencing public opinion might be exaggerated. What makes the relationship more complicated is the fact that most officials think that television is more important than print media in affecting the public.³⁵

Due to the “inherent mechanical need” of television to have images, their reporters had been accused of being especially “susceptible to being used” by news sources. Because most stories of foreign affairs concerned the White House, and it was more difficult to get decision makers to talk on camera, stories of this kind were mostly “talking heads” and “standuppers”-- the White House correspondent, with the White House in the background, talking his story into the camera or even the anchor reading the stories in the studio.³⁶ This was even truer when it came to stories about China due to the lack of images.

Comments on Sources: Media under Study

As Melvin Small points out in *Covering Dissent*, there are numerous difficulties in analyzing the media’s coverage of a historical process: the determination of the media to be examined, the identification of important events, and the sampling method.³⁷ I select some of the

³⁴ Robert M. Batscha, *Foreign Affairs News and the Broadcast Journalist* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 50; Philip Geyelin, “The Editorial Page,” in *The Editorial Page*, ed. Laura Longley Babb (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 18.

³⁵ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 16-17.

³⁶ Batscha, *Foreign Affairs News and the Broadcast Journalist*, 32, 142.

³⁷ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 3.

most influential media in both countries and examine how they covered the important events that affected Sino-American relations.

For sources of U.S. media, I look at newspapers, magazines, and television news programs. Among newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were the most influential in this period because other major newspapers, magazines, and television networks, often accepted their definition of “what was ‘news.’” The *New York Times* is especially important because of the prominence it had gained since the 1940s when it invested heavily in foreign affairs reporting, a neglected field of journalism at the time. Since then, the *Times* had the largest, if not the best, staff of foreign correspondents. The importance of the *Times* can also be shown that several scholars use it as the major source to represent the American media when they study the foreign policy reporting.³⁸ In addition, *Time* and *Newsweek*, among magazines, and the evening newscasts of the three national networks, CBS, ABC, and NBC, were also important sources for Americans. Students of American journalism would agree with Johnson and Nixon who believed that these seven media institutions were the most important in the United States.³⁹

Among sources of the Chinese media, I mainly use *Renmin Ribao*, or the *People’s Daily*, and *Cankao Xiaoxi*, or the *Reference News*, because they represented the two levels of the Chinese communication system, one in the form of mass media, the other the internal channel.⁴⁰ *Hong Qi* (the Red Flag magazine), the “ideological journal” of the CCP,⁴¹ appear in my narrative occasionally when it published joint editorials with the *People’s Daily*. My original plan was to

³⁸ See Braley, *Bad News*, 568-9. See also Nicholas O. Berry, *Foreign Policy and the Press: An Analysis of the New York Times’ Coverage of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

³⁹ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 3.

⁴⁰ Michel Oksenberg, “Methods of Communication within the Chinese Bureaucracy,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 57 (January-March 1974), 1.

⁴¹ *NYT*, March 22, 1964, 13.

examine the *People's Liberation Army Daily* (the *PLA Daily*) as well. However, after checking a number of key events, such as Beijing's 1968 statement offering the renewal of the Warsaw Talks and Mao's photo with Snow in 1970, I find that its articles were identical to those in the *People's Daily*. So I decided not to single it out for analysis.

I do not use Chinese electronic media for several reasons. First, TV programs were not transmitted on a regular basis and the number of sets available to the Chinese public was quite limited in the 1960s. The second reason is that archives of telecasts and radio programs in China are not easy to access. The third and most important reason is that the centralized nature of the Chinese media--their common ownership by the state-owned Xinhua News Agency--decides that voices of all media forms in China should be generally identical. Important news and commentaries in TV and radio appeared in the *People's Daily* as well.

As the official publication of Central Committee of the CCP, the *People's Daily* was the most important newspaper in China and scholars often use it for studying the Chinese media. Each edition had a wide readership when it was circulated in many work units or put in bulletin boards in public areas. Under the direct control of the Central Propaganda Department, it was tasked with disseminating the Party line and policies to the people. *People's Daily* published commentaries in the following forms: editorials, which were the most commonly used; short general commentaries and articles by the paper's own commentators, which were very brief and usually more locally oriented; articles by the paper's editorial department, reserved for more abstract subjects; articles by political observers dealing with foreign issues; and articles by various dignitaries representing the voice of the CCP. Despite the variety in their names, they generally reflected the position of the CCP or the Chinese government. Editorials in this newspaper were of great importance and its level of authority ranked just under directives, Party

resolutions, and Mao's words. News stories were secondary to editorials in the newspaper. In a highly politicized culture, it was a common practice among local party branches of the CCP or various small work units consisting of adults to hold regular meetings to study the editorials of the *People's Daily*.⁴²

The *Reference News* was an internal newspaper few scholars have used in studying Sino-American relations. Founded in 1931, it was originally a classified internal publication read only by top CCP leaders and military commanders with a circulation of around fifty in the 1930s and two thousand after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. In 1957, Mao decided to turn it into an internal newspaper with its readership expanded to Communist cadres above the county-level and a limited number of non-communist intellectuals who worked with the CCP. By running news stories that were not fit to publish in the open media, Mao wanted the newspaper to function as a tool to inform the Chinese cadres about world affairs and world opinions about China, both positive and negative. In his words, "by letting the cadres know about how our enemies criticize us, *Reference News* would function as a vaccination that promoted their immune system and judgment." Its circulation was 200,000 in 1957 and 400,000 in 1964. When China was moving toward the United States, *Reference News* became even more important in preparing the Chinese cadres for the possible new relationship. On July 5, 1970, the Central Committee of the CCP issued a notice, which dramatically increased its circulation to around five million.⁴³

⁴² Yu, "The Role of Chinese Media During the Cultural Revolution," 47-50.

⁴³ Wei Guangyi, "*Mao Zedong dingzhu: ban yizhang tianxia duyiwuer de baozhi* [Mao Zedong's Urge: Make the World's Most Unique Newspaper]," *Zongheng* [Across Time and Space], no. 4 (2000), 44-6; Zhang Xinmin, "*Cankao xiaoxi: cong neibu kanwu dao gongkai faxing* [the Reference News: From Internal Publication to Public Circulation]," *Dangshi bolan* [General Review of the Communist Party of China], no. 10 (2007), 5; Li Yang, "*Cankao xiaoxi ruhe jiemi* [How to Declassify the Reference News]," *Zhongguo xinwen zhoukan* [China News Week], no. 42 (2008), 76.

As David Bonavia of the *New York Times* wrote in July 1975, *Reference News* carried “accurate though often abridged” translations of reports from the main world news agencies to keep readers informed of trends in foreign public opinion rather than to propagate the news of the Chinese leadership, although he admits the existence of a “slant.” He put it in sharp contrast to the Soviet equivalent, a weekly publication that presented only foreign materials favorable to Moscow’s propaganda line, and that regularly distorted or misinterpreted the contents of the originals for political purposes.⁴⁴

Due to its internal nature, the subscriptions of the *Reference News* had to be approved by the Party and foreigners were not allowed to access it up to the late 1970s. At one time, the ability to read this newspaper had been regarded as a privilege or a sign of social status in China. Its header used to have a notice “*neibu kanwu, zhuyi baocun*,” which means “internal circulation, please handle with discretion.” Even its used copies had to be recycled to prevent it from flowing to the public. After the *Reference News* became a newspaper, people gave it a nickname known as *xiao cankao* (Small Reference) to differentiate it from the daily internal publication called *Reference Materials*, or *da cankao* (Big Reference), which published about a hundred pages with a morning issue and an afternoon issue. As its nickname *da cankao* suggests, the *Reference Materials* was read only by the “big shots”--officials of the CCP at very high level.⁴⁵

The two U.S. newspapers during the period under study are available in the online database of ProQuest. The two magazines can be found on microfilm. Many universities in the United States have access to the *People’s Daily* database. The Harvard-Yenching library has the paper copies of the *Red Flag* magazine and the two Chinese newspapers under study on disks. It

⁴⁴ Rudolph, *Cankao-Xiaoxi: Foreign News in the Propaganda System of the People’s Republic of China*, 6-7

⁴⁵ Ibid. See also Wei, “*Mao Zedong dingzhu*,” 44-6; Zhang, “*Cankao xiaoxi: cong neibu kanwu dao gongkai faxing*,” 5; Li, “*Cankao xiaoxi ruhe jiemi*,” 76.

also has the *People's Daily* on microfilm. Now many newspapers, both American and Chinese, have been digitalized into searchable items via key words and dates. One problem is that the number of entries turned out by the search engine might be hugely different depending on what criteria the researcher uses. Another problem with digitalized newspapers articles is that they have been singled out as separate entries, usually with pictures and cartoons omitted because of property right issues. Therefore, reading the digitalized article is vastly different from reading the actual newspaper on the microfilm, which tells more about the context of that article. One of the ways to compensate for these problems is to use the *New York Times* index, which gives a complete picture about what entries and how many there are in each newspaper. Besides showing the location of each news entry, the number of entries in the index also shows the amount of attention given and how long it remained in the spotlight.

The political narrative requires the actual policy inputs of both countries. On the American side, I use the series of *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* and the *Department of State Bulletin* published by the Department of State, the *Congressional Record*, in addition to the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United State*. Chinese primary sources include works of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai on diplomacy, the *Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai*, and the multi-volumes of the *Manuscripts of Mao Zedong*, all published by the Central Party Literature Press of China. Moreover, many of the conversations between Chinese leaders and foreign leaders concerning the Indochina Wars and Sino-Soviet conflicts had been declassified and compiled into working papers in the *Bulletins of the Cold War International History Project* by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. In addition, I have read the memoirs of senior officials, diplomats, and prominent journalists in both countries.

Sampling Method: How to Read the Media

After the selection of the media to examine, I set up the chronological boundary, which covers the administration of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon's first term. It starts with Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman's major policy speech in 1963, which signified a new U.S. posture toward China, and ends with Nixon's visit in 1972. Over this ten-year period, I select a number of key events that affected Sino-American relations and examine how they were covered by the mainstream media in their respective countries. The identification of these key events can be subjective. However, I try to pick those whose importance has been agreed upon by most historians. These events are: the Hilsman Speech in 1963; the French Recognition of China, the escalation of the Vietnam War, and China's nuclear test in 1964; the Fulbright Hearings and the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966; the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the beginning of the Paris talks, and the Chinese offer to resume the Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks in Warsaw (known as the Warsaw Talks) in 1968; the Sino-Soviet border clashes and U.S. overtures to China in 1969; the resumption of the Warsaw Talks and Edgar Snow's visit to China in 1970; Ping-Pong Diplomacy and Henry Kissinger's secret trip to China in 1971, and finally Nixon's trip in 1972.

For each event, I briefly describe its development on the basis of secondary accounts and memoirs. It should be noted that several of the events did not happen on a single day, but consisted of events that occurred over a long period of time, for example, the Cultural Revolution, the Sino-Soviet conflict, and the Sino-Vietnam split. For these events, I devote more space to their historical background.

After the narration of the event, I examine how the elite U.S. media covered it in terms of headlines, placement, opinions, and the general evaluation of the significance. If there were

photos or political cartoons attached, I describe them and interpret their implications, evaluating their possible influence on the audience. If one event that I think is important was not covered by a certain source, it is always worthwhile to explain the reason for the silence. To locate articles from the ProQuest database, I use the search engine on the basis of the date and key words. From the larger sample of articles, I mainly focus on front-page stories, editorials, and columns, eliminating when possible duplicate ideas and arguments. The selection process also involves placement, relevancy, and the reputation of the columnists.

In his study of the media coverage of the antiwar movement, Melvin Small does not look at editorials because he argues that for print media, headlines, lead paragraphs, and pictures on the front pages are more important in influencing the public than editorials or columns that are usually buried deep. He also believes that editorials of elite newspapers tend to be more conservative than their more objective news articles. Richard Nixon also holds that editorial pages of the newspapers “tilt right,” while their reports from the Washington bureau generally “tilt left.”⁴⁶

Small’s argument is true indeed, but the importance of news articles, especially front-page stories, does not necessarily mean that editorials and columns are not important. According to a report based on a research by Belden Associates, on a Newspaper Association of American Report detailing a national survey of newspaper readership, on a 1993 study of media and their markets by Simmons Market Research Bureau, and on a review of academic research into readership patterns, editorial readership is next only to general news for adult readers at every level of education and ranks ahead of categories that include sports, business, entertainment, food, and home. Similar studies in 1994 show that 79 percent of adult readers who read

⁴⁶ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 4, 13; Richard Nixon, *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 254.

newspapers daily read or look at the editorial page. More importantly, these studies show that editorial page readers tend to be “older, more affluent, and better educated,” which means their readers are more likely to “hold sway” in public affairs.⁴⁷ Moreover, even Small agrees that editorials and opinions in newspapers had more influence on the presidents than news stories because they were given special importance in the news summaries of the Johnson and Nixon administrations. They seemed to think that “publicly expressed opinions” were more important in influencing Americans than front-page news stories.⁴⁸

Time and *Newsweek* are available on microfilm. In order to locate relevant articles on an event, I use *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* in combination with the magazines' own indices. As magazines were published once a week, timeliness was obviously not their strength, which lay in the large amount of pictures, political cartoons, and in-depth analysis. Magazines could also prioritize a topic by putting it on their covers.

Then I turn to television programs. During most of the time under study, the U.S. television networks did not have many images from China due to their lack of access to the country and the extremely rare interactions between Chinese and Americans. Moreover, the Vanderbilt University Television News Archives' videotape collection in Nashville extends back only to 1968. Of the three networks, only CBS maintains an archive for pre-1968 broadcasts. But they are not open to public use.⁴⁹ Therefore, I use more sources in the print media, especially the two elite newspapers, than television footage in studying the period between 1963 and 1967. Even though U.S. telecasts become part of my narrative from 1968, it was not until Ping-Pong Diplomacy in April 1971 that they began to play a substantially more prominent role in Sino-

⁴⁷ Steven M. Hallock, *Editorials and Opinion: The Dwindling Marketplace of Ideas in Today's News* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 23.

⁴⁸ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

American relations. In watching television footage, I mainly look at the direction of the camera, symbols in the picture, activities and expressions of people featured in the video because these elements could potentially influence the audience's perception of the event. For "talking heads" in the studio, I examine the expression, tone, and arguments of the anchors.

Because of the differences between the media in the two countries, I have come upon different issues in looking at them. In studying the U.S. media, I address the issue of their relationship with the government to see if they played an independent role in America's China policy. When it comes to the Chinese side, evaluation of the media enables me to obtain hints about Beijing's attitude because of their close relationship with the Party and the government.

When reading the *People's Daily*, I pay attention to the placement, the headlines, and the format of an article. Usually, editorials appearing jointly with *Red Flag* and the *PLA Daily* are more important than articles in other formats. For a specific article, I examine how it characterized the United States, sometimes in comparison to the Soviet Union, to find clues about official attitudes toward them. From the propaganda or the "empty cannon," I try to find nuances such as the demonstration of commitment. With regard to the *Reference News*, I mainly focus on the placement of the story and especially how it dealt with the signals from the United States in order to see what kind of information Beijing released to the cadres.

In a more general sense, I look at the differences among the media and try to explain why. For example, the differences between the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in their reporting of China might reflect the opinions of different groups. On the other hand, the different attitude to the United States in the *People's Daily* and the *Reference News* reflected how Beijing communicated its foreign policies to people at different positions of the political hierarchy. I am also interested in how the media in both countries responded to each other because usually the

reporting of the media in one country would attract the attention of the other. The interpretation of news reporting from the other side could potentially affect the domestic audience. Moreover, I look at the relationship between the actual governmental policy and the media representation. Usually the discrepancy between governmental “words” and “deeds” on certain issues had implications. It is my job to explain the causes of the differences.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter one covers the period from Hilsman’s speech in late 1963 to the Fulbright Hearings in spring 1966. By working with the critics from academic and congressional circles, the U.S. media contributed to the “depoliticization” of the China issue in the public arena.⁵⁰ The Chinese media’s attitude toward the United States, on the other hand, changed from moderately hostile to radically hostile during this period. They responded to the new developments in the United States with mockery and vigilance, describing them as “hoax” and “tools of peaceful transformation.”

The second chapter deals with the high point of the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1968, during which the Chinese media promoted Beijing’s image as a fighter against both “American imperialists” and “Soviet revisionists” in order to inspire the struggle against Mao’s political enemies. While the voices calling for a more flexible China policy in the U.S. media were overwhelmed by stories of recurrent violence in China, their coverage of its troubles with Moscow and Hanoi presented a disorganized and greatly weakened China that had become less of a threat to the United States.

Chapter three examines 1969, when the eruption of Sino-Soviet border clashes brought Beijing and Washington closer. Whereas Washington assumed a public posture of detachment, the U.S. media openly elaborated on the benefits of closer ties with Beijing. When Beijing

⁵⁰ Lumbers, “Staying out of This Chinese Muddle,” 285.

showed a genuine concern for a Soviet surprise attack in its media, the *Reference News* started to report on U.S. overtures despite the rigid rhetoric in the *People's Daily*.

Chapter four looks at the “intricate minuet” between Beijing and Washington from the renewal of the Warsaw talks in early 1970 to Kissinger’s secret trip to Beijing in July 1971. During this period, Beijing became a much more active player in promoting Sino-American rapprochement, especially through the media. The U.S. media’s positive reports of China, especially during Ping-Pong Diplomacy, helped to change its image into a rational country possible to deal with.

The last chapter looks at the period between Kissinger’s secret visit to Nixon’s trip to China in 1972. While Nixon started his media campaign to prepare for the show in Beijing, the Chinese government used its media to prepare its people for the dramatic change in relations with its former number-one enemy. The China visit turned into a “TV spectacle” when massive media coverage contributed to and became part of this success story of public relations.

Chapter 2: The Depoliticization of the China Issue: 1963-1966

The period between late 1963 and spring 1966 witnessed the gradual “depoliticization” of the China issue in the United States.¹ The speech of Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Roger Hilsman in December 1963 was received favorably as a change in U.S. posture toward China. In 1964 China established diplomatic relations with France and successfully exploded its first atomic bomb. These two events dramatically elevated Beijing’s international position and posed new challenges to the China policy of the Johnson administration, which faced increasing pressure to include China into the international community.

The U.S. escalation in Vietnam, especially the introduction of ground-combat troops in 1965, caused great concern in the United States about the danger of military confrontations with China. This concern provided a strong logic for a reappraisal of U.S. policy toward China. During the highly publicized Fulbright Hearings in spring 1966, the “containment without isolation” thesis proposed by the academics received overwhelmingly favorable responses in journalistic as well as official circles. The media’s coverage of the hearings was important in “legitimizing” the airing of views that would have been considered dangerous in the 1950s.²

By looking at the media coverage of the events from Hilsman’s speech through the French recognition, the Chinese nuclear test, and U.S. escalation in Vietnam to the Fulbright Hearings, this chapter examines how influential U.S. media acted as vocal critics of the Johnson administration’s rigid policy toward China and how they contributed to the “depoliticization” of the China issue. It also examines how Chinese media responded to the new developments in the United States.

¹ Michael Lumbers, “‘Staying out of This Chinese Muddle’: The Johnson Administration’s Response to the Cultural Revolution,” *Diplomatic History* vol. 31, no. 2 (April 2007), 285.

² See *New York Times* (hereafter as *NYT*), March 9, 1966, 1; *Washington Post* (hereafter as *WP*), March 9, 1966, 1; Michael Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain: Tentative Bridge-Building to China During the Johnson Years* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2008), 155.

U.S.-China relations to 1963

In 1949, the relationship between the United States and the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) was shaped by the larger Cold War context. Before the establishment of the PRC, Mao Zedong had declared openly that China would "lean to one side" and join the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union. Not in a hurry to extend recognition to China, the Truman administration adopted Secretary of State Dean Acheson's policy to "wait until the dust settles."³ The breakout of the Korean War in 1950, the American effort to stop the Chinese Communists from taking over Taiwan, and the fight between the two countries on the Korean peninsula shattered the last hope of a better relationship.

The policy of "containment and isolation" set up by the Truman administration became the foundation of America's China policy over the next two decades. Under this policy, the United States refused to recognize the newly established People's Republic and blocked its admission to the United Nations. Moreover, it placed an economic embargo on China and formed military alliances with South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and South Vietnam to contain its "expansion." Due to the McCarthy witch hunt in the early 1950s and the powerful influence of the China Lobby, an interest group consisting of "zealous protagonists" of the Nationalist government on Taiwan,⁴ any talk about changing this policy became risky politically.

The Republican administration of Dwight Eisenhower did not show any interest in improving relations with China. It pursued a "wedge strategy" designed to split China from the Soviet Union by placing "diplomatic, economic, and military pressure" on Beijing that Moscow

³ Robert J. McMahon, *Dean Acheson and the Creation of an American World Order* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2009), 99.

⁴ John King Fairbank, Introduction to *American Policy toward Communist China: 1949-1969*, by Foster Rhea Dulles (New York: Crowell, 1972), vi.

would be unable or unwilling to relieve.⁵ As the primary architect of this policy, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles believed that it would eventually produce the “desired rupture” between them.⁶ This policy also froze U.S.-China relations between 1953 and 1960 in a state of high tension, which was well reflected in the two Taiwan Strait Crises in 1954 and 1958.

The tension between China and the United States lessened a little under the presidency of John F. Kennedy. When he was a senator, Kennedy had criticized the rigid China policy of the Republican administration in a *Foreign Affairs* article in 1957.⁷ In one of his television debates with Richard Nixon during the 1960 campaign, Kennedy advocated forsaking the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, which lied within the canon range Chinese forces, to avoid military confrontations with China. This position nearly cost his election and he had to change his position later.⁸ When Kennedy entered the White House, China was ending its disastrous Great Leap Forward. Millions of Chinese lives had perished due to the famine it caused. Kennedy flirted with the idea of shipping famine-relieving wheat to China, but on the condition that Beijing requested it first. When the Nationalists planned to invade China in 1962, U.S. representatives told the Chinese at the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw that Washington would not support their war effort. Xia Yafeng argues that the pro-Taiwan sentiment in the United States, Beijing’s militancy during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and its attempt to acquire a nuclear capability, dissuaded Kennedy from ending the policy of containment and isolation.⁹

⁵ Harry Harding and Yuan Ming, *Sino-American Relations, 1945-1955: A Joint Reassessment of a Critical Decade* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1989), xxiii.

⁶ Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 87.

⁷ John F. Kennedy, “A Democrat Looks at Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 36, no. 1 (October 1957), 44-59.

⁸ Stephen Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician: 1913-1962* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 579-80.

⁹ Xia Yafeng, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks During the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 117, 216.

Hilsman's Speech

Though Sino-American relations did not improve much during the Kennedy administration, there had been a reformist sentiment among higher-level officials dealing with the China policy.¹⁰ Roger Hilsman claims that even the president himself authorized an attempt to open the door to a normalization of relations with China not long after the Cuban Missile Crisis and the signing of the limited nuclear test-ban treaty in 1963.¹¹ Kennedy lost the chance to do more with his assassination on November 22, 1963.

On December 13, three weeks after Kennedy's death, Hilsman made a major speech on China policy in his address to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco. In this speech he stated that the United States would like to "keep the door open" to negotiations with Communist China if the Chinese leaders forsake their "venomous hatred" of the United States. Acknowledging that the Communist regime was not likely to be overthrown, Hilsman expressed hope that Chinese leaders "at the second echelon" would take a realistic approach and that they would realize that the Great Leap Forward reflected "a stubborn addiction to theories which did not work in modern world."¹² Six years earlier, also in San Francisco, John Foster Dulles had reiterated the American policy of "no recognition, no U.N. seat and no trade and cultural interchanges" with China. He had confidently assumed that Communist rule in China was a "passing and not a perpetual phase."¹³

¹⁰ For a detailed study of the China policy reform attempts during the Kennedy administration, see Rosemary Foot, "Redefinitions: The Domestic Context of America's China Policy in the 1960s," in *Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973*, eds. Robert Ross and Jiang Changbin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 264-5.

¹¹ Roger Hilsman, *The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs: Conceptual Models and Bureaucratic Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1987), 273.

¹² Roger Hilsman, "United States Policy toward Communist China." *Department of State Bulletin 50* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964): 11-17. Accessible at www.heinonline.org

¹³ John Foster Dulles, "Our Policies toward Communism in China." *Department of State Bulletin 37* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1957): 91-95.

The *New York Times* placed the Hilsman speech on its front page with “KEY POLICY STATEMENT” in the headline. Calling the speech “a new exposition of policy toward China-- the first such major statement from either the Kennedy or Johnson administration,” it pointed out that it had been “cleared through higher levels of the administration” and the text of the speech had been distributed by the State Department. In a column “Looking Toward Peking: Washington Shows New Frankness on Policies Long under Discussion,” Max Frankel, chief of the *Times*’ Washington Bureau and its major China watcher, claimed that the most important thing about the speech was that “it was made at all.” While calling Kennedy’s China advisers timid because of the offensives of Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) and the China Lobby during the 1950s, he described the Chinese leaders as “prudent and sensible.” Frankel also appealed to readers by saying that the statement was “aimed at Americans” and that it was a call for their “realism and moderation” in dealing with Beijing.¹⁴

The *Washington Post* did not give the speech as much prominence as the *Times*, placing it on page five. Even though it called China the “most populous and most embittered” nation in the world, the article favorably reviewed Hilsman’s “dispassionate” speech, putting it in contrast to Dulles’ statement six years earlier, which it described as having been “couched in tones of outrage and indignation.” In its editorial, the *Post* again pointed out that while Dulles’ statement had “a certain fatalism,” Hilsman’s version saw “a certain prospect for change.” It criticized the absence of fresh policy on China by asking a question, “After six years, has the United States nothing more to say than that if China changes, the situation might improve? Not even a trial balloon?”¹⁵

¹⁴ *NYT*, December 14, 1963, 1; November 16, 1963, 3.

¹⁵ *WP*, December 14, 1963, A5; December 15, 1963, E6.

Newsweek described Hilsman's speech as the administration's "tentative, probing move designed to test the reaction--both at home and in Peking--to a subtle change in its attitude toward China."¹⁶ Interestingly, *Time* was silent on Hilsman's speech. Instead, it followed Chinese Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai's six-week trip to Africa. Referring to Zhou as "the grandest panjandrum from Peking ever" to visit that continent, *Time* claimed that China obviously wanted to establish "the yellow man's burden" even if it "could not afford to pick it up." Here the word "panjandrum" sounds much more evil than "leader," and "the yellow man's burden" compared the Chinese diplomatic activities in African to Western colonial conquest of this region in the past. When Hilsman resigned from office in early 1964, *Time* described him as an "aggressive and abrasive" man hindering the teamwork necessary for coordinating policy. It even quoted a State Department official who said Hilsman's resignation was just a "two-day deal" and they did not mind.¹⁷

The hostility of *Time* to China was closely related to its owner Henry Luce, the son of missionary parents who had worked in China before 1949. Luce liked to tell friends that the only ambassadorship he would take was to a "restored democracy in China." His championing of the Nationalists was so much that by the time they were driven out of the mainland, Chiang Kai-shek had appeared on the cover of *Time* more often than anyone else--even more frequently than Roosevelt or Churchill or Hitler.¹⁸ Luce was a leading member of the China Lobby, in which the most important nation-wide bipartisan organization was called the Committee of One Million, founded in 1953 to mobilize sentiment against any "appeasement of Communist China." Two weeks after Hilsman's speech, the *Times* reported that the committee attacked him for "departing

¹⁶ *Newsweek*, December 30, 1963, 27.

¹⁷ *Time*, December 20, 1963, 22; March 6, 1964, 27.

¹⁸ Stephen J. Whitefield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 160.

from” official U.S. policy by promoting a “two-China” solution. However, it buried the story deep,¹⁹ and the *Post* ignored the story. Overall, positive responses to Hilsman’s speech far outweighed criticisms in the U.S. media under examination.

In his memoir, Hilsman describes the birth of his speech as more like a reformist movement from below rather than one initiated from above. According to him, James C. Thomson, Jr. the Special Assistant in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs; Lindsey Grant, Officer in charge of Mainland China Affairs; Allen S. Whiting, Director of the Office of Research for Far Eastern Affairs; Joseph W. Neubert, also a special assistant in Far Eastern Affairs; and Abram Manell, Public Affairs Adviser for Far Eastern Affairs, were all involved in drafting the speech. In order to make sure the American people understood its significance, he pointed out, Allen Whiting had briefed the press, the two wire services, the two local Washington papers and especially the *New York Times*, telling them the speech signified a “departure of historical significance,” especially from Dulles’ China policy statement of 1957. As a former professor and a graduate of West Point with ten years of service in the Army, Hilsman believed he could “blunt” the criticism from the far left as well as the far right.²⁰

As Hilsman stated, the speech was cleared by the Defense Department, various branches of the State Department and the White House staff. However, it was George Ball who read and approved the speech as the Acting Secretary because Dean Rusk was away for weekend.²¹ Actually, Rusk was shocked by the Hilsman speech and expressed reservations about it in

¹⁹ Seymour Topping, *On the Front Lines of the Cold War: An American Correspondent's Journal from the Chinese Civil War to the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 325. See also *NYT*, December 31, 1963, 22.

²⁰ Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Delta, 1968), 350-5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 355.

private.²² Moreover, President Johnson did not read and comment on the speech because by being “not too closely and personally identified with the decision to make it,” he could avoid taking responsibility if it backfired.²³ Hilsman’s resignation in February 1964, to some extent, suggests that his China approach was not widely shared by the major policy makers of the Johnson team. It does not matter whether the speech was Hilsman’s own initiative or it had been approved by the White House. What matters is that the audience got the impression that the Johnson administration was considering a new posture towards China. Here the impression created by the media is more important than the actual positions of policy-makers.

Hilsman’s speech, as he said, served as a “test balloon” of public reaction at very little risk to the Johnson administration’s future choice about the issue.²⁴ Media’s positive response, as James Thomson observed in his recommendations to National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, suggested “a dramatic ebbing of passions on the China issue over the past decade.”²⁵ The ebbing of passion opened the door for more reasonable talk about a flexible China policy.

The Chinese media response to Hilsman’s speech was mild at the beginning. The *People’s Daily* ran an article entitled “Hilsman Whining, Trapped in the Dead Alley of Anti-China, the U.S. is Attempting to Play Double Sides to Avoid Defeat.” Interestingly, other than the sarcastic title, the article was moderate in tone as it fairly covered the main ideas of Hilsman’s speech: the United States had to acknowledge the Communist government was here to stay and expanding its influence; the United States was not ignoring the seven hundred million

²² Nancy B. Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 96.

²³ Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, 354-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, China*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964), Document 63: “Memorandum From James C. Thomson, Jr., of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs,” October 28, 1964. All documents from the U.S. Department of State’s *FRUS* series are henceforth cited in the format *Title* and Document number. All are accessible at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>

Chinese but trying to talk to them through channels like Warsaw; the two-Chinas policy; an “open door” policy to push China give up its rigid policy and accept a diversified world.²⁶ There was neither a vicious attack on the American policy nor any commitment of official position.

Two months later, the *People's Daily* published a much longer editorial with severe attacks on U.S. officials' recent talks about a possible “open door to China.” It reiterated the Chinese support for the national liberation struggles in Asia, Africa as well as Latin America, and warned the United States to give up hope that the Chinese leaders of the second echelon would surrender their rigid values of class struggle. It even drew a parallel to 1949 when the United States should not have had hope for the lovers of individual freedom and democracy in China. At last, it argued that the change in U.S. policy served as a good “counter-example” that would only “reinforce the confidence and determination” of the Chinese and Asian people in their fighting against American imperialists.²⁷ Later on, even the *Times* noted the CCP's theoretical journal *Red Flag's* concern that its young members might be subverted by Western influences when it urged older party members to educate future leaders in revolutionary traditions. Without any interest in reconciliation with Washington, Beijing viewed its flexibility as a tool of “peaceful transformation” that might dampen the revolutionary spirit of the Chinese people.²⁸ It ridiculed Washington's new posture in order to frustrate any hope of better relations between the two countries.

The Chinese media response was in line with the guideline set by a Standing Committee meeting of the CCP's politburo held from January 7 to 17, 1960 and chaired by Mao. The guideline suggested that China should “fully expose the imperialistic nature” of the United States and stress that it was still the “root of war, the enemy to world peace, to the national liberation

²⁶ *People's Daily* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1963) (Hereafter as *PD*), December 15, 1963, 3.

²⁷ *PD*, February 19, 1964, 3.

²⁸ *NYT*, March 22, 1964, 13.

movement and world socialism,” and that it was trying to destroy world revolution with methods including subversion and deception. With regard to the ambassadorial talks in Warsaw, it advocated a policy of “talk without breaking, talk but not in haste,” which meant that China would keep negotiating with Washington, but it would not establish diplomatic relations in haste. The idea was that delaying a few more years was good for China.²⁹ After the Sino-Soviet split became public in July 1963, when the Soviet Union signed the test-ban treaty with Great Britain and the United States, Chinese attitude toward the United States became even more militant. In competing with Moscow over who had more revolutionary credentials, Beijing did not want to be viewed as “being soft” on the “imperialists.”

The French Recognition of China

When 1963 approached its end, the *Times* carried an editorial “An Atmosphere of Détente” to describe the world situation. Among the evidence for optimism, it listed the statements of President Johnson, West German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s “gratification” at Johnson’s call for an end to the cold war, and Zhou Enlai’s remark that China was seeking “peaceful coexistence with all nations.”³⁰ Zhou made the remark in a televised interview with the French state television during a visit to Morocco. While the *Post* placed Zhou’s interview on page six, focusing on Zhou’s remark about peaceful existence, the *Times* placed the story on its front page, focusing on his remark that he hoped for a “normalization” of relations between France and China.³¹ By that time, France and China were indeed close to establishing diplomatic relations.

²⁹ Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan: 1956-1966 zhongsu guanxi huiyilu* [Ten Years of Polemics: A Memoir of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1956-1966] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999), 241-2, 247.

³⁰ *NYT*, December 31, 1963, 18.

³¹ *WP*, December 31, 1963, A6; *NYT*, December 31, 1963, 1.

On January 7, 1964, the French government informed U.S. Ambassador Charles Bohlen that it had decided to extend recognition to the People's Republic of China.³² Before the official announcements from Beijing and Paris, the White House chose to leak the information to the media, as could be seen in the "authoritative sources" in the *Times* and "informed sources confirmed" in the *Post* in their front-page stories. The *Post* interpreted it as an "official reluctance to acknowledge the development."³³ In a phone conversation with his "mentor" Senator Richard Russell (D-GA),³⁴ President Johnson said he would send a low-key protest for the record. When Russell said, "the time's going to come when we're going to have to recognize them," Johnson admitted, "Yeah, I think so--don't think there's any question about it." Russell pointed out that it was "poison" politically at the time.³⁵ Russell was right, American public opinion was not ready for a change in China policy in 1964. A January Gallop Poll showed that 71 percent of the respondents thought that Beijing should not be admitted to the UN.³⁶

As the *Times* reported, the Committee of One Million published an advertisement with the signature of 72 sponsors in the *International Herald Tribune*, appealing to the people of France to oppose President Charles de Gaulle's decision. *Le Monde* refused to publish the advertisement without giving a reason. The *Times* also refused to carry it on the account that the committee could not certify that it had obtained the consent of all persons named as sponsors for using their names.³⁷

When Johnson was asked to comment on the French intention to recognize China in a press conference on January 25, he simply said, "we gave them our views and the general effect

³² Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 63.

³³ *NYT*, January 18, 1964, 1; *WP*, January 18, 1964, A1.

³⁴ Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 64.

³⁵ *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, China*, Document 2.

³⁶ George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* vol. III (New York: Random House, 1972), 1864.

³⁷ *NYT*, January 24, 1964, 2.

it would have on the alliance and on the free world, and it is a matter for them to decide.” When Paris and Beijing finally made the joint announcement two days later, the State Department called the French move “an unfortunate step when the Chinese Communists were actively promoting aggression and subversion in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.”³⁸ The U.S. government kept a low profile probably because of the frustration after repeated attempts to stop the French move had failed.

The French recognition of China did not come as a surprise to the American audience. Rumors of a Sino-French understanding had been spread since June 1963 when both countries rejected the Limited Test Ban Treaty agreed on by the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union.³⁹ The *Times*, for example, reported frequent diplomatic and economic exchanges between China and France between October and December in 1963. Among them were visits to Beijing by prominent French businessmen and high-level official such as Senator Edgar Faure, a former premier close to de Gaulle. In mid-December 1963, de Gaulle reportedly reassured Secretary of State Dean Rusk that he had no intention to recognize China in the near future.⁴⁰ As a man of vision, Charles de Gaulle was convinced that sooner or later China would become a major power with its reserves of manpower and resources.⁴¹ He thought it was wise to deal with the nation before being forced to do so when it grew. De Gaulle may have been the first Western statesman

³⁸ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Lyndon Johnson 1963-64* (hereafter as *PPPUS*), Book I, 231; *Department of State Bulletin* 50 (1964), 260. Both the *Public Papers of the Presidents* and *Department of State Bulletin* are accessible at www.heinonline.org.

³⁹ Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 63. The treaty was tentatively concluded on July 25 and officially signed in Moscow on August 5, 1963. See Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy*, 117.

⁴⁰ *NYT*, October 27, 1963, 13; November 21, 1963, 8; December 1, 1963, 7; December 28, 1963, 4; December 17, 1967, 3.

⁴¹ Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope: Renewal and Endeavor*. Translated by Terence Kilmartin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971), 201.

to appreciate the importance of the Sino-Soviet split and decided to take advantage of it.⁴² This grand design strategy is one of the reasons why Richard Nixon admired him. Things developed faster than the U.S. government was willing to see. Within a month of his meeting with Rusk, de Gaulle announced his decision that was disappointing to the secretary and embarrassing to the recently inaugurated Lyndon Johnson.

If the official attitude toward the French recognition of China can be described as *unhappy if acquiesced*, U.S. media showed more passion over the issue. The *Times* front-page article described the French move as a “personal policy of General de Gaulle” and a “defiant challenge” to the United States and that Washington was “informed,” not “consulted.” It argued that the “reaffirmation” of France’s role as a “great independent world power” was the motive behind the move. C. L. Sulzberger, the foreign affairs correspondent of the *Times* and part of the family that owned the newspaper, in his column “Foreign Affairs,” claimed that de Gaulle “jabbed” the United States at a time of “maximum inconvenience.” In his column “Washington,” James Reston, the associate editor of the *Times*, maintained that the “weakness and the greatness” of Charles de Gaulle was that “he is so sure that he is right.” He called the general a “trouble least sensitive to the personal feelings of other men.”⁴³ The *Post* editorial argued that de Gaulle’s reputation made people suspect that he approached China not for any legitimate goal or because of any serious calculation, but merely to “play out his private dream for France and to irk the United States en route.”⁴⁴

Different from newspapers, magazines used more dramatic language in order to attract readers’ attention. *Time* claimed de Gaulle had “detonated a political bomb that scattered fallout

⁴² Franz Schurmann, *The Foreign Politics of Richard Nixon: Grand Design* (University of California, Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1987), 24; See also Edward A. Kolodziej, *French International Policy under de Gaulle and Pompidou: The Politics of Grandeur* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 323.

⁴³ *NYT*, January 18 1964, 1, 22; January 24, 1964, 26.

⁴⁴ *WP*, January 19, 1964, E6; January 21, 1964, 13.

from the Formosa Strait to Washington's Foggy Bottom." In its summary of the world response, the newsweekly paid more attention to negative ones from West Germany, some African countries, and especially the Chinese Nationalists who referred to the situation as a "state of war," predicting that a "showdown was not far off." Its political cartoons pictured de Gaulle as "a buzzing gadfly, a silly rake wooing an Oriental tart, a kook cutting loose a dangerous dragon."⁴⁵ In contrast to the general hostility of *Time*, the response of *Newsweek* was milder. It called the French decision as "troublesome" as America's enemies. Its political cartoon featured an arrogant de Gaulle riding a horse side by side with a silly-looking Mao on a small donkey, with a subtitle "Don Charles and Sancho Mao: Who is leading whom?"⁴⁶ It was more of a mockery of de Gaulle's decision rather than a demonization.

Despite their attack on de Gaulle's personal style and the "timing and manners" by which he made the announcement, journalists did not simply follow the official line that blamed China's "subversion and aggression in Southeast Asia and elsewhere." Several of them dwelled upon the possible benefits to the United States. For example, a *Times* editorial argued that the Paris-Beijing agreement was a blow to American "national pride" rather than "national interests." While blaming de Gaulle as "substantially, but not entirely" responsible for the deterioration of Franco-American relations, it argued that American policy toward China was "equally in need of reappraisal" since forty-nine countries had recognized the Communist regime. It maintained that UN membership might be a "restraining influence" and that a negotiation including China might help solve the problem in South Vietnam.⁴⁷

The *Post* editorial argued that the United States would benefit from the French move in the long run because it would sustain the Sino-Soviet quarrel and test the "taming effects of

⁴⁵ *Time*, January 24, 1964, 23-4; February 7, 1964, 60.

⁴⁶ *Newsweek*, January 20, 1964, 27.

⁴⁷ *NYT*, January 24, 1964, 26.

diplomacy and commerce” on China. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning column “Today and Tomorrow” in the *Post*, Walter Lippmann claimed that the French recognition was a good thing because it “opens the door, or at least unlocks the door” that the government of Beijing was in fact the government of China. As he claimed, even though the U.S. government would go through the “formality” of protesting the French move, Americans should be grateful because “it takes the situation off the dead center.”⁴⁸

In another *Newsweek* political cartoon, de Gaulle bends over to poke at the body of a fat Mao while an angry Johnson in a cowboy dress stood afar yelling, “...I say he doesn’t exist.” The article underneath the cartoon argued, “though officials in the U.S. pretend Communist China doesn’t exist, it has long been recognized that eventual admission of Peking into the world community was inevitable.”⁴⁹ What they targeted at was the U.S. policy of deliberately ignoring the existence of China.

The issue of French recognition remained in the spotlight for a much longer period than Hilsman’s speech. An important reason was the media’s obsession with the prospect of China’s UN membership caused by the French move, which the Johnson administration was unwilling to talk too much about. The United States hoped that Taiwan would not be too hasty to cut off relations with France so that it would reduce the accomplishment of the Chinese government on the mainland. On the day when the French government informed the United States of its decision to recognize China, McGeorge Bundy suggested to President Johnson if Taiwan did not break relations with France, it would “put the monkey right back on Peking’s back.”⁵⁰

U.S. media wanted to see how the idea of “two Chinas” would play out because it would open a door to solve the problem of China’s membership in the UN without sacrificing Taiwan.

⁴⁸ *WP*, January 19, 1964, E6; January 21, 1964, 13.

⁴⁹ *Newsweek*, February 3, 1964, 31.

⁵⁰ *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, China*, Document 2.

Noting that Beijing did not ask Paris to break off relations with Taiwan as a precondition for recognition, the *Times* called it a “Communist concession,” which it regarded as the reason why France moved so rapidly. Similarly, the *Post* called attention to the fact that the French government used the word “establishing” instead of “re-establishing” relations in the communiqué. It interpreted this nuance as a sign that Paris was leaving the possibility open that Taiwan could retain ties with Paris. Its news analysis argued that the French recognition might lead to similar moves by other nations, as the “tactical concession” of Beijing could enable it to pick up more recognitions and get closer to UN membership.⁵¹

The U.S. media’s hope for “two Chinas” turned out to be wishful thinking. In an editorial celebrating the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France, the *People’s Daily* especially attacked U.S. media’s speculation that China had become “soft” on the “two-China” policy and reiterated Beijing’s determination to “liberate Taiwan.”⁵² On February 10, 1964, when the French Foreign Ministry announced that its government no longer regarded the Nationalists as representing China in Paris, Taiwan announced its break of relations with France. As the *Times* said on its front page, this break not only saved the difficulty of de Gaulle, but also ended the possibility of “two Chinas.”⁵³

France was the first major Western power that extended full diplomatic recognition to China since the Korean War. As a *Times* headline described, it was the “first Western break from U.S. aim of isolating China in fourteen years.”⁵⁴ Though the media under study generally did not like de Gaulle’s personality and the way he embarrassed President Johnson, they voiced criticism

⁵¹ *NYT*, January 18, 1964, 1; *WP*, January 28, 1964, A1.

⁵² *PD*, January 29, 1964, 1.

⁵³ *NYT*, February 11, 1964, 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, January 28, 1964, 1.

of the administration's rigid policy of isolating or simply ignoring China. Their voices constituted a challenge to the Johnson administration.

Chinese Nuclear Test

On October 16, 1964, one day after Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's fall from power, China successfully exploded its first nuclear bomb. In its official declaration, Beijing celebrated it as a "great contribution to safeguarding world peace." Labeling the test-ban treaty a "fraud" intending to keep the three powers' "nuclear monopoly," it proposed a world summit conference to discuss the "total banning" and "complete destruction" of nuclear weapons.⁵⁵

The official U.S. reaction was to discount the military significance of the Chinese explosion and to reassure the American public that Washington was prepared for it. In a television address, President Johnson said that China still needed many years to build a stockpile of reliable weapons with effective delivery means and the "free world nuclear strength will continue to be greater." He also stated that the bomb was a "tragedy" for the Chinese people because the government used its scarce sources, which might be useful improving their lives, to build a "crude nuclear device" which would only "increase the sense of insecurity of the Chinese people."⁵⁶ Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara said at a news conference that the "long-anticipated" explosion of a "primitive nuclear device" in China did not require any change in U.S. strategic plans.⁵⁷ As to the Chinese call for world summit conference banning nuclear weapons, the State Department called it "neither serious nor constructive." Dean Rusk dismissed it as a propaganda "smokescreen."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *PD*, October 17, 1964, 1.

⁵⁶ *PPPUS*, Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1964) Book II, 1357-8.

⁵⁷ *WP*, October 23, 1964, A1.

⁵⁸ *NYT*, October 22, 1964, 1; October 24, 1964, 1. See "Mr. Rusk and Mr. Bundy Interviewed on Red China's Nuclear Testing," *Department of State Bulletin* 51 (1964), 615.

Despite the reassurance of the government, U.S. media showed two major concerns in their evaluation of the significance of the Chinese bomb: the threat caused by the Chinese bomb and the pressure to include China in the international community due to the danger of nuclear diffusion. In its editorial response, the *Times* argued that the successful nuclear test by an “industrially underdeveloped” country like China raised the specter of nuclear proliferation because other countries might follow suit quickly. It urged older nuclear powers, including the United States, to talk directly with China in order to stop the spread of nuclear weapons.⁵⁹ The *Post*, in contrast, advocated a tougher policy. Claiming that China’s bomb would enhance its power image that it was “desperately trying to project in Southeast Asia, at Moscow and around the world,” it called on Washington to display its “resolve to uphold American responsibilities in Asia.”⁶⁰ *Newsweek* had a cartoon with a dragon looking at itself in the mirror with a new tooth, the nuclear device.⁶¹ *Time* called the Chinese nuclear test a “fateful firecracker,” for which Mao had genuine reason to “triumph.” It argued that the United States and Russia “share one dilemma” that they would have to “do something about the China problem” sooner or later.⁶² The comments of *Time* seemed to suggest a closer relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union vis-à-vis China.

As the prevention of nuclear proliferation required the participation of all countries, how to include China became an issue for the United States because it was the only nuclear power that had no diplomatic relations with China and denied its entrance into the UN. On October 17, Senator John Pastore (D-RI), chairman of the Joint Congressional Atomic Energy Committee, was reported as saying that the Chinese nuclear test meant “the necessity of including Red China

⁵⁹ *NYT*, October 17, 1964, 28.

⁶⁰ *WP*, October 17, A12.

⁶¹ *Newsweek*, October 26, 1964, 54.

⁶² *Time*, October 23, 1964, 36.

in any and every inspection condition attached to any nuclear agreement America might take.”⁶³ On October 18, Johnson again went on TV to comment on the recent ouster of Khrushchev and the U.S. position on the Chinese nuclear bomb. Among the basics of U.S. policy, he stated that China should join the non-proliferation agreement in the framework of the test-ban treaty and he reiterated the U.S. commitment to support any country against “nuclear blackmail.”⁶⁴ In covering Johnson’s speech, the *Times* headline was “President Terms Strength of U.S. the Key to Peace”, the *Post* headline was “Johnson Warns Peking on Nuclear Blackmail,”⁶⁵ again demonstrating its support for a tough policy toward China.

The Johnson administration was further put in a “defensive propaganda position” on October 23 when the *Times* and the *Post* reported on their front pages UN Secretary General U Thant’s proposal that the five nuclear powers, including China, meet in 1965 to discuss a ban on nuclear tests and measures to prevent nuclear proliferation.⁶⁶ The *Times* also reported on its front-page that Patrick Gordon Walker, the foreign minister of the newly elected Labor Party administration, declared after a meeting with U Thant that his government supported Thant’s proposal and Britain would vote to seat China in the United Nations at the 1964 session of the General Assembly.⁶⁷

Washington did not respond enthusiastically to the proposal of the Secretary General. State Department officials said that new international talks were unnecessary because there were already many channels through which Beijing could communicate with the other four nuclear powers, including the United States. As to the disarmament talks in Geneva, the spokesman

⁶³ *NYT*, October 18, 1964, 3.

⁶⁴ *PPPUS, Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1964) Book II, 1377-80.*

⁶⁵ *NYT*, October 19, 1964, 1; *WP*, October 19, 1964, 1

⁶⁶ *WP*, October 24, 1964, 1.

⁶⁷ *NYT*, October 28, 1964, 1.

conceded that “at some stage” China would participate in arms-control agreements. The two newspapers interpreted this official gesture as “firm but negative.”⁶⁸

The *Times* considered Thant’s proposal a sign of “China’s increased prestige,” arguing that China’s admission in the nuclear club had enhanced its chances for UN membership because many neutral states in Asia and Africa would call to include China in international agreements stopping nuclear tests. As it suggested, if a five-power agreement could be reached, it might mark “a first step in bringing Peking out of its isolation.” It urged Washington that “the moment is now” as far as nuclear proliferation was concerned.⁶⁹ The *Post* also advocated giving Thant’s proposal “the widest and broadest consideration” because a flexible U.S. policy would keep the world attention focused on China. It also criticized a recent U.S. underground explosion in Mississippi as “ill-timed” because it had taken the mind of the world off the Chinese blast. Similar to the *Times*, it urged the Johnson administration that “the months and years immediately ahead” might be the “very last chance” to prevent nuclear proliferation and nuclear tests.⁷⁰

If the recognition by a major Western power in early 1964 greatly elevated China’s international position, its entry into the nuclear club in October constituted another reason that it could not be simply ignored. U.S. media’s review of the Chinese nuclear bomb had two effects. On one hand, their prominent coverage built up the image of China threat. On the other, they constituted a vocal critic of the rigid policy of the administration. By elaborating on the urgency of preventing nuclear spread, they pushed the idea that the inclusion of China in the international community was no longer an option, but a necessity.

⁶⁸ Ibid., October 24, 1964, 1; *WP*, October 24, 1964, 1.

⁶⁹ *NYT*, October 25, 1964, E10, E11.

⁷⁰ *WP*, October 24, 1964, A12.

U.S. Escalation in Vietnam

Before the Chinese nuclear test, the United States had dramatically escalated its involvement in the Vietnam War with the response to the Gulf of Tonkin Incidents on August 2 and 4, 1964. On August 5, President Johnson authorized retaliatory bombing of patrol-boat bases and a supporting oil complex in North Vietnam. On August 7, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, granting the president vast power in using American military forces to “head off aggression.” From August 8, 1964 to Johnson’s inauguration on January 27, 1965, the military and political situations in South Vietnam deteriorated rapidly and the United States had to decide between direct military involvement and the loss of South Vietnam. In February 1965, Johnson initiated the massive bombing campaign Operation Roller Thunder and sent the first detachment of ground-combat troops--two battalions of marines--to Da Nang. By July 28, 1965, U.S. troops in the theatre had risen to 175,000.⁷¹

The escalation in Vietnam dramatically changed Beijing’s posture to the United States in its official media. In the first half of 1964, Zhou Enlai and Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi on several occasions had expressed Beijing’s willingness to reduce tension with the United States and blamed Washington for refusing to sign two agreements with China. One was the “peaceful coexistence based on the “five principles.” The other was the U.S. promise to withdraw all its forces from the “Chinese province of Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait.”⁷² Also during this period, the *People’s Daily* presented several neutral entries about the United States, such as the structure of the Department of State, and the national conventions of the Democratic and Republican

⁷¹ Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1995), 135, 139, 145, 174.

⁷² *PD*, February 28, 1964, 1; April 26, 1964, 1; June 20, 1964, 2. 1. The “five principles,” proposed by Zhou Enlai at the Bandung Conference in 1955, include: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.

parties, in a special “World Knowledge” column.⁷³ This was the time when moderates like State Chairman Liu Shaoqi, Premier Zhou Enlai, and Party Secretary Deng Xiaoping were in charge of the policies of the CCP.⁷⁴ After the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, the *People’s Daily* completely stopped using “peaceful coexistence” in its comments on the United States.⁷⁵

Through the *People’s Daily*, Beijing issued warnings to Washington to show its support for Hanoi. An article on August 6 threatened that the “invasion of the DRV is an invasion of China” and that “the Chinese people will not sit still.” After Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the Chinese government reportedly mobilized twenty million people in mass demonstrations. The *People’s Daily* coverage of the mobilization highlighted how the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) was prepared “to defend China.” What was noticeable in the editorial was that it sent a message to those who wanted better relations with the United States: “The malicious aggression of the United States in Vietnam again reminded the Chinese people that they should not cherish any illusion about the imperialists.” Ironically, on the same front page covering the mass protest, there was a story about Mao watching a Beijing opera with other leaders of the CCP.⁷⁶ His activity shows that the Chinese government was not too worried about the U.S. threat at this point.

With the U.S. deployment of ground-combat troops in South Vietnam, the Chinese government increased the seriousness of its warnings and especially its commitment to support the Vietnamese. On March 25, 1965, the *People’s Daily* published on its front-page a statement from the National Liberation Front (NLF) and followed it with an editorial pledging that the

⁷³ *PD*, January 11, 1964, 3; July 15, 1964, 3; September 6, 1964, 5.

⁷⁴ Won Ho Chang, *Mass Media in China: the History and the Future* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 40-41.

⁷⁵ The last time the official organ applied the term to the United States was on July 1, when it had an editorial commenting on a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement warning the United States against the infringement of Chinese territorial water and airspace. See *PD*, July 1, 1964, 3.

⁷⁶ *PD*, August 6, 1964, 1; August 12, 1964, 1.

Chinese people would “try all their means to provide necessary material support, including weapons and all war materials, to the heroic people in South Vietnam.”⁷⁷ Under a headline “Peking Says It will Send Men to Vietcong if Asked,” the *Times* interpreted this statement as the “most direct commitment” of Chinese intervention.⁷⁸

Beijing also took military steps to deter the United States from expanding the war to the Chinese border. On August 13, 1964, Mao told visiting North Vietnamese leaders that China had deployed several air force and antiaircraft artillery divisions to provinces bordering Vietnam and was planning to construct new airfields in this area. Mao specifically said, “We will not make this a secret but will make this open.”⁷⁹ In April 1965, Mao rescinded the “Six-Point Directive” passed by the CCP Central Military Commission in January that instructed the Chinese military not to attack U.S. aircrafts that entered Chinese airspace, and ordered them to “resolutely strike American aircrafts that overfly Hainan Island.” On April 14, the CCP Central Committee distributed the document throughout the party structure above the county level, alerting the cadres to the grave danger posed by the American escalation of the war in Vietnam and stressed the urgency of war preparations.⁸⁰

The Chinese government sent serious warnings to the United States not only through deterrent measures and its propaganda machine, but also through private channels. During his visit to Karachi in April 1965, Zhou Enlai asked Pakistani President Mohammad Ayub Khan to convey three points to Washington: “1. China would not take the initiative to provoke a war against the United States; 2. China meant what it said. 3. China was prepared.”⁸¹ In messages

⁷⁷ Ibid., March 25, 1965, 1, 2.

⁷⁸ *NYT*, March 25, 1965, 1.

⁷⁹ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 214.

⁸⁰ Zhai Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 143.

⁸¹ “Zhou Enlai and Pakistani President Ayub Khan,” Karachi, 2 April, in “Seventy-Seven Conversations between Chinese Leaders and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-1977,” ed. Odd Arne Westad, Chen

through Indonesia's first prime minister Subandrio and the British chargé d'affaires Donald Charles Hopson in May, Beijing added the fourth point: "If the United States bombs China, that would mean bringing the war to China and there would be no boundary to the war."⁸²

Though Zhou's "four points" were made in the form of a warning, they also indicated Beijing's desire to avoid direct confrontation with Washington. Mao expressed it clearly in his interview with leftist American journalist Edgar Snow on January 9, 1965. When Snow said that there would not be war between China and the United States, Mao agreed and said that China would only fight when U.S. forces invaded China. Mao was probably expecting the journalist to take the message to Johnson because Snow told him that he would meet with the President after his return home. Mao also told Snow, "Wherever there is revolution, we issue a statement and hold rallies to show support... We like to fire empty cannons, but we don't send troops."⁸³

While escalating in Vietnam, President Johnson also displayed his openness to peace negotiations. In a speech at Johns Hopkins University on April 7, 1965, he pledged that his administration would keep the conflict from spreading and remain ready for "unconditional discussions." He even offered "billion-dollar American investment" in Vietnam after peaceful settlement was under way.⁸⁴ Johnson's speech was well received in the media. The *Times* editorial praised him for opening a "hopeful phase" of the conflict and winning a "moral battle" over China and the Soviet Union that, as it pointed out, either rejected or omitted Johnson's peace proposal in their propaganda machines.⁸⁵ The *Post* editorial warned Chinese and Vietnamese Communists to take "sword and olive branch" in the speech very seriously because

Jian, Stein Tonneson, Vu Tung Nguyen, and James Hershberg, Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), *Working Paper No.22* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998), 82.

⁸² Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 217.

⁸³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and Document Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, eds., *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan* [Selected Works of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe and shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1994), 554-8.

⁸⁴ PPPUS, *Lyndon B. Johnson* (1965) Book I, 394-9.

⁸⁵ *NYT*, April 9, 1965, 32.

the American military power had shown just the “thinnest edge” and “there was more where the power came from.”⁸⁶

The editorial page of the *Post* strongly supported President Johnson’s Vietnam policy in such articles as “Why we are in Viet-Name...in Defense of Self-determination” and one that went as far as “Viet-Nam Policy: Critics Unwanted.”⁸⁷ Johnson once expressed his appreciation to Editor Russell Wiggin’s support, saying that the *Post*’s editorials were worth “two divisions” to him. Many reporters and their wives thought the paper’s editorial support for the war was “morally wrong.” When Ben Bradlee returned to the *Post* as the Managing Editor in 1965, its editorial page became less conservative as he hired several first-rate journalists including David Broder of the *New York Times*, Don Oberdorfer, a foreign affairs expert, and Stanley Karnow, who would become the *Post*’s chief China watcher and the head of its Hong Kong Bureau. The change was complete in 1968 when Bradlee replaced Wiggins as its Executive Editor.⁸⁸

With the escalation in Vietnam, administration officials constantly evoked the specter of the “China threat” in their justification for Vietnam policy. In his Johns Hopkins speech, for example, President Johnson referred to the conflict in Vietnam as “the new face of an old enemy...the deepening shadow of Communist China,” which he described as “helping the forces of violence all over the world.”⁸⁹ Another good example was their response to a long article entitled “Long Live the Victory of People’s War” published by Chinese Minister of Defense Marshall Lin Biao in the *People’s Daily* on September 3 1965, in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the victory over Japan in WWII. With a focus on the “People’s War,” the article talked about the importance of “self-reliance” and condemned Khrushchevists in the

⁸⁶ *WP*, April 8, 1965, A24.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, April 21, 1965, A27; April 28, 1965, A24.

⁸⁸ Benjamin Bradlee, *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 286-7.

⁸⁹ *PPPUS, Lyndon B. Johnson* (1965) Book I, 395.

Kremlin as “betrayers” of the people’s war. In lauding the contribution of Mao Zedong’s thought to world revolution, Lin claimed that Mao’s theory of the countryside defeating the cities through besieging them could be applied to world revolution because North America and Western Europe were the “cities” and the developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America were the “countryside.”⁹⁰

The *Times* gave high prominence to Lin’s speech. In a single issue, it not only covered the story on the front page, but also followed it with excerpts of the article, whose English version was circulated by the Chinese official press, and an editorial that called the speech Mao’s “nightmare blueprint for world’s future.”⁹¹ Though the *Post* gave the article a lower prominence, wrapping it in a page-four story about PLA Chief of Staff Luo Ruiqing’s speech, Walter Lippmann, in his *Post* column, compared the certainty of its revolutionary propaganda to the way Hitler announced that his Reich “would last for a thousand years.” From the emphasis on “self-reliance” in the speech though, Lippmann claimed that Beijing wanted the war in Vietnam to continue, but it was unwilling to intervene.⁹²

Lin Biao’s article was soon taken up by administration officials to condemn China. In his speech to block China’s UN membership, Ambassador Arthur Goldberg used it as evidence of its attempt to “change world order by violence.” Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, and his deputy Cyrus Vance compared Lin’s article to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and used it as evidence of Chinese expansion.⁹³ McNamara explicitly said that the speech signified a program of “aggression” and that the United States should “take the Chinese Communists at their word and develop improved

⁹⁰ *PD*, Sep. 3, 1965, 1-4.

⁹¹ *NYT*, September 4, 1965, 1, 2, 20.

⁹² *WP*, September 4, 1965, A4, September 9, 1965, A25.

⁹³ *NYT*, September 24, 1965; October 2, 1965, SUA5_1; October 8, 1965, SU1_1; *Chicago Tribune*, October 15, 1965, 15.

means of coping with their threat.”⁹⁴ People may wonder whether McNamara was sincere in his claim about the nature of the China threat because as the secretary of defense, he was well aware of the Chinese capability to project its power beyond its border. McNamara, along with many Johnson aides, seemed to be deliberately calling attention to the Chinese words rather than deeds.⁹⁵ In 1965 when the United States was substantially expanding the war in Vietnam, China’s bellicose rhetoric became useful political assets for administration officials who were eager to exaggerate the “China threat” to justify American policy in Indochina.

Between 1963 and 1965, U.S. media’s call for China policy reform did not turn into “widespread clamoring for change” because it had not been elevated to a pressing issue on the American political agenda. There were strong anti-reform elements in the Johnson administration. Since his assumption of office in late 1963, Lyndon Johnson depended heavily on Dean Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, and Robert McNamara on foreign policies. These three advisers, particularly Rusk, were opposed to any modification of China policy. Rusk wondered at one time why “the question of Peking’s admission to the United Nations had been renewed without adequate reproaches being made over their policies in South East Asia.”⁹⁶

Moreover, Johnson faced severe restraints from Congress as well as public opinion. On April 19, 1965, the Committee of One Million made a declaration opposing any concessions to China, including opposition to recognition, its admission into the UN, and trade relations with it. The declaration received the endorsement of 321 congressmen--fifty-one Senators and 270 members of the House.⁹⁷ That was more than half of Congress. What contributed to the negative attitude toward China included its bellicose rhetoric, its support for the Vietcong, and the threat

⁹⁴ *NYT*, October 2, 1965.

⁹⁵ Lumbers, “Staying out of This Chinese Muddle,” 262.

⁹⁶ Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 95, 59, 61, 67.

⁹⁷ *WP*, April 20, 1965, 2; *NYT*, April 20, 1965, 18. Obviously the *Times* gave much lower prominence to this story than the *Post*.

caused by its possession of nuclear bombs. During this period, Americans opposed to the recognition of China and its entry into the UN in public surveys consistently exceeded half of the total. As a cautious politician, Johnson decided to “stay the course” in his China policy.⁹⁸

Fulbright Hearings

Since President Johnson’s escalation in Vietnam, J. William Fulbright (D-AK), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was one of the most eloquent critics of his Vietnam policy. On January 26, 1966, Fulbright’s committee began a routine hearing on a supplemental aid bill for South Vietnam. He shrewdly transformed the sessions into an inquiry on U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. When General Maxwell Taylor and Dean Rusk “clashed dramatically” with General James M. Gavin, a parachute hero during WWII, and George F. Kennan, the father of the “containment” policy, over war strategy in Vietnam, the media’s attention was attracted, in particular the television networks, which began to report the sessions alive. Johnson became so worried that he hastily held a conference with American military commanders and leaders of South Vietnam in Honolulu to divert the media attention away from the hearings. But it did not work very well. Between late January and March 1966, the hearings remained in the headlines.⁹⁹

In his criticism of Johnson’s Vietnam policy, Fulbright repeatedly evoked the danger of war with China if the conflicts in Vietnam escalated. Contending that reconciliation with China was necessary if the United States wanted to find a solution in Vietnam, he proposed at the hearings that Washington should reach “a general neutralization agreement for Southeast Asia” with Beijing.¹⁰⁰ Beginning in March, he called a review of America’s China policy for

⁹⁸ Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 95.

⁹⁹ Melvin Small, *Covering Dissent: The Media and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 61-62.

¹⁰⁰ *NYT*, February 8, 1966, 1; March 2, 1966, 1, 4; March 7, 1966, 1.

“education” reasons, asking China experts, including A. Doak Barnett from Columbia, John King Fairbank from Harvard and several others, to testify.

A few months earlier, more than 1000 students and several hundred faculty members of Yale had published a full-page advertisement in the *Times* on December 10, 1965, calling for a “nationwide reappraisal” of American policy in the Far East. This advertisement was sponsored by a group called Americans for Reappraisal of Far Eastern Policy, which was started by Yale students. According to the *Times*, the organization sponsored seminars on more than 20 campuses throughout the country on October 24 to discuss U.S. policy in Asia. An active participant in those meetings, Fairbank also signed the advertisement. The effort by the group probably could not attract much attention because the *Times* placed the news article on page twenty-one and the advertisement on fifty-three.

The prominent media attention to the Fulbright Hearings provided the academics with a much better forum to present their views. At the hearings, Barnett put forward his famous idea of “containment without isolation,” which meant the United States should continue to contain the expansion of China, but adopt measures to end its isolation from the world community. Fairbank criticized U.S. officials who compared Lin Biao’s speech to a blueprint of world conquest or a “Mein Kampf” type of outline, arguing that the statement was simply “a reassertion of faith” that the “parochial example of rural-based revolution” in China was a model for underdeveloped countries.¹⁰¹ As *Newsweek* reported, Senators Fulbright and Wayne Morse (D-OR) tried to push Barnett and Fairbank to support their challenge to Johnson’s Vietnam policy at the hearings, but they both refused. Even though they were concerned about a clash with China, the two professors supported Johnson’s Vietnam policy and the containment of China, of which the

¹⁰¹ U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. “The United States and China.” 89th Cong. 2d. sess. 7, 8, 10 March. *Congressional Record* (1966) vol. 112, parts 4, 5. accessible at <http://home.heinonline.org/>.

commitment in South Vietnam was an important part.¹⁰² In the media the two professors appeared as moderate advice givers, which was in sharp contrast to radical leftists in the streets. Their expertise and moderation made it reasonably easier for the public and those in Washington to consider.

Overall, the elite media in the United States covered the Fulbright hearings prominently, completely and favorably.¹⁰³ Fulbright and the China experts were given prominence when they made the front pages six times in the *Times* and five times in the *Post* in March.¹⁰⁴ Among those who were opposed to the “containment without isolation” policy, George Taylor and David Nelson Rowe, professors from University of Washington and Yale University, and Walter Judd, former Republican Representative from Minnesota and a prominent figure in the China Lobby, were called to testify when the hearings were close to the end. They made the front pages of the two elite newspapers only once without any editorial comment.¹⁰⁵ The *Times* placed the testimony of former Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter S. Robertson at the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the last three paragraphs of the jump page of an article, probably because he was an advocate of hard-line policy toward China.¹⁰⁶

In their editorial pages, both the *Times* and the *Post* gave favorable reviews of the China debate, especially Barnett’s “containment without isolation” thesis. The *Post* praised the hearings for “contributing to public understanding” and particularly endorsed the distinction between “containing” and “isolating” China. The most important factor that led “urgency” to Barnett’s argument, as it pointed out, was the danger of U.S. defeat in the UN on the issue of Chinese admission. While acknowledging the difficulty of ending the isolation of China, it argued that

¹⁰² *Newsweek*, March 21, 1964, 25-26.

¹⁰³ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 61-2.

¹⁰⁴ They made the front pages of the *Times* on March 2, 7, 9, 11, 21, 31, the *Post* on March 7, 9, 11, 17, 19.

¹⁰⁵ *NYT*, March 29, 1966, 1; *WP*, March 29, 1966, 1.

¹⁰⁶ *NYT*, March 9, 1966, 1.

American thought had been turned toward that direction through the “ventilation” of those ideas.¹⁰⁷

The *Times* argued that the Fulbright hearings had validated its long-held view that “the country was far ahead of the Administration” in openness to new approaches. Citing the fact that a statement calling for a more flexible China policy had recently been supported by 198 scholars and opposed by only nineteen members of the Association for Asian Studies, it tried to show where the weight of “informed American opinion” was. It criticized Rusk and McNamara for drawing “fallacious parallels” between China and Hitler’s Germany because they might close off a “reappraisal of China policy” for many years. Similar to the *Post*, it showed concern for the “urgency” of the UN issue. As it maintained, America’s open attitude would not only send positive signals to new generation of China leaders, but also attract more international support for American policy in Asia and reduce the danger of military confrontation with China.¹⁰⁸

In an article named “Reading the Dragon’s Mind,” *Time* argued that the hearings were “all right” for their educational purpose. *Newsweek* regarded the China debate as a subject that permitted legislators a “remarkable degree of rational discussion and agreement.”¹⁰⁹

As James Reston argued in his *Times* column, Fulbright’s official “teach-in” in front of TV cameras was the “first serious open debate” on the problems of American foreign policy in years, and the combination of Congress with TV cameras would be a “powerful influence for understanding and change.”¹¹⁰ By the time the hearings ended, 71 percent of Americans polled had heard about them, and almost 60 percent had seen some parts on television. *Newsweek*

¹⁰⁷ *WP*, March 10, 1966, A24; March 15, 1966, A14.

¹⁰⁸ *NYT*, March 23, 1966, 46.

¹⁰⁹ *Time*, March 18, 27; *Newsweek*, March 21, 1964, 25-26.

¹¹⁰ *NYT*, February 13, 1966, 176.

described them as the “most searching public review of U.S. wartime policy” since the MacArthur hearings of 1951.¹¹¹

Even though the China policy review was secondary to the discussions on Vietnam policy at the hearings, the administration was happy about it because many critics of America’s China policy supported the Vietnam policy. The consensus on a more open policy toward China looked better than the division over Vietnam. In his appearance on NBC on March 13, Vice President Hubert Humphrey echoed Barnett, saying that the U.S. policy toward China should be one of “containment without necessarily isolation.” He mentioned that the administration had decided recently to allow scholars and writers to travel to China, which he described as the “beginning of a much better relationship.”¹¹² Senator Stuart Symington (D-MO), an ardent supporter of the official policy in Vietnam, said, “I do not see anything that I do not agree with.” A White House aide also claimed that the President was pleased with the transcripts of the week’s hearings.¹¹³

With the media’s coverage, the China policy review served as a test balloon for the government. It had the effect of explaining what the government had been doing but otherwise was hesitant to state explicitly. Ultimately, the China debate at the Fulbright Hearings, as Michael Lumbers argues, marked “something of a watershed.” Because of the media’s prominent and favorable coverage, they “legitimized” the airing of views that would have been considered “heresy” in the 1950s and “emboldened” those advocates of China policy reform inside and outside the government to push that agenda.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Small, *Covering Dissent*, 61-2; *Newsweek*, February 21, 1966, 27.

¹¹² *NYT*, March 14, 1966, 1; *WP*, March 14, 1966, A1.

¹¹³ *Newsweek*, March 21, 1964, 25-26.

¹¹⁴ Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 155.

The media's intensive and favorable review of the China debate at the Fulbright Hearings played an important role in educating the public about America's China policy. In December 1965, a Gallup Poll indicated that the ratio between those who supported China's UN membership and those opposed was 22 per cent to 67 percent with ten per cent having no opinion. In March 1966, the ratio changed to 25 per cent to 55 percent with 20 per cent having no opinion. When asked if China's UN membership would improve relations with the United States, the ratio between "yes" and "no" became 56 percent and 28 per cent.¹¹⁵ Similarly, as reported in the *Post*, a Harris survey in June showed that 57 per cent of the respondents favored U.S. recognition of China and 55 per cent supported Chinese entry into the U.N. so long as Taiwan was not expelled.¹¹⁶ The polling results showed a growing openness to a more flexible China policy after the Fulbright Hearings.

The Fulbright Hearing might also have led to the decline of the Committee of One Million. When Marvin Liebman, the committee's secretary, learned of the hearings, he complained that he had not been given advance notice and that those scheduled to testify represented viewpoints "contrary to the Committee and to the majority of Americans, including Congress."¹¹⁷ Indeed, in a Gallup Poll in September 1966, those who were opposed to China's admission into the UN still accounted for 56 percent of the total.¹¹⁸ Moreover, the Committee still managed to obtain the endorsement of 325 members of Congress in October when it published in a *Times* display ad its opposition to China's UN membership. While publishing its ad, the *Times* carried an editorial repudiating the committee. As it argued, "It is the opinion of this newspaper that a majority of those Americans" concerned with the question "either favor

¹¹⁵ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*, 1931-2, 2001-1.

¹¹⁶ *WP*, June 27, 1966, A13.

¹¹⁷ Stanley D. Bachrack, *The Committee of One Million: "China Lobby" Politics, 1953-1971* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 232.

¹¹⁸ Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*, 2032-3.

inviting Peking into the United Nations or would at least “have no serious objections.”¹¹⁹ When Senator Jacob K. Javits (R-NY), who had appeared on the front page of the *Times* during the Fulbright Hearings due to his support for ending the isolation of China, announced his decision to withdraw from the committee, the *Times* placed his story on the front page, arguing that the China hearings was a factor for his move. The *Times* also reported a memorandum sent by Liebman to all Congressional members declaring that the committee would not use their names on letterheads and publication. It interpreted the memorandum as a sign that members of Congress had begun to have doubts about the committee’s policy.¹²⁰ The *Times* story left an impression that the Committee of One Million was declining.

The *People’s Daily* responded to the China policy review at the Fulbright Hearings with mockery. It labeled the speakers as “clowns” and the hearings as a “farce of illusion” when the Johnson administration was “at its wit’s end” in dealing with China. When Humphrey displayed “unusual friendliness” to China, the official organ attacked his remarks as “dream talking” and the “kiss of Judas.” Viewing the “containment without isolation” policy as an American effort to subvert the Chinese revolution through “peaceful transformation,” it pledged that the Chinese people would become more vigilant of the “trickery of the American imperialists.”¹²¹

A Lost Chance in 1966?

By early 1966, Beijing and Washington seemed to have reached a tacit agreement about no direct confrontation with each other in Vietnam. Washington took measures to reassure China that it neither wanted to attack China or destroy the Hanoi regime. In a memorandum to Under Secretary of State George Ball, William Bundy, who took over Roger Hilsman’s position, recommended clarifying the U.S. intention to avoid direct confrontation with China at the next

¹¹⁹ *NYT*, Display Ad 50, October 31, 12; November 2, 1966, 28.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, December 18, 1966, 1.

¹²¹ *PD*, April 12, 1966, 4; March 14, 1966, 3.

Warsaw meeting on December 15, 1965.¹²² On May 10, 1966, the *People's Daily* published Zhou Enlai's four points to the United States for the first time.¹²³

On May 12, 1966, when the U.S. Air Force reportedly shot down a Chinese aircraft close to the Vietnamese-Chinese border,¹²⁴ Beijing's response was quite restrained. In its "strong protest," the Chinese Defense Department declared that the Chinese people "are not easy to trifle with" and that "blood would be repaid with blood." Interestingly, it reiterated Washington of Zhou's "four points."¹²⁵ North Vietnamese Defense Minister General Vo Nguyen Giap later complained that Zhou's remark "stabbed the Vietnamese in the back" because it was a signal to the United States that "it could bomb Vietnam at will, as long as there was no threat to the Chinese border."¹²⁶

Considering the favorable American public opinion after the Fulbright Hearings and the two governments' tacit agreement on Vietnam, Xu Guangqiu, in his book about the relationship between Congress and China policy, claims that "a chance to improve Sino-American relationships was lost" in the 1960s. He cites the memoir of Wang Guoquan, the Chinese Ambassador to Poland who represented China in the Warsaw talks with the United States between July 1964 and March 1967. Wang wrote, "If the Cultural Revolution had not happened in 1966, the Beijing government might have modified its U.S. policy in that year, and U.S.-China normalization might have started in 1966 rather than in 1972." As far as Xu understands, when Congressional leaders called for a change in China policy in the 1960s, the White House

¹²² *FRUS, 1964-1968 Volume XXX, China*, Document 112.

¹²³ *PD*, May 10, 1966, 1.

¹²⁴ The U.S. pilots claimed that while they were flying south of the Red River on May 12, they were attacked by unidentified aircraft and returned fire. See *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, China*, Document 153.

¹²⁵ *PD*, May 13, 1966, 1.

¹²⁶ Nguyen Vu Tung, "Interpreting Beijing and Hanoi: a View of Sino-Vietnamese Relations, 1965-1970," in Westad, et al. eds., "Seventy-Seven Conversations," 63note104.

escalated the Vietnam War. Therefore, Beijing “suspected” the real intentions of the legislators and “misunderstood” congressional suggestions about a flexible China policy.¹²⁷

Xu and Wang are probably too optimistic about the status of Sino-American relations in the 1960s, or early 1966. Though the Johnson administration was moving toward a more flexible policy, the flexibility was rather limited and was far short of reconciliation with China. On the part of Beijing, its actions to avoid confrontation with the United States were for its own interests and they did not mean that Chinese leaders wanted better relations. Beijing did not need to misunderstand the real intentions of either the congressional legislators or the academics. In the first half of 1966, the *People’s Daily* still frequently referred to the United States the “most dangerous” or the “worst enemy” to people all over the world.¹²⁸ For a leadership bent on revolution, “olive branches” from Washington looked even more dangerous because of their potential ability to “soften” the revolutionary spirit of the Chinese people.

In reality, Chinese foreign policy witnessed a radical turn after the Tenth Plenary of the Eight Congress in August 1962, when Mao criticized Wang Jiaxiang, the head of the International Liaison Department of the CCP, for advocating a policy of “*san he yi shao*” (three moderations and one reduction), which meant moderation of struggles against imperialists, revisionists, and reactionary forces (in Taiwan), and a reduction in Chinese support for revolutionary struggles in the third world.¹²⁹ The radicalization accelerated with the deterioration

¹²⁷ Xu Guangqiu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship, 1949-1979* (Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 2007), 206, 302.

¹²⁸ *PD*, January 7, 1966, 5; February 4, 1966, 5; March 27, 1966, 1, 3; April 24, 1966, 2; May 25, 1966, 6.

¹²⁹ Wang proposed the ideas after Mao made a self-criticism for causing the problems of the Great Leap Forward (GLF) at the seven-thousand men meeting in January 1962, hoping that China could use more energy to fix the problems at home. Niu Jun and Li Jie argue that Mao’s criticism of Wang was part of his counter-offensive against those questioning the GLF because he linked the “three moderations and one reduction” to what he called the “three selfs and one contract” (more small privately farmed plots for peasant households, more free markets with prices determined by the buyers and sellers, more enterprises with profit and loss borne by the management, and farms contracted to households at fixed output quotas) and alleged that the former was the international program of some Party members and the latter, their domestic program, labeling the two policy packages the “revisionist line.”

of Sino-Soviet conflict in 1963 and the escalation of American involvement in Vietnam in 1964. When Mao was considering the Cultural Revolution, the last thing he wanted was to reconcile with the American “imperialists.”

Conclusion

As this chapter shows, between 1963 and 1966, many U.S. journalists criticized the Johnson administration’s rigid China policy. Though Hilsman’s speech in late 1963 was not initiated by high-level policy makers in the Johnson team, it worked as a test balloon. The media’s positive review of the administration’s new posture toward China signified an ebbing of emotion over the issue and suggested an opening for reasonable talk about it. In the case of French recognition, while the elite media did not like the “timing and manner” of de Gaulle’s decision, they criticized the administration’s rigid posture and called for a move toward a “two China” solution before a U.S. defeat in the UN. When China joined the nuclear club, U.S. media elaborated on the dangers of nuclear proliferation and urged Washington to use creative means that could include China in international agreements on nuclear nonproliferation. In both cases, media called for China’s inclusion in the international community. When the United States expanded its military operations into North Vietnam, Congressional critics of Johnson’s war policy found themselves allied with academics and the media because of their common concern for military confrontation with China. Media discussions on these issues created forums for public deliberations on America’s China policy.

By the end of 1966, more than half of the American population still opposed the recognition of China as well as its admission into the UN, and a majority in Congress endorsed

See Niu Jun, “1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China’s Foreign Policy,” CWIHP, *Working Paper 48* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2005), 31-6; Li Jie, “Changing in China’s Domestic Situation in the 1960s and Sino-American Relations,” in Ross and Jiang eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, 305, 453note9. See also Zhang Baijia, “The Changing International Scene and Chinese Policy toward the United States, 1954-1970,” in Ross and Jiang eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, 61.

the Committee of One Million's China policy. However, influential U.S. media moved ahead of public opinion and pushed for a flexible China policy by prioritizing the critical voices from the academic community and Congress in their front pages and making their own critiques in editorials. Because of the media's prominent and intensive coverage, critical voices at the Fulbright Hearings were legitimized and accepted more widely in the public sphere, which created a favorable environment for Johnson to ease the rigidity on China. Essentially, if the Hilsman speech set off the "depoliticization" of the China issue, the Fulbright Hearings symbolized the culmination of this process.

Unfortunately, while U.S. journalists were pushing Washington for a more flexible China policy between 1963 and 1966, Chinese foreign policy turned increasingly radical. In this context, the rhetoric of the Chinese media toward the United States changed from moderately hostile to radically hostile. After the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964, they dropped "peaceful existence" with the United States and increased invectives against Washington to show moral support for the Indochinese peoples.

In the first half of the 1960s, Beijing had no desire to improve relations with Washington. It rejected talks about flexibility from U.S. officials and academics, attacking them as "hoax" and tools of peaceful transformation. When Mao mobilized the Chinese people for his "continuous revolution" and the ideological polemics with the Soviet Union, Washington became a convenient "whipping boy" in the Chinese media.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, 349.

Chapter 3: The Cultural Revolution as a Watershed: 1966-1968

Between 1966 and 1968, the heyday of the Cultural Revolution coincided with the high point of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Mao frequently described this period as “all under heaven is great chaos” when he talked about China’s domestic and international conditions.¹ The Cultural Revolution turned out to be a “watershed” for Sino-American relations because several conditions for Nixon’s opening to China came into being during this chaotic period.² Among these conditions were the reduction of tension between Beijing and Washington, the replacement of the United States by the Soviet Union as China’s primary enemy, and Beijing’s open rift with Hanoi. This chapter examines how these conditions played out in the media of both countries. It looks at U.S. media’s coverage of the factional struggles in China, the Sino-Soviet polemics, the Sino-Vietnamese discord, as well as the Chinese media’s handling of the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Vietnam War.

U.S. media’s overwhelmingly favorable review of the Fulbright China Hearings in spring 1966 not only signified the depoliticization of the China issue, but also greatly encouraged the Johnson administration to move toward a conciliatory posture toward China. On July 12, 1966, President Johnson made what the White House officials called his “first major statement” on China in his address to the annual conference of the American Alumni Council. Johnson called for the “reconciliation between nations that now call themselves enemies” and maintained that lasting peace in Asia could never come “as long as the 700 million people of mainland China are isolated by their rulers from the outside world.” He also mentioned the steps his government had

¹ Chen Jian and David Wilson, Introduction to “All under Heaven Is Great Chaos: Beijing, the Sino-Soviet Border Clashes, and the Turn toward Sino-American Rapprochement, 1968-69,” eds., Chen Jian and David Wilson, Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), *Working Paper No. 11* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998), 155.

² Michael Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain: Tentative Bridge-Building to China During the Johnson Years* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2008), 202.

taken to permit American scholars and experts in medicine and public health to travel to China, and particularly a case where Washington issued a passport for a leading American businessman to exchange knowledge with the Chinese on the very day of his speech.³ Johnson's statement was covered prominently and favorably by the *Times* and the *Post*. The editorial of the *Times* argued that it had laid a new basis for the "concrete measures" that would provide a solution to the problems in Asia. The *Post* claimed that the United States should bring down its barriers in order to "diminish the dangerous isolation" of China from the world.⁴

In his State of the Union address on January 10, 1967, Johnson again stated that the United States would "continue to hope for a reconciliation between the people of mainland China and the world community" and that the United States would be "the first to welcome a China which decided to respect her neighbors' rights."⁵ This time, the two newspapers did not pay special attention to his remark about China. James Reston noted Johnson's conciliatory tone in his column a few days later, but he did not assign it too much importance except arguing that it showed Johnson's cautious attitude about the convulsions in China.⁶ By that time, Johnson's conciliatory tone had seemed much less exciting to U.S. media than the extraordinary turmoil in China because of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

According to the Chinese official designation--"Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China"--passed at the Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh Congress of the CCP on June 27, 1981, the Cultural Revolution lasted ten years and it went through three phases. Phase one started with the adoption of the "May 16

³ PPPUS, Lyndon B. Johnson (1966) Book II, 718-22.

⁴ *New York Times* (hereafter as *NYT*), July 13, 1966, 1, 40; *Washington Post* (hereafter as *WP*), July 13, 1966, 1; July 14, 1966, A16.

⁵ PPPUS, Lyndon B. Johnson (1967) Book I, 2-14.

⁶ *NYT*, January 18, 1967, 34.

Notification” at the enlarged meeting of the CCP’s Politburo in May 1966 and ended with the Ninth Congress in April 1969; Phase two went from the Ninth Congress to the Tenth Congress in August 1973; The last phase was between 1973 and 1976 with the death of Mao.⁷ In their analyses, many scholars, including this author, focus on phase one, which has been widely referred to as the “most radical” stage, or the “Red Guards phase,” of the Cultural Revolution.⁸

As an important document of the Cultural Revolution, the “May 16 Notification” was categorized as “highly classified” at first and circulated only among high-level CCP officials.⁹ It went public on May 17, 1967, when the *People’s Daily* and *Red Flag* published a joint editorial celebrating the first anniversary of the movement. As they claimed, this document had “sounded the marching bugle” of the Cultural Revolution. The “notification” defined the purpose of the movement as an effort to remove “those representatives of the bourgeois who have sneaked into the Party, the government, the army and various cultural circles, and a bunch of counter-revolutionary revisionists.”¹⁰

As to the cause of the Cultural Revolution, Roderick MacFarquhar claims that what happened in the Soviet Union had a major impact on Mao, who wanted to make sure his country would not follow the Soviet path, which he believed had abandoned Marxist-Leninist revolution in pursuit of a “capitalist restoration.” As MacFarquhar maintains, after China recovered from the disastrous Great Leap Forward (GLF), Mao became worried about its future because he thought that his colleagues, especially State Chairman Liu Shaoqi and CCP Secretary General Deng Xiaoping, were no longer interested in his idea of “continuous revolution.” With the

⁷ *People’s Daily* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1981) (hereafter as *PD*), July 1, 1981, 1.

⁸ Xia Yafeng, “China’s Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969-February 1972,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol. 8, no. 4 (Fall 2006), 6; Harry Harding, “The Chinese State in Crisis,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 15: *The People’s Republic, Part 2: Revolutions within the Chinese Revolution 1966-1982*, eds. Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 111.

⁹ Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 41.

¹⁰ *PD*, May 17, 1967, 1; May 18, 1967, 1.

dismissal of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1964, Mao's anxiety over Liu and Deng increased and he decided that if revolution from above were impossible, he would start it from below. If the party could not change society, he would "unleash society to change the party."¹¹

Harry Harding argues that for Mao, the greatest danger to the success of socialist revolution was not the threat or attack from outside, but the restoration of capitalism at home. Odd Arne Westad takes the opposite view and emphasizes Mao's perception of external threats in 1965, arguing that Mao always used "revolutionary housecleaning" as his "best form of defense" because of his obsession with "foreign subversion."¹² Despite their disagreements on the impacts of external threats and domestic concern on Mao, these scholars agree on Mao's preoccupation with the domestic transformation.

To start the Cultural Revolution, Mao first took steps to gain control of the propaganda machines by which he could mobilize the whole country to join the campaign. By targeting a historical play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* written by Wu Han, who was the editor-in-chief of Beijing's party mouthpiece *Beijing Daily* and the vice-mayor of the city, Mao successfully purged Peng Zhen, Mayor of Beijing and a key member of the Politburo, Lu Dingyi, head of the Propaganda Department, and Wu Lengxi, editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily*. In their places, Mao installed persons loyal to himself and set up a new Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG) under the Standing Committee of the Politburo.¹³

¹¹ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. I: *The Coming of the Cataclysm 1961-1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 468-71.

¹² Harding, "The Chinese State in Crisis," 115; Odd Arne Westad, "History, Memory, and the Language of Alliance-Making," in "Seventy-Seven Conversations between Chinese Leaders and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-1977," eds. Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tonneson, Vu Tung Nguyen, and James Hershberg, CWIHP, *Working Paper No.22* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998), 9.

¹³ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 15-9; Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Ten Years of Turbulence: The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993), 65; See also MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 472-3.

The main tool Mao employed in his attack on the Party establishment and his political enemies were the Red Guards, a movement first born on May 29, 1966 when a small group of students at one of Beijing's elite high schools, attended mostly by the children of high-ranking officials, pledged to defend the Chairman and his thought and to struggle against revisionism. Mao gave his official endorsement to them when he attended a six-hour rally at Tiananmen Square on August 18.¹⁴ After the rally, the *People's Daily* featured a headline "Workers, Peasants and Soldiers should Support the Revolutionary Students," which called the Red Guards activities "revolutionary" and "legal" and deemed any action opposing them as "opposing Chairman Mao and the Party."¹⁵

In January 1967, Mao called on revolutionary people of all walks of life to overthrow the existing Party authority at different levels and "seize power" for their own. Red Guard attacks on Party establishments caused them to defend themselves by forming their own Red Guard organizations, which fell into factional struggles and turned into armed fighting, bringing China to what Mao later called an "all-round civil war."¹⁶

In what was considered the "most spectacular uprising against the Cultural Revolution" in Wuhan in July 1967, forces of the Wuhan Military Region mutinied and seized Minister of Public Security Xie Fuzhi and Wang Li, both prominent members of the Cultural Revolution Group. When Mao tried to mediate the situation in person, the mutiny went out of control and even threatened his life. Mao ended up being escorted to the airport at two in the morning. On another occasion, Red Guards broke into the British mission office in Beijing on August 22,

¹⁴ Barbara and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*, 94-6; MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 461-3.

¹⁵ *PD*, August 23, 1966, 1.

¹⁶ Barnouin and Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence*, 107-9; Harding, "The Chinese State in Crisis," 158-9.

1967 and set it on fire after the British rejected a Chinese ultimatum demanding it to release Chinese agitators in Hong Kong and to lift the ban on two pro-Chinese newspapers.¹⁷

To stop the chaos, in October 1967, the CCP ordered classes to be resumed immediately, but it had little effect. In the summer of 1968, Mao sent “Mao Zedong Thought Worker Propaganda Teams” to universities to restore order. At Qinghua University, the Red Guards greeted the worker teams with bullets and stones. After the incident, the central authority began to dismantle the Red Guards, whose glory days were soon over as millions of them were systemically sent to the countryside.¹⁸

Two years after Mao’s first review of the Red Guards at Tiananmen Square, the *People’s Daily* published an editorial calling on the Red Guards to “cooperate with workers, peasants and soldiers.” The meeting of the Twelfth Plenum of the Eight Congress between October 13 and 31 in 1968 meant that the CCP was ready to move on to the next stage. Its communiqué explicitly stated that worker teams would stay at schools and lead them “permanently,” which meant the Red Guards had been deprived of their leading role in the Cultural Revolution. Though Mao never officially declared its ending, it was generally believed that the Cultural Revolution, or its most radical stage, had come to an end with the convening of the Ninth Congress in April 1969, whose communiqué stated that the focus of the Party should be “summing up experiences” since the Cultural Revolution had achieved its “greatest and most decisive victory.”¹⁹

During the Cultural Revolution, the *People’s Daily* played important roles in mobilizing the mass and causing chaos. On May 31, 1966, Mao’s former secretary Chen Boda, who was also the editor of *Red Flag* and the head of the CCRG, seized control of the *People’s Daily*. After

¹⁷ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 199-227; Harding, “The Chinese State in Crisis,” 181-2.

¹⁸ Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 244.

¹⁹ *PD*, August 18, 1968, 1; November 2, 1968, 1; April 28, 1969, 1.

that point, the newspaper no longer reflected the views of the Central Committee of the CCP, but the ideas of Mao himself. According to Ma Jisen, an employee at the Chinese Foreign Ministry during the Cultural Revolution, when the Cultural Revolution started, acting Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei told his staff, “Now the newspapers lead the Cultural Revolution movement. The *People’s Daily* presents the guiding principle.” He told them to read it carefully when it came out because it would “give the tenor of the movement.” The newspaper, with its provocative language such as “sweeping away all Oxen, Ghosts, Snakes and Demons (OGSD),” “eliminating all class enemies,” and many others, had become “a source of turbulence.”²⁰

Due to Mao’s encouragement of big-character posters and the airing of views fully, the Cultural Revolution witnessed a period of freedom of speech in China. Before the movement, the CCP adopted a dual system of communication by which the latest Party directives were transmitted through the internal system and were released to the public later in an always revised version in order to cushion the possible negative impact. During the Cultural Revolution, this system broke down when Red Guard newspapers and wall posters openly carried fresh directives from the central authority. What was more, in some places the Red Guards broke into party archives and accessed classified documents in search for “black materials” that would go against the Party leaders. They would disclose the secrets, sometimes in “distorted” versions, through Red Guard newspapers and wall posters.²¹ These newspapers and posters became important sources for foreign correspondents in their reporting of the Cultural Revolution.

During the Cultural Revolution, people could learn from the *Reference News* about the problems China had with several of its previously friendly neighbors because of Beijing’s

²⁰ Ma Jisen, *Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004), 15. See also “Introduction to the Author,” Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, http://www.chineseupress.com/asp/c_Book_card.asp?BookID=2059&Lang=C last accessed, February 27, 2012.

²¹ Michel Oksenberg, “Methods of Communication within the Chinese Bureaucracy,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 57 (January-March 1974), 35-36.

militant and chaotic foreign policies. In early 1967 for example, it covered the frequent exchanges and co-operation between Moscow and Pyongyang. There was even a report that Pyongyang “had warned Beijing not to take unfriendly actions toward North Korea” and another one explicitly stating that the recently concluded Soviet-North Korean Agreement showed that “Pyongyang had returned to the embrace of Moscow.”²² In another case, while the *People’s Daily* consistently praised Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia and the traditional friendship between the two countries,²³ the *Reference News* covered many of his “unfriendly” remarks about China. In September 1967, for example, it featured a story that Sihanouk had asked two pro-Beijing cabinet members to resign and attacked China for “interfering with its internal affairs.” Sihanouk was also reported as having said that the clashes between “white Communists” and “yellow Communists” showed that the international Communist movement was “nothing but a farce.” It even published stories that Sihanouk had requested the United States not to leave Asia, or Cambodia would “fall into the hands of China.”²⁴

Response of the Johnson Administration to the Cultural Revolution

When the Cultural Revolution broke out in the summer of 1966, Washington persisted in sending peace signals to Beijing. In January 1967, the State Department advised all U.S. diplomats and consular posts stationed abroad to emphasize the limited objectives of the United States in Vietnam and to “seek ways of recognizing the past and potential greatness of China and the history of friendly relations between the American and Chinese peoples.” When Romanian Premier Ion Gheorghe Maurer, who was on good terms with Chinese leaders, visited the United States in June 1967, Johnson asked him to convey his message to Beijing that the United States

²² *Reference News* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1967) (hereafter as *RN*), January 3, 1967, 4; January 4, 1967, 4; March 8, 1967, 4; March 10, 1967, 4.

²³ *PD*, June 21, 1967, 5; August 8, 1967, 6; August 24, 1967, 5; August 15, 1968, 5; August 29, 1968, 5.

²⁴ *RN*, September 14, 1967, 2; November 15, 1967, 2; November 5, 1968, 3; November 10, 1968, 3.

did not want war with China or to change its system and that “all we want to do is to trade with China and get along with her to the extent that she will permit.”²⁵ Johnson’s public conciliatory gesture toward China promoted the administration’s peace image to the “restless” and “war-weary” American people and shifted the blame for the Sino-American deadlock to Beijing for “domestic and international consumption.”²⁶

In responding to the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, senior U.S. officials believed that the U.S. capability to shape events in China was limited and any hint of U.S. interference in Chinese politics might “unwittingly” undermine the position of pragmatic elements in Beijing. Therefore, they refrained from making comments on either China’s state of affairs or the administration’s preferred outcome. National Security Adviser Walter Rostow later recalled that Johnson deliberately refrained from condemning Mao in public. By refusing to publicly take sides in China’s internal struggle or to gloat over its troubles, the Johnson administration tried to reduce Chinese hostility as well as its “siege mentality.”²⁷ As the main China hand in the NSC, Alfred Jenkins acknowledged the U.S. posture of “quiet reasonableness” and the “hope for ultimate reconciliation.” But he recommended postponing even “the minor policy changes” until Washington could “make a better judgment as to the course of events in China.”²⁸

While Jenkins was mainly concerned with the proper timing of China policy reform, Rusk consistently believed that the U.S. “firm posture in Asia” was crucial and that any significant “concessions” to Communist China would be “seriously misunderstood in key

²⁵ Michael Lumbers, “‘Staying out of This Chinese Muddle’: The Johnson Administration’s Response to the Cultural Revolution,” *Diplomatic History* vol. 31, no. 2 (April 2007), 275.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 260-5, 288.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 273-4, 293.

²⁸ *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, China*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), Document 236: “Memorandum From Alfred Jenkins of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow),” February 3, 1967. All documents from the U.S. Department of State’s *FRUS* series are hereafter cited in the format *Title* and Document number. All are accessible at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>

quarters, not to mention the Congress.” Ultimately, due to Rusk’s opposition, in addition to the great domestic turmoil in 1968, Johnson’s search for a negotiated settlement in Vietnam, the distraction of the general election, and Beijing’s cold attitude, the Johnson administration did not make much progress in improving relations with China.²⁹

Beijing’s Attitude toward the United States

During the Cultural Revolution, Beijing not only rejected the U.S. initiatives, but also reduced their contacts via the only communication channel in Warsaw. When the American representative at a Warsaw meeting talked about Washington’s offer of trade and travel relaxations, Chinese Ambassador to Poland Wang Guoquan turned them down, arguing that it was “absolutely impossible to improve Sino-American relations” if the Taiwan issue was not solved. Wang charged that the United States was trying to “deceive” the Chinese people and “lull their fighting spirit” with proposals for contacts so that it can “impose war on Chinese people at appropriate time.”³⁰

From 1966 to 1968, the Chinese side deliberately lengthened the gap between the meetings despite American requests to meet more frequently.³¹ While in both 1964 and 1965 the two sides met five times, the number of meetings decreased to three in 1966, two in 1967, and only one in 1968. Moreover, the contact was lowered to the level of second secretary between meetings. On May 18, 1968, the Chinese embassy sent a letter to the U.S. embassy saying that it wanted to postpone the 135th meeting to mid- or late- November because “there was nothing to discuss.” Though Rusk was worried at one time that China might break or suspend the meetings, U.S. representatives in Warsaw felt that Beijing wanted to retain the channel of

²⁹ Lumbers, “Staying out of This Chinese Muddle,” 285.

³⁰ *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, China*, Documents 234, 270.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Document 180, 234, 270.

communication.³² The Chinese side was also deliberate in putting off the meetings as agreed upon by both sides. In 1967, the *People's Daily* published three stories about the postponement of Sino-American meetings for “institutional” reasons. The 134th meeting, in particular, was put off by two months from November 8, 1967 to January 8, 1968.³³ These gestures were Beijing’s deliberate efforts to show the world how it degraded the importance of the meetings and how it slighted Washington.

Beijing’s reduction of contacts with Washington also reflected its effort to avoid the political embarrassment of dealing with American “imperialists” in secret when it attacked Moscow for “colluding” with Washington. Since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Beijing’s official protests against U.S. military operations in Vietnam were usually accompanied by attacks on the Soviet Union. In response to the U.S. bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong in June 1966, for example, while the *People's Daily* labeled the American “imperialists” as the “most dangerous enemy” to people all over the world, it also charged the Soviet Union for acting as the “number-one accomplice of American imperialists.” Attacking the Soviet Union for “colluding” with the United States in sabotaging the struggle of the North Vietnamese through “peace ploy,” it called on the “oppressed” people of the world to “abandon any hope for the American imperialists and Soviet revisionists.”³⁴ When *People's Daily* charged the Americans with a “war provocation” by bombing Chinese civilian facilities close to the Vietnamese border, it blamed the Soviet Union for “cooperating with and instigating” the Americans in their plot to “spread the war to all of Indochina.”³⁵

³² Ibid., Document 228, 234, 311.

³³ *PD*, January 9, 1966, 5; June 9, 1967, 6; November 2, 1967, 6.

³⁴ Ibid., July 5, 1966, 1; July 11, 1966, 1; July 23, 1966, 1; July 24, 1966, 1.

³⁵ Ibid., December 16, 1966, 1; April 26, 1967, 2; May 3, 1967, 2.

According to *People's Daily*, the Soviet official organ *Pravda* in July 1966 insinuated a “Sino-American deal” by publishing American Ambassador to Poland Gronouski’s remarks about a Sino-American meeting in an interview. In order to show Beijing’s ideological orthodoxy, the *People's Daily* published on its front page the full texts of Wang Guoquan’s opening statement and his remark to the media after the meeting. On both occasions he used strong words repudiating both the United States and the Soviet Union.³⁶ Under the table, Wang complained several times to Gronouski about the leak of the meeting contents by the American side.³⁷

In January 1967, both the *Times* and the *Post* featured on their front pages a story by a French editor, who claimed that a Chinese diplomat in Paris a year earlier had asked the French Foreign Ministry to relay Beijing’s message that China would not enter the Vietnam conflict so long as the United States observed three conditions. Taking into account the performance of U.S. military operations in North Vietnam, both newspapers concluded that the two countries had reached an “accord” about no heads-on collision in Vietnam.³⁸ The story was soon picked by the press of the Soviet Union and India. In response to “rumors” of “understanding” or “tacit agreement” between Beijing and Washington, the *People's Daily* attacked the “slandering” of China by the Soviet and Indian press as the “enemies’ ploy” to “sabotage” the close friendship between the Chinese and Vietnamese people.³⁹ As mentioned in the last chapter, up to May 1966, when the U.S. Air Force downed a Chinese plane, the *People's Daily* was still talking about Zhou Enlai’s “four points.” After that, the “four points” was no longer found in the CCP’s

³⁶ Ibid., August 3, 1966, 4; September 8, 1966, 1.

³⁷ *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, China*, Documents 137, 180.

³⁸ *NYT*, January 16, 1967, 1; *Washington Post* (hereafter as *WP*), January 16, 1967, A1.

³⁹ *PD*, February 2, 1967, 6.

official organ. The Chinese media eliminated any sign that could be interpreted as a “compromise” with the United States with the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.

In order to consolidate Beijing’s revolutionary credentials, the Chinese media promoted conflicts between China and the United States. Between 1966 and 1968, the *People’s Daily* carried stories where Chinese fishermen were killed or the Chinese embassy in Hanoi was hit by U.S. bombs.⁴⁰ More importantly, it reported several shooting incidents where the Chinese military downed U.S. aircrafts.⁴¹ On August 21, 1967, the Chinese Air Force shot down two U.S. navy jets straying into the Chinese air space and captured a pilot named Robert Flynn. The *People’s Daily* published the photos of Flynn as well as the plane wrecks, arguing that the PLA’s punishment of U.S. “aggressors” would inspire the Cultural Revolution at home.⁴²

At the Warsaw talks, when Gronouski proposed a joint investigation of the incidents, Wang rejected it as “unnecessary” and charged it as an American effort to “cover its crime” and “deceive the people.” In one incident where the U.S. military seemed to have rescued several Chinese fishermen in December 1966 on the basis of their testimonies in Saigon, Wang accused the U.S. side of “maltreating” them and attempting to “recruit them as spies or defectors to Taiwan.”⁴³ On the front page of the *People’s Daily*, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement protesting the killing and injuries of Chinese fishermen because of U.S. bombing.⁴⁴ Beijing’s rejection of joint investigations suggested that it wanted to avoid dealing with the United States as much as possible. More importantly, whether those incidents actually happened

⁴⁰ Ibid., September 6, 1966, 1; December 18, 1966, 1; May 3, 1967, 2; July 7, 1967, 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., September 17, 1966, 2; September 18, 1966, 1; April 26, 1967, 1; August 30, 1967, 1; February 15, 1968, 1. According to a *Post* editorial, the United States admitted losing eight planes over or near China in three years. See *WP*, February 15, 1968, A24.

⁴² *PD*, August 22, 1967, 1, 4; August 30, 1967, 2.

⁴³ *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXX, China*, Documents 234, 270.

⁴⁴ *PD*, December 6, 1966, 1.

or how they were solved was much less important to the Chinese than their propaganda value showing Sino-American conflicts.

While the front-pages of the *People's Daily* highlighted the “conflicts” between China and the United States, its interior pages featured many stories of the domestic problems in the United States, such as the anti-war protests, race riots, and inflation. In its short comments on Johnson’s State of the Union Address in 1967, the *People's Daily* omitted his message about China, describing him as being “engrossed in problems at home and abroad.”⁴⁵ The *Reference News* reprinted a story from a Hong Kong newspaper that the American desire to build connections with China had been rejected by the CCP, but its abridged version of Johnson’s address kept the message about China.⁴⁶ The Chinese media gave the impression that the United States was in a state of decline and that its offer of friendliness simply showed its weakness.

U.S. Media on the Cultural Revolution

When the Cultural Revolution broke out in China, U.S. media were confused and did not pay much attention to the “cultural” aspect in the Chinese official propaganda. However, the downfall of Peng Zhen, a key member in the Politburo and one whom they viewed as a possible successor to Mao, became a headline in the *Post* and the *Times*. Because Mao had disappeared from the public view since November 1965, they speculated that he had lost control of the situation.⁴⁷ The *Post* published A. Doak Barnett’s speculation that Mao was probably dying and the current turmoil was a power struggle around his succession.⁴⁸ The *Times* first learned of the

⁴⁵ Ibid., January 13, 1967, 5.

⁴⁶ *RN*, January 11, 1967, 1; January 13, 1967, 4.

⁴⁷ *NYT*, June 4, 1966, 1; July 26, 1966, 1; *WP*, May 30, 1966, A16; June 4, 1966, A1.

⁴⁸ *WP*, May 30, 1966, A16.

official name of the campaign--“Cultural Revolution”--on June 18 when Zhou Enlai informed leaders of Romania during his visit to that country.⁴⁹

After disappearing from the public view for several months, Mao swam in the Yangtze River on July 16, 1966. For some unknown reason, the Chinese media chose not to release the story of the swimming until July 25. With several pictures on its front page, the *People's Daily* claimed that Mao had swum thirty *li*, approximately nine miles, within an hour.⁵⁰ Mao's sudden appearance drew the attention of the two key newspapers and magazines. While reprinting a photo of Mao's swimming, they ridiculed the story as propaganda. The *Post* claimed that the mass swimming demonstrations at the bidding of Mao allegedly had caused mass drowning due to ill preparation. *Time* magazine ran an article entitled “The Great Splash Forward.” Since the disastrous Great Leap Forward, its variations had appeared frequently in U.S. media.⁵¹ The newsmagazine pointed out that Mao's performance of swimming nine miles in one hour was four times the world record of marathon swimming, which was obviously impossible for a seventy-two-year old. *Newsweek* used the title “No Ordinary Swim: New Light on the Great Purges as Chairman Mao Surfaces.” It showed skepticism by reprinting a *London Daily Mirror* commentary that suggested Mao might have been held up “by inscrutable Chinese frogmen.” As it correctly pointed out, Mao's appearance showed that he was in good health and had been in full control of the Party and the purge from the beginning.⁵²

With the Cultural Revolution increasing in intensity, stories on the mass violence appeared frequently in U.S. media. This is not surprising because of the media's “penchant for

⁴⁹ *NYT*, June 19, 18.

⁵⁰ *PD*, July 25, 1966, 1.

⁵¹ At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, the *Post* said the purge “foreshadowed another ‘Great Leap’ Modernization; *Newsweek* used “Great Leap Outward” to describe the exodus to Hong Kong from Guangdong province during the Cultural Revolution, see *Newsweek*, October 24, 1966, 57-60.

⁵² *NYT*, July 26, 1966, 2; *WP*, July 26, 1966, 1; *Time*, August 5, 1966, 27; *Newsweek*, August 8, 1966, 36-37.

drama.”⁵³ U.S. media were deeply disturbed and horrified by the government-supported “xenophobic frenzy” in defiance of diplomatic norms when the Red Guards targeted Western life styles as well as foreign nationals in response to Mao’s call to “eliminate the bourgeois influence.” In August 1966, for example, the *Times* and the *Post* reported on their front pages how the Red Guards in Beijing attacked churches in Beijing. Western journalists received a rare first-hand experience of the Red Guards brutality when eight expelled nuns crossed the border into Hong Kong. As *Newsweek* described it, when an eighty-five year old nun fainted, she was “unceremoniously dumped faced down on a baggage cart” and wheeled across the border while scores of Red Guards stood nearby and jeered. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* presented a photo of the sister wheeled across the border. The story that the sister died in a Hong Kong hospital the next day added horror to the scenario.⁵⁴

To solve the problem of no direct access to China, U.S. media used the stories of Canadian, Japanese, Soviet, and Czechoslovak journalists based there. Often, journalists used wall posters or Red Guard newspapers for their source of information. One merit of these unofficial channels was that they provided news that would never appear in the Chinese official media, such as stories about the bloody fights and casualties, personal attacks on Mao’s wife Jiang Qing, Lin Biao, and even Mao himself. One big problem was that information in these posters could not be verified. For example, a *Post* front-page article reprinted dispatches from Japanese and Czechoslovak correspondents who employed wall posters claiming that fifty-four persons had been killed during the riots in Nanjing. As to the number of the injured, the Japanese report was 6,000 while the Czechs listed 60,000. The Czech news agency also quoted Red

⁵³ Melvin Small, *Covering Dissent: The Media and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 11.

⁵⁴ *NYT*, August 24, 1966, 1; *WP*, August 24, 1966, 1; *Time*, September 9, 1966, 29; *Newsweek*, September 12, 1966, 29.

Guards leaflets circulated in Beijing that described tortures of their own members by opposing factions: “Their fingers, noses, and ears were chopped off and their tongues were cut off.” The *Post* admitted that there was no eyewitness to such events.⁵⁵ These leaflets might have deliberately exaggerated the atrocities of opposing factions in order to arouse anger and hatred. Even though some stories could not be confirmed, the audience got a sense of the extent of chaos in China.

In covering the Cultural Revolution, the *Post* seemed to present more graphic and sensational pictures than the *Times*. While the *Times* used “red guards” or “Maoists,” the *Post* mostly used “mobs.” When reporting the Red Guard harassment of Soviet women and children at the Beijing airport, for example, the *Times* used a headline “Soviet Dependents Harassed in Peking.” It claimed that the Chinese demonstrators at the airport were “evidently under a measure of discipline” because Red Guards fists “stopped within inches of Russian face.” The *Post*, in contrast, used a headline “Soviet Wives Forced to Crawl in Peking,” describing how Soviet officials were pushed and manhandled when they tried to protect their women and children who “had to crawl” beneath the portrait of Mao.⁵⁶ The *Post* also seemed to be more impressed by the provocative rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution that could be shown in headlines such as “Peking Declares War of Annihilation” and “Mao Urges Crushing of Foes.”⁵⁷ The *Post*’s reporting of the Cultural Revolution was in line with its somewhat tougher position on Beijing in general.

For all the differences on their front pages, the *Post* and the *Times* both expressed disgust to the Red Guards in their editorials. The *Times* compared the “officially organized violence

⁵⁵ *WP*, January 8, 1967, 1.

⁵⁶ *NYT*, February 6, 1967, 1; *WP*, February 7, 1967, A1; *Newsweek*, February 20, 1967, 27.

⁵⁷ *WP*, September 4, 1966, 1; January 12, 1967, 1.

against foreigners” in China to Empress Dowager’s endorsement of the Boxers in 1900.⁵⁸ The *Post* argued that the image of China had become dominated by “a steadily darkening ugliness” and that the “young fogeys of Peking are frightening.”⁵⁹

Stories in U.S. media often misread Cultural Revolution propaganda when they took the Chinese papers at their face value. For example, in a story entitled “Lin Piao is Made Red Guards’ Head: Chou Enlai and Ho Lung Also Named to High Posts in Chinese Youth Unit,” the *Times* reprinted the Japanese monitoring of a Beijing broadcast that reported Zhou Enlai as having said, “I will join your picket corps and will serve as an adviser” when the Red Guards placed an armband on him. The radio also said Marshals He Long and Lin Biao had agreed to serve as chief of staff and commander in chief of the Red Guards when the youth asked them.⁶⁰ During the Cultural Revolution, there was never any official Red Guards organization with Lin as the commander-in-chief, Zhou as the adviser, and He Long as the chief of staff. What the Japanese picked up from the Chinese radio was nothing but propaganda aimed to show the endorsement of the Red Guards movement by the top leaders. Actually, in its coverage of the Red Guard rallies, the *People’s Daily* consistently called Mao the “paramount commander.” Mao and his wife had much more influence on the Red Guards than Lin, Zhou and He, who probably would have had reservations about their rampages.

Because the Chinese media repeatedly attacked Liu Shaoqi as Mao’s chief opponent, U.S. media also described him as the “rallying point” of “Mao’s foes.” The *Times* considered Liu and Deng as either “fence-sitters” or “leaders of the reported opposition.”⁶¹ *Time* reprinted the

⁵⁸ *NYT*, August 26, 1966, 32; February 6, 1967, 27.

⁵⁹ *WP*, August 25, 1966, 20.

⁶⁰ *NYT*, September 5, 1966, 1; *Time*, September 16, 1966, 41.

⁶¹ *NYT*, November 2, 1966, 1.

Chinese propaganda that “Liu’s faction” had tried to “vote Mao out of power.”⁶² *Newsweek* maintained that “pitched battles between the supporters of Mao and Liu” had become almost daily occurrence.”⁶³ In the summer of 1967, when Deng Xiaoping came under attack, the *Post* speculated that he was “a major figure functioning behind the scenes to mobilize Mao’s adversaries.”⁶⁴ In a typical example, *Time* listed pictures of Mao, Jiang Qing, and Lin Biao as “Heroes” on the left column, and those of Liu Shaoqi and his wife, Tao Zhu, Peng Zhen, Deng Xiaoping, Li Xuefeng, and Zhou Enlai as “Villains” on the right.⁶⁵ The list revealed the American media’s tendency to oversimplify the struggle in China into one between Mao and his alleged “enemies,” or one between “good guys” and “bad guys.”

The reality in China was much more complex because the factions fighting against each other all claimed to be followers of Mao. Those who were purged more recently might have been beneficiaries of previous purges. They were later purged merely because they were unfortunate to have fallen out of Mao’s favor or they might have stood in the way of his political maneuvering. In the above list of “villains,” Tao Zhu and Li Xufeng had been promoted to replace Peng Zhen and Wu Han who had been purged earlier. As for Zhou Enlai, even though the Red Guards attacked him for being “too soft on Mao’s foes,”⁶⁶ he was not purged because Mao needed him to ensure the functioning of the country in the middle of the “civil war.” Another case was the PLA. While Mao wanted it to “support the left” and seize power from the Party establishment and organize revolutionary committees, local military forces did not

⁶² *Time*, July 7, 1967, 31.

⁶³ *Newsweek*, August 7, 1967, 46.

⁶⁴ *WP*, September 30, 1966, A1; July 26, 1967, A1.

⁶⁵ *Time*, January 13, 1967, 22-23.

⁶⁶ *WP*, January 11, 1967, 1.

cooperate well with mass representatives supported by the radical Cultural Revolution Group even though they all claimed to be loyal to Mao.⁶⁷

When U.S. media linked all opponents to radicals together into a consolidated bloc that was anti-Mao in nature, the result was the exaggerated strength of “Mao’s opponents.” In an article “Some Doubt Survival of Present Peking Setup” published on the eve of the Chinese National Day in 1966, the *Post* speculated that Mao and Lin Biao could be overthrown by an opposition that had “grown significantly.” The *Times* editorial also maintained that the turmoil in China had raised questions about the “stability of the Peking regime” with signs denouncing Mao.⁶⁸ On the cover of a January 1967 issue, *Time* magazine featured a large picture of Mao’s head wound up by a dragon of the Great Wall with a subtitle “China in Chaos.” The accompanying article described China as reaching the final stages of the “legendary dance of the scorpion--just before it stings itself to death.”⁶⁹ The speculation about the downfall of Mao’s rule might have been wishful thinking. However, the troubles inside China, as James Reston argued, reduced the possibility of China’s military intervention in Vietnam.⁷⁰

U.S. media’s misunderstanding also included projecting U.S. values on Chinese realities. When the Cultural Revolution started, for example, a *Post* editorial speculated that the movement might signify another “Great Leap Forward” modernization.⁷¹ In March 1967, it claimed that Mao was retreating from his Cultural Revolution and the central issue now was “how to modernize China,” which needed help from the outside world. Therefore, it argued, Beijing in its weakness would be “receptive to arrangements with Washington.”⁷² The *Post* was

⁶⁷ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 236; Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, 233; Harding, “The Chinese State in Crisis,” 169.

⁶⁸ *NYT*, January 7, 1967, 24.

⁶⁹ *Time*, January 13, 1967, 20.

⁷⁰ *NYT*, January 18, 1967, 34.

⁷¹ *WP*, May 30, 1966, A16; Jun 18, 1966, A8.

⁷² *Ibid.*, March 8, 1967, A16.

probably too optimistic about China's need for modernization as a driving force for it to seek reconciliation. It well reflects the prejudices of the "modernization theory" at the time, which posited that every country would go through "development," defined by "progress" in technology and economy among many other things.⁷³ Being embroiled in power struggles, Mao was probably much more interested in revolution than "modernization." Moreover, even if China needed modern technologies, it could have obtained them from other Western countries rather than the United States. Lastly, modernization counted little when Chinese leaders made the decision to reconcile with Washington later.

Despite the chaos in China, U.S. newspeople persisted in criticizing the rigid China policy and pushed for more flexibility. The newspapers were more straightforward than the administration in expressing their preference. The *Post* argued that the United States had a "stake" in the outcome and a flexible American posture would give encouragement to moderate forces in China. The *Times* also maintained that it was in the interest of the United States to encourage the "rational" faction in China by "holding open the door wherever possible."⁷⁴

In July 1967, those who disapproved of Johnson's handling of the Vietnam War exceeded 50 per cent for the first time in the Gallup Poll.⁷⁵ In face of the rising criticisms of the Vietnam War, the Johnson administration mounted its offensive on the critics in fall 1967. Many administration officials responded to media interviews with "predominantly hawkish advice,"⁷⁶ and invoked the specter of the "China threat" in their defense of the administration's Vietnam policy. A typical example was Dean Rusk at a press conference on October 12, 1967. When

⁷³ Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 3.

⁷⁴ *WP*, January 24, 1967, A8; *NYT*, June 22, 1968, 32.

⁷⁵ "Gallup Poll Index Report No. 34 April 1968," *Gallup Opinion Index, Political, Social and Economic Trends* (Gallup International, Inc, 1968), 3.

⁷⁶ Michael Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 113-4.

asked to elaborate on why U.S. security was at stake in Vietnam, Rusk responded that in another ten or twenty years, “there will be a billion Chinese on the Mainland, armed with nuclear weapons, with no certainty about what their attitude toward the rest of Asia will be.”⁷⁷ In their front-page stories reporting Rusk’s press conference, the two newspapers obviously did not support him. The *Post* mentioned Rusk’s “unwarranted obsession about Communist China.” The *Times* noted that his “usual calm tone was missing,” giving the impression that he was emotional. In a column, James Reston argued that Rusk’s remarks were “good theatre but bad policy” and that the reporters liked his “loyalty, optimism, and appealing conviction” but simply could not “believe he was right.”⁷⁸ Rusk’s remarks caused more controversy when Senator Eugene McCarthy (D-MN) accused him of obscuring the issue by invoking the “yellow peril.” Even though Rusk denied it promptly, it became headlines in both the *Times* and the *Post*. In his *Post* column article entitled “Rusk’s Raising of Yellow Peril is Truly Dangerous Escalation,” Joseph Kraft argued that Rusk had put his country in a position that had “elements of madness.”⁷⁹

Dean Rusk was not the only administration official who used the “China peril” to defend the administration’s Vietnam policy. When speaking at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Pennsylvania on October 15, Vice President Hubert Humphrey reasserted that the U.S. security was at stake in Vietnam and that the “current threat to world peace is militant, aggressive Asian communism, with its headquarters in Peking, China.” The *Times* seemed to be more critical of the “hawkish” remarks of administration officials than the *Post*. It placed Humphrey’s speech on its front page while the *Post* did not.⁸⁰ Interviewing specialists on China

⁷⁷ Transcript of Rusk’s press conference, *NYT*, October 13, 1967, 14.

⁷⁸ *NYT*, October 13, 1967, 1, 14, 38; *WP*, October 13, 1967, 1.

⁷⁹ *NYT*, October 17, 1967, 1; *WP*, October 17, 1967, A1, A17.

⁸⁰ *NYT*, October 16, 1967, 1; *WP*, October 16, 1967, A5.

affairs and U.S. diplomacy, the *Times* published an article “Some Specialists Say U.S. Aides Exaggerate Peking Threat.”⁸¹

As U.S. media watched the rise and fall of unrest in China, their call for better Sino-American relations was soon swamped by new stories of Red Guard violence. In March 1967, both the *Times* and the *Post* claimed to have found signs that Mao’s Cultural Revolution was subsiding. A *Post* editorial was so optimistic that it claimed a “propitious moment” had come to “assay the small steps with which America’s eventual reconciliation with China must begin.”⁸² A month later, world famous violinist Ma Sicong and his family arrived in the United States seeking asylum after they fled China. Their arrival caused much interest because the Ma family was among the very few Chinese witnesses of the Cultural Revolution to set foot on American soil.⁸³ After learning of Ma’s “mistreatment” by the Red Guards, an editorial in the *Post* condemned the Communist madness, predicting that such a system would not “persist long enough to imperil for generations the safety and security of millions of people.”⁸⁴ While both newspapers claimed to have noticed signs that the Cultural Revolution was coming to a close as early as October 1967, *Time* and *Newsweek* reported that bodies were still flowing down the Pearl River to Hong Kong and Macao in July 1968.⁸⁵ With stories of recurrent violence, China seemed too unpredictable to work with diplomatically. For the American people, the media’s coverage of Red Guard brutalities, their violent xenophobia and fanaticism must have alienated them.

⁸¹ *NYT*, October 18, 1967, 4.

⁸² *WP*, March 2, 1967, 34; March 8, 1967, A16.

⁸³ *NYT*, April 13, 1967, 1; *WP*, April 13, 1967, A1; *Time*, April 21, 1967, 40.

⁸⁴ *WP*, April 14, 1967, A20.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, October 22, 1967, A1; *NYT*, October 28, 1967, 1, *Time*, July 19, 1968, 24; *Newsweek*, July 8, 1968, 38-9.

For all their misreading of the situation in China, U.S. media were right in perceiving from the struggles Mao's weakness in keeping the country under control. Mao's use of the military to deal with his opponents, as the *Times* saw it, was an "admission of weakness."⁸⁶ In response to the mutiny in Wuhan in July 1967, the *Times* argued that if Mao could not even "liquidate his opponents in so central an institution as the armed forces," it only showed that he was not "fully the master in his own realm." The *Post* also maintained that the incident suggested Mao was failing in his effort to impose the "discipline and purity of his Cultural Revolution across his distressed land."⁸⁷ The resistance and obstruction to Mao, although exaggerated by U.S. media, destroyed the myth of an "impenetrable" Chinese leadership.⁸⁸ The media's coverage of the chaos indeed presented the irrational image of China. However, stories of chaos also created the impression that China was preoccupied with domestic troubles, which reduced the likelihood of an oversea adventure or overture.

Escalation of Sino-Soviet Polemics in U.S. media

During the Cultural Revolution, U.S. media were not only attracted by the struggles in China, they also watched closely its conflicts with the Soviet Union. Coverage of strife between Communist countries could not only discredit the ideological opponents of the United States, but also benefit it in one way or another.

As mentioned earlier, Mao's decision to start the Cultural Revolution was closely related to the developments in the Soviet Union. He disagreed with Khrushchev's "secret speech" attacking Stalin's "cult of personality" at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1956 and especially opposed his policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the West. Sino-Soviet conflict turned public after the Soviet Union signed the test-ban treaty in

⁸⁶ *NYT*, July 24, 1967, 32.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1967, 26; *WP*, August 4, 1967, A18.

⁸⁸ Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 202.

August 1963. Between September 1963 and July 1964, the *People's Daily* published a series of nine “polemics” spelling out the causes of Beijing’s breaking with the CPSU. The ninth polemic entitled “On Khrushchev’s Phony Communism and Historical Lessons for the World” published on July 14, 1964, stipulated that “successors of the proletarian revolutionary cause can only be born in the mass struggle and grow up in the great winds and waves of revolution.” This document contained the essence of what would become the Cultural Revolution.⁸⁹

After Khrushchev was forced to resign in October 1964, Zhou Enlai went to Moscow trying to express Beijing’s goodwill to the new Soviet leadership. However, new Soviet leader Leonard Brezhnev disappointed him by publicly reiterating the “peaceful coexistence” policy with the West and his endorsement of the test-ban treaty. Worse still, a personal dimension was added when Soviet Defense Minister Rodion Malinovskii allegedly told Marshal He Long, “We have already gotten rid of Khrushchev, you ought to follow our example and get rid of Mao Zedong.”⁹⁰ Concluding that Moscow would not abandon its “revisionist” policy, the *People's Daily* and *Red Flag* ran a joint editorial “How Khrushchev Lost His Power,” attacking the new Soviet leadership as practicing “Krushchevism without Khrushchev.”⁹¹

After the Cultural Revolution started, Mao was not hesitant to use anti-Soviet slogans to advance his domestic cause when he targeted the “Khrushchev sleeping by our side.” In the communiqué of the Eleventh Plenum that passed the “Sixteen Points Decision” about the Cultural Revolution, “struggle against the Soviet Union” was adopted as an official policy.⁹² Under the strong anti-revisionist propoganda in China, the Red Guards targeted the Soviet

⁸⁹ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 7. As the head of the Xinhua News Agency and the Editor-in-Chief of the *People's Daily*, Wu Lenxi was involved in drafting the polemics. See Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan: 1956-1966 zhongsu guanxi huiyilu* [Ten Years of Polemics: A Memoir of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1956-1966] (Beijing: Zhongyang xenxian chubanshe, 1999), 637-41.

⁹⁰ Nicholas Khoo, “Breaking the Ring of Encirclement: The Sino-Soviet Rift and Chinese Policy toward Vietnam, 1964-1968,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol.12, no. 1 (Winter 2010), 14-15.

⁹¹ *PD*, November 11, 1964, 1.

⁹² *Ibid.*, August 14, 1966, 1.

embassy for mass rallies and demonstrations in August 1966. They also renamed the street in front of the Soviet embassy as the “Anti-Revisionism Street.” The Chinese government’s failure to rein in the Red Guards’ attack on the embassy annoyed Moscow, whose protests only served to add fuel to the Red Guards’ frenzy.

Sino-Soviet quarrels reached its peak with the “Moscow Incident” in January 1967. On January 24, sixty-nine Chinese students studying in Europe arrived in Moscow on their way back to Beijing to take part in the Cultural Revolution. When they requested to present a wreath to Stalin’s grave, they were rejected by the Soviet authority but allowed instead to pay tribute to the Lenin Mausoleum, which was also at Red Square. After laying the wreath, the students refused to leave and together they read aloud Mao’s quotations that included anti-Soviet slogans. Clashes broke out when the Soviet police tried to stop the Chinese students. In protest, the Red Guards laid siege to the Soviet embassy in Beijing for several weeks. In retaliation, the Soviets besieged the Chinese embassy in Moscow for several days. When tensions in Beijing caused the Soviets to evacuate Russian women and children, as mentioned earlier, many of them were harassed by the Red Guards on their way to the airport. In Moscow, Soviet citizens broken into the Chinese embassy complex, grabbed the display articles inside, and beat up Chinese diplomats. These “tit-for-tat” struggles intensified the Sino-Soviet tension and sent it on a no-return track.⁹³

What complicated the Sino-Soviet “war of words” was the tension along their disputed frontiers. Since the Cultural Revolution started, violence against Soviet diplomats and the anti-Soviet hysteria in China further aroused Moscow’s fear of war with China. In a CPSU plenum in December 1966, several key party leaders complained that Chinese leaders had put struggle against the Soviet Union in the first place. As a result, Moscow accelerated its military buildup

⁹³ Ma, *Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 168-71; MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 222-3.

along the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian borders in 1967 and 1968. From 1965 to 1969, the number of Soviet divisions reportedly increased from seventeen to twenty-seven. Brezhnev's assumption was that more troops would reduce the danger of military confrontations.⁹⁴

In Xinjiang, an autonomous region in central Asia, the chaos caused by the Red Guard movement and their hunt for Soviet sympathizers triggered large numbers of Uyghurs and Kazakhs to flee to the Soviet Union, which the Soviet press reported as several hundred thousand in January 1967. In response, Mao ordered all border forces on the Soviet frontier to be alerted on February 11. In February, Moscow reported a withdrawal of Chinese troops one hundred miles from the Soviet and Mongolian borders.⁹⁵ In late 1966, the *Reference News* had started to reprint Western media stories about increasing Soviet troop deployment, frequent military drills and Soviet leaders' anti-China indoctrination during their visit to the Sino-Soviet border.⁹⁶ All news of Sino-Soviet border tensions was censored in the *People's Daily* though. It shows that Mao was not expecting a real war against the Soviet Union when the Cultural Revolution was raging. He was mainly interested in using the ideological differences with Moscow to serve his domestic struggle against "revisionists."

American journalists covered the Sino-Soviet polemics with prominence and not without drama. They published vivid stories of the "war of words" emanating from Moscow and Beijing in early 1967. Under the headline "Moscow and Peking in Loudspeaker War," the *Times* described a scene where large Soviet loudspeakers mounted on two trucks blared against two smaller ones installed by the Chinese embassy.⁹⁷ The *Post*, *Time* and *Newsweek* placed pictures

⁹⁴ Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2009), 181-4, 202.

⁹⁵ Peter Jones and Sian Kevill, *China and the Soviet Union, 1949-1984* (New York: Facts on File, 1984), 91-92.

⁹⁶ *RN*, November 10, 1966, 1; December 9, 1966, 4; December 17, 1966, 4; December 24, 1966, 4; February 5, 1967, 1; July 8, 1967, 1.

⁹⁷ *NYT*, February 9, 1967, 1.

of demonstrators burning effigies of Soviet leaders in Beijing side by side with the Russians shouting “shame on Mao” in Moscow. In an article entitled “Mao Bait the Russian Bear,” *Newsweek* reported the clashes at the Red Square with an amusing effect. As it went, when the Chinese embassy in Moscow produced two of the “allegedly injured students at a press conference, one of them spoiled the whole effect by becoming so excited that he unwittingly ripped off his bandages to reveal an unblemished face.”⁹⁸

While U.S. media admitted that Beijing was more provocative than Moscow, they did not appreciate the “quiet self-congratulation” of the Soviets.⁹⁹ For example, the *Times* claimed that the Soviet press was “more graphic about unrest and violence in China than many Western papers.” James Reston noticed that U.S. officials talked about the Cultural Revolution far less than the top leaders of the Soviet Union. In an editorial entitled “Moscow Fishes in Peking,” the *Post* argued that the Russians were conducting an extensive campaign to “dislodge” Mao by putting pressure on him and making his rule as “arduous” as possible. *Newsweek* pointed out that Moscow had good reason to be worried by the fact that Beijing had accorded it the same “arch-demon status” as Washington.¹⁰⁰ During his visit to Great Britain in February 1967, Kosygin remarked in a television interview that the Soviet Union sympathized with Chinese people who were struggling against “the dictatorial regime of Mao Tse-tung.” The *Post* interpreted Kosygin’s unusual condemnation of Mao as a sign that Moscow was giving priority to better relations with the West. In the editorial “Kosygin Drops the Mask,” the *Times* argued that his

⁹⁸ *WP*, February 10, 1967, A1; *Time*, February 17, 1967, 26; *Newsweek*, February 20, 1967, 27; February 13, 1967, 47-48.

⁹⁹ *Newsweek* described the Soviets as showing “remarkable restraint,” September 12, 1966, 29; *Time* noted that the demonstrators in front of the Chinese embassy in Moscow were more behaved than the Red Guards surrounding the Soviet embassy in Beijing. See *Newsweek*, February 17, 1967, 26.

¹⁰⁰ *NYT*, September 17, 1966, 1; January 18, 1967, 34; *WP*, December 16, 1966, A28; *Newsweek*, September 12, 1966, 29.

remark “in the capital of a capitalist nation” was “counterproductive” because it only served to inform the West of the “extreme seriousness of the Sino-Soviet crisis.”¹⁰¹

U.S. media also gave prominence to the Sino-Soviet border tensions and speculated about a possible war between the two Communist giants. Before 1967, *Time* magazine had called attention to the border conflict, which it described as a “lesser known and potentially dangerous” aspect in the Sino-Soviet disputes. Citing the increase of Soviet anti-China indoctrination on the border, it claimed that “the war of words” might become an “Armageddon at the summit of the Communist world.”¹⁰² Similarly, an editorial in the *Times* argued that by provoking a crisis with Moscow, Mao might be preparing a campaign to win some of the disputed territory in Siberia. With regard to Kosygin’s remarks in London, it again raised the question whether it might spark a war between the two Communist powers.¹⁰³ On February 10, 1967, journalists from the Japanese news agency Kyodo reported from leaflets in Beijing that Mao had given orders to alert all Chinese border troops. The *Times*, the *Post*, and *Time* quickly picked up the story even though they had no means to confirm it. *Newsweek* also talked about the “War of Nerves” on the Sino-Soviet border.¹⁰⁴ By February 1967, the seriousness of the Sino-Soviet conflict had become so clear to newspeople that a permanent split seemed very likely to them.¹⁰⁵ In general, their coverage of the Sino-Soviet conflict was more accurate than their perceptions of the Cultural Revolution.

¹⁰¹ *WP*, February 11, 1967, A12; *NYT*, February 11, 1967, 1, 27.

¹⁰² *Time*, December 2, 1966, 38, February 3, 1967, 25-6..

¹⁰³ *NYT*, February 6, 1967, 27; February 11, 1967, 1, 27.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, February 12, 1967, 1; *WP*, February 12, 1967, 1; *Time*, February 17, 1967, 26; *Newsweek*, March 6, 1967, 44.

¹⁰⁵ It can be seen from the following titles: “China Dares Russia to End Ties, and Warns ‘Graves Await You’” in the *Post*, February 9, 1967; “German Red Foreshadow Rift” in the *Times*, February 12, 1967, 2; “Close to a Final Split,” in *Time*, February 17, 1967, 26; In an article entitled “Mao Bait the Russian Bear,” *Newsweek* held that Mao was deliberately trying to “goad their former allies into a diplomatic break.” February 13, 1967, 48.

As the Sino-Soviet rift developed, it provided a foundation for new thinking for those who were concerned about Sino-American relations. In February 1967, scholars on China convened a conference at University of Chicago's Center of Policies Studies. In his speech at the conference, Senator Robert Kennedy (D-NY) asserted that the United States had "widely exaggerated" the threat of China and underestimated the significance of the Sino-Soviet split. He called on administration officials to distinguish between "armed attack and internal revolution," between "Chinese direction of revolutionary forces and Chinese exhortation." Kennedy's speech made the front pages of both the *Times* and the *Post*.¹⁰⁶ The next day, the *Times* covered ideas from the conference with a title "Victory for Mao held Best for U.S.: Experts See Chinese-Soviet Rift as an Advantage."¹⁰⁷

Several *Post* columnists criticized Kennedy. Claiming that the senator's proposal had existed inside as well outside the government for some time, Joseph Alsop complained that Kennedy had appeared on the front pages too often and that he was given too many credits for pressing a so-called "brand new" China policy. William S. White, in his column article "Who's Advising Bobby?...China Proposals Shock Associates," criticized Kennedy by reemphasizing the Chinese "aggression" in Korea and Vietnam. He attacked the senator for "becoming a part-time dove" on Vietnam where his brother JFK had been a "resolute hawk." He also described Kennedy's academic advisers as "splendid" writers but not "wise politicians."¹⁰⁸ Though not shared by all, these criticisms of Kennedy reflected opposition to China policy reform during the Cultural Revolution.

In reality, the United States had been much closer to the Soviet Union than to China since the early 1960s. It was especially true during the Cultural Revolution when the Soviet leadership

¹⁰⁶ *NYT*, February 9, 1967, 1; *WP*, February 9, 1967, 1.

¹⁰⁷ *NYT*, February 10, 1967, 2.

¹⁰⁸ *WP*, February 13, 1967, A 17; February 14, 1967, A17.

was truly alarmed by the Chinese anti-Soviet hysteria. In January 1967, the Soviet Politburo approved a policy to maintain Soviet-American relations on a certain cordial level to help the Soviet Union avoid fighting on two fronts.¹⁰⁹ At the Glassboro Summit in June 1967, though Kosygin and Johnson did not reach any concrete agreement, the intimate atmosphere at the meeting was interpreted by the *Times* and the *Post* as the beginning of a better Soviet-American relationship.¹¹⁰ At the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1967, Harrison Salisbury, a prominent journalist on the Soviet affairs and the assistant managing editor of the *Times*, wrote a column “China Tops Soviet List of Potential Dangers,” arguing that the United States had dropped to the third place on the list of potential threats to the Soviet Union with China and West Germany on the top two.¹¹¹ The Johnson team appreciated the Soviet cooperation over the Paris talks. They were unwilling to exploit the Sino-Soviet rift because of their fear of alienating the Soviets, whom they believed might help find a settlement in Vietnam.¹¹²

U.S. Media on China’s Role in Vietnam

U.S. media not only followed the Sino-Soviet polemics, they were also interested in the relations between Beijing and Hanoi because any rift between them could affect the U.S. war effort in Vietnam. As one of the greatest victims of the Sino-Soviet disputes, Sino-Vietnamese relations had started to strain after Moscow increased its role in the Vietnam War with Kosygin’s visit to Hanoi in January 1965. When Kosygin proposed a Sino-Soviet “joint action” to support Vietnam, Mao dismissed his proposal, asserting that China’s argument with the Soviet Union would “continue for another 9,000 years.”¹¹³ Beijing’s obstinate rejection of “joint action”

¹⁰⁹ Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 198.

¹¹⁰ *NYT*, June 23, 1967, 33; June 24, 1967, 22; June 25, 1967, E8; June 26, 1967, 32; *WP*, June 23, 1967, A20; June 25, 1967, C6; June 27, 1967, A16.

¹¹¹ *NYT*, November 3, 1967, 1.

¹¹² Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 199.

¹¹³ Zhai Qiang, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 153.

proposals of world Communists supporting Vietnam severely embittered Hanoi. Several years later, when China invaded Vietnam in 1979, Hanoi listed the “crimes” of Beijing in “sabotaging the united action” in its publication of the history of Sino-Vietnamese relations.¹¹⁴

Beijing not only rejected the joint-action proposal, but also demanded that Hanoi should take sides in the Sino-Soviet quarrel and repudiate Soviet revisionism. Evidence shows the existence of great differences between Beijing and Hanoi in 1966. In his talks with Le Duan, the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Worker’s Party (VWP), in March 1966, Zhou Enlai emphasized that “opposing the U.S. should necessarily go hand in hand with opposing revisionism” and the two things could not be separated. He also complained that Vietnamese newspapers were carrying stories about Chinese aggression against Vietnam in the past. When he failed to convince the North Vietnamese to distance themselves from the Soviet Union, Zhou insisted that mentioning the Soviet aid together with the Chinese aid was an “insult” to China.¹¹⁵ These actions only alienated the North Vietnamese and pushed them further toward Moscow.

Beijing also disagreed with Hanoi’s military strategies, especially on the launching of the Tet Offensive. As an advocate of protracted people’s war or guerilla warfare in rural areas, Mao opposed using large units fighting conventional warfare in urban centers because he believed the North Vietnamese would expose themselves to the heavy bombing of the superior American air force. However, with more sophisticated weapons and heavy artillery provided by the Soviet Union and the expectation that simultaneous uprisings would emerge everywhere in South Vietnam, in January 1968 Hanoi launched the Tet Offensive, which consisted of simultaneous

¹¹⁴ Khoo, “Breaking the Ring of Encirclement,” 32-33.

¹¹⁵ Tension could obviously be felt in the following remarks of CCP’s hot-tempered General Secretary Deng Xiaoping to Le Duan in April, “Why are you afraid of displeasing the Soviets, and what about China? ... Vietnamese comrades have some other thoughts about our methods of assistance, but you have not yet told us...Are you suspicious that China helps Vietnam for our own intentions? ... We will withdraw our military men at once.” See “Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Kang Sheng and Le Duan, Nguyen Duy Trinh,” April 13, 1966; See also “Zhou Enlai and Le Duan,” March 23, 1966; “Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong, Hoang Tung,” August 23, 1966, all in Westad, et al. eds., “Seventy-seven Conversations,” 91-96.

conventional attacks on major cities in South Vietnam. Though the United States defeated the Tet Offensive, the enemies' ability to mount such a large-scale offensive after heavy U.S. bombing caused a "shock" to Americans who now began to raise serious doubts about official reports of "progress" and the prospect of victory in Vietnam. Public support for the war and Johnson's handling of it went on a big "downward spiral."¹¹⁶ Since July 1965, Americans had been polled repeatedly about whether they thought the United States had made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam. In February 1968, those who answered "yes" exceeded those who said "No" for the first time.¹¹⁷ In order to seek a settlement, President Johnson on March 31 declared his de-escalation plan by offering a partial halt to U.S. bombing against North Vietnam unilaterally. After suffering heavy casualties, Hanoi started to negotiate with Washington in Paris in May.

As the rift between Beijing and Hanoi developed, the *Times* had spotted sign as early as May 1966 when Albanian Premier Mehmet Shehu visited China. From the joint announcements made by Chinese and Albania leaders that there could be no "neutrality" or "the middle of the road" in the struggle against Soviet revisionism, it sensed "thinly veiled attacks" on Hanoi's leaders. When the Cultural Revolution erupted, *Newsweek* speculated that Hanoi might have been "disillusioned" by the upheavals in China because they might affect its war effort. During the Glassboro Summit in June 1967, the *Post* featured the story "Talks Said to Cool Hanoi-Peking Ties," arguing that the gap between Beijing and Hanoi would widen when the Soviets' increasing influence on Hanoi would facilitate its role as a "high-level broker" between the

¹¹⁶ George Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 154.

¹¹⁷ "Gallup Poll Index Report No. 34 April 1968," 14.

United States and North Vietnam.¹¹⁸ In other words, a closer Soviet-American tie would alienate the relations between Hanoi and Beijing because of Hanoi's closer relations with Moscow.

When the Paris talks started in May 1968, the *People's Daily* remained silent and reduced coverage of Vietnam, especially on its front pages. The *Post* interpreted Beijing's continued silence as an indication of its unhappiness with Hanoi. In a front-page article "Hanoi and Moscow Appear to Mesh Tactics on Talks," the *Times* noted that China had been excluded from policy formulation over negotiations. It also featured an editorial entitled "Hanoi and Peking: They Don't Always See Eye to Eye." Seeing China's upgrading of the Viet Cong mission in its capital, *Newsweek* interpreted it as Beijing's effort to "drive a wedge" between Hanoi and the Viet Cong if Paris talks went on.¹¹⁹

Moreover, both the *Times* and the *Post* reported stories of Chinese demonstrations in front of North Vietnamese consulates in Chinese cities. The *Post* even obtained information from a Red Guard bulletin in Guangzhou (Canton), which claimed that Red Guards had stormed the North Vietnamese consulate and taunted its diplomats in Nanning, the capital of Guangxi Province adjacent to North Vietnam, on June 2, 1968.¹²⁰ In July, the two newspapers reported that Chinese leaders including Zhou Enlai blamed the factional strife for halting the shipment of Soviet and Chinese aid to Vietnam. They speculated that the Red Guards might be deliberately blocking the transportation to show their discontent toward Hanoi.¹²¹

The Red Guards could have learned about the Paris talks from the *Reference News*, which had followed them closely since the Vietnamese representatives arrived in Paris in May. It even featured a story about how Hanoi's chief negotiator Xuan Thuy met with Kosygin en route to

¹¹⁸ *NYT*, May 12, 1966, 1; *Newsweek*, September 19, 1966, 51; *WP*, June 25, 1967, A1.

¹¹⁹ *WP*, April 10, 1968, A2; *NYT*, April 22, 1968, 1; April 28, 1968, E2; *Newsweek*, April 29, 1968, 15.

¹²⁰ *WP*, July 13, 1968, 1; *NYT*, June 29, 1968, 1.

¹²¹ *WP*, July 6, 1968, A1; July 12, 1968, A1; *NYT*, July 10, 1968, 1. See also *Time*, December 6, 1968, 6.

Paris and reprinted several of his speeches at the negotiations.¹²² Stories of discord between Beijing and Hanoi reduced Beijing's role in Vietnam, which to some extent weakened the China threat.

Impact of the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia

In the last year of the Johnson administration, the domestic and international environments for both the United States and China moved in a direction that favored a better relationship between them. As the chaos in China showed apparent signs of decline, Johnson also started his de-escalation plan through negotiation. Moreover, the China Lobby in the United States had been severely weakened with the Committee of One Million losing the endorsement of congressional majorities.¹²³ Candidates of both parties no longer took it as a taboo to publicly talk about negotiating with China.¹²⁴ Most important of all, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and the introduction of “the Brezhnev Doctrine,” which used the conception of “limited sovereignty” to justify the Soviet military intervention in another socialist state, greatly increased Beijing's concern about the Soviet threat. Slowly, Beijing started to turn its attention away from Vietnam to the mounting danger to the north.

In denouncing the Soviet invasion, the *People's Daily* described Moscow as “having degenerated into a social-imperialist and social-fascist” state.¹²⁵ The change from “revisionist” to “social-imperialist” in the Chinese official discourse symbolizes that the Soviet Union had shifted from an “ideological opponent” to a “strategic threat.”¹²⁶ In September 1968, the official

¹²² *RN*, May 8, 1968, 2; May 11, 1968, 2, May 16, 1968, 2, May 24, 1968, 2.

¹²³ Stanley D. Bachrack, *The Committee of One Million: “China Lobby” Politics, 1953-1971* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 258.

¹²⁴ The Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey had talked about opening to China since 1966. In a news conference in Miami on August 6, the Republican candidate Richard Nixon declared that whoever became the American president would be prepared to talk with the next superpower, Communist China. *NYT*, August 7, 1968, 1.

¹²⁵ *PD*, August 23, 1968, 1; August 24, 1968, 1; August 30, 1968, 1.

¹²⁶ Nicholas Khoo, *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Soviet Alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 157.

organ began to publicize strategic threats from the Soviet Union. For example, the *People's Daily* for the first time revealed tensions along the Sino-Soviet border by publishing a Foreign Ministry protest against Soviet intrusions into China's air space in the past, particularly in August. In October, it published Zhou Enlai and PLA Chief of Staff Huang Yongsheng's public speeches with reference to Soviet troop deployment and "provocations" on the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolia borders.¹²⁷

The *People's Daily* also singled out Moscow when it attacked countries that formed the anti-China strategic circle. In an article entitled "Warning to the 'Heroes and Good Fellows' in the Anti-China Circle" from the PLA's point of view, it listed recent "anti-China activities" conducted by the Soviet Union.¹²⁸ Between September and November 1968, while the *People's Daily* ferociously attacked the "Soviet socialist imperialists" on its front pages, it only briefly referred to the American military "failures" in Vietnam and great civil disturbances at home in interior pages. It seemed that Beijing was more concerned with a threatening Soviet Union than a weakened United States.

The *Reference News* displayed signs that Beijing regarded Moscow as its "principle enemy" after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. A front-page article entitled "Soviet Revisionists Is Playing the Leading Role in the Anti-China Circle at the Acquiescence of the United States" argued that the Soviet military drills between 1965 and 1967 reflected that China had become the "number one imaginary enemy" of the Soviet Union after Moscow had effectively reduced tensions with the West. As it stated, while the "anti-China circle" put together by the United States had collapsed due to the resistance of the Vietnamese in the initial

¹²⁷ *PD*, October 1, 1968, 6; October 5, 1968, 3; November 7, 1968, 6.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, September 21, 1968, 5.

stage of the Soviet-American understanding, the Soviet Union had taken up the leading role in the second stage, by containing China from both sides with “the two claws of the crab.”¹²⁹

After the Paris talks began, Hanoi’s refusal to repudiate the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia further weakened Sino-North Vietnamese relations. During the National Day celebration of 1968, the *People’s Daily* placed Vietnamese representatives after guests from Albania, Pakistan, Burma, Indonesia and New Zealand when it reported the state reception held by Zhou Enlai. Lin Biao totally ignored the conflict in Vietnam in his speech at the Tiananmen Square celebration the next day. On the same occasion a year earlier, Vietnam had been ranked next only to Albania and Congo, and Lin had expressed warm support for the Vietnamese.¹³⁰ The *Post* read Lin Biao’s speech as a sign that Beijing had shifted its focus away from Vietnam to the danger of a possible collision with the Soviet Union.¹³¹

Beijing’s public attitude toward the Paris talks began to change in October 1968, when the *People’s Daily* for the first time ran a front-page article pointing out that the talks had reached its “delicate stage” after twenty-six formal negotiations since their beginning on May 13. As it reported, “more and more signs show that the stalemate at the Paris talks might have been broken” when Johnson was planning to use the “fraud” of a comprehensive halt to bombing. It grudgingly claimed that the stories needed to be “further confirmed as the situation develops.”¹³² The *Times* speculated that Beijing chose to disclose the Paris talks because it needed to prepare its public when progress was “imminent.”¹³³ Before that, the *Reference News* had featured a story about Washington’s intention of complete halt to bombing in order to make a breakthrough

¹²⁹ *RN*, October 12, 1968, 1.

¹³⁰ *PD*, August 25, 1968, 3; October 1, 1968, 3; October 2, 1968, 2; October 1, 1967, 2; October 2, 1967, 2.

¹³¹ *WP*, October 2, 1968, A1. The *Times* did not pay much attention to this message and it focused on the degraded role of the Red Guards shown in the celebration. *NYT*, October 2, 1968, 1.

¹³² *PD*, October 20, 1968, 1.

¹³³ *NYT*, October 21, 1968, 10. The *Post* ignored the piece.

in the Paris talks.¹³⁴ Beijing did not want its cadres to be too surprised when progress in Paris became a reality.

When Johnson declared in a television address on October 31 a complete halt to the bombing, the *People's Daily*, to the surprise of the foreign media, published the full text of his address.¹³⁵ It also published Hanoi's official response declaring that it was ready to join the quadripartite talks that included the NLF and South Vietnam, along with Ho Chi Minh's message to the Vietnamese people. On November 18, it published the statements of the U.S. State Department and the Foreign Ministry of the DRV on their positions on the recent Paris talks.¹³⁶ In Beijing's strategic consideration, if Hanoi's support for the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was a sign that it had "lost out in its competition with the Soviet Union over Hanoi's allegiance,"¹³⁷ the beginning of the quadripartite talks in November consolidated the Soviet victory. By publicizing Hanoi's negotiations with the United States, Beijing seemed to be discrediting Hanoi and preparing for its own disengagement from Vietnam. While in private Mao expressed his endorsement for the "fighting and talking" strategy before the DRV and NLF leaders in November 1968, China started to withdraw support troops from North Vietnam at the same time.¹³⁸

More importantly, in November, Beijing signaled to Washington its wish to renew Warsaw contacts. When the United States proposed to put off the 135th meeting to February 20 1969, a month after the inauguration of Richard Nixon, the Chinese Foreign Ministry made a quick reply that was unusually longer and more detailed than any previous statements. The

¹³⁴ *RN*, October 12, 2.

¹³⁵ The *Reference News* documented Western media's surprise on its front page on November 7, 1968, 1.

¹³⁶ *PD*, November 3, 1968, 5; November 5, 1968, 5; November 18, 1968, 6.

¹³⁷ Westad, "History, Memory, and the Language of Alliance-Making," in Westad, et al. eds., "Seventy-seven Conversations," 11.

¹³⁸ "Mao Zedong and Pham Van Dong" November 17, 1968, in Westad, et al. eds., "Seventy-seven Conversations," 141; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 179.

statement, with its attack on the “typically imperialist” attitude of the United States, stated that China would like to talk with the United States on two principles: the U.S. withdrawal from Taiwan and its willingness to sign an agreement with China based on “the five principles of peaceful coexistence.”¹³⁹ This rhetoric had disappeared from Chinese media since the Gulf of Tonkin Incident in August 1964. The Chinese government could have just sent the letter to the U.S. embassy and published a statement when the meeting was over, as it normally did. Publishing the response in full served as a defense of Beijing’s position before the domestic audience. It could also demonstrate that the government of China was not afraid of talking to the “imperialists” in a rational manner.

In the United States, the *Times* was the most excited about the Chinese offer, granting it a front-page prominence. It argued that the “peaceful coexistence” clause might signify “a possible shift in the Chinese foreign policy from belligerency back to the flexible policy of the 1950s.” Considering Beijing’s “overture of coexistence” and the starting of quadripartite negotiations over Vietnam, its editorial pages expressed great optimism about peace prospects in Asia at the end of 1968.¹⁴⁰ The *Post* was not too impressed by Beijing’s proposal at first when it placed the story on page sixteen and did not read too much meaning from the Chinese statement. In December, it changed to argue that it was amazing that the United States was “wooded” by both Beijing and Moscow.¹⁴¹

Of the three TV networks, only CBS reported the Chinese story in the evening news of that day. It put the story at the end of a clip showing the recent activities of the president-elect Richard Nixon, whose foreign policy advisor Robert Murphy was reported as saying that he was

¹³⁹ *PD*, November 27, 1968, 5. For previous statements, see *PD*, April 25, 1965, 5; July 2, 1965, 4; September 17, 1965, 4; December 17, 1965, 4; January 27, 1967, 5.

¹⁴⁰ *NYT*, November 27, 1968, 1; November 29, 1968, 44; December 1, 1969, E1; December 22, 1968, E10.

¹⁴¹ *WP*, November 27, 1968, A16; November 28, 1968, A4; December 4, 1968, A19.

“pleased but not excited” about the Chinese offer to talk.¹⁴² ABC reported the news a week later, claiming that change in the Chinese attitude might be an opportunity for Nixon to make concessions in his China policy.¹⁴³ NBC reporting came out three weeks later after it had time to weigh the significance of the Chinese announcement. While showing the film of Mao’s recent meeting with the Pakistani president, the anchor said that Mao wanted to test the temper of Nixon by using the “five principles of coexistence,” which could have been condemned as “rank revisionism” a year ago. It concluded that Nixon was the “first beneficiary of the Cultural Revolution.”¹⁴⁴

Of the two newsweeklies, Henry Luce’s *Time* described the signals from Beijing as “erratic, vague and contradictory,” but it acknowledged them as a positive sign that China’s relations with the world could expect to become “more rational and more flexible.” *Newsweek* did not cover the Chinese call for talks until February of the next year.¹⁴⁵ It took U.S. media several weeks to gradually dwell upon the positive significance of the Chinese call for the renewal of the Warsaw talks. As is often the case, the evaluation of the *Times* may have exerted some impact on the others.

The Johnson administration responded to the Chinese offer with restrained optimism. In his memo to National Security Advisor Walt Rostow, Alfred Jenkins argued that he did not believe it was much of an “invitation for rapprochement.” He thought it was probably a signal of Beijing’s “readiness” to listen to any interesting change in policy from the new administration. Rostow and Dean Rusk recommended that President Johnson approve a change in trade

¹⁴² CBS Evening News, November 27, 1968, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Record #: 198589. (All newscasts are hereafter cited in the format network, date, record number. All are accessible at Vanderbilt Television News Archive in Nashville, TN).

¹⁴³ ABC Evening News, December 3, 1969, Record #: 1115.

¹⁴⁴ NBC Evening News, December 13, 1968, Record #: 441090.

¹⁴⁵ *Time*, January 17, 1969, 28-9; *Newsweek*, February 10, 1969, 43.

regulations and permit U.S. subsidiaries abroad to sell a limited range of non-strategic goods to China. Rusk believed that this change was a useful move prior to the scheduled meeting with the Chinese in Warsaw. Rostow thought that they could set up a “modest precedent” that Nixon could either follow or ignore, but it would reduce the significance if Nixon initiated it.¹⁴⁶ The Johnson administration ended up leaving the initiative to Nixon.

Conclusion

As this chapter indicates, the Cultural Revolution became a “watershed” in Sino-American relations.¹⁴⁷ While the U.S. escalation in Vietnam caused the Johnson administration to cautiously reduce tensions with China through tentative bridge-building gestures, the Cultural Revolution witnessed the dramatic escalation of Sino-Soviet tension and the open rift between Beijing and Hanoi. What came out of the chaos was an international environment that favored a better relationship between China and the United States.

During the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese media promoted Beijing’s image as a fighter against both “American imperialists” and “Soviet revisionists” in order to inspire the struggle against Mao’s political enemies. The contrast between Chinese words and deeds shows that Beijing did not if ever want to fight either of the superpowers while China was in a state of turmoil. The Chinese media played an important role in provoking the Soviet Union and intensifying the Sino-Soviet polemics. As they continued in their ideological invectives against the United States, the Chinese media displayed Beijing’s slight of Washington by repeatedly delaying the already reduced contact in Warsaw. In order to defend China’s revolutionary credentials and to dispel the “rumor” of its “understanding” with Washington in Vietnam, they eagerly took advantage of the propaganda value of the “conflicts” between the two countries in

¹⁴⁶ *FRUS 1964-1968, Volume XXX, China*, Documents 330, 336.

¹⁴⁷ Lumbers, *Piercing the Bamboo Curtain*, 202.

the high seas as well as along the Chinese border. Their attacks on the “U.S. aggression” usually served the additional purpose of embarrassing the Soviet Union when it constantly labeled Moscow as the “number-one accomplice” of the United States.

With the start of the Paris talks in May and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, Chinese media demonstrated Beijing’s unhappiness with Hanoi and its increasing concern with the Soviet Union as a strategic threat. As the importance of Vietnam declined, the Soviet Union first equaled, and then replaced the United States as the primary threat to China in the media.

While the Johnson administration refrained from making public comments on the domestic politics of China, U.S. media’s penchant for drama caused them to cover the power struggles and Red Guard violence in China prominently. These stories unavoidably caused the decline of China’s image among the American audience. Due to the lack of access to China and their simplified reading of the Chinese propaganda, U.S. journalists tended to over-simplify the situation in China and to project their own wishful thinking on the Chinese reality. Their coverage of the resistance to the Cultural Revolution, however, suggested the weakness of Mao’s control and shattered the myth of a united Chinese leadership. Despite the chaos in China, some commentators persisted in criticizing the government’s rigidity and pushed for a more flexible policy. The chronic violence in China, in turn, shattered the optimism for improved Sino-American relations.

In comparison to their coverage of Chinese domestic politics, U.S. media were more accurate in assessing China’s international environment, especially the Sino-Soviet and Sino-North Vietnamese rifts. The seriousness of the Sino-Soviet split discussed in the media encouraged those who were concerned with Sino-American relations to think more seriously

about exploiting the rift, even though the lame-duck Johnson team did not move in that direction. Accounts of the rift between Beijing and Hanoi described Beijing's reduced role in Vietnam. Essentially, U.S. media pictured a disorganized and greatly weakened China with deep domestic as well as international troubles, which made it less likely to intervene in Vietnam. At the end of 1968 when Beijing offered to renew contacts in Warsaw, U.S. media were looking for a more promising Sino-American relationship in the coming Nixon administration.

Chapter 4: The Sino-Soviet Crisis: “Danger and Opportunity” in 1969

The year 1969 witnessed the opportunity for a thaw in Sino-American relations. When Richard Nixon came into office, he faced much more favorable domestic and international environments than Lyndon Johnson had in dealing with China. Not only had the China Lobby been severely weakened, but China entered into a period of stability when the Ninth Congress of the CCP put an end to the most radical stage of the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, Beijing had openly expressed its desire to renew talks through the Warsaw channel. Most important of all, the Sino-Soviet tensions suddenly intensified and turned into military conflicts. In the Chinese language, the word for “crisis”--*weiji*--has two characters: “danger” and “opportunity.”¹ The crisis not only brought about the “danger” of large-scale war between the two Communist giants, but also provided an “opportunity” for Washington and Beijing to move closer.

This chapter looks at how U.S. media responded to the Sino-Soviet crises and especially how they dealt with the prospect of Sino-American accommodation in the new context. It also studies the media’s role when Nixon sent clear signals to Beijing about the American intention to improve relations. Also, by looking at the performance of the Chinese media, this chapter examines how Beijing reconsidered its policy and moved slowly toward Sino-American reconciliation.

Abortion of the Warsaw Talks

On January 20, 1969, Richard Nixon was inaugurated as the 37th president of the United States. He was faced with an opportunity to improve Sino-American relations because the previous November Beijing had offered to renew talks in Warsaw. Beijing stated, “We totally understand your proposal because the new president is coming into office. And it would be easier

¹ Nixon also liked using these two characters defining “crisis,” as in his book *Six Crises*. See *Life*, April 30, 1971, 4.

for you to make decision by the time we meet next time when the new president would have been in office for a month.”² This statement was seen as a gesture to the incoming Richard Nixon for improved Sino-American relations.³

Chinese media did not assign too much importance to Nixon’s inauguration. For a week, the *People’s Daily* kept it off the front pages without publishing any major editorial comments against the American president. It reported only a few demonstrations in Washington, D.C. and a small one in Austria in the interior pages.⁴

A week later, a campaign against Nixon suddenly started in the Chinese media when the *People’s Daily* and *Red Flag* published a joint editorial “A Confession in an Impasse: Comments on Nixon’s Inaugural Address and the Shameless Flattering of the Soviet Revisionists.” It depicted American “monopoly capitalism” as a “failing, yet brutal and aggressive system over which Nixon presided as a frightened ineffectual front man.” Mocking Nixon’s peace proposal as a “façade for further aggression,” it claimed that he was “beset with difficulties at home and abroad” and that he would “not fare any better than his predecessor.” In the following days, the Party organ published many stories about how Chinese workers and soldiers who, upon learning of the editorial, swore to repudiate Nixon and the Soviet Union. Many of these articles used titles with personal invectives against Nixon such as, “Let Nixon’s ‘Benevolent Rule’ Go to Hell!” “Dump Nixon into the Trash of History!” “Get Rid of Nixon’s Junk of Ideas.” To highlight the

² *People’s Daily* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1968)(hereafter as *PD*), November 27, 1968, 5.

³ Zhang Baijia and Jia Qingguo, “Steering Wheel, Shock Absorber, and Diplomatic Probe in Confrontation: Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks seen from the Chinese Perspective,” in *Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973*, eds., Robert Ross and Jiang Changbin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 194.

⁴ *PD*, January 21, 1969, 5; January 22, 1969, 6.

importance of the editorial, the newspaper even reported that organizations in Japan and Africa had expressed their support after reading it.⁵

One may wonder why Beijing waited for one week before it started the media campaign against Nixon. A probable reason was that Liao Heshu, the chargé d'affaires of the Chinese embassy in the Netherlands, had defected on January 24 before seeking asylum in the United States.⁶ Before Liao's defection was known to the world, China might have started the campaign to show that it was not compelled to do so.

Beijing remained silent on Liao's defection until February 4, when the State Department announced that he had been admitted to the United States.⁷ In response, the *People's Daily* published Beijing's strong protest, attacking Washington for "deliberately engineering" the serious anti-China incident in collusion with its "little flunky" the Dutch government. It claimed that the incident showed that Nixon and his predecessor Lyndon Johnson were "jackals from the same den" in terms of their hostility toward China. What was notable about the statement was the line that the Chinese representative at Warsaw had filed a strong protest to American Ambassador to Poland Walter Stoessel, demanding Liao be handed back, or the United States would have to "bear any serious consequences" it caused.⁸ This was unusual because Beijing had never before publicly announced its protest through the Warsaw channel even when U.S. bombing had caused Chinese casualties. The statement threw a cloud over the coming Warsaw meeting. On February 18, two days before the scheduled meeting, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced the decision to back out, stating that the "undeniable crime" of the United States

⁵ Ibid., January 28, 1969, 1; January 29, 1969, 5; January 31, 1969, 5; February 1, 1969, 5; February 2, 1969, 5; February 3, 1969, 6.

⁶ *NYT*, February 5, 1969, 1; For the statement of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, see *PD*, February 7, 1969, 6.

⁷ *NYT*, February 5, 1969, 1.

⁸ *PD*, February 7, 1969, 6.

against China in inciting Liao's defection rendered the atmosphere "unsuitable" for diplomatic talks.⁹

Washington did not expect that the defector incident could have caused Beijing to cancel the meeting because Chinese officials had still come to Warsaw in a similar case in 1966. Moreover, when Stoessel inquired of the Chinese whether the official meeting could be held in either the U.S. or Chinese embassies, they responded on February 5, the day after Washington announced the defection, and said that the meeting should be held at the usual venue. Stoessel described the atmosphere of their brief discussion as "relaxed and pleasant." As for the Chinese protest, a State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) report claimed to have found a departure from its standard accusations against Lyndon Johnson because it had not accused Nixon of wanting to "wage war on China" or using Vietnam to threaten its security. INR concluded that these "significant holes in Beijing's propaganda" suggested its willingness to give Nixon a chance.¹⁰ Another sign of Washington's failure to see any indication of the Chinese cancellation was that National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger still sent a memo to Nixon making recommendations about the coming Warsaw talks as late as February 12. INR interpreted Beijing's abrupt decision as the "latest and most striking evidence of disagreement and indecision at the highest levels of the Chinese leadership."¹¹

While U.S. media were still talking about Chinese moderation signaled by its calling for the renewal of the Warsaw talks, their sudden cancellation was shocking. The networks reported the Chinese announcement that emphasized the defection. The *Post* blamed China for cutting the

⁹ Ibid., February 19, 1969, 5.

¹⁰ Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 12, 8-9.

¹¹ *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969), Document 6: "Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon," February 12, 1969. All documents from the U.S. Department of State's *FRUS* series are henceforth cited in the format *Title* and Document number. All are accessible at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>

tie, alleging that it seemed to be “less interested in being accepted” into the international society than in “reasserting its traditional role as the great power, paid tribute to by countries nearby.” *Newsweek* quoted a China specialist who described Washington as an “innocent victim” of Beijing’s leadership problems.¹²

With many first-rate China watchers, like Tillman Durdin who headed its Hong Kong bureau, the *Times* was probably the least shocked because it had sensed bad omens from the Chinese media in the past. When Beijing started the campaign against Nixon a week after his inauguration, the *Times* interpreted it as a “calculated blow at détente with the United States” because the attacks had been withheld for several weeks. It thus suggested that the outlook for the Warsaw meeting on February 20 would be “less favorable.” Moreover, when Washington announced Liao’s defection, the *Times* had displayed its worry that the announcement might become a source of “potential diplomatic embarrassment” for the two governments. On the Chinese cancellation, the *Times* not only talked about the possible leadership problems in Beijing, but also criticized the Nixon administration for the lack of initiatives toward China. Along with the *Post*, it argued that the U.S. government should not limit itself to the Warsaw channel in seeking accommodation with China.¹³

Though Beijing cancelled the Warsaw meeting, there were signs of flexibility in the Chinese media. One noticeable thing that escaped U.S. media’s attention was that the *People’s Daily* published the full text of Nixon’s inaugural speech in the same issue as the joint editorial. What was more interesting was that other major newspapers all over China, following the

¹² CBS Evening News, February 18, 1969, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Record #: 202146; (All newscasts are hereafter cited in the format network, date, record number. All are accessible at Vanderbilt Television News Archive in Nashville, TN); NBC Evening News, February 18, 1969, Record #: 444247; ABC Evening News, February 18, 1969, Record #: 3861; *WP*, February 19, 1969, A1, A20; *Newsweek*, March 3, 1969, 42.

¹³ *NYT*, January 29, 1969, 18; February 5, 1969, 1; February 20, 1969, 1, 46; *WP*, February 19, 1969, A1, A20. See also *Time*, February 14, 1969, 33.

general practice during the Cultural Revolution of reprinting the editorials of the *People's Daily*, also published Nixon's address. This was unprecedented in the history of the PRC.¹⁴ There was evidence that Mao had personally ordered the publication of Nixon's address. When editors of the *People's Daily* and *Red Flag* sent their editorials to Mao for approval, his instruction was: "Publish the article as it is. Nixon's [inaugural] speech should also be published."¹⁵

Nixon did not specifically mention China in his inaugural address, but his meaning was not hard to perceive when he stated, "Let all nations know that during this administration our lines of communication will be open. We seek an open world--open to ideas, open to the exchange of goods and people--a world in which no people, great or small, will live in angry isolation."¹⁶ Mao's head nurse Wu Xujun said that Mao, who had been impressed by the line, asked her to keep it in mind.¹⁷ The phrase "angry isolation" echoed Nixon's 1967 *Foreign Affairs* article in which he famously stated, "We simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors. There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation." In that article, Nixon also predicted that China had the potential to become one of the five major power centers of the world.¹⁸ There is evidence that Mao not only had read the article, but also had shown it to Zhou Enlai. When Senate Majority leader Mike

¹⁴ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 238. See also *PD*, January 28, 1969, 5.

¹⁵ "Mao Zedong's Comments on an article by Commentator of *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*) and *Hongqi* (*Red Flag*)," January 1969, in "All under Heaven Is Great Chaos: Beijing, the Sino-Soviet Border Clashes, and the Turn toward Sino-American Rapprochement, 1968-69," eds., Chen Jian and David Wilson, *Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), Working Paper No. 11* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1998), 161.

¹⁶ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Richard Nixon, 1969* (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 1971)(hereafter as *PPPUS*), 1-4. Accessible at www.heinonline.org.

¹⁷ Wu Xujun, "Mao Zedong de wubu gaoqi: dakai zhongmei guanxi damen shimo [Mao Zedong's Five Superior Moves in Opening Sino-American Relations]," in *Lishi de zhenshi--Mao Zedong shenbian gongzuo ren yuan de zhengyan* [the True Life of Mao Zedong--Eyewitness Accounts by Mao's Staff] by Xu Tao, Lin Ke, and Wu Xujun (Hong Kong: Liwen chubanshe, 1995), 312.

¹⁸ Nixon, "Asia after Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs* vol. 46, no. 1 (October 1967), 121, 119.

Mansfield (D-MT) visited China in 1972, Zhou told him, “It is Chairman Mao’s decision to open up Sino-U.S. relations. Actually, he has read an article written by Nixon before he won the presidential election in 1968.”¹⁹ Mao might have inferred from the article a possible change in U.S. China policy if Nixon were elected president.

Nobody knows for certain Mao’s motives. Chen Jian argues that Mao might have ordered the publication of the address to reveal that “he had noticed Nixon’s message.”²⁰ Mao might have had other considerations. While brainstorming on Sino-American relations, he might have wanted to keep different options open by letting the Chinese people know about Nixon’s original meaning. It might also be his direct message to the American president.

Another sign of Chinese flexibility was reflected in how the *People’s Daily* treated Nixon’s first press conference on January 27. When asked about his China policy, Nixon said his administration would “continue to oppose Communist China’s admission to the United Nations.” Among the reasons, he cited the Chinese lack of interest in joining the UN, its refusing to abide by the U.N. Charter, and its insistence on the expulsion of Taiwan, which Nixon described as a “responsible member of the international community.” Though he expressed interest in what China had to say at the next Warsaw meeting, Nixon concluded that he saw “no immediate prospect of any change” in U.S. policy “until some changes occur on their side.”²¹

Nixon’s remarks about China, as *Newsweek* commented, could have been “eagerly cited as proof of America’s evil intentions” a year earlier. In an editorial “Coolness to China,” the *Times* called it the “the most disappointing section” of his press conference as he chose to ignore the fact that the Chinese initiative in calling for the Warsaw talks was itself a change of its earlier

¹⁹ Gong Li, “Chinese Decision Making and the Thawing of U.S.-China Relations,” in Ross and Jiang eds., *Re-examining the Cold War*, 332, 465note28.

²⁰ Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 238-9.

²¹ Transcript of the Nixon press conference, *WP*, January 28, 1969, A8.

stance.²² Interestingly, neither the *People's Daily* nor the *Reference News* cited these lines in their coverage of the conference. Headlines of the *People's Daily* gave more priority to criticizing the Soviet Union for “shamelessly flattering” Nixon and “colluding” with him.²³ Beijing displayed a keen interest in the relations between Washington and Moscow.

After Nixon's inauguration, the Chinese media sent conflicting signals. Although Beijing launched the media campaign against Nixon, the lack of “teeth” in those invectives showed that Chinese leaders might not have wanted to completely shut the door on him. At best, the media inconsistencies demonstrated that they were not ready for dealing with the United States. Its sudden lack of interest in talking also had the effect of testing the Nixon administration's intentions towards China.

Eruption of Sino-Soviet Border Clashes

Even though the initial probing between Washington and Beijing failed, the eruption of Sino-Soviet military conflicts provided an opportunity for the two sides to make bolder moves toward each other. The fighting that broke out on March 2, 1969 was a culmination of Sino-Soviet border tensions that had been brewing for years, especially over two small islands, Zhenbao and Qiliqin, on the Wusuli (Ussuri) River. According to A. Ielizavetin, a Soviet diplomat then in Beijing, his embassy had proposed several times that the Soviet border forces should “attack and repulse” the Chinese patrol units on the islands. The most serious incident occurred on January 5, 1968, when a group of Soviet armored vehicles attacked Chinese working on Qilin Island and killed four. The Soviets moderated their actions upon strong protests from Beijing. In the wake of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the CCP's twelfth Plenum in

²² *Newsweek*, February 10, 1969, 44. The *Post* pointed out that Nixon's position might let down Americans who longed for Washington's flexibility, but that it might “sweeten” the Russians who were worried that he may immediately “play the China card.” *Washington Post* (hereafter as *WP*), January 28, 1969, A14.

²³ *PD*, January 21, 1969, 5; January 22, 1969, 6; January 29, 1969, 6; February 3, 1969, 6; February 8, 1969, 5; February 18, 1969, 6.

the second half of 1968, tensions rose sharply in this area. Between December 1968 and February 1969, several incidents occurred where Soviet armored vehicles landed on Zhenbao Island and its soldiers beat up Chinese soldiers with sticks or caused injuries by other means. After careful preparations, Beijing authorized its border troops to teach the Soviets a “bitter lesson.” On March 2 and 15, they inflicted heavy casualties on Soviet forces in the two battles at Zhenbao Island. When clashes broke out, neither China nor the Soviet Union seemed to be considering a large-scale war. Soviet leaders did not even change their foreign visit itinerary upon learning of the first clash. After the second battle on March 15, Mao’s order was “We should stop here. Do not fight any more.”²⁴

In their immediate response, the *Times* and the *Post* were both surprised not by the fighting but by the fact that it was promptly announced by both governments. They knew there had been skirmishes along the border for years, but Beijing and Moscow had either denied unofficial reports of border incidents or dismissed them with vague references. The *Post* said that the conflict was “important for being announced as for being fought.” The *Times* claimed that territorial issue was only a “sidelight” that can be turned on or off as the overall climate changed.²⁵ *Time* claimed that China had put its border clash with Russia to use “in a new domestic campaign” similar to the Great Leap Forward.²⁶ Giving equal coverage to the Soviet and Chinese versions of the battle, the diplomatic notes and domestic reaction from both sides, the background provided by both sides and their explanations of their motives, *Newsweek* left the readers to decide who was right.²⁷

²⁴ Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement,” *Cold War History* vol.1, no. 1 (August 2000), 24-30.

²⁵ *NYT*, March 3, 1969, 1; *WP*, March 4, 1969, A18.

²⁶ *Time*, March 21, 1969, 23.

²⁷ *Newsweek*, March 17, 16-17, 1969.

The three networks used Soviet-provided film showing the memorial service for fallen Soviet soldiers and Chinese border guards violently waving Mao's Red Books and shouting in the face of Soviet guards. To add to the sensation, they all quoted the Soviet Foreign Ministry announcement that the Chinese had mutilated dead Soviet soldiers with bayonets.²⁸ The overall impression was, of course, that the Chinese were more provocative than the Soviets.

From the exchange of words between Beijing and Moscow, U.S. media found the atmosphere was not that intense. Even in the Soviet-provided film, some Russian civilians, though shouting slogans, did not look furious but relaxed and some were even smiling. ABC reporter Irv Chapman described the atmosphere as overall "good-humored." The *Times* claimed that the banners and shouts of the marchers brought forth by cheerleaders in loudspeaker trucks in Moscow were in contrast with "the gay comportment" of many demonstrators. It described the crowd in Beijing, many of them women or schoolchildren, as more relaxed and less threatening than the protest meetings by the Red Guards during the heyday of the Cultural Revolution. The *Post* depicted the Soviet demonstrators as "restrained" when they passed the Chinese embassy in an "orderly fashion, six abreast."²⁹ By contrasting the official fury with the relaxation of the protestors, U.S. media seemed to be mocking the two governments for staging the demonstrations.

Between April 1 and 24 in 1969, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) convened its Ninth National Congress. At the 12th plenum of the 8th Congress that convened the previous October, Mao had said that the Cultural Revolution would probably last three years and might end in the

²⁸ CBS Evening News, March 7, 1969, Record #: 202959; ABC Evening News, March 7, 1969, Record #: 4603; NBC Evening News, March 7, 1969, Record #: 444972.

²⁹ ABC Evening News, March 7, 1969, Record #: 4603; *NYT*, March 8, 1969, 1; March 4, 1969, 1; *WP*, March 9, 1969, 1.

summer of 1969.³⁰ Even though Mao never officially declared the ending of the Cultural Revolution, with the dissolution of the Cultural Revolution Leading Group and the restoration of power to the Politburo, its most radical stage had ended.³¹

At the Ninth Congress, leaders did not seem to show too much concern about the border clashes either. Though Lin Biao condemned the Soviet Union in his official report, he stated that the Chinese government was considering the Soviet request for negotiation. Mao talked about preparing for war, but mainly in a “spiritual sense,” which was not different from his position since the early 1960s. He did not demand special material mobilization or extra alerts to deal with the Sino-Soviet conflict.³² After the eruption of the Sino-Soviet conflict, Mao told his head nurse Wu Xujun, “Now that China is fighting against the Soviet Union, it provides an excellent topic for the Americans to write a good essay.”³³ Mao’s words might not be sufficient evidence to show that he started the conflicts for Nixon to act. At least, they suggest that he was well aware of the opportunity for Washington and Sino-American rapprochement.

What was noticeable was that in the March/April joint issue of *Red Flag*, the editorial “About Summing up Experience” was placed in front of another one attacking the Soviet Union for the border clashes. It declared that the Cultural Revolution had achieved its “great and decisive” victory and called on citizens to work harder in the “fronts of industry, agriculture and education.”³⁴ This editorial, along with another one entitled “Make Revolution, Promote

³⁰ Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Ten Years of Turbulence: The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993), 173-6.

³¹ Gong, “Chinese Decision Making and the Thawing of U.S.-China Relations,” 324. See also Anne-Marie Brady, “Red and Expert: China’s “Foreign Friends” in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, 1966-1969,” in *China’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: Master Narratives and Post-Mao Counternarratives*, ed. Woei Lien Chong (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 96; Xia Yafeng, *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks During the Cold War, 1949-1972* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 137.

³² *PD*, April 28, 1969, 1; “Mao Zedong’s Speech at the First Plenary Session of the CCP’s Ninth Central Committee, 28 April 1969,” in Chen and Wilson, eds., “All under Heaven is Chaos,” 164.

³³ Wu, “Mao Zedong de wubu gaoqi,” 312.

³⁴ *PD*, February 21, 1969, 1, March 15, 1969, 1; *Red Flag*, March 14, 1969, 5-9.

Production and Win New Victory in the Industrial Front,” both reprinted in the *People’s Daily*, reflected the shift of China’s focus from “revolution” to “production.” Its placement suggested that for the leadership in Beijing, reorganization of the Party and the shift of its focus were more important than the conflict with the Soviet Union at the time.

As the Ninth Congress was the first major meeting of the CCP in thirteen years and it was announced in the 1969 New Year’s joint editorial of the *People’s Daily*, *Red Flag* and the *PLA Daily*, U.S. media were well aware of its importance. At the beginning of the year, the *Times* and the *Post* had managed to obtain the draft of the new Party Constitution circulating at the provincial level.³⁵ When the congress started, they observed on their front pages that it would put an end to Mao’s Cultural Revolution. *Newsweek* argued the fact that “military men and career bureaucrats” were the majority in China’s top ruling organs was a sign of moderation in Chinese domestic policy. *Time* viewed the Ninth Congress as “China’s search for stability,” arguing “the fact that the congress was convened at all showed that Mao had made at least some progress toward domestic peace.”³⁶

With the general impression that the Ninth Congress would bring stability to China, some U.S. news agencies began to dwell on its significance for Sino-American relations. In an article headlined “Washington Hopes Peking Meeting Leads to Talks with U.S.,” the *Times* shrewdly referred to an ongoing China policy review headed by Henry Kissinger as “disclosed” by U.S. officials and Secretary of State William Rogers’ recent remark to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the Ninth Congress “might result in the formulation of new policies setting the course for China’s future developments.” NBC went even further than the *Times*. After reporting Rogers’s statement that the United States would not exploit Sino-Soviet troubles and that it

³⁵ *WP*, January 2, 1969, A1; *NYT*, January 4, 1969, 1.

³⁶ *WP*, April 2, 1969, A1; *NYT*, April 2, 1969, 1; *Newsweek*, April 14, 1969, 60; *Time*, April 11, 1969, 30.

wanted better relations with both countries, the anchor said that the CCP's Ninth Congress might result in a "softer" China policy and that "diplomatic gossip" in East Europe about US-China warming-up gave the Russians "sleepless nights."³⁷ Although Rogers' statement gave the impression of American neutrality, the anchor's comments pointed toward better relations with China, because of the Sino-Soviet conflict.

The NBC story is a typical example where U.S. media tilted toward China when the government assumed neutrality on the Sino-Soviet conflict. In covering the fighting, U.S. media generally described the Soviets as more aggressive than the Chinese and many of them argued that the current trouble between the two Communist giants provided a good opportunity for Washington to improve relations with Beijing. The *Post*'s editorial followed the line of Stephen Rosenfeld, former chief of the *Post*'s Moscow bureau, who argued that the United States should avoid exploiting the Sino-Soviet trouble and develop close relations with both. Stanley Karnow, the *Post*'s main China watcher in Hong Kong, however, advocated tilting toward Beijing when he described the Soviets as more threatening, as seen in "Moscow is Strident: China Tones Down Trouble on Border" in his front-page article and "Soviet Anti-Chinese Blasts Provide Openings for U.S." for his column. The *Post* featured a headline "Chinese Threat Obsesses Table-Pounding Brezhnev" to refer to the Soviet leader's performance at the Warsaw Pact countries.³⁸

In "Rethinking China policy," *Time* pointed out that China had been involved "less dramatically outside its borders than the Soviet Union" and concluded that "with the passing of monolithic Communism, interesting possibilities open up for U.S. diplomacy and the case for change in U.S. policy is powerful." *Newsweek* argued that if the Russians won the war against China, it would dramatically change the "the international balance of power" to the disadvantage

³⁷ *NYT*, April 2, 1969, 16; NBC Evening News, April 7, 1969, Record #: 445420.

³⁸ *WP*, March 4, 1969, A18; March 30, 1969, 40; March 22, 1969, A1; March 24, 1969, A25; March 19, 1969, A1; April 3, 1969, A1.

of the United States and would cause deeper suspicion and animosity in Soviet-American relations than those that prevailed during the worst of the Cold War.³⁹

On its editorial page, the *Times* reprinted a speech of former White House counsel Theodore Sorensen, who presented evidence to show that Beijing was more hostile in words but Moscow was more threatening in deeds.⁴⁰ Sorensen made his address at the National Committee on United States-China Relations conference on March 20, chaired by Edwin O. Reischauer of Harvard, former Ambassador to Japan and A. Doak Barnett. It attracted prominent media coverage due to the attendance of Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), who in his keynote address called for a “sweeping change” of America’s China policy in the context of Sino-Soviet conflicts. After reporting Kennedy’s speech on their front pages, the *Times* and the *Post* ran additional stories about how China specialists praised his proposal. In a NBC telecast, the anchor started with, “however improbable it may seem, the United States and China might have an understanding.” He then explained that when the New York liberals met to talk about China policy, Russia’s *New Time* condemned the meeting because it seemed to “coincide with” the Chinese attack. When he pointed out that the meeting had been planned a year earlier, it may have been a blow to the Soviet accusation.⁴¹

As with the Fulbright Hearings three years earlier, the media appeared to be again working with academics and Congress to push for a reform in China policy. In covering the Sino-Soviet conflicts, U.S. media, unlike the U.S. government, did not have to worry about upsetting the Soviet Union when they openly talked about moving closer to China. They helped

³⁹ *Time*, June 6, 1969, 48-9; *Newsweek*, August 18, 1969, 38.

⁴⁰ *NYT*, March 30, 1969, E13;

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, March 21, 1969, 1; March 22, 1969, 7; *WP*, March 21, 1969, A1; March 22, 1969, A12; NBC Evening News, April 3, 1969, Record #: 445359.

the government educate the public by elaborating on something it might want to do, but was otherwise unable to state explicitly.

The Four Marshals' Reports

The Ninth Congress of the CCP in April not only ended the most radical stage of the Cultural Revolution, but also marked a watershed in China's foreign relations. In its wake, Beijing began to normalize its diplomatic activities by sending out its diplomats again.⁴² As early as January 1969, the *Times* had obtained information that a leading tailor shop in Beijing was busy making suits for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, which it interpreted as a sign that Beijing was "contemplating a more active role in foreign affairs."⁴³ In order to improve relations with other countries, Beijing invited several foreign envoys to join Mao and other Chinese leaders for the May Day celebration at the Tiananmen rostrum.⁴⁴

The most significant event after the Ninth Congress was the review of China's foreign relations by four highly esteemed marshals: Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen, who had been sidelined because of their complaints about the Red Guard violence in the "February Reverse Current" incident in 1967. When Lin Biao was officially designated as Mao's successor at the Ninth Congress, his followers and radicals headed by Mao's wife Jiang Qing won most of the key positions in the central leadership. In order to counterbalance their power, however, Mao inserted several veteran civilian and military officials into the party leadership. Even though the four marshals had lost their power to control the military, they retained some sort of influence because all of them entered the Central Committee and kept their positions as the vice chairmen of the Central Military Committee at the Ninth Congress. Marshal

⁴² Ma Jisen, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004), 320.

⁴³ *NYT*, January 4, 1969, 4.

⁴⁴ Gong, "Chinese Decision Making and the Thawing of U.S.-China Relations," 323. See *PD*, May 2, 1969,

Ye Jianying even entered the Politburo.⁴⁵ Ye would play an active role in the Sino-American talks after Kissinger's secret visit to China in 1971.

Under the instructions of Mao, Zhou Enlai asked the four marshals, who were "studying" at factories in the suburb of Beijing, to meet from time to time and discuss current international affairs. Zhou encouraged them not to limit themselves to conventional thinking in their analyses and said that he would pass on their reports to the chairman. Zhou also assigned Xiong Xianghui, a spy during the Chinese Civil War and the former chargé d'affaires to the United Kingdom, who later acted as his aide in talks with Kissinger, to assist the marshals with English materials. Between June 7 and July 10, the four marshals met six times and talked in total for nineteen hours about the international situation, especially about the triangular relations among China, the United States and the Soviet Union.⁴⁶

On July 11, the four marshals submitted their first report. As they argued, even though the United States and the Soviet Union collaborated with each other, their hostilities toward each other were fiercer than before. They explicitly pointed out that the Soviet Union posed a more serious threat to the security of China than the United States. While they discounted the possibility that Washington and Moscow would start a large-scale war against China, either jointly or separately, they recommended that China should "postpone" the conflict with either of them. In terms of China's overall foreign policy, they recommended the enhancement of its offices abroad and the expansion of their diplomatic activities.⁴⁷ According to Xiong, the General Office of the CCP distributed their report to leaders of the central authority

⁴⁵ Xiong Xianghui, *Wode waijiao yu qingbao shengya* [My Career in Intelligence and Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1999), 165; Gao Wenqian, *Wannian Zhou Enlai* [Zhou Enlai's Later Years] (New York: Mirrorbooks, 2003), 407-8.

⁴⁶ Xiong, *Wode waijiao yu qingbao shengya*, 165-71.

⁴⁷ "Report by Four Marshals--Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen--to the Central Committee, 'a Preliminary Evaluation of the War situation' (excerpt), (11 July 1969)," in Chen and Wilson, eds., "All under Heaven is Great Chaos," 167-8

as a party document on July 20.⁴⁸ The spread of their report reflected Mao's approval of their evaluation of the triangular politics.

There were some interesting developments in the Chinese media in June and July. According to Gao Wenqian, a researcher at CCP Central Party Literature Research Center involved in writing the official biographies of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong after the Cultural Revolution, in late June 1969, when Chinese newspapers were about to publish their routine editorials attacking the American "invasion" of Taiwan nineteen years earlier, Zhou Enlai at a Politburo meeting proposed that the current focus was the struggle against the Soviet Union and that attacks on the American invasion of Taiwan should be toned down.⁴⁹

Xiong Xianghui pointed out another change in the Chinese media after the congress. As he said, even though the report of the congress had described the relations between Washington and Moscow as "competing and colluding" with each other, the Chinese official documents and the media dropped the Soviet-American "competition" and shifted to highlight the "collusion" between them, especially their collusion for anti-China purposes.⁵⁰ In June and July 1969, besides reporting more incidents supposedly started by the Soviet Union, the *People's Daily* carried several articles charging that the United States and the Soviet Union were collaborating with each other or were working with Japan in carrying out activities against China.⁵¹ In the past, Beijing had attacked the Soviet-American collusion in order to embarrass the Soviet Union and serve its domestic purpose. Now its tough rhetoric was a test to see which side the United States

⁴⁸ Xiong, *Wode wajiao yu qingbao shengya*, 178.

⁴⁹ Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, 410. On June 27, 1950, President Harry Truman ordered the Seventh Fleet to neutralize the Taiwan Strait in response to the outbreak of the Korean War.

⁵⁰ Xiong, *Wode wajiao yu qingbao shengya*, 169-173.

⁵¹ For border incidents, see *PD*, June 12, 1969, 1; July 9, 1969, 1. For editorials, see *PD*, June 7, 1969, 6; June 27, 1969, 6; July 3, 1969, 6; July 8, 1969, 6.

would stand on. If Washington did want to improve relations, it had to adopt concrete measures to show that it did not want to “collude” with Moscow against China.

Nixon’s Initiatives in the Summer of 1969

In evaluating the Ninth Congress, the Nixon administration was not as optimistic as the media in finding signs of moderation in Beijing. On April 29, Kissinger submitted to Nixon a report prepared by the CIA, the Department of State, and the NSC. Referring to the signs that continued “power stalemate” existed in the Chinese leadership and the “denigration” of the United States in the party communiqué, Kissinger claimed to have seen “no indication that the Chinese leaders intend to become less cautious in avoiding foreign commitments.”⁵²

What triggered the Nixon administration to take more rigorous initiatives toward Beijing, according to Kissinger, was the “heavy-handed” Soviet diplomacy in handling the clashes with China. According to him, when he met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin on March 11, 1969, the latter told him “passionately” that China was “everybody’s problem.” When Kissinger described the encounter to Nixon that evening, the President was intrigued and talked about how “unexpected events could have a major effect.” Kissinger then suggested that the United States had a chance to “gain a great deal strategically.” In May when new border clashes broke out in Xinjiang where the Soviets had much better logistic lines than the Chinese, Kissinger changed his perception of their powers and began to think that the Russians were more aggressive. What intrigued Washington further was Brezhnev’s proposal of “collective security in Asia” in his speech to the International Conference of Communist Parties on June 8, which was obviously directed against China. Kissinger reported to Nixon that these signs showed that the growing Soviet obsession with the China problem had reached the point that it could be turned to the

⁵² *FRUS, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972, Document 11.*

advantage of the United States. When Nixon read the report, he wrote down the following comments on the margin, “This is our goal.”⁵³

In July and August 1969, through a series of public diplomatic activities and private channels, the Nixon administration sent clear signals to Beijing of its intention to improve relations. On July 21, 1969, the State Department announced the easing of trade restrictions and travel ban on China. The timing of the announcement was based on shrewd calculations. Nixon had made the decision in June, but he chose to announce it on the day of his trip to countries that included Pakistan and Romania, both of which had friendly relations with China. In so doing, Nixon hoped that his policy change would be viewed as a friendly gesture by the Chinese leadership. Another reason why the announcement was made in July before the Nixon trip was that a delay might force the United States to deal with “unforeseeable situations” such as the worsening of the Sino-Soviet border situation. It could “preclude” the announcement and thus cause Washington to lose the diplomatic benefits. Also, if Nixon waited to announce the decision until he returned from Romania, which was not on good terms with Moscow, it probably would be tied in with speculation regarding a “putative anti-Soviet” purpose in the “Bucharest stopover.” This would give his decision too much “overt anti-Soviet significance.”⁵⁴

Nixon’s decision to relax trade and travel restrictions with China received a variety of contradictory comments in U.S. media. ABC praised him for dismantling “the most formidable barriers” between the two countries, which showed that he was “really interested” in improving relations. An NBC anchor appeared somewhat skeptical. He said that the United States wanted to be “somewhat friendlier” to China and that the U.S. policy was not “a warm or loving embrace” as the trade restrictions were partly lifted, but not eliminated. He also doubted China would

⁵³ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 172-9.

⁵⁴ *FRUS, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, Documents 14, 17.

respond. CBS just reported the announcement and did not make further comments on the significance of the Nixon policy.⁵⁵

Different from TV programs that were limited by time constraints, newspapers have enough space to elaborate on the background, significance, and response to a government policy. Calling attention to the effective date of the Nixon policy, the *Times* referred to the recent China policy review by the NSC and the endorsement of the policy by Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield (D-MT). It concluded that they seemed to signal an “official response to evolving attitudes in the United States toward the Chinese, away from the hostile rigidity.”⁵⁶ While the *Times* placed the story on the front page, the *Post* assigned it to page twenty, arguing that the Nixon move had “greater symbolic meaning” than any practical application that might result from the changes. Recalling Nixon’s tough words about China at his first press conference and the recent Chinese attack on him, it expressed doubt about the possibility of an open door between China and the United States.⁵⁷ While the *Times* presented a picture of favorable domestic environment for a change of relations, the *Post* seemed to emphasize the empty half of the glass.

During his trip, Nixon sent public gestures of friendliness to China on several occasions. In his informal conversations with the press in Guam on July 25, he announced what would later be known as the “Nixon Doctrine,” by which the United States, despite its commitment to honor its commitments in Asia, would “look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.” He also told the press that China was not nearly as effective in exporting revolution as it was five or ten years ago and it was playing a

⁵⁵ ABC Evening News, July 21, 1969, Record #: 6284; NBC Evening News, July 21, 1969, Record #: 446568; CBS Evening News, Record #: 204654.

⁵⁶ *NYT*, July 22, 1969, 1.

⁵⁷ *WP*, July 22, 1969, A20.

“minimal role” in Vietnam as compared to the Soviet Union.⁵⁸ Here Nixon was underplaying the China threat in comparison to the Soviet Union to justify his move toward Beijing. During his private visit to the Pacific area four years earlier, Nixon had declared in Australia that the United States should bomb China if it were “so rash as to introduce so-called volunteers [into Vietnam].”⁵⁹ Now Vietnam had declined as a major issue between China and the United States in Nixon’s rhetoric.

Besides public gestures, Nixon also pushed hard through private channels. During his talk with Pakistani President Yahya Khan, Nixon told him that the United States wished to see an accommodation with China and would appreciate it if Khan’s government would pass on this message to Zhou Enlai when the Chinese Premier visited Pakistan. Even though Nixon told journalists in Guam that his trip to Romania should “under no circumstances” be interpreted as “an affront to the Soviet Union or as a move toward China,” in his conversation with Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu, Nixon said Washington would not join in a Soviet arrangement against China in Asia and expressed his hope that Ceausescu would play a “mediating role” between Washington and Beijing.⁶⁰

Due to China’s friendly relations with Pakistan and Romania, U.S. media alluded to the China connection in their coverage of Nixon’s trip to these countries. ABC correctly guessed that their leaders might serve as the middlemen between the United States and China. It even reported a rumor that Nixon might meet Chinese officials in Romania.⁶¹ Both the *Times* and the *Post* in

⁵⁸ PPPUS, *Richard Nixon* (1969), 544-56.

⁵⁹ *WP*, September 10, 1965, A25.

⁶⁰ *FRUS, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, Document 20. *NYT*, July 25, 1969, 8.

⁶¹ ABC Evening News, August 1, 1969, Record #: 6596, 6598.

their editorials argued that Nixon's visit to Romania, a dissident in the Communist movement, could help the United States open its door to Beijing.⁶²

During Nixon's trip, Secretary of State William Rogers also went on a Pacific tour visiting Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand to explain American policy in Asia, especially its decision to slowly withdraw from Vietnam. On his tour, Rogers openly reiterated the willingness of his government to talk to China. While he was in Hong Kong, the *Post* featured on its front page a photo of Rogers playing golf at a countryside lodge three miles from the Chinese border. As the *Times* reported, Rogers cited the recent American effort to lift trade restrictions and criticized China for not responding to it. In Australia, Rogers made a major speech declaring that Beijing would "soon" be asked to reopen the Warsaw talks.⁶³

The *People's Daily* responded to Washington's overtures with invectives. It attacked Nixon's visit to Asia as a cover for his policy of "aggression and war" and ridiculed his withdrawal from Asia as merely a change in tactics to serve the long-term goal to "occupy" Asia. It reported several demonstrations in countries Nixon visited with people shouting slogans like "Down with Nixon" and "Out with Nixon." In order to justify the U.S. withdrawal from Asia, Nixon had proposed the idea of "collective security" by Asian countries themselves in dealing with aggression as part of the "Nixon Doctrine." The official organ compared it to the Soviet proposal of Asian collective security and used them as evidence of Soviet-American "collusion" in containing China, listing both as the "worst enemies" to the Asian people.⁶⁴

While the *People's Daily* attacked the "evil designs" of the Nixon administration, the *Reference News* fed Chinese cadres at higher-levels undistorted stories of Washington's

⁶² *WP*, July 31, 1969, A19; *NYT*, August 5, 1969, 36.

⁶³ *WP*, August 5, 1969, 1; *NYT*, August 4, 1969, 6; August 11, 1969, 7.

⁶⁴ *PD*, July 31, 1969, 6; August 6, 1969, 6.

intentions. During the Ninth Congress in April, it reprinted articles introducing the China policy review in Washington along with the U.S. hope that the congress would lead to the moderation of China. The most notable line was the Agence France-Presse's comment that there had never been such an "advantageous moment" to normalize the U.S.-China relations in the last twenty years.⁶⁵

When Nixon's Asian trip was announced in late June, the *Reference News* carried a story claiming that Nixon's acceptance of Ceausescu's invitation to visit Romania was aimed at China. On its front pages, it not only featured the State Department's announcement of relaxing trade and travel restrictions to China in an article entitled "The United States Put on a 'Conciliatory' Posture," but also carried Taiwan's complaints about Washington's change in policy. In covering Nixon's meeting with Indonesian President Suharto, it reprinted Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik's remark that "Nixon was not interested" in the Soviet proposal of collective security in Asia. It also reported Roger's statements about Washington's desire to renew contact with Beijing when he visited Hong Kong and Australia.⁶⁶

Nixon's peace initiatives were understood well in Beijing. On July 16, the Chinese captured two American yachtsmen whose lifeboat drifted into Chinese territorial waters close to Hong Kong. According to Kissinger, Washington decided not to announce it immediately to see if Beijing would use it for anti-U.S. propaganda. When Zhou Enlai learned of the incident, he instructed the Foreign Ministry and the Public Safety Ministry to do a thorough investigation and to be cautious not to attach political meaning to the captured Americans. The Chinese media, under Zhou's instruction, remained silent on the incident. Beijing released the two Americans on July 24 after the U.S. relaxation in trade and travel. Kissinger argued that Zhou Enlai, who had

⁶⁵*Reference News* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency) (hereafter as *RN*), April 6, 1969, 3; April 5, 1969, 3.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, July 1, 1969, 4; July 25, 1969, 1; July 30, 1969, 2; August 5, 1969, 1; August 10, 1969, 1.

understood the American gesture, also made a move that required no reciprocity from the United States.⁶⁷

In the Shadow of the War Scare

As the Nixon administration was sending friendly signals to China, Sino-Soviet military conflict suddenly escalated. On August 13, the Soviet armed forces ambushed a unit of Chinese border patrol in Xinjiang with superior force consisting of helicopters, tanks and armed vehicles, which caused heavy Chinese casualties. After the attack, Moscow gave the impression that it was considering a preemptive strike against Chinese nuclear facilities. Besides deploying nuclear strike groups along the border, Soviet diplomats also inquired of diplomats from its Eastern European allies and the United States about what their response would be if the Soviet Union initiated a nuclear attack against China.⁶⁸ In response, on August 28, the CCP Central Committee issued the “Order for General Mobilization in Border Province and Regions.”⁶⁹

When war fervor began to increase along the Sino-Soviet border in August 1969, the Nixon administration began to seriously consider how to deal with the scenario of a large-scale war between China and the Soviet Union. At a NSC meeting on August 14, Nixon stated that it was against the interests of the United States to let China be “smashed” in a Sino-Soviet war. His view was in line with Kissinger’s, who had pointed out that history had shown that it was better to align with the weaker, not the stronger of two antagonistic powers, when some Russian experts expressed concern that better relations with China might ruin those with the Soviet Union at an earlier NSC meeting in May.⁷⁰ The administration ended up excluding the option of siding with the Soviet Union and focused on only two options: “impartiality” and “shading” toward

⁶⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 180; Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, 410-1.

⁶⁸ Yang, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969,” 34.

⁶⁹ “Document No. 10, The CCP Central Committee’s Order for General Mobilization in Border Provinces and Regions, 28 August 1969,” in Chen and Wilson, eds., “All under Heaven is Great Chaos,” 168-9.

⁷⁰ *FRUS, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, Documents 25, 13.

China. A NSC memo concluded that trying to be “even-handed and impartial or neutral” when China was attacked would be “tantamount to supporting the USSR.” However, an open partiality toward China might cause dramatic reaction from the Soviet Union and hurt the arms reduction talks. So the memo recommended Washington maintain public impartiality and at the same time give a strong signal that it would not encourage a Soviet nuclear attack on China.⁷¹

In a speech at the 65th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Baltimore on September 5, Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson made what was considered Washington’s first official statement on the Sino-Soviet conflict. After explaining the U.S. position to associate with neither side against the other, he said, “We are not going to let Communist Chinese invective deter us from seeking agreements with the Soviet Union. Conversely, we are not going to let the Soviet apprehensions prevent us from attempting to bring China out of its angry, alienated shell.”⁷² The next day, the *Times* featured a headline “Nixon Aide Affirms U.S. Will Press for China Ties,” which only published the statement “we are not going to let the Soviet apprehensions prevent us from attempting to bring China out of its angry, alienated shell,” omitting his remarks about Washington seeking agreements with the Soviet Union. Essentially it rendered what appeared to be a neutral statement of the government into an official bias toward China. The *Post* headline in contrast, used the title “Keep Peace, U.S. cautions China, Soviet.” which claimed that Richardson’s statement was the “first high level public admonition to the Soviet Union and China not to breach the peace of the world.”⁷³ The *Post* gave the impression that the United States assumed the moral high ground over the Sino-Soviet conflicts and adopted a tough policy toward both of them. The agenda of improving

⁷¹ Ibid., Documents 27, 29.

⁷² Elliot L. Richardson, “The Foreign Policy of the Nixon Administration: Its Aims and Strategy.”

Department of State Bulletin 61(Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969), 260. Accessible at <http://www.heinonline.org>.

⁷³ *NYT*, September 6, 1969, 1; *WP*, September 6, 1969, A1.

relations with either of them was underplayed. For some reason, the newsweeklies and the nightly newscasts ignored Richardson's statement.

Kissinger argues that Richardson's statement was a "revolutionary step" for the U.S. government when it publicly warned against a threat to China, a country that had been hostile to the United States and with which it had no communication since Nixon took office. In his memo to Kissinger on October 8, NSC staffer John Holdridge suggested calling the Chinese attention to Richardson's statement as part of the U.S. overtures.⁷⁴ Actually, the *Reference News* reprinted the full text of Richardson's statement,⁷⁵ which might have impressed leaders in Beijing.

While fears of a full-scale war between China and the Soviet Union were increasing, Soviet premier Aleksei Kosygin suddenly stopped at the Beijing airport on September 11 to meet with Zhou Enlai on his way back from the funeral of Ho Chi Minh. After the meeting, Tass declared "the two sides openly explained their positions and held a conversation useful for both sides." The *People's Daily* published a terse statement, declaring that the two premiers had met and engaged in a "frank" conversation.⁷⁶ According to Gao Wenqian, in drafting the announcement of the Zhou-Kosygin meeting, Moscow had used several positive adjectives such as "comradely" and "friendly" to create the impression that the Sino-Soviet tensions had been relieved. However, Zhou Enlai crossed them out when he received the Soviet draft and only retained the word "frank."⁷⁷ Even though Zhou Enlai made an effort to reduce tensions, the cold atmosphere between Beijing and Moscow still left the door open for the Nixon administration to approach China.

⁷⁴ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 184; *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 38.

⁷⁵ *RN*, September 9, 1969, 4.

⁷⁶ *WP*, September 12, 1969, A1; *PD*, September 12, 1969, 2.

⁷⁷ Gao, *Wannian Zhou Enlai*, 412-3.

U.S. media expressed great “astonishment” upon learning of the Zhou-Kosygin meeting. All three networks made the news one of their lead stories. NBC used “enigmatic” in describing the behavior of the Chinese and the Russians.⁷⁸ Both the *Times* and the *Post* read from the Russian statement of “useful” and the Chinese statement of “frank” as signs that no substantial progress was achieved at the talk. In their editorial pages, while the *Post* was skeptical that the Sino-Soviet war had been avoided, the *Times* interpreted the meeting as a sign that “the tension had been eased” and suggested those observers who had been predicting an imminent war to “take another look.”⁷⁹

Even though the Kosygin-Zhou meeting relaxed the “extreme tension” between China and the Soviet Union, it did not relieve Beijing’s suspicion of a Soviet surprise attack.⁸⁰ The pressure from Moscow had the potential of pushing Beijing further toward Washington. On September 17, the four marshals, who had read reports of Nixon’s recent initiatives and the minutes of the Zhou-Kosygin meeting, submitted another report. They proposed that China use negotiation as a tactic and wage “a tit-for-tat struggle” against Moscow and Washington since they were both trying to exploit the other two countries in order to gain strategic advantages. Besides agreeing on the Soviet requests for negotiation on border issues, they suggested responding “positively” to the American request for resuming the Warsaw talks when the “timing is proper.” Marshal Chen Yi, the Foreign Minister who had lost his actual power, submitted a separate report to present his “wild” thoughts about how to pursue a “breakthrough” in the Sino-American relations. He recommended that at Warsaw China should take the initiative to propose talks at the ministerial level or even higher without raising prerequisites and that the

⁷⁸ NBC Evening News, September 11, 1969, Record #: 447314.

⁷⁹ *NYT*, September 12, 1969, 1, 46; *WP*, September 12, 1969, A1; September 14, 1969, 38.

⁸⁰ Yang, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969,” 39-40.

Taiwan question could be gradually solved by talks at higher levels.⁸¹ Nobody can tell for certain whether Mao followed the suggestions of the marshals. At least they provided perspectives and some legitimacy for Mao if he was thinking about moving in the same direction. More importantly, the articulation of Sino-American rapprochement by the four marshals itself shows that this concept was no longer a taboo among the top leadership. When Sino-American talks were renewed in early 1970, things developed just as Marshal Chen had proposed.

The Zhou-Kosygin meeting did not eliminate Beijing's worry. Some people thought that Kosygin's Beijing trip might be a smokescreen for a Soviet surprise attack. On September 17, the *People's Daily* published twenty-nine slogans for the National Day celebration. The twenty-second slogan called on people of the world to "oppose the invasion started by any imperialist or socialist imperialist powers, especially nuclear wars" and asked the people to "be prepared right now." The next day, it ran an editorial pointing out that the twenty-second slogan was a "great order of mobilization with profound strategic significance."⁸²

After the publication of the "great order of mobilization," there were more significant developments in the *People's Daily*. On September 21, it published Mao and Lin's order to honor ten soldiers in the Zhenbao battle as "war heroes." In an October Day joint editorial, Beijing expressed its desire to "use negotiation" to solve border disputes between countries. At the same time, it called on the Chinese people to be "highly alert" against the enemy's "surprise attack" and to be prepared to defend China's "sovereign frontier." In an address to foreign dignitaries at the National Day reception, Zhou Enlai reiterated the principle that China would never attack any country unless attacked first and the Chinese determination to "fight to the very

⁸¹ "Report by Four Marshals--Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen--to the Central Committee, 'Our Views of the Current Situation,' (excerpt), (17, September, 1969)" and "Further Thoughts by Marshal Chen Yi on Sino-American Relations," in Chen and Wilson, eds., "All under Heaven is Great Chaos," 170-1.

⁸² Xiong, *Wode waijiao yu qingbao shengya*, 181, 187. *PD*, September 17, 1969, 1; September 18, 1969, 1.

end until victory” if anyone imposed the war of aggression on China. In order to inspire the morale of the Chinese people, the official organ on October 5 reported a story that China had been successful in exploding another H-bomb and in its first underground atomic test a week earlier. It claimed that these new achievements were a “severe blow to the nuclear hegemony of the American as well as socialist imperialists.”⁸³ These calls for war preparation against the socialist imperialists--the Soviet Union--revealed the intensity of war nervousness in Beijing. The *Reference News* also emphasized the atmosphere of war preparation when it reprinted foreign news agencies’ response to the editorials and speeches of Chinese leaders.⁸⁴

On October 7, China took a major step to defuse tensions with the Soviet Union by announcing its decision to start border negotiations at the level of vice foreign minister. Beijing’s statement went, “the Chinese government has never covered up the fact that there exist irreconcilable differences of principle between China and the Soviet Union and that the struggle of principle between them will continue for a long period of time. But this should not prevent China and the Soviet Union from maintaining normal state relations on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence.” The next day, it published Beijing’s “five-point proposal” calling for mutual troop withdrawal from the disputed areas. What was noticeable was that it even carried the letter from the Soviet Union congratulating the twentieth anniversary of the People’s Republic.⁸⁵ It was an effort to show the reduced tensions between the two governments.

Beijing’s decision to sit down and talk with Moscow was watched with great interest in Washington. In a memo to Kissinger, John H. Holdridge wrote that he found the thesis of “normal relations on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence” in the Chinese statement particularly interesting because it reminded him of the Chinese call for the renewal of

⁸³ *PD*, September 21, 1969, 1; October 1, 1969, 2, 3; October 5, 1969, 2.

⁸⁴ *RN*, October 1, 1969, 1, October 4, 1969, 1.

⁸⁵ *PD*, October 8, 1969, 1; October 9, 1969, 2, 5.

Warsaw talks a year earlier and that it could apply to the United States as well. Holdridge also pointed out “concrete evidence” of Beijing’s reduced hostility toward Washington. For example, he mentioned the Norwegian Ambassador who had talked about the “even-handed” discussions he had with Chinese officials about Sino-American relations. As the French ambassador related, Zhou Enlai did not reject resuming the talks in Warsaw, but he said that the “situation was complicated,” apparently referring to the situation in Beijing. He also referred to Zhou’s statement that the American attitude in the Sino-Soviet conflict was “ambiguous.” Based on these indicators along with the “apprehensive tone” he saw in the Chinese statement, Holdridge suggested it might be an “opportune moment” for a move toward Beijing.⁸⁶

Interestingly, Holdridge’s report was leaked in a *Times* story “U.S. Aides Discern Signs that Peking is Easing Enmity.”⁸⁷ It resulted in widespread attention when reporters tried to verify its contents with the State Department. CBS reported that the State Department had denied the “rumor” through “unspecified channel” that China had become “soft” on the United States as it cited the Chinese cancellation of Warsaw talks as evidence.⁸⁸ The *Times* article even attracted the attention of the Chinese media. The *Reference News* carried a front-page article in which State Department spokesman Carl Bartch stated that Washington had always hoped to improve relations with Beijing when he was asked about the article.⁸⁹

The *Post* noticed the “unusual display of candor” in Beijing’s statement, which it interpreted as a sign that China had emerged from “three years of rigidity” to a period of “relative realism.” However, its headline “Fear Drives China to Talk to Russia” emphasized Chinese fear when it claimed that Beijing’s move towards a détente with Washington suggested

⁸⁶ *FRUS, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, Document 38.

⁸⁷ *NYT*, October 9, 1969, 1.

⁸⁸ CBS Evening News, October 9, 1969, Record #: 201041.

⁸⁹ *RN*, October 12, 1969, 1.

a lesson that “nothing has a greater impact on Peking than the menace of force.” In an editorial on “A Momentous Sino-Soviet Breakthrough?” the *Post* maintained that the United States had a “compelling interest in cooling off of the dispute.” That is, if Moscow could get the China border issue in hand, the Soviet-American missile talks would “soon” begin.⁹⁰ An editorial of the *Times*, in contrast, suggested a different lesson, which was, “Chinese leaders were not mad, but rational men able to weigh the costs and advantages of alternative policies.”⁹¹ Here, the *Post* editorial seemed to be more interested in the Soviet Union, while the *Times* was more interested in China.

Beijing’s effort to relax tensions with the Soviet Union not only reduced the terror of war, but also meant that the Chinese need for improved relations with the United States was no longer especially urgent. In a way, it became a test of intentions for the Nixon administration. In order to obtain a diplomatic advantage, it was better for Washington to establish contact with Beijing before it reached any settlement with Moscow. ABC showed the eagerness of Washington when it reported the State Department’s statement that the United States was ready to talk with China “anywhere” and “as soon as possible.”⁹² The story appeared only one day after Beijing’s announcement of border talks with Moscow.

Meeting again after the “Unusual Encounter”

In order to contact Beijing as soon as possible, the Nixon administration tried different channels. On October 27 1969, U.S. Consul-General in Hong Kong Edwin W. Martin wrote Liu Xingyuan, chair of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee of Guangdong, inquiring about the whereabouts of two Americans who had been imprisoned in China since February. With Zhou Enlai’s personal instruction, the Foreign Ministry reported the inquiry to the Central Committee on November 7 with a note, “This is obviously a new act on the part of the U.S. government to

⁹⁰ *WP*, October 9, 1969, A1, A24.

⁹¹ *NYT*, October 9, 1969, 46.

⁹² ABC Evening News, October 9, 1969, Record #: 2929.

test our response. We suggest that we take over the matter and have the two released at the right moment.”⁹³

On November 16, the Nixon administration sent another friendly signal to China by decreasing its naval patrol in the Taiwan Strait by two destroyers attached to the Seventh Fleet on account of “budget reasons.” Earlier that month Pakistani President Yahya had called the Chinese Ambassador to inform him of his impressions of the talk with Nixon in August and the U.S. intention to withdraw the destroyers.⁹⁴ Interestingly, the story about the removal of destroyers did not show up in U.S. media until Christmas through a Japanese news agency claiming that the United States had informed Japan of its decision. Neither the *Times* nor the *Post* made a big deal about the issue, and they merely ran short stories in interior pages.⁹⁵ In the case of naval patrol withdrawal, the U.S. government may have tried hard to keep it under the radar. It is also possibly due to the unwitting cooperation of U.S. media, which did not prioritize it, that Nixon avoided serious opposition from conservatives at home.

As early as September during the height of war scare, Nixon and Kissinger had urged Ambassador Stoessel to get in touch with his Chinese counterpart as soon as possible. It was not until December 3 that he finally had a chance to approach a Chinese diplomat at a Yugoslavian fashion show at Warsaw’s Palace of Culture. Without clear instructions from Beijing, the Chinese diplomat did not know how to handle the situation. As a result, he tried to flee the scene with the U.S. ambassador running after him. Stoessel managed to catch a Chinese interpreter and told him that he had an important message for the Chinese government.⁹⁶

⁹³ Gong, “Chinese Decision Making and the Thawing of U.S.-China Relations,” 336-7.

⁹⁴ *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Documents 50note4, 54.

⁹⁵ *NYT*, December 25, 1969, 8; *WP*, December 25, 1969, D6.

⁹⁶ Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy*, 144-6.

When the American ambassador's "unusual behavior" was reported to Zhou Enlai, he immediately relayed this "encounter" to Mao and said, "the opportunity is coming; we now have a brick in our hands to knock at the door [of the Americans.]" Zhou Enlai at once instructed the Chinese embassy in Warsaw to let the Americans know of Beijing's interest in reopening communications. Moreover, with Mao's approval, on December 7 Zhou Enlai ordered the release of the two Americans whom the U.S. consulate in Hong Kong had inquired about.⁹⁷ In order to make sure the American side receive this signal, Zhou suggested that the release should be announced in the press and that the Chinese ambassador to Poland be informed of it.⁹⁸ As the Chinese leadership hoped, the release of the two Americans duly appeared on the front pages of the *Times* and the *Post*.⁹⁹ After the *People's Daily* announced the release of the two Americans, the *Reference News* noted on its front page the "surprise" of the State Department, whose spokesman stated that they had learned of the news from the Xinhua News Agency.¹⁰⁰ Beijing was sending signals to Washington through its media. The incident at the fashion show thus became a turning point, after which Beijing became much more responsive in reciprocating the initiatives from Washington.

On December 11, the Chinese embassy took the initiative by calling the American embassy and invited U.S. representatives to have a meeting at the Chinese embassy the next day.¹⁰¹ When State Department spokesman Robert McCloskey announced the meeting the next day, it was placed among the lead stories of the television programs and the headlines of the two elite newspapers. Both the *Times* and the *Post* called it an important "breakthrough" in Sino-American relations after two years of "diplomatic silence." As an editorial of the *Times* pointed

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Gong, "Chinese Decision Making and the Thawing of U.S.-China Relations," 336-7.

⁹⁹ *NYT*, December 7, 1969, 1; *WP*, December 7, 1969, 1. The networks did not cover the story.

¹⁰⁰ *PD*, December 8, 1969, 6; *RN*, December 9, 1969, 1.

¹⁰¹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 188.

out, the importance of the meeting could be shown by the speed at which China responded to Stoessel's informal initiative a week earlier and from the fact that he was invited to the Chinese embassy. The *Post*, by taking into account the Soviet-American strategic arms limitation talks in Helsinki, the renewal of Sino-American contact in Warsaw, as well as the Sino-Soviet border negotiation in Beijing, concluded that the formation of the "Washington-Moscow-Peking triangle" by the end of 1969 had become a "historic event in international affairs."¹⁰²

Conclusion

The last year of the 1960s witnessed great changes in world politics. As the Ninth Congress of the CCP officially ended the most radical stage of the Cultural Revolution, it started the normalization of China's domestic politics as well as diplomatic activities. At the same time, the United States began to reduce its involvement in Asia with the announcement of the "Nixon Doctrine." Most important of all, the eruption of the Sino-Soviet crisis created an opportunity for Washington and Beijing to take concrete steps to move toward reconciliation.

In covering the CCP's Ninth Congress and Beijing's handling of the Sino-Soviet border negotiations, U.S. media presented a rational China that was potentially more responsive to U.S. overtures. On the Sino-Soviet conflict, U.S. media not only pictured the Soviet Union as more aggressive than China, but also called attention to the Soviet fear of possible Sino-American "unity." While Washington assumed a public posture of detachment, U.S. media were not worried about upsetting Moscow as they elaborated on the benefits of improving relations with Beijing. They played important roles in educating the American public and creating a favorable opinion environment for Nixon to take more active steps approaching China.

¹⁰² ABC Evening News, December 12, 1969, Record #: 3352; CBS Evening News, December 12, 1969, Record #: 201563; *NYT*, December 13, 1969, 1, 46; *WP*, December 13, 1969, A1; December 16, A14.

In this year, Chinese media showed aloofness as well as reception to the U.S. overtures. Even though the *People's Daily* maintained a hostile posture toward the United States, it revealed signs of flexibility, especially from the treatment of Nixon's inaugural address and his first press conference. In the context of Sino-Soviet crises, Chinese media's attack on Soviet-American "collusion" not only served to mobilize the domestic solidarity against foreign invasion, but also could test which side Washington stood on. What was remarkable was that the *Reference News* objectively reported Washington's overtures that might have impressed the Chinese. Through these measures, Beijing effectively left open the option of reconciliation with Washington when it was deliberating on its foreign policy.

The war nerves in the Chinese media from September through the Chinese National Day shows that Beijing was truly worried about a Soviet surprise attack. This worry was decisive in pushing Beijing toward Washington. As Beijing was patiently waiting for the right moment to reciprocate the Washington overtures, "the unusual encounter" at the Yugoslavian fashion show finally convinced it to drop its hesitation and became a more active player in Sino-American reconciliation.

Chapter 5: From Warsaw to Beijing: The “Intricate Minuet”: 1970-1971

The “unusual encounter” at the Yugoslavian fashion show in December 1969 not only reassured Beijing of Washington’s sincere desire to improve relations, but also satisfied Chinese national pride. Mao and Zhou later repeatedly told other Chinese leaders, “It is the Americans who need something from us, not the other way around.”¹ This sentiment could also be seen in the *People’s Daily* announcement, which particularly emphasized that the initial Sino-American meeting at the Chinese embassy was held “at the request of the American ambassador.”²

After the encounter at the fashion show, Beijing became a much more active player in advancing Sino-American rapprochement. As Henry Kissinger claimed, between November 1969 and June 1970, there were at least ten instances where U.S. officials exchanged words with Chinese officials at diplomatic functions and on at least four occasions the Chinese initiated the contact. However, twenty years of hostility without direct contact had made Sino-American relations so delicate that leaders of both countries had to be extremely cautious in communicating their intentions in order to avoid a backlash at home. Kissinger described the signaling between Beijing and Washington as “an intricate minuet” that was “so delicately arranged that both sides could always maintain that they were not in contact, so stylized that neither side needed to bear the onus of an initiative, so elliptical that existing relationships on both sides were not jeopardized.”³

This chapter examines how the “intricate minuet” between Beijing and Washington played out through the media from the renewal of the Sino-American Warsaw talks in early 1970

¹Xia Yafeng, “China’s Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969-February 1972,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol.8, no. 4 (Fall 2006), 11.

²*People’s Daily* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1969) (hereafter as *PD*), December 15, 1969, 5.

³Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 187.

to Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing in July 1971. It also looks at how Beijing began to actively promote the Sino-American rapprochement, particularly by employing the media.

The Beginning of Triangular Politics

The Warsaw talks had a good beginning when they were officially reopened in early 1970. Beijing took the initiative to propose that the meetings be held alternatively at the Chinese and U.S. embassies instead of the venue provided by the Polish government. This arrangement could avoid eavesdropping because Poland was a close ally of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Washington stopped the previous administrations' "standard practice" of briefing the Russians with records of the Warsaw talks. These changes also signified an important change in Washington's attitude toward the two communist powers. In proposing the policy shift to Nixon, Kissinger argued that he saw no point in giving the Russians the opportunity to "gloat" to Beijing that they were kept informed, which he thought would heighten Chinese suspicions from the start.⁴

The Chinese approach to the meetings with the Americans also witnessed an obvious change. In contrast to its aloofness during the Cultural Revolution, Beijing gave special prominence to publicity. On December 11, 1969, Chinese chargé d'affaires Lei Yang called U.S. Ambassador to Poland Walter Stoessel Jr., inviting him to talk at the Chinese embassy. When Stoessel said he would be happy to arrive "discreetly at the rear door," Lei told him that the main entrance was "eminently suitable."⁵ Lei's arrival at the American embassy a few days later, as described by both the *Post* and the *Times*, was quite an "impressive" scene. Crowds of passersby

⁴ *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), Document 51: "Memorandum From Helmut Sonnenfeldt of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger)," December 11, 1969. All documents from the U.S. Department of State's *FRUS* series are henceforth cited in the format *Title* and Document number. All are accessible at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>.

⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 188.

reportedly watched “the largest and longest black limousine in Poland, sporting silk red-and-gold starred flags on its fenders and curious tail lights, shaped like Chinese lanterns” drive up to the American embassy.⁶ When the two sides decided on the date of the next formal U.S.-China ambassadorial talk, Lei Yang immediately proposed making the plan public. Lei Yang’s “flamboyant” arrival at the American embassy and his proposal to announce the meeting, as Kissinger correctly observed in his memo to Nixon, indicated Beijing’s intention to show the “appearance” of its ability to deal with the United States--primarily for “Soviet consumption.”⁷

On January 8, 1970, when the United States and China announced simultaneously that the Warsaw talks would resume on January 20, the State Department used the term “People’s Republic of China” (PRC) for the first time. In their front-page articles, both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* called attention to the change.⁸ An editorial in the *Times* and a column by Harrison Salisbury instantly used the term. Actually, that was not the first time for the newspaper. It had used that term several times a year earlier, though not in prominent places.⁹ The U.S. signal was instantly caught by the *Reference News*, which reprinted on its front page the full text of the U.S. announcement, where the PRC appeared several times. It also pointed out that Lei’s visit to the U.S. embassy was the first time by a senior Chinese diplomat and that the meeting signified “a progress the Nixon administration had achieved in its attempt to improve relations with Beijing.” In contrast to the Sino-American progress, two articles on the same page talked about the fruitlessness of the Sino-Soviet border negotiations and the possibility of increased Soviet pressure on China.¹⁰

⁶ *Washington Post* (hereafter as *WP*), January 9, 1970, A1; *New York Times* (hereafter as *NYT*), January 11, 1970, 167.

⁷ Kissinger italicized the word “appearance,” in *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 59.

⁸ *NYT*, January 9, 1970, 1; *WP*, January 9, 1970, 1.

⁹ *NYT*, January 10, 1970, 29; January 11, 1970, 167; January 4, 1969, 1; April 3, 1969, 3; October 2, 1969, 3.

¹⁰ *Reference News* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1970) (hereafter as *RN*), January 10, 1970, 1.

On their front pages, while the *Times* interpreted the renewal of the Warsaw talks as the “fruition of a year-long effort by the Nixon administration” to engage China, the *Post* viewed it as China’s “formal entrance into a triangular relation” with its two main adversaries. In an editorial, the *Times* editorial was optimistic about a “good beginning” toward better Sino-American relations. Even though it ruled out the possibility of a “Sino-American plot” against Moscow, it conceded that Beijing’s decision to talk with Washington would have a “sobering impact” on Moscow. In contrast to the optimism of the *Times*, the *Post* argued that Beijing only wanted to use Washington as a “counterweight” against the Soviet threat and it doubted there would be genuine progress in Sino-American relations because Mao had been believed to be the “most opposed to doing business with the United States.” It even claimed that Mao’s absence and the resumption of Warsaw talks suggested something “unusual” in China.¹¹

The *Post*’s somberness on the improvement of Sino-American relations was not groundless. With the Sino-Soviet conflict in the background, U.S. media could not fail to draw the Soviet connection in their coverage of the renewal of the Warsaw talks. The day after the Sino-American joint announcement, both the *Times* and the *Post* reported on their front pages the fierce attacks on Beijing in the Soviet media. The *Post* noticed that Sino-Soviet polemics had resumed a week earlier after several months of quietness after the Sino-Soviet border talks began. The *Times* claimed that Moscow appeared to link the scheduled resumption of talks with Beijing’s “military psychosis” against the Soviet Union. It mentioned Soviet officials who drew attention to the resumption of the talks in early December, which was at about the same time the Sino-Soviet talks reached a deadlock.¹²

¹¹ *NYT*, January 9, 1970, 1; January 10, 29; *WP*, January 9, 1970, A1, January 12, 1971, A18;

¹² *NYT*, January 10, 1970, 1; *WP*, January 10, 1970, A1.

The newsmagazines also made references to the Soviet Union in their analyses of the Sino-American talks. Both *Newsweek* and *Time* took note of the violent attack of the Soviet Army newspaper *krasnaya zvezda* (Red Star) on Beijing. While *Newsweek* argued that the Soviet reaction would benefit Washington in its strategic arms limitation talks with Moscow, *Time* claimed to have found signs of Soviet fear of attacks from its newly released maps, which had modified the location of many cities close to the Chinese border.¹³ Though U.S. media showed different levels of confidence for the prospect of Sino-American relations, one thing they seemed to agree on was the beginning of triangular politics in early 1970.

The Cambodia Incursion

In early 1970, it seemed that Beijing and Washington were on the verge of a breakthrough. At the 135th meeting of the Warsaw talks, Lei Yang stated Beijing's offer to talk through "higher-level discussions or any other channel that both sides might agree upon." At the 136th meeting in February, he made an unusually conciliatory statement and accepted the U.S. proposal to send an emissary to Beijing.¹⁴ On April 28, the Chinese side informed the U.S. embassy that it was ready to meet on May 20. However, what happened in Cambodia complicated the international situation. On March 18, 1970, when Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia visited Moscow seeking Soviet support in dealing with Hanoi, the National Assembly deposed him from power and installed the pro-U.S. general Lon Nol as the head of the government. With the tacit support from Lon Nol, U.S. forces moved into Cambodia to clear Viet Cong sanctuaries on April 30.¹⁵

¹³ *Newsweek*, February 2, 1970, 40; *Time*, February 2, 1971, 24-25.

¹⁴ *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 62.

¹⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 692. See also Pobzeb Vang, *Five Principles of Chinese Foreign Policies* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008), 311.

Beijing's response to the Cambodian incursion was mild at the beginning. On May 4, it issued a statement warning the United States against its "flagrant provocation." Even though it declared that 700 million Chinese would be the strong backing for the three Indochinese peoples, what it offered was merely Mao's quotations that the United States was just a "paper tiger" and that they would definitely defeat the American "imperialists" if they worked together and persisted in fighting. Kissinger told Nixon, "The Chinese have issued a statement, in effect saying they wouldn't do anything."¹⁶

At that time, it seemed that Beijing still wanted to go ahead with the scheduled Warsaw talks on May 20. What made the situation more complicated was the Sino-Soviet polemics, which had resumed in late November 1969, when border talks between them made little progress. On April 22, the *People's Daily*, *Red Flag*, and the *PLA Daily* published a joint editorial in memory of the centenary of Lenin's birthday. In what was seen as the most violent attack on the Soviet leadership since the opening of border negotiations, the editorial condemned the "Soviet renegade" for having degenerated into a "dictatorship of the Hitler type" and called the Brezhnev doctrine a "fascist theory." In a counterattack, *Pravda* ran a 5,000-word editorial entitled "Pseudo-Revolutionaries with their Masks Off" on May 18. It charged that the Chinese rejection of the Soviet call for joint action had enabled "imperialists to carry out anti-popular designs" in Indochina, implying the U.S. invasion of Cambodia. The Soviet attack was so intense that even the *Post* reprinted its excerpts.¹⁷

Having been the first to recognize Sihanouk's Beijing-based government-in-exile upon its establishment on May 5, 1970, the Chinese government was extremely sensitive to the Soviet accusation of selling out in Indochina. When many Communist countries, including Albania and

¹⁶ *PD*, May 5, 1970, 1; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 694.

¹⁷ Peter Jones and Sian Kevill, *China and the Soviet Union, 1949-1984* (New York: Facts on File, 1984), 97-9; *PD*, April 22, 1970, 2; *WP*, May 19, 1970, 14.

North Korea, followed suit in extending recognition, Moscow was still uncommitted.¹⁸ The day after the *Pravda* editorial, which had been almost three weeks after the United States launched its operation, Beijing announced its decision to put off the scheduled Warsaw talks. In a terse statement, it declared, “In view of the increasingly grave situation caused by the United States, which has brazenly sent troops to invade Cambodia and expanded the war in Indochina, the Chinese government deemed it no longer suitable for the 137th meeting of the Sino-U.S. ambassadorial to be held on May 20 as originally scheduled.” However, it left the door open for further communication, declaring that the date of the next meeting would be “decided upon later through consultation by the liaison personnel of the two sides.”¹⁹

In coordination with the cancellation of meeting with the Americans, Beijing launched a national campaign to display its support for Sihanouk’s Cambodia. To start the campaign, Mao issued a personal pronouncement entitled “People All Over the World, Unite and Defeat the American Aggressors and Their Running Dogs” on the scheduled day of the Warsaw meeting. In the pronouncement, Mao mentioned that more than twenty countries had recognized Sihanouk’s Cambodia within ten days of its establishment. Besides displaying to the world the Chinese support for the exiled leader, Beijing also used the campaign to embarrass the Soviet Union for failing to offer support for him. The day after his pronouncement, Mao, along with Lin Biao and Sihanouk, attended a rally of half a million people in Tiananmen Square. In reporting the rally, the *People’s Daily* front-page article did not focus on the statement. It instead listed the names of almost every one on the Tiananmen rostrum, especially representatives from Communist parties in India, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, North Korea, Romania, Albania, Pakistan, and Japan. Interestingly, while it placed most of the foreign dignitaries at the front of the guest list, it

¹⁸ Moscow recognized to the Sihanouk government on June 23 but retained diplomatic relations with the Lon Nol government in Phnom Penh. See Vang, *Five Principles of Chinese Foreign Policies*, 314.

¹⁹ *PD*, May 19, 1970, 5. English version in *NYT*, May 19, 1970, 1.

consigned the names of the Soviet representatives to the very bottom of the article to display its slight of Moscow.²⁰

U.S. media were confused by the vehemence of the Chinese response. Both the *Times* and the *Post* related the Chinese decision to cancel the Warsaw talks to the Vietnam War, especially a message to North Vietnam in the *People's Daily* on the late Ho Chi-Minh's 80th birthday anniversary when Beijing called on the peoples of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos to continue fighting the United States "until complete victory." The *Times* speculated that the Warsaw cancellation had been decided a week earlier when first secretary of the North Vietnamese Party Le Duan was in Beijing. The *Post* argued that the talks might be resumed when U.S. forces were out of Cambodia by the end of June. As to Mao's "unusual pronouncement," the *Times* described it as "another expression of the leadership role" in world revolution China had taken lately, whereas the *Post* saw it as a sign of "stiffening Chinese attitude towards the United States."²¹

In reality, when Beijing cancelled the talk on May 20, it offered to meet again on June 20.²² However, a CCP Politburo meeting on June 16 decided that the official Warsaw Talks should be further postponed "in view of the current situation," but it decided that liaisons of the two governments would still meet on the day.²³ Even though Beijing once again postponed the official talks, it announced the meeting between the liaisons. The announcement in the *People's Daily* was noticeably milder in tone than the one a month earlier. Without blaming Washington for the postponement, it referred to the current situation as "clearly understood by both sides"

²⁰ *PD*, May 21, 1970, 1; May 22, 1970, 1.

²¹ *NYT*, May 19, 1970, 1; May 21, 1970, 1; *WP*, May 19, 1970 1; May 21, 1970, 1.

²² *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 80.

²³ Li Ping and Ma Zhisun eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1898-1976* [A Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai, 1898-1976] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), 1287.

and stated that the date of the next meeting would be discussed “at a proper time.”²⁴ Beijing’s mild announcement not only signaled to Washington its interests in continued contacts, but also had the effect of unsettling Moscow.

After the U.S. withdrawal from Cambodia in late June, Beijing made a friendly move on July 10 by suddenly releasing James Walsh, a 79-year-old Roman Catholic bishop who had been detained in China for 12 years on charges of espionage.²⁵ Different from the statement announcing the release of two American yachtsmen on December 8, 1969, Beijing offered detailed information about the prisoner’s name, age, and hometown. The justification for his release was that “the bishop had confessed his crime upon education from the Chinese authority. Considering his senior age, our authority decided to release him ahead of schedule on the proletarian principle of ‘leniency to those who confess and severity to those who resist.’”²⁶ Its prominent position on page two and the detailed introduction of the bishop showed the importance Beijing attached to his release.

As the Chinese government hoped, the bishop’s release made headlines in U.S. elite media. Both elite newspapers related the timing of his release to the exit of U.S. forces from Cambodia. The *Post* commented that by doing so Beijing sought to “take the edge off some of its recent sharp verbal attacks on the United States.” In an editorial titled “...and a Signal from China,” the *Times* argued that his release was not accidental and Beijing might be sending a signal to Washington, “the most important signal since the Chinese People’s Republic agreed to resume the Warsaw talks.”²⁷

²⁴ *PD*, June 21, 1970, 6.

²⁵ The Chinese government did not give prior notice to U.S. consulate in Hong Kong about his release. Nor did the bishop himself understand why he was released at that particularly time. See *NYT*, July 11, 1971.

²⁶ *PD*, December 8, 1969, 6; July 11, 1970, 2.

²⁷ *WP*, July 11, 1970, 1; *NYT*, July 11, 1970, 1, 19.

The three networks showed vivid images of the bishop crossing the border into Hong Kong and his press conference afterwards. ABC and CBS rushed to interview Walsh's sister and brother, both of whom said his release was a "miracle."²⁸ When the bishop showed up in a wheel chair at the press conference, he was described as "alert." Even though he claimed that he had been forced to sign the confession and that he found it hard to justify the severity of the sentence "meted out" to him, he said that overall he received "good treatment" in prison and he "could not feel angry toward any Chinese" because he just "loved the Chinese people."²⁹ Instead of a condemnation of the Chinese government, the message from the press conference was more about the gratitude people felt about Walsh's release. The bishop's experience stood in sharp contrast to the brutal scene when the eight expelled nuns crossed the border into Hong Kong during the heyday of the Cultural Revolution. Through the media's prominent coverage, Beijing showed to the U.S. government as well as its people that China had become much more rational and it was taking steps to reduce the tension between the two countries.

Besides releasing the bishop, Beijing did not make any other gesture in the summer of 1970. During this period, there was a power struggle going on between Mao and his heir apparent Lin Biao. According to Kissinger, on July 2, two Chinese Mig-19s carried on an "apparently premeditated attempt" to intercept a C-130 reconnaissance plane flying one hundred miles off the Chinese coast. He thought it very likely that someone in the power structure wanted to "wreck" Sino-American relations, citing that the Air Force was the most radical in the Chinese armed service during the Cultural Revolution.³⁰ The power struggle in the Chinese leadership

²⁸ ABC Evening News, July 10, 1970, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Record #: 11052 (All newscasts are hereafter cited in the format network, date, record number. All are accessible at Vanderbilt Television News Archive in Nashville, TN); CBS Evening News, July 10, 1970, Record #: 210826.

²⁹ ABC Evening News, July 16, 1970, Record #: 11139; CBS Evening News, July 16, 1970, Record #: 210944; NBC Evening News, July 16, 1970, Record #: 452085.

³⁰ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 697. In his memoir, Wu Faxian, commander of the Chinese Air Force, denied that either he or Lin Biao was opposed to Sino-American rapprochement and he did not show any knowledge

escalated into a “de facto showdown” between Mao and several of Lin’s main supporters at a party Central Committee plenary session held between August 23 and September 6 at Lushan, a mountain summer resort in mid-Southern China.³¹ Mao’s preoccupation with the power struggle might have hindered him from making further moves toward the United States.

Signals through Edgar Snow

As it turned out, Mao prevailed in the struggle against Lin Biao and his followers at the Lushan Conference. In the fall of 1970, Beijing sent signals to Washington through Edgar Snow, an “old friend” of the Chinese Communists since the mid-1930s when he visited their headquarters in Yan’an and interviewed their leaders. Snow’s greatly acclaimed book, *Red Star over China*, published in 1938, provided a favorable description of the Chinese Communist revolution to readers within China and without.³² The Chinese government sent the invitation to Snow in the name of Mao in June and he arrived on August 14, 1970.³³ Snow’s first public appearance in China was at an exhibition match between the Chinese and North Korean ping-pong teams. On its front page, the *People’s Daily* placed him among dignitaries from Communist parties around the world and featured a separate photo story about Zhou Enlai’s meeting with him.³⁴ On the October Day for national celebration, Zhou Enlai deliberately arranged Snow and his wife to stand next to Mao on the Tiananmen rostrum in reviewing the parade and a picture of Snow with Mao and Lin Biao was taken.³⁵

of the incident. He claimed that while he was away in Beijing, Lin Biao’s son Lin Ligu, who was a senior officer stationed in South China, had grown so powerful in the Air Force because of his family connection that few people could control him. See Wu Faxian, *Wu Faxian huiyilu* [the Memoirs of Wu Faxian] (Hong Kong: Star North Books Company, 2006), 845-7.

³¹ Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 253.

³² *Ibid.*, 254.

³³ Huang Hua, *Qinli yu jianwen--Huang Hua huiyilu* [Personal Experience and Eyewitness Account--Memoir of Huang Hua] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2007), 149-51.

³⁴ See *PD*, 19 August 1970, 1, 2.

³⁵ Edgar Snow, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1972), 3,

Interestingly, the *People's Daily* did not publish the photo immediately. On its front page the next day, pictures of Mao with the guests on the Tiananmen Square were mostly those taken from the distance and Snow could barely be recognized in them.³⁶ Mao's photo with Snow was not published in the *Peoples' Daily* until Christmas 1970. Its caption stated, "The Chinese people's great teacher Chairman Mao has recently met friendly American Edgar Snow and had a cordial and friendly talk with him." Since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, all Chinese newspapers carried a quotation of Mao's in the small box at the upper right-hand corner of every front page. The Mao quotation for that day was, "People of the world, including the American people, are our friends." When they met in January 1965, the *People's Daily* also published their photo, but it called Snow "an American writer, the author of *Red Star over China*."³⁷ The different treatments Snow received in the official organ illustrated the change in Sino-American relations. When the two countries were locked in hostility, he was treated as a private citizen without hint of friendship. In 1970 Snow had become a representative of the American people whom Beijing wanted to befriend.

Scholars agree that Snow's photo with Mao was an important message to Washington. Several of them, however, have neglected the three-month delay in its publication.³⁸ Chen Jian refers to secondary sources claiming that Zhou Enlai had overseen its publication in late December for other major Chinese newspapers to follow, but he fails to explain the cause of the

³⁶ *PD*, October 2, 1970, 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, December 25, 1970, 1, January 10, 1965, 1; *PLA Daily*, December 25, 1970, 1. The English version of the caption of the 1970 photo comes from *NYT*, January 22, 1971, 39.

³⁸ Stanley Spangler, "The Sino-American Rapprochement, 1969-1972: a Study in Signaling," (Diss. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1978), 91; Nancy Tucker, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 240; Tsan-Kuo Chang, *The Press and China Policy: The Illusion of Sino-American Relations, 1950-1984* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1993), 72.

delay.³⁹ What happened during those months might have changed Mao's attitude to Sino-American rapprochement.

On October 12, Zhou Enlai wrote a note on a Foreign Ministry report to Mao, suggesting that he take the interview with Snow before October 15 because the American journalist would leave Beijing by then. Mao wrote, "All right. <I am> planning to listen to his views about international affairs."⁴⁰ Though Mao agreed to meet with Snow, he deferred it until mid-December. From his note to Zhou, Mao seemed to be more interested in consulting with Snow than in delivering the message in October. Xia Yafeng and Yang Kuisong argue that Mao had been vacillating between revolution and reconciliation even in 1970 and that he might not have been "psychologically ready" for reconciliation at the time.⁴¹

Xiong Xianghui, Zhou Enlai's aide who had assisted the four marshals in their study of international condition in 1969, claimed that Mao's decision to take the interview with Snow had to do with his earlier interview with Zhou Enlai, which had appeared in the Italian magazine *Epoca* on 13 December. The *Reference Materials* reprinted not only the article, but also several stories about how Zhou's interview had impressed Western news agencies. Xiong thought that Mao must have read them. From the "minutes of the Mao-Snow conversation" later distributed among Chinese leaders, moreover, he found that not long after the interview started, Mao took the initiative to talk about the *Epoca* article, saying that it was "pretty good." Finally, Snow wrote in *The Long Revolution* that he was summoned to meet with Mao without advance notice and that Mao had a slight cold when they met. Based on these observations, Xiong argued that

³⁹ Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 255, 365note77. Snow claimed that it was Mao's birthday, which was actually one day later. See Snow, *The Long Revolution*, 4.

⁴⁰ Document Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, ed., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Manuscripts of Mao Zedong since the Founding of the People's Republic of China] vol. 13 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), 150. (Hereafter as *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*).

⁴¹ Yang Kuisong and Xia Yafeng, "Vacillating between Revolution and Détente: Mao's Changing Psyche and Policy toward the United States, 1969–1976," *Diplomatic History* vol. 34, no. 2 (April 2010), 402-3.

the *Epoca* article must have inspired Mao, who then decided to meet with him immediately even though he was not feeling well.⁴² Xia Yafeng and Yang Kuisong claim that it was Snow's line "China was building a broader anti-imperialist united front not excluding the Americans" in the article that had enlightened Mao.⁴³

In his interview with Snow, Mao "casually" said that Nixon would be welcome to visit China because the current problems between China and the United States had to be solved by him and that he would be happy to talk with Nixon "either as president or as a tourist." This remark was later published and known to the outside world as Mao's invitation to Nixon. Actually, Mao sent more messages. Because of the Chinese censorship, the "minutes of Snow-Mao Talk" that later circulated among Chinese officials contained more details than Snow's *Life* magazine article in April 1971.⁴⁴ In the "minutes," Mao said that Nixon had expressed his desire to talk with Chinese leaders in Beijing or Washington under extreme secrecy without even the knowledge of the Foreign Ministry or the State Department. Mao said, "If he really wants to come to Beijing, you can take a message to him. Tell him not to sneak in. He can just come in a plane." When Snow asked Mao, "Since I don't know Nixon, but if I meet him, Can I...?" Before he finished the sentence, Mao said, "You can just say <that I think> he is a good person, the world's top good person. Brezhnev is not good. Brandt is not good either."⁴⁵ This conversation indicates the comfortable position in which Mao handled the accommodation and that he was expecting Snow to pass on the message to Nixon. Publishing the photo a week later was in line with his state of mind at that time.

⁴² Xiong Xianghui, *Wode waijiao yu qingbao shengya* [My Career in Intelligence and Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1999), 198-213; Snow, *The Long Revolution*, 168.

⁴³ Xia and Yang, "Vacillating between Revolution and Détente," 404.

⁴⁴ Snow, *The Long Revolution*, 192, 9, 12. See also Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 178.

⁴⁵ For the full text of the "minutes," see *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, vol. 13, 163-82.

Mao's increased confidence in rapprochement in late 1970 might also have been influenced by the new overtures from Washington. In his interview with *Time* magazine published on October 5, 1970, Nixon said, "If there is anything I want to do before I die, it is to go to China. If I don't, I want my children to."⁴⁶ Nixon's willingness to visit China did not stand out in the article titled "I Did Not Want the Hot Words of TV," which was mostly about his general view of the world. It was literally ignored in U.S. media at the time. The *Times* did not pay attention to the interview. The *Post* reported the interview, but it ignored Nixon's remarks about visiting China.⁴⁷ Maybe they did not want to credit their competitor with a scoop.

In this month, when Nixon met with several countries' leaders who were in the United States to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, he sent more messages to Beijing. In his meeting with Pakistani President Yahya Khan on October 25, Nixon asked him to convey two points to the Chinese leadership: 1) the U.S. government would "make no condominium against China" and he wanted the Chinese leaders to know it whatever may be put out; 2) the U.S. government would "be glad to" send emissaries to Beijing and to establish links secretly. Before Mao's interview with Snow, Beijing had received Nixon's message and sent their warm reply through Yahya.⁴⁸

The day after his meeting with Yahya, in his toast to Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu at a White House banquet, Nixon stated that he was in a rather unique position because "he heads a government which is one of the few in the world which has good relations with the United States, good relations with the Soviet Union and good relations with the People's Republic of China." That was the first time an American president addressed China with its proper name on an official occasion. Even though the *Times* and the *Post* both made references

⁴⁶ *Time*, October 5, 1970, 25.

⁴⁷ *WP*, September 28, 1970, A14.

⁴⁸ *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 94.

to China in reporting the meeting, they failed to catch the nuance in the President's message. The *Times* quoted Nixon's toast on the jump page without commenting on its significance. The *Post* did not pay attention to the toast, to say nothing of Nixon's signal.⁴⁹ While U.S. media missed the significance of Nixon's new posture, the *Reference News* was quick to understand the nuances of the "historical" toast and reprinted its full text.⁵⁰

Moreover, Mao might have gained confidence from the elevation in China's international standing when it established diplomatic relations with Canada and Italy in October and November. In negotiating with these two countries, Beijing became more flexible and no longer insisted that they recognize its sovereignty over Taiwan as a precondition for diplomatic recognition. When Beijing and Ottawa issued the joint communiqué on October 13, its most important line was, "the Canadian government recognizes the People's Republic of China as the sole legal Government of China...The Chinese government reaffirms that Formosa is an inalienable part of the territory of the People's Republic of China. The Canadian government takes note of this position of the Chinese government." Both the *Times* and the *Post* picked up the Chinese concession on Taiwan when they interpreted the phrase "taking note of" as not accepting.⁵¹ With the formula provided by the Canadian recognition, the Italian government quickly concluded the treaty with Beijing and issued the joint communiqué on November 6, 1970.

Beijing's recognition by two major Western powers had a great impact on the General Assembly voting on China's UN membership. On November 20, the PRC won 51 percent of the votes supporting its admission and the expulsion of Taiwan, a simply majority for the first time. Even though it was not admitted because of the American insistence on a two-thirds majority,

⁴⁹ *NYT*, October 27, 1970, 1; *WP*, October 27, 1970, A1.

⁵⁰ *RN*, October 31, 1970, 4.

⁵¹ *NYT*, October 14, 1970, 1; *WP*, October 14, 1970, 1.

journalists viewed it as a “setback” for the United States and a sign that Beijing would enter the UN very soon.⁵² Washington had changed its rhetoric even before the voting. In his speech to the General Assembly on November 12, Christopher H. Philips, the deputy permanent representative of the United States, said, “The United States is as interested as any in this room to see the People’s Republic of China play a constructive role among the family of nations.” He also went out of his way to compliment “the industry, talents, and achievements of the great people who live in that ancient cradle of civilization.” Before and after the voting, the two newspapers noted that Washington had refrained from saying anything that might be interpreted as opposition to China’s entrance into the world body.⁵³ Their depictions of Washington’s change in position on China’s UN membership were another friendly signal to Beijing.

Beijing’s signals to Nixon through Snow did not produce timely effects. When the *Times* and *Post* received a copy of Zhou’s conversation with Snow in *Epoca*, they only paid attention to his remark that “China was still threatened with war by the superpowers with some one million men as well as rocket troops to the north and west; and with the United States in alliance with a remilitarizing Japan on the east.” They interpreted this line as evidence of Beijing’s inflexibility and refused to buy Snow’s argument that “Zhou Enlai’s willingness to have serious conversations with an American writer after the Cultural Revolution was itself meaningful.”⁵⁴ The magazines and networks simply ignored the article. Even though *Beijing Review*, the only China-published English magazine targeting the Western audience, published Mao’s photo with Snow in the first issue of 1971, American journalists did not pay much attention. C.L. Sulzberger of the *Times* did mention it in his “Foreign Affair” column entitled “The Tea Leaves Change,” but it

⁵² *WP*, November 21, 1970, A1; *NYT*, November 21, 1970, 1, 29.

⁵³ *NYT*, November 13, 1970, 1, 35; *WP*, November 13, 1970, 1.

⁵⁴ *NYT*, December 11, 1970, 11; *WP*, December 11, B16. Snow, *The Long Revolution*, 159-63. Snow’s version in this book was a combination of the two conversations he had with Zhou. The Italian magazine published only the first one. So is the Chinese translation of *Epoca* in the *Reference News* on June 7, 1971.

was published in late January.⁵⁵ Other U.S. media were not impressed by Mao's high-profile appearance with Snow probably because of their natural suspicion of leftists, especially those with a pro-Communist record. During the Cultural Revolution, Robert F. Williams, author of *Negroes with Guns* published in 1962 and a black power activist hounded into exile by the U.S. government over criminal charges, had been treated as a head of state when he joined Mao on the Tiananmen rostrum with the honor of making a speech to the throng for China's National Day celebration.⁵⁶ Williams' experience in China had received very little coverage in U.S. media.

Nor could Snow deliver Mao's message at an earlier date. His interview with Mao was not published in *Life* until April 30, 1971, the same issue that called attention to Nixon's remark to *Time* that he would like to visit China.⁵⁷ By that time, they could only stand in the shadow of the "aftershock" caused by Ping-Pong Diplomacy. Richard Nixon claimed in his memoir that he learned of Mao's statement to Snow within a few days after their conversation.⁵⁸ Nixon was probably bragging or simply lying because nobody else could verify his claim. Nor did he produce any evidence about how he obtained it.⁵⁹

According to Snow, after every interview with Zhou Enlai and Mao, he had to submit to the Chinese for correction a long dispatch based on his notes. When the clearance came a week later, the official version omitted things not publishable. Huang Hua, a senior diplomat who would become the first Chinese Ambassador to the UN and the Foreign Minister, also said that

⁵⁵ *NYT*, January 22, 1971, 39.

⁵⁶ Paul Finkelman, ed., *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-First Century* vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 374. See *PD*, August 9, 1966, 2, 3.

⁵⁷ *Life*, April 30, 1971, 4, 46-51.

⁵⁸ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 547.

⁵⁹ On the New Year Eve of 1970, the Consulate in Hong Kong sent an airgram to the Department of State reporting Zhou's interview with Snow as published in *Epoca*. Even though it argued that "it was apparent that Beijing considers Snow an important vehicle for carrying Chinese views and images to the West," it did not mention Mao's interview with Snow. Moreover, it could probably have failed to arouse the attention of Rogers and the White House because of the timing issue. See Chris Tudda, *A Cold War Turning Point: Nixon and China, 1969-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 62, 229note19.

when Snow's wife left China before Christmas 1970, he had to wait for the interview draft.⁶⁰ The Chinese arrangements made it difficult for Snow to publish the interview at an earlier date.

Seymour Topping, foreign editor of the *Times*, claimed that, after he left China in February 1971, Snow sent to his newspaper a lengthy article based on a series of interviews with Zhou Enlai. Unfortunately, executive editor Abe Rosenthal, who was strongly anti-Communist due to his experience as a reporter in Poland, felt uneasy about giving too much space to a piece written by a journalist known for his strong sympathy for the Chinese Communists. He insisted on drastic cuts, arguing that the article was too long and "propagandistic." When Snow refused to make the cut, Rosenthal "summarily" rejected his article, not knowing that it reflected Mao's attitude that had been conveyed to Snow in "off-the-record remarks."⁶¹ The *Times* thus missed a precious opportunity to pass on the important signal to the Nixon administration and also a scoop. The suspicion of communists in U.S. media, to some extent, had prevented Mao from delivering his message through Snow at an earlier date.

Kissinger's version was that the State Department probably could not have obtained a full text of Snow's talk with Mao because a memo to him on April 1, 1971 did not mention the element of an invitation to Nixon. It instead reported that Snow had gained the impression from his meetings with Chinese leaders that "there was no immediate prospect of improving Sino-American relations because of the war in Indochina."⁶²

The Snow scenario reflects the different roles of Zhou and Mao in handling Sino-American rapprochement. While Zhou's job was to set up the mechanisms or to deal with details

⁶⁰ Snow, *The Long Revolution*, 9, 12. Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China*, 178; Huang, *Huang Hua huiyilu*, 154-5.

⁶¹ Seymour Topping, *On the Front Lines of the Cold War: An American Correspondent's Journal from the Chinese Civil War to the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 325-6.

⁶² Kissinger, *White House Years*, 709.

such as arranging the photo shoot, Mao had the final say on when and how to deliver the message. According to Gao Wenqian, after the Ninth Congress, Zhou often picked noticeable international developments and commentaries as reference materials for Mao to read, thus to influence Mao's thinking on foreign policies in a subtle way.⁶³ Without Mao's approval, Zhou Enlai was extremely cautious in the signals he sent out. It explains the mixture of restrained optimism and tough rhetoric in his interview with Snow in November. It is probably why the two U.S. elite newspapers did not read any significant change from the interview published in *Epoca*. The difference in their importance was also illustrated by the fact that Zhou Enlai's photo with Snow in August as well as his interview with Snow caused much less sensation and were interpreted with much less symbolical meaning than Mao's. After all, only Mao's conversation with Snow was later distributed as a party document.

Breakthrough via Secret Diplomacy

The missing of signals between Nixon and Mao well exemplified the delicate nature of the "intricate minuet" between Beijing and Washington. These signals through public media had the danger of being delayed or even totally lost. Since the break-off of the Warsaw Talks in February 1970, Nixon and Kissinger tried to reestablish contact with Beijing through different channels. At first they tried Lieutenant General Vernon A. Walters, the military attaché in Paris. Between July and September, Walters tried several times to tell his Chinese contact that he had an important message from Washington to Beijing. However, the Chinese official only said that he would inform his government that Walters had a message without making any further response.⁶⁴ The Paris channel did not produce any result.

⁶³ Gao Wenqian, *Wannian Zhou Enlai* [Zhou Enlai's Later Years] (New York: Mirrorbooks, 2003), 407.

⁶⁴ *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 89.

It was mainly through the Pakistani channel that Washington and Beijing achieved a breakthrough. As mentioned earlier, on October 25, Nixon had asked Pakistani President Yahya Khan to take his message to Zhou Enlai. Yahya visited China from November 10 to 15. On December 9, the Pakistani ambassador Agha Hilaly met with Kissinger and dictated Zhou's "authoritative personal message" to Nixon. Acknowledging Washington's past messages from different sources, Zhou emphasized that it was "the first time a proposal has come from a Head through a Head, to a Head" and that he spoke not only for himself, but also for Mao and Lin Biao. He also expressed wishes to receive a special envoy of Nixon in Beijing to talk about the Taiwan issue. Kissinger never obtained an adequate explanation why Yahya waited for three weeks after his return to Pakistan before transmitting the message. He speculated that Beijing might have deliberately wanted Yahya to postpone communicating it.⁶⁵ As with what had been mentioned earlier, Beijing probably felt more comfortable delivering the message in December.

On December 16, Kissinger summoned Hilaly and asked him to tell the Chinese that Washington was "prepared to attend a preliminary meeting at an early date" to make arrangements for sending a U.S. delegation to Beijing for higher-level talks, but he stated that the talks would not be "confined to the question of Taiwan" but all issues concerned with improving relations between the two governments. He also said the Chinese request for withdrawing U.S. forces from Taiwan was not hard to comply with because there were no military forces there except "advisory and training missions."⁶⁶

Zhou Enlai's reply came through Romanian Ambassador Corneliu Bogdan on January 11, 1971. Even though he insisted that the U.S. "occupation" of Taiwan was the only "outstanding issue" between the two governments, Zhou wrote that Beijing was ready to receive

⁶⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 700-1.

⁶⁶ *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 100.

a U.S. special envoy if the United States had a “desire to settle the issue” and a “proposal for its solution.” More importantly, he added, since President Nixon had visited Bucharest and Belgrade, he would also be welcome to visit Beijing. It was the first time Zhou formally expressed Beijing’s willingness to receive the American President in China. Unfortunately, Nixon and Kissinger interpreted his message as China’s insistence on the U.S. agreement to the Chinese principle on Taiwan as a prerequisite for negotiations. Nixon wrote a note on Kissinger’s memo, “I believe we may appear too eager. Let’s cool it. Wait for them to respond to our initiative.”⁶⁷ As the two sides were bargaining over the agenda through intermediaries, South Vietnamese forces invaded Laos with the air cover of the United States in February 1971. The incursion put the Sino-American secret negotiations on a temporary hold.

The Laos Incursion

The Chinese response to the Laos incursion was even milder than its response to the Cambodian invasion a year earlier. This time, Mao did not make any personal pronouncement attacking the United States. What the *People’s Daily* offered was his words, “So long as the peoples of Indochina work closely with each other and persist in a prolonged people’s war, they will definitely overcome whatever difficulties and win the final victory.” When it covered a half-million-person demonstration against the United States in Beijing ten days later, it did not mention any Chinese leader being present.⁶⁸

According to Kissinger, on the day of the editorial attack on the Laos incursion in the *People’s Daily*, Qiao Guanhua, the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister and an old associate of Zhou Enlai, told Ole Aalgard, the Norwegian Ambassador to China, that Beijing was aware of a new trend in American policy and he particularly expressed a desire to meet with Kissinger.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Document 102. See also note 2 of the document.

⁶⁸ *PD*, February 4, 1971, 1; February 14, 1971, 1.

Washington noted the message and reassured Beijing of its limited purposes in Laos. In a press conference on February 17, Nixon declared that the operation in Laos was not directed against China.⁶⁹

Because part of the area invaded by the Saigon forces was close to the Chinese border, the response from Beijing was significant. Both the *Times* and the *Post* read from the Chinese statement that it would not resort to military counterattack in response. Under a *Times* headline, there was a small caption, “Peking Issues a Warning on Incursion--Ziegler Says It Is No Threat to China.” The juxtaposition of the two made the Chinese warning look much less threatening. When Xuan Thuy, the chief North Vietnamese negotiator in Paris, made the front page of the *Times* by declaring that the Laos incursion posed a threat to China, his statement was followed by the comments of the administration’s China specialists who expressed confidence that China would not intervene when the United States was withdrawing troops from the region.⁷⁰ Similarly, when Laotian Premier Souvanna Phouma reportedly claimed that Chinese volunteers might enter Laos, the *Post* ran an article entitled “Peking Silent About ‘Volunteers’”⁷¹ These articles fostered the impression that Beijing and Washington would not fight over the Laos incursion.

In the middle of the Laos incursion, Nixon sent another signal by addressing China with its official name in his State of the World Message to Congress on February 25, 1971. The most notable line was, “I wish to make it clear that the United States is prepared to see the People’s Republic of China play a constructive role in the family of nations.” On its front-page article entitled “Highlights of the Message,” the *Times* called attention to Nixon’s “subtle compliment” of China “the first of its kind by an American President.” Even though the *Post* still used

⁶⁹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 706. See also Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 548.

⁷⁰ *NYT*, February 13, 1971, 1; February 19, 1971, 1.

⁷¹ *WP*, February 13, 1971, A10.

“Communist China” in commenting on Nixon’s desire to “establish a dialogue” with Beijing, it reprinted the section where he talked about the problems of Indochina and China.⁷²

The *Post*’s negligence of Nixon’s nuance might have to do with its preoccupation with the Vietnam War. As Kissinger stated, no matter how hard Nixon tried to make his annual State of the World Message a statement of the basic philosophy of American foreign policy, each year the press would focus on the section on Indochina. Instead of a debate over U.S. purpose in the world, it “invariably generated a discussion in Vietnam.”⁷³ In reporting Nixon’s State of the World message, the *Times* headline was “Nixon Sees Risk of Isolationism if Disengagement is too Swift,” and the *Post* used “President Sees no Early End to War in Asia.” The networks also gave prominence to Indochina and the China policy in their coverage of Nixon’s report.⁷⁴

The *Reference News* was quick to catch Nixon’s signal. It carried an article that called attention to the fact that Nixon had used the PRC “seven times” in his foreign-policy report and that it was the first time an American president had done so in an official document. The next day, it reprinted on its front page the section of Nixon’s message about China and its source was not any foreign press agency, but “this newspaper.”⁷⁵ This arrangement seemed to tell readers that Nixon’s message was not selected at random, but by the order from the central government.

In contrast to the *Reference News*’ undistorted presentation of Nixon’s message, the *People’s Daily* attacked his administration for its determination to “occupy” Taiwan” and its “criminal trick” of creating “two Chinas.”⁷⁶ By displaying China’s “firm” position on Taiwan, the article helped Beijing retain its public image as a revolutionary power. Nevertheless, the

⁷² *NYT*, February 26, 1971, 1; *WP*, February 26, 1971, A1, A14.

⁷³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1052-3.

⁷⁴ *NYT*, February 26, 1971, 1; *WP*, February 26, 1971, A1; NBC Evening News, February 25, 1971, Record #: 456162; ABC Evening News, February 25, 1971, Record #: 14415; CBS Evening News, February 25, 1971, Record #: 215118.

⁷⁵ *RN*, February 27, 1971, 1; February 28, 1971, 1.

⁷⁶ *PD*, March 5, 1971, 6.

secondary placement of the comments showed a reduced level of hostility to Washington. Sophisticated readers who read both newspapers could see the change in Beijing's attitude toward the United States.

Ping-Pong Diplomacy

In late March 1971, the operation in Laos ended in a fiasco, eliminating an irritant between China and the United States. In April, Beijing made a bold initiative that greatly accelerated Sino-American rapprochement, a move that amazed the whole world. Between 28 March and 7 April 1971, the thirty-first World Table Tennis Championships was held in Nagoya, Japan. From the beginning, Beijing regarded whether to send a team as a "political" issue because it would have been the first time for a Chinese sports team to appear in a major international event since the Cultural Revolution. According to Chen Jian, the Foreign Ministry and the National Commission on Sports were opposed to the idea at first because they were worried that Chinese players might have to deal with players from "puppet regimes" in South Vietnam and Cambodia. However, Mao and Zhou, who were well aware of the public relations value of the Chinese players in displaying the "new outlook" of the Chinese people to the world, decided to send their team.⁷⁷

During the championships, the *People's Daily* devoted considerable space to the Chinese team's activities besides reporting the game results. It repeatedly mentioned the theme of "friendship" in covering the interactions between Chinese players and those from other countries. In reporting the opening ceremony, it featured an article entitled "Transmitting Friendship through the Silver Ball--Chinese Ping-Pong Team in Nagoya." In an article called

⁷⁷ Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 258-9; See also, Xiong, *wode qingbao yu waijiao shengya*, 230-2.

“Friendship first, Competition second,” the *People’s Daily* called on the Chinese players to “use politics to guide skills and friendship to direct matches.”⁷⁸

The Chinese players performed excellently in fulfilling their “political” task and showed extraordinary courtesy when they encountered American players on several occasions. On 27 March, they talked with a few American players at the game’s opening reception. On 4 April, Glenn Cowan, a nineteen-year-old American player from Santa Monica College in California, boarded a bus carrying Chinese players “by accident,” as Chen Jian states. In the bus, three-time world champion Zhuang Zedong approached him and offered an embroidered scarf as a gift. When Cowan and the Chinese players got off the bus, they ran into a crowd of waiting journalists. The next day, Cowen returned the favor by giving Zhuang a Beatles T-shirt. Their exchange was again caught by journalists and cameras.⁷⁹

In reality, Cowan got into the bus not by accident, but by the invitation of Chinese players. According to Xiong Xianghui, the story that *Reference Materials* reprinted from Kyodo News Service went as follows: Cowan was hurriedly walking to the gym wearing a U.S. team jacket. When he passed by the bus for the Chinese players, they waved to him and said, “Are you going to the gym? Hop in.” Cowan was surprised, but he got in.⁸⁰ Without any prior encouragement from the government, Chinese players probably would not have been so forthcoming in dealing with U.S. players.

What happened between Zhuang and Cowan might have encouraged the Chinese leaders to make bolder moves. According to Mao’s head nurse Wu Xujun, Mao, who was intrigued upon learning of the story between Zhuang and Cowan from the *Reference Materials*, praised Zhuang for his “diplomatic adroitness” and “political smartness.” During the tournament, leaders of the

⁷⁸ *PD*, 29 March 1971, 6; 2 April 1971, 6.

⁷⁹ Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 260-1.

⁸⁰ Xiong, *Wode qingbao yu waijiao shengya*, 238-40.

American delegation had inquired repeatedly whether they could visit China when they met their Chinese counterparts. They became especially eager upon learning that Beijing had invited teams from England and Canada. When the American request was reported to Beijing, Zhou Enlai's opinion was positive. Mao was undecided at the beginning. On 6 April, when the tournament was about to end, he suddenly made the decision to invite the American team.⁸¹

On April 11, Beijing allowed three U.S. newsmen, John Roderick from the Associated Press along with John Rich and Jack Reynolds from NBC, to go with the American team. Roderick and Rich had reported from the mainland during the Chinese Civil War. In addition to them, there were two Japanese technicians working for NBC and two non-U.S. reporters working for *Life* magazine. On April 16, Tillman Durdin, head of the *Times*' Hong Kong bureau and a prominent China watcher, was given a one-month visa, the first of this kind issued to an American journalist for regular news coverage since 1949.⁸² The selection of the *New York Times* was not an accident. Chinese leaders must have noticed its efforts in promoting better Sino-American relations and that it was the most influential U.S. newspaper.

During the week in China, the American ping-pong team toured universities, factories as well as farms, watched a revolutionary ballet, and played exhibition matches with the Chinese players in front of a large audience. Besides Beijing, they toured Shanghai and Guangzhou (Canton). The *People's Daily* devoted much space to their activities, even their departure from China. The matches between Chinese and American players received live coverage on Chinese television and radio. The Chinese television anchor's comments that "for a long time, friendship has existed between the Chinese and American peoples" and that "the visit by the American

⁸¹ Ibid.; Wu Xujun, "Mao Zedong de wubu gaoqi: dakai zhongmei guanxi damen shimo [Mao Zedong's Five Superior Moves in Opening Sino-American Relations]," in *Lishi de zhenshi--Mao Zedong shenbian gongzuo ren yuan de zhengyan* [the True Life of Mao Zedong--Eyewitness Accounts by Mao's Staff] by Xu Tao, Lin Ke, and Wu Xujun (Hong Kong: Liwen chubanshe, 1995), 306-10.

⁸² *NYT*, April 11, 1; April 16, 1971, 1.

table-tennis team will enhance such friendship” had been examined and revised by Zhou Enlai carefully.⁸³

The high moment of the visit came on April 14, when Zhou Enlai met with the American team in the Hall of the People, where he said, “Your visit has opened a new page for more friendly relations between the two peoples.” The *People’s Daily* placed Zhou’s pictures with them in prominent places. The quotation of Mao for that day was, “People all over the world support each other in their just fight. Our friends are all over the world.”⁸⁴

Ping-Pong Diplomacy displayed Beijing’s use of “people-to-people” diplomacy before the establishment of the official relationship with Washington. Zhou Enlai’s welcoming speech as well as the Chinese media carefully separated the “aggressive and imperialistic” American government from the “heroic” American people.⁸⁵ When the game in Japan was over, the *People’s Daily* featured an article entitled “Our Friends are all over the World.” It claimed that Chinese player Zhuang Zedong had reportedly told an American couple, “Even though the U.S. government is hostile to China, Chinese people and American people are friends. We differentiate the American government from the American people.” After the American team’s visit to China, the *People’s Daily* ran an editorial entitled “Salute to the Courageously Fighting American People.”⁸⁶

In order to prepare the Chinese people for a change in relations, Beijing started promoting the friendship between the two peoples in the media. The *People’s Daily* could not

⁸³ Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 261-2; Xia, “China’s Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement,” 16, note 53.

⁸⁴ *PD*, April 15, 1971, 1, 4.

⁸⁵ This distinction was first proposed by Mao in 1965 when he met with a Japanese delegation. He was especially supportive of the American people when they opposed their own government. See, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China and Document Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, eds., *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan* [Selected Works of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe and shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1994), 575-6.

⁸⁶ *PD*, April 9, 1971, 6; April 27, 1971, 2.

directly comment on what the U.S. team's visit meant to the official relations because Beijing had to worry about its "revolutionary" image. However, because of the media's intensive coverage of the Americans' activities in China, ordinary Chinese people could feel that something new was happening between the two countries.

U.S. media were much more excited than their Chinese counterparts. When the Nixon administration completely lifted travel restrictions to China three weeks before the Chinese invitation, the *Times* and the *Post* did not attach too much meaning to the move.⁸⁷ Beijing's invitation to the first sizable group of Americans and its granting of visas to U.S. reporters thrilled American newspeople indeed. Walter Cronkite of CBS called the invitation a "consolation prize" for the U.S. team and "unexpected good news." The *Post* headline was, "Surprise Served at Table Tennis Match: U.S. Team Invited to Peking."⁸⁸ Harrison Salisbury, in his *Times* column, claimed that the invitation was "not only a gesture of friendship, but also one of national honor" considering the importance of ping-pong as China's "paramount international sport." With a phrase "Major Policy Change" in its headline, the *Times* interpreted Beijing's granting of visas to American newsmen as "more significant" than the invitation to the ping-pong team in showing its discarding of the policy of "self-isolation." It called the two moves as Beijing's "first positive response" to American overtures.⁸⁹

For two weeks, John Roderick's dispatches from Beijing made several front pages of the *Times* and the *Post*, and Ping-Pong Diplomacy occupied the prime time of the three networks. Frequently using Zhou Enlai's remark about a "new page" in Sino-American relations, U.S. media presented overwhelmingly positive stories about China. The *Post* pictured that "the smile on the face of the dragon was dazzling" as the American team received "first class treatment,

⁸⁷ *NYT*, March 16, 1971, 2; *WP*, March 16, 1971, 2.

⁸⁸ CBS Evening News, April 7, 1971, Record #: 216587; *WP*, April 8, 1971, A1.

⁸⁹ *NYT*, April 11, 1971, E3, 1.

warm welcomes and speeches of friendship.” The *Times* reported Zhou’s meeting with the American team with a headline “Chou, 73, and ‘Team Hippie’ Hit It Off.”⁹⁰

The cover of *Newsweek* was a big cartoon depicting Mao and Nixon playing ping-pong with a caption “A New Game Begins.” It noticed that the Chinese ping-pong players appeared in Japan with “no small little red book, no chanting of quotations, no speech making and no singing.” Instead, they were “profusely” polite when socializing with their ping-pong rivals and the local people. Also, it put the “cleanness” of Guangzhou (Canton) in sharp contrast to the “litter-strewn shanty towns of Hong Kong” and claimed that everything, including the Chinese guards and officials, had been “freshly scrubbed.”⁹¹

Time published several large pictures of the American team’s activities in China. In an article based on witness accounts of *Life*’s two reporters, it described China as “a nation that was unified and organized--with a level of poverty, but absolutely no misery” and the people as “healthy and self-confident. Moreover, it described Zhou Enlai as “smooth, very handsome, and quite witty.” In 1954 when Zhou Enlai led the Chinese delegation to the Geneva Convention, *Life* had called him “a political thug,” “a ruthless intriguer, a conscienceless liar and a saber-toothed political assassin.”⁹² In the brand new atmosphere, newspapers and magazines also ran articles tracing the development of Sino-American relations. Some of them dated the “traditional friendship” between the two countries back to the American Revolution.⁹³

Television had obvious advantages in covering Ping-Pong Diplomacy. For the first time the networks had the chance to show films provided by the Chinese official news agency. As the only network with reporters in China, NBC sent over 10,000 feet of color film and 30-odd

⁹⁰ *WP*, April 11, 1971, 1; *NYT*, April 15, 1971, 1.

⁹¹ *Newsweek*, April 12, 1971, 57; May 17, 1971, 48.

⁹² *Time*, April 26, 1971, 26-8; *Life*, June 28, 1954, 116, 125.

⁹³ *NYT*, April 15, 1971, 16; *WP*, April 12, 1971, A19; *Newsweek*, April 19, 1971, 62.

voicecasts back to the United States through telephone relay without being censored by the Chinese.⁹⁴ In the NBC video, there were smiling Chinese children holding Mao's red books and a large crowd waving to the Americans when they toured the Summer Palace. During the exhibition matches between the Chinese and the American teams, 18,000 audience members were shown clapping for the American team. The most impressive scene of the game came at the closing ceremony when players of the two countries marched into the gym in pairs holding hands. In the end, the reporter stated, "In sports at least, the Chinese and the Americans have found a common meeting ground."⁹⁵

ABC had its own way of illustrating the new relationship. While the anchor was talking in the studio, the background changed from the Communist "hammer and sickle" into two crossing ping-pong bats, each bearing the Chinese and American flags.⁹⁶ Through the Canadian Broadcast Company, CBS ran a video of American players visiting the elite Qinghua University, where Chinese students produced tractors. Under the influence of the Cultural Revolution, it claimed, students would not be trained as an intellectual class, but workers with their own hands.⁹⁷

Ping-Pong Diplomacy excited Nixon so much that a few hours after Zhou Enlai's meeting with the American team, he announced the plan to remove the trade embargo with China over non-strategic goods. White House Press Secretary Ron Ziegler deliberately linked it with Ping-Pong Diplomacy by telling the media that Nixon had made the decision two weeks earlier,

⁹⁴ *Time*, April 26, 1971, 54.

⁹⁵ NBC Evening News, April 14, 1971, Record #: 457079; April 16, 1971, Record #: 457126.

⁹⁶ ABC Evening News, April 13, 1971, Record #: 15040.

⁹⁷ CBS Evening News, April 16, 1971, Record #: 216151.

but the timing was greatly “influenced” by the Chinese decision to invite the American ping-pong team and Zhou Enlai’s remarks about a “new page” in U.S.-China relations.⁹⁸

The *Reference News* well documented the positive response to Ping-Pong Diplomacy. It reprinted stories about how the American team was warmly received at the White House upon its return home, and Nixon’s hope to receive the Chinese ping-pong team as Zhou Enlai had the American team. It even reported that Nixon had started practicing ping-pong to prepare for the meeting with Chinese players. As always, it also reported the worries of Brezhnev and the Nationalists on Taiwan, and their concern about the possibility that Japan might follow the example of the United States.⁹⁹

Most observers knew that the venues visited by American players and journalists in China had been carefully screened and stage-managed. What matters, nonetheless, was that the overwhelmingly positive report on China by American journalists helped create an image of stability and rationality, which stood in sharp contrast to the chaos during the Cultural Revolution. They displayed to the world that the Chinese government felt confident enough to receive journalists from other countries, especially the United States. The film of Chinese and American players holding hands must have had a strong impact on American audiences. The Chinese government was well aware of the media’s role when it invited the American the ping-pong team along with journalists. It is fair to say that the Chinese government successfully used American media to improve the chances for rapprochement.

One of the few to express dissent about Ping-Pong Diplomacy in the Nixon administration was Vice President Spiro Agnew. While attending the spring Republican governor’s conference on April 19, Agnew told journalists that he had misgivings about Nixon’s

⁹⁸ *NYT*, April 15, 1971, 1.

⁹⁹ *RN*, April 23, 1971, 4; April 26, 1971, 4.

policy of easing relations with Beijing because it might undermine Taiwan's position. He especially disliked the media's overwhelming positive coverage of China, for example, their stories about the "contented and productive" lives of workers who lived in tiny apartments in Beijing. He argued that it helped the Chinese government achieve a "propaganda triumph" over the United States. Agnew's remarks were so shocking that it made the headlines in newspapers and the networks. In order to clear up a possible policy rift within the Nixon administration, Ziegler summoned the media the next day and declared that there was "no disagreement" between the President and the Vice President and that Mr. Agnew "fully" supported Nixon's initiatives to improve relations with China.¹⁰⁰ While most media accepted Ziegler's assertion, CBS speculated that Nixon might have "orchestrated" Agnew's statement to appease conservatives.¹⁰¹ Agnew's concern was directed at U.S. media because of their promotion of an overwhelmingly favorable image of China.

U.S. media's coverage of Ping-Pong Diplomacy most likely played an important role in changing public opinion about China. In its wake, a May Gallup Poll found that for the first time, people supporting the admission of China into the U.N. exceeded those who were against by a ratio of 45 percent to 37 percent. The poll also indicated that for the first time, Republican respondents who favored China's U.N. membership exceeded those of their Democratic counterparts.¹⁰² It should be noted that this change happened before Washington announced in July Kissinger's secret trip to China and Nixon's coming visit to China. In reporting the poll results, while the *Times* used an article entitled "Gallup Poll Reports a Plurality Favors Entry of Peking in U.N.," which suggested favorable public opinion, the *Post* used a title "Peking U.N.

¹⁰⁰ *NYT*, April 20, 1971, 1; April 21, 1971, 1; *WP*, April 20, 1971, 1; April 21, 1971, 1.

¹⁰¹ CBS Evening News, April 21, 1971, Record #: 216286.

¹⁰² George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* vol. III (New York: Random House, 1972), 2308.

Seat Favored by 45%.”¹⁰³ Whether the *Post* editor was deliberate in choosing such a headline or not, readers with no knowledge about past poll results could hardly read from it any significant progress or any sign of promising change in public opinion because it was below 50 percent.

Kissinger’s Secret Trip to Beijing

Ping-Pong Diplomacy, which turned out to be a great success, greatly encouraged leaders of the two governments to move toward a common ground. Soon after the U.S. ping-pong team left China, Zhou Enlai sent a message through Yahya to Nixon explaining that it had not been possible to reply earlier to his message “owing to the situation of the time.” Zhou changed the wording carefully, “As the relations between China and the U.S.A. are to be restored fundamentally, a solution to this crucial question can be found only through direct discussions between high-level responsible persons of the two countries.” Changing the negotiation focus from solving the Taiwan issue to restoring Sino-American relations, Zhou again included Nixon on the list of people invited to visit China.¹⁰⁴

Beijing’s concession cleared the last obstacle for the American president to accept the invitation. In his reply to Zhou Enlai on May 10, Nixon said that Kissinger was to visit Beijing in advance to discuss arrangements for a presidential visit and that he hoped the first meeting between Kissinger and Chinese officials be kept “strictly secret.” At first, Zhou was not too pleased with the suggestion about secrecy. After Yahya explained that Nixon wanted to handle these negotiations entirely by himself to prevent any politicians from disrupting his efforts until a “government-to-government channel” was established, Zhou Enlai accepted the American suggestion. When Washington and Moscow were about to reach an agreement on arms limitation, Nixon sent a special message to Zhou Enlai on May 20, reassuring him that the

¹⁰³ *NYT*, May 30, 1971, 16; *WP*, May 30, 1971, 125.

¹⁰⁴ *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 118.

agreement was not “directed against the People’s Republic of China.” Finally on June 4, Nixon informed Zhou Enlai that in order to make arrangements for the presidential visit to China, Kissinger was to visit Beijing between July 9 and 11, 1971.¹⁰⁵

On June 10, the Nixon administration announced the relaxation of China trade, which went much further from the previous step announced during Ping-Pong Diplomacy. He authorized the export of a wide range of “nonstrategic items” and lifted all controls on imports from China. Though trade with China was still limited to “nonstrategic items,” the *Times* and the *Post* both regarded the policy as a move to “end the 21-year trade embargo against trade with China.” The *Times* regarded this announcement as “the most important milestone” in a two-year series of diplomatic efforts by Nixon to improve relations with China--the White House turned into a “major political occasion” when it issued the list of items that could be exported to China without special licensing. The *Post* viewed the Nixon measure as a “prelude” to an ending of U.S. opposition to China’s U.N. seat later in the year.¹⁰⁶ Among the three networks, ABC commented that the biggest reaction to the U.S.-China trade announcement might occur in the Soviet Union. NBC interpreted it as a “resumption of direct trade” with China without considering the response of the Chinese government.¹⁰⁷ Considering the insubstantial volume of trade between China and the United States at the time, the resumption of “direct trade” had more symbolic meaning than substance. While the Chinese media were not impressed by this gesture, U.S. media treated it with great prominence. Therefore, it had a larger impact on American audiences.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Documents 125, 122, 130, 132.

¹⁰⁶ *NYT*, June 11, 1971, 1, 8; *WP*, June 11, 1971, 1.

¹⁰⁷ ABC Evening News, June 10, 1971, Record #: 15843; NBC Evening News, June 10, 1971, Record #: 458199.

Three days before Kissinger set out on his disguised trip to Asia, the *Times* worried him by speculating that he might go to China in a story about possible new ambassadorial assignments in the Far East. As the article stated, the White House had “refused to confirm--and pointedly declined to deny--repeated reports” that Nixon had asked some months earlier that he or his representative Henry Kissinger be invited to China in early 1972. While William Rogers thought it was “funny,” Kissinger regarded it as a possible State Department leak to get him away from Washington.¹⁰⁸ The context of that article was its claim that there was “a race to be the first prominent American official” to visit Beijing between Nixon and his Democratic competitors Senators George McGovern (D-SD) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA).¹⁰⁹ Ping-Pong Diplomacy had brought about a favorable change in American opinions. After that celebrated event, Beijing invited several non-official U.S. delegations to visit China, which made American officials jealous. Politicians of both parties were anxious to gain benefits by visiting China, especially those interested in their party’s presidential nomination.

On July 1, Kissinger started his visit to South Vietnam, Thailand, India, and Pakistan. At the beginning of the trip, he made it look as “boring” as possible to reduce media interest. Upon his arrival in Pakistan, the last leg of his tour, Kissinger started complaining about an upset stomach. As a result, all his appointments were cancelled and word was put out that he would recuperate at Pakistani President Yahya Khan’s rest house in Murree, a hill station not far from Islamabad. At 3:30 in the morning of July 9, Kissinger boarded a Pakistan International Boeing 707, a civil flight with regular service to Beijing, and set on his adventure into China.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 732.

¹⁰⁹ *NYT*, June 28, 1971, 11.

¹¹⁰ John H. Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide: An Insider’s Account of the Normalization of U.S.-China Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 51-53; Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: the Week that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007), 187-91.

The talks between Kissinger and Zhou Enlai went well. Before the trip, Nixon had told Kissinger to secure reassurances from Beijing that no other American political figure would be invited before his visit. Zhou said that he had a great pile of letters from American politicians asking for invitations, but he had not answered them. Zhou also told Kissinger that he had placed James Reston, vice president of the *Times*, on a slow train so that he would not arrive in Beijing until Kissinger had left.¹¹¹

Before the meeting was over, one last thing they could not agree upon was how to announce Kissinger's secret trip and Nixon's forthcoming visit to China. The Chinese wanted to make it appear that the U.S. president asked for the invitation. Kissinger, who did not want to give the impression that the United States was playing the role of supplicant, reminded Beijing that it was the Chinese who had proposed such a visit. Finally, under Mao's instructions, the Chinese side agreed to the wording that suggested the initiative came from both sides. The final version was, "Knowing of President Nixon's expressed desire to visit the People's Republic of China, Premier Zhou Enlai on behalf of the People's Republic of China has extended an invitation to President Nixon to visit China at an appropriate time before May 1972. President Nixon had accepted the invitation with pleasure"¹¹² With their final agreement on the agenda of Nixon's trip, the next step for Beijing and Washington was to make the announcement that shocked the world.

While Beijing and Washington were reaching agreements on Nixon's visit to China, he dropped hints in this direction on several public occasions. Unfortunately, these hints impressed the Chinese more than U.S. media. Besides his interview with *Time* published in October 1970, Nixon explicitly talked about his intention to visit China on at least two occasions in April 1971.

¹¹¹ *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 140.

¹¹² MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 194-9. See also *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 142.

The first was on April 16, when he spoke to the convention of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, two days after Zhou Enlai's meeting with the American ping-pong team. Nixon said he had suggested his two daughters consider visiting China for their honeymoon. He also said, "I hope they do, as a matter of fact, I hope sometime I do. I am not sure that it is going to happen while I am in office." Neither the *Times* nor the *Post* was impressed by his remark in their front-page stories the next day. The second occasion occurred at the end of a news conference on April 29, the day before *Life* published Snow's article containing Mao's signal to him. Nixon said, "I would finally suggest--I know this question may come up if I don't answer it now--I hope, and as a matter of fact, I expect to visit mainland China sometime in some capacity--I don't know what capacity. But that indicates what I hope for the long run." Nixon gloated in his memoir that "even the most rigorous monitors and analysts of Nixon rhetoric" could not pick up his hints.¹¹³ In both cases, "tricky Dick" deliberately left the date of the China trip open, which made him look not so serious about it. However, the *Reference News* faithfully reprinted his remarks at prominent places.¹¹⁴ The Chinese newspaper understood well his signals.

On another occasion, when addressing a large group of Midwestern media executives in Kansas City on July 6, 1971, Nixon spent considerable time talking about the potential of China and the importance of improving relations with it. Again it attracted more attention in Beijing than in the United States.¹¹⁵ Actually, when Zhou Enlai mentioned Nixon's speech in Kansas City to Kissinger during their talk in Beijing, Kissinger was embarrassed that he knew nothing about it. Later, he had to borrow a copy of the speech from Zhou Enlai.¹¹⁶ Having known about

¹¹³ Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 548-50.

¹¹⁴ *RN*, April 19, 1971, 1; May 2, 1971, 2;

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, July 9, 1971, 1.

¹¹⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 748.

the secret from the top, the official Chinese media were probably more alert to Nixon's signals than independent U.S. papers.

Another reason for the failure of American newspeople to take seriously Nixon's remarks about visiting China was because they had seen such comments before. As early as 1960 when he campaigned against John F. Kennedy, the *Post* carried articles that speculated on the possibility of Nixon's use of a China trip as a "gimmick" to promote his own reputation. They thought he might want to repeat the personal triumph he had achieved while confronting Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in the famous "Kitchen Debate" a year earlier.¹¹⁷ None of those stories turned into reality eventually.

Moreover, Nixon and Kissinger had been very successful keeping their communications with Beijing secret. Even Secretary of State Rogers did not learn of Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing until July 8, when Nixon told him that it was a "last-minute decision" in response to an invitation received while Kissinger was in Pakistan.¹¹⁸ Before the two countries established diplomatic relations, no one could image Nixon meeting Mao, regardless of what he said.¹¹⁹ By comparing U.S. media with the *Reference News*, it seemed that more Chinese picked Nixon's hints about visiting China than Americans before Kissinger's secret trip to China was announced.

Conclusion

The period between the renewal of the Warsaw contact in December 1969 and Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July 1971 witnessed the most important breakthrough in Sino-American reconciliation. During this period, Beijing became a much more active participant in the "intricate minuet" in which leaders of the two governments communicated their

¹¹⁷ *WP*, November 10, 1959, D2; March 28, 1960, A15.

¹¹⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 747.

¹¹⁹ Eric J. Ladley, *Nixon's China Trip* (San Jose, CA: Writers Club Press, 2002), 101-2.

desire to improve relations through sophisticated means. When there was no direct contact between them, the media in both countries functioned as the message carriers.

As U.S. media correctly pointed out, Beijing's entrance into talks with Washington marked the beginning of the triangular politics with the Soviet Union as the third player. The Chinese eagerness to publicize the meetings with the Americans was mainly used to increase the Soviet concern. Besides displaying to the world Beijing's support for the Indochinese people, the anti-U.S. campaign in the Chinese media was also aimed to embarrass Moscow. Though Beijing broke off the Warsaw talks in response to the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, it was tough on words but flexible in deeds, leaving the door open for further contacts with Washington.

A key feature of the "intricate minuet" was that many of the signals emanating from the two capitals were unilateral steps that did not require reciprocity and several of these signals did not reach the intended audience. While Beijing's release of the bishop was well received in U.S. media, Mao's signals through Edgar Snow were too nuanced for U.S. media and the government to comprehend. Similarly, Nixon's signals by addressing China with its proper name at the reception for Ceausescu and his remarks about visiting China did not attract enough attention in U.S. media. The Chinese media were more impressed with these signals because they showed that the U.S. government had accorded China its "rightful" place in the world.

Another difference was that U.S. media seemed to be more interested than their Chinese counterparts in Nixon's initiatives of releasing trade and travel restrictions. Between 1969 and 1971, the Nixon administration shrewdly coordinated the timing of these announcements with important political events, such as Nixon's Asia trip in July 1969, the renewal of Warsaw contacts in December 1969, and Ping-Pong Diplomacy in April 1971. The prominent coverage and positive response from U.S. media helped reinforce the effect of these initiatives. Though

U.S. media were free from government control, they acted as the unwitting “cooperative partner” of the government in promoting Sino-American rapprochement.¹²⁰

By inviting American ping-pong players to China and allowing U.S. reporters to cover their activities, Beijing achieved a great public-relations success. As a landmark in Sino-American relations, Ping-Pong Diplomacy made great contributions to preparing the two peoples for a change in relations. For the audiences in both countries, it was the first time to see friendly exchanges between the two peoples since the establishment of the PRC. The headlines, pictures, and videos had a profound impact on their perception of the relations. More importantly, U.S. media’s overwhelmingly positive coverage of China changed its image from a militant, irrational revolutionary power into a more stable country that was rational and possible to deal with. In this sense, the media functioned as not only observers, but also as crucial participants in U.S.-China rapprochement.

¹²⁰ Words of Bernard Cohen, quoted in Patrick O’Heffernan, *Mass Media and American Foreign Policy: Inside Perspectives on Global Journalism and the Foreign Policy Process* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1991), 81.

Chapter 6: Preparing for the Show in Beijing: 1971-1972

After the announcement of Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in July 1971, both Washington and Beijing faced problems at home. Nixon needed to deal with the formidable challenges from conservatives who stood up for Taiwan. He could counter their opposition with a well-calculated public-relations project to maximize media coverage of his China trip, especially through television. In an election year, this would appeal to the majority of Americans, who could understand the benefits to be gained through the dramatic diplomatic breakthrough.

On the other hand, Beijing used different channels, especially its media, to accustom its people to the fact that their government had forged a new relationship with the United States, formerly its archenemy. Nixon's trip turned out to be a great success for both his own administration and China. Massive media coverage contributed to and became part of this success story. This chapter studies how the two governments prepared for the Beijing summit through their respective media and then how the media covered the visit itself.

Impact of the Announcement

At 7:30 on the evening of July 15, 1971, in the NBC studio in Burbank, California, President Nixon announced that Henry Kissinger had paid a secret visit to Beijing and met with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai during his recent Asian tour, and that he had accepted Zhou's invitation to visit China sometime before May 1972.¹ Eager to be part of the "historic moment," Nixon had requested airtime so that his "major policy statement" would receive live broadcasting on national radio and television.

As Nixon hoped, his photo as well as the "surprising" news became the main headlines in the two elite newspapers as well as the cover story of the newsmagazines. The *Times* described

¹ Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 544.

his acceptance of the visit as “simply astounding” and a “dizzying performance.” The *Post* compared the China trip to a “moon landing” and called the news “mind-blowing.” It went as far as predicting a “possible end of the Cold War.” *Time* was amazed by the “extraordinary Nixon-Kissinger diplomatic adventure.” Calling Nixon’s move a “political masterstroke,” *Newsweek* argued that his “awesome power” in conducting foreign affairs had “shattered two decades of hallowed American policy” in just three and half minutes.² In the case of Kissinger’s secret trip, the media seemed to support Nixon’s use of the executive power for the sake of good ends.

In response to the Nixon announcement, congressional leaders including Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-MT), House Republican Leader Gerald Ford (R-MI), and Senate Republican Leader Hugh Scott (R-PA), in addition to Senator George McGovern (D-SD), who was the only announced Democratic Presidential candidate, responded favorably. Two conservative Republicans, Senators James Buckley (R-NY) and John Tower (R-TX), expressed their opposition. In evaluating the overall response, the *Times* claimed that Nixon had won “bipartisan support” and the conservative Republicans constituted only “a handful.” The *Post* described it as “universally favorable.” *Time* mentioned conservatives who compared Nixon’s move to going to Berlin to “wine and dine with Adolf Hitler.” Noting the irony that Nixon’s announcement came during the “Free China Week” designed by supporters of Taiwan, it admitted that Nixon’s anti-Communist credentials made him far less vulnerable than a liberal Democratic President. In an article “A Setback for the Democrats,” *Newsweek* similarly noted how Nixon could easily get away with such a bold move when the conservative outcry was “surprisingly slight.”³

² *New York Times* (hereafter as *NYT*), July 16, 1971, 1, 30; *Washington Post* (hereafter as *WP*), July 17, 1971, A1, A14; *Time*, July 26, 1971; *Newsweek*, July 26, 1971, 16.

³ *NYT*, July 16, 1971, 1; July 17, 1971, 1; *WP*, July 16, 1971, 1 A16; *Time*, July 26, 1971, 16-7; *Newsweek*, July 26, 1971, 20-21.

Though Nixon said in the announcement that his decision was not made “at the expense of old friends,” journalists noted its ramifications for Taiwan. The front pages of the *Times* and the *Post* not only published photos of Nixon, Zhou Enlai, and Kissinger, but also those of Nationalist Ambassador to the United States James Shen and Premier C.K. Yen. They predicted that Nixon’s visit to China would increase the chance of China’s entrance into the U.N. and Taiwan’s expulsion.⁴ A cartoon in *Time* featured Uncle Sam leading Mao to the door of the UN with a subtitle “Tell’em Sam sent you.” *Newsweek* ran a picture of the Nationalist leader Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) looking afar with a telescope. The subtitle was “Chiang: A Bleak Prospect.”⁵ Though journalists offered generally favorable reviews of the Nixon visit, their expressed worry about Taiwan served as a restraint on Nixon’s approach to Taiwan.

In contrast to Nixon’s dramatic announcement of his trip, the Chinese media handled the news with a much lower profile. The *People’s Daily* placed the joint announcement on the front page, but in the lower right corner. While other articles were arranged horizontally and easier to read, the font of the announcement was smaller and the text was arranged vertically, which made it harder to read.⁶ This arrangement shows the complex mentality of the Chinese leadership. On one hand, they knew that the visit to China by the head of a former enemy was important news. On the other, its secondary position on the front-page displayed the detachment of the Chinese government, which did not want to appear too excited about Nixon’s visit.

After the announcement, the *People’s Daily* refrained from making any commentaries on the Nixon trip. The only one it published was an editorial entitled “The Tide of History is Irresistible” reprinted from North Korea’s *Rodong Sinmun* (Newspaper of the Workers). Buried on the last page, this editorial claimed that Nixon’s planned visit to China signified the failure of

⁴ *NYT*, July 16, 1971, 1, July 17, 1971, 1; *WP*, July 16, 1971, 1, July 17, 1971, 1.

⁵ *Time*, July 26, 1971, 12; *Newsweek*, July 26, 1971, 20.

⁶ *People’s Daily* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1971) (hereafter as *PD*), July 16, 1971, 1.

the United States in “isolating and containing China” and that it was “a great victory of the Chinese people as well as the revolutionary people of the world.”⁷ Beijing apparently suggested that the North Korean article represented the position of all “revolutionary” people of the world.

While the *People’s Daily* refrained from making comments on Nixon’s visit, the *Reference News* devoted considerable space to the shock and positive response of the international community. For example, it reprinted Agence France Presse (AFP)’s claim that Nixon had exploded the “most shocking bomb of diplomacy” and Reuters’s comments that the “warming between Washington and Beijing will have incalculable impact on the world situation, especially the Vietnam War and the general election the next year.” It even included a story about how Nixon had spent “the happiest night” by having a dinner of “crab leg and wine” before making the historic announcement. For a diplomatic payoff, it reported how the Greek government declared that Nixon’s move would accelerate its negotiations with China over normalization of relations.⁸ The positive world response in the *Reference News* vindicated to the Chinese people the correctness of the government decision to host Nixon.

The articles selected by the *Reference News* also highlighted a theme that the Chinese government had been consistent in its position on Sino-American relations while the United States had changed its policy. It reprinted a comment from an Egyptian newspaper that claimed, “The American Giant had been beaten by the Asian Giant” and Zbigniew Brzezinski’s *Newsweek* article that argued Nixon’s action symbolized a “kowtow” to Beijing.⁹ In an article “Why did Mao agreed to let Nixon Come to Beijing,” Zhou Enlai told several foreign visitors that it was the United States, not China, that had taken the initiative, and that he did not think of

⁷ Ibid., August 10, 1971, 5.

⁸ *Reference News* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1971) (hereafter as *RN*), July 17, 1971, 1; July 18, 1971, 1, 2; July 19, 1971, 2, 4.

⁹ Ibid., July 20, 1971, 1; July 28, 1971, 4; August 10, 1971, 2; August 12, 1971, 4; August 13, 1971, 4.

the new contact between the two governments as something of a “miracle.” By comparing a growing China with a declining United States plagued with all kinds of problems, Beijing wanted to show the world it was the United States that was anxious to seek reconciliation. These commentaries also reduced the threat of the United States before the Chinese audience and made their own country appear superior.

Nixon’s Media Campaign

In order to guarantee the success of his trip, Nixon started his own media campaign. First, he had to deal with unrealistic illusions about it. In briefing Congressional leaders on July 19, he cautioned against tying it to the solution in Vietnam. Press Secretary Ron Ziegler made similar comments in his news briefing afterward.¹⁰

Moreover, Nixon asked Kissinger to explain the rationale of the new development in communicating with the media. After his return from Asia, Kissinger held several news briefings hosted by the White House or in the presidential jet from California to Washington. In those briefings, he made very positive comments about his China experience and Zhou Enlai in particular.¹¹ In a memo, Nixon asked Kissinger to tell the press how he himself was “uniquely prepared” for the meeting and how “ironically” he was similar to Zhou Enlai in terms of personality and background in coming up through “adversity.”¹²

Nixon also changed his discourse on China. In a press conference on August 4, 1971, he claimed that China could potentially become the “most powerful nation in the world” and that there could be no world peace without communication between the “two great superpowers, the

¹⁰ *NYT*, July 20, 1971, 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, July 17, 1971, 1; July 19, 1971, 11.

¹² *FRUS, 1969–1976 Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), Document 147, “Memorandum From President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger),” July 19, 1971. All documents from the U.S. Department of State’s *FRUS* series are henceforth cited in the format *Title* and Document number. All are accessible at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>.

People's Republic of China and the United States.”¹³ By elevating China to the status of a “super power,” Nixon wanted to magnify the impact of his trip. Granting China such an equal status could also unsettle the Soviet Union in the triangular relationship.

Nixon's dramatic announcement of his China trip encouraged other countries to seek diplomatic relations with Beijing, which directly affected the balance in the UN vote on China's membership. In fact, since the UN vote a year earlier when China's entry won a simple majority for the first time, the Nixon administration had envisioned that it would not be able to stop the inevitable. The State Department proposed “dual representation,” which meant a shift from stopping the entry of Beijing to fighting against Taiwan's expulsion. Due to his concern for the conservatives, Nixon still felt leery about announcing the policy shift. According to Kissinger, Nixon prevented Rogers from announcing the policy in January, April, and June 1971. When Kissinger met with Zhou Enlai in July, he got the impression that the UN seat was not Beijing's utmost concern and that it could continue to wait if conditions to enter was not favorable. Seeing the positive response to his announcement of the China trip, Nixon became convinced that “the price was manageable.” He then authorized Rogers to declare on August 2 that in the coming fall at the General Assembly the United States would support the seating of China, but it would oppose the expulsion of Taiwan.¹⁴ In a conversation on September 30, 1971, Nixon and Kissinger told U.S. Ambassador George Bush to “fight hard” to keep Taiwan in the UN. At the same time, Nixon told Rogers that he did not want any “personal involvement” in the UN issue, particularly when Washington was “working on” Beijing.¹⁵ Besides his consideration of the

¹³ PPPUS, *Richard Nixon*, (1971), 849-61.

¹⁴ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 772-3. See also *NYT*, August 4, 1971, 2.

¹⁵ *FRUS 1969–1976 Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, Document 167.

ongoing Sino-American reconciliation, Nixon was taking steps to disassociate himself from a possible defeat.

The most important part of Nixon's preparatory work was with the media. *Washington Post's* White House correspondent Carroll Kilpatrick said that Nixon "understood the press better than Johnson did and he knew how to make news."¹⁶ Early in his political career, Nixon had learned about the power of the media in the Alger Hiss case, which not only brought him national prominence but also made him the enemy of eastern liberals and particularly the eastern media.¹⁷ Though Nixon despised most journalists and he believed that they hated him in return, as a shrewd politician, he was well aware of the importance of their favorable coverage of his trip, which he knew would place him in a unique position in history and would help him in his re-election.¹⁸ Among different forms of the media, Nixon was particularly suspicious of the print press. Living in an era when television had become widely available to ordinary Americans, he knew well that television could help him reach a large number of people with far less physical effort.¹⁹ In his "farewell" to the journalists in 1962, he declared, "Thank God for television and radio for keeping the newspapers a little more honest."²⁰ After he became president, Nixon chose to deliver his key messages through television speeches. As he told the press, "I think the American people are entitled to see the President and to hear his views directly and not to see

¹⁶ David Broder, *Behind the Front Page: A Candid Look at How the News Is Made* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 164-5.

¹⁷ Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 11.

¹⁸ Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: the Week that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007), 150-2.

¹⁹ Richard Nixon, *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 123.

²⁰ Joseph C. Spear, *Presidents and the Press: The Nixon Legacy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 85.

him through the press.”²¹ Kissinger said, “Television in front of the President is like alcohol in front of an alcoholic.”²²

John Ehrlichman, Nixon’s Assistant for Domestic Affairs, described him as “usually capable of a passionless and penetrating analysis of his press opportunities” and that he thought “like an editor.”²³ With his China trip, Nixon believed that “people” contact was more important than meetings in terms of public relations. Before Kissinger’s interim trip in October, Nixon asked him to raise the question of Pat Nixon’s going since he wanted her to act as a “prop” for “good people pictures.” He also thought it was a good opportunity to convey to the American audience the “human side of the Chinese.” He told his chief of staff Robert Haldeman, “On TV the American President received by a million Chinese is worth a hundred times the effect of a communiqué.”²⁴

As a successful advertising man in Los Angeles and a tireless worker, Haldeman was not only Nixon’s chief of staff, but also his chief “stage manager.” He shared Nixon’s suspicions of the media and his consciousness of their role in public relations. Knowing well how to sell an image, Haldeman wanted to make sure that Nixon “shone” as a great leader and statesman in China.²⁵ According to Kissinger, in the cabinet meeting upon his return from the secret trip to China, what concerned Haldeman most was the “size of the press contingent.” He was “disdainful” upon learning that Kissinger had not settled the issue with Zhou Enlai, especially when Kissinger said that forty was enough, which was even less than the number of secret

²¹ Broder, *Behind the Front Page*, 164-5.

²² MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 150.

²³ John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 263-4.

²⁴ H.R. Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1994), 364-6.

²⁵ MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 273-4.

service people. As he said, “Haldeman saw no sense in making history if television was not there to broadcast.”²⁶

In order to guarantee the success of TV coverage, the White House worked, in the words of the *Post* columnist Don Oberdorfer, “hand-in-glove” for several months to bring it about. According to him, four days after Nixon’s announcement of his China trip on TV, the Washington bureau chiefs of the three networks met with Press Secretary Ron Ziegler to talk about coverage. The networks put forward three plans: film cameras only with footage to be flown out of China and transmitted to the American audience via satellite from Tokyo, Seoul or Hong Kong; film cameras only with footage transmitted directly from China via satellite through a ground station in China; and live coverage with electronic cameras transmitting images directly from a Chinese ground station. They pushed hard without hopes of success for the third choice--live coverage.²⁷

During Kissinger’s trip to Beijing in October, he secured from Zhou Enlai the permission to build ground stations in China. Zhou said he understood the equipment would be used to “manage the whole show.”²⁸ In early January when Kissinger’s deputy General Alexander Haig and Ziegler led the advance team of eighteen into China, seven network executives and engineers went along. Their job was to install the ground stations to be used for communication and live transmission through satellites. During his talks with the Chinese, Haig emphasized the importance of making Nixon’s trip a “visible success.” Travelling to Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou, the advance group literally traced every place Nixon planned to visit, paced every step he might take, and worked on every camera angle.²⁹

²⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 757.

²⁷ *WP*, February 20, 1972, B7.

²⁸ *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume E-13, Documents on China, 1969-1972*, Document 40.

²⁹ MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 228, 273-4.

The White House also gave extraordinary privileges to networks in allocating the seats of correspondents who would travel to China. In the list of eighty-seven newsmen Ziegler announced on February 7, 1972, only fifteen independent newspapers were invited and six went to the two wire services. Three went to columnists Richard Wilson, William Buckley whom Ziegler described as a “conservative,” and Joseph Kraft whom he depicted as a “nonconservative.”³⁰ Six slots went to magazines including *Reader’s Digest*, which did not normally cover the White House but was friendly to Nixon.³¹ Each of the three networks could send four correspondents. In addition to the eight seats for cameramen and seventeen for television technicians, they received thirty-seven in total. This did not include the sixty television technicians who had arrived in China earlier in the month. In the end, the networks each had twenty-one seats while newspapers, magazines, and non-network broadcast organizations had only one seat each--if they were lucky. In order to attend the festivities, many TV executives and producers disguised themselves as “television technicians” bumping real engineers.³²

Max Frankel, the only *Times* correspondent lucky to be on the press plane, talked about the “massive competition” he faced when he arrived in China. As he wrote, “From the moment we landed, I saw myself outgunned by cameras, so I labored to paint verbal pictures into interpretive commentaries in ways that television could not match.”³³ Frankel won a Pulitzer Prize in 1973 for his reporting of Nixon’s epochal trip. The three networks also “scooped” the print media when *TV Guide* reported a week in advance many details of Nixon’s plans, which the newspapers were jealous of but had to employ in their own reports.³⁴

³⁰ *NYT*, February 8, 1972, 5; *WP*, February 8, 1972, A2.

³¹ Spear, *Presidents and the Press*, 98.

³² *NYT*, February 8, 1972, 5; *WP*, February 8, 1972, A2; February 20, 1972, B7.

³³ Max Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with the Times* (New York: Random House, 1999), 348-9.

³⁴ *WP*, February 15, 1972, A1; February 20, 1972, B7.

To deal with conservative fears of the betrayal of Taiwan, on February 9, a week before his departure for China, Nixon reiterated in his State of the World message that the United States would maintain its “friendship, diplomatic ties, and defense commitment” with Taiwan.³⁵ Three days before his departure, he ordered a further ease in Chinese trade restrictions whose effect, as Ziegler told the media, would place China on an equal footing with the Soviet Union and East European countries. Though Ziegler denied that the timing of the new trade action was connected to Nixon’s forthcoming trip, his words that “we would hope that the People’s Republic of China will be receptive to this step” was interpreted by both the *Times* and the *Post* on their front pages as a move to “improve the political atmosphere” for the visit. In the press briefing, Ziegler also referred to Nixon’s recent meeting with André Malraux, the celebrated French author who had known Mao and Zhou since the 1930s and had kept intermittent contact with them through the years. Nixon had recommended his book “Anti-Memoirs” to the journalists in his press conference on February 10, 1972. When he honored Malraux with a small working dinner with many officials, Nixon invited ABC commentator Howard Smith to be present.³⁶ By showing the media how “diligently” he was preparing for the China trip, Nixon was building the crescendo of his “show.”

Preparing the Chinese People for the New Relations

When Beijing made the decision to reconcile with its former number-one enemy, it took great efforts to educate the Chinese people, who had been taught to hate the American “imperialists,” about a new relationship. Beijing’s education was done at three different levels: the internal channel of the Party institution, the semi-internal channel through the *Reference News*, and its main propaganda machine--the *People’s Daily*.

³⁵ *NYT*, February 10, 1972, 20.

³⁶ *WP*, February 15, 1972, 1; *NYT*, February 15, 1972, 1, February 11, 1972, 16. See also Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 557.

In order to reduce the shock to the Chinese people before the announcement of Kissinger's secret trip and Nixon's visit, Beijing first informed the top leadership in the Party, the government, and the military. On May 26, 1971, under Mao's instructions, Zhou Enlai explained to the CCP Politburo the rationale of Sino-American rapprochement. Stressing that the decline of the United States and its desire to leave Vietnam had caused it to seek reconciliation with China and that an improvement in Sino-American relations would be beneficial to the struggle against "imperialist expansion and hegemonism," to peace in Asia as well as in the world, and to China's security and the solution to its "unification problem" in a peaceful way, Zhou pointed out that a successful opening might accelerate the "competition between the two superpowers" and benefit China.³⁷

Between May 27 and 31, the central government convened a national conference on foreign affairs, where Zhou Enlai suggested that the attendees should adapt to the new situation when China would renew its contact with the world and receive people from "the left, the center, and the right."³⁸ On May 31, the Central Committee, with Mao's approval, ordered the distribution of the minutes of Mao's interview with Edgar Snow to the party's bottom branches and that it be "verbally related to every party member." It also ordered, "the study of the interview should be carefully organized so that the spirit of the chairman's words will be correctly comprehended."³⁹ On June 4, Zhou Enlai read the "Report of the CCP's Politburo on Sino-American Talks" at a working conference attended by two hundred and twenty-five

³⁷ Xia Yafeng, "China's Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement, January 1969-February 1972," *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol. 8, no. 4 (Fall 2006), 17-20.

³⁸ Li Ping and Ma Zhisun, eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu, 1898-1976* [A Chronological Record of Zhou Enlai, 1898-1976] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), 1328-9.

³⁹ Document Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, ed., *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Manuscripts of Mao Zedong since the Founding of the People's Republic of China] vol. 13 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), 182. (Hereafter as *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*).

officials from different levels.⁴⁰ After the joint announcement of Nixon's visit, the CCP on July 21 issued a confidential document to local party branches, explaining that the chairman himself had invited Nixon and that it was "another tactic in the struggle against imperialism."⁴¹ These measures aimed to make sure that rank-and-file party members understood Mao's decision.

On August 17, 1971, the *People's Daily* published a front-page article entitled "A Powerful Weapon to Unite the People and Defeat the Enemy--On Policy." The article called for a study of Mao's 1940 article "On Policy," which argued for cooperating with the Nationalists in fighting the Japanese. By referring to this "united-front" policy, the editorial implied that reconciliation with the United States was a tactic to deal with the more threatening Soviet Union.

The second level of education was through the internal newspaper--the *Reference News*, which was the only source for most Chinese cadres and intellectuals to learn about foreign affairs, especially the status of the Sino-American reconciliation. In July 1970, before Snow started visiting China, Mao had ordered the most dramatic expansion in the circulation of the *Reference News* so that it could be read by all local party branches in factory workshops, village production teams, PLA companies, and among college students. He even suggested putting the *Reference News* on public bulletin boards so that everyone could read it. As a result, its circulation increased from 400,000 in 1964 to around five million in 1970.⁴² At the working conference on foreign affairs in May 1971, Zhou Enlai said, "After his meeting with Chairman Mao, Snow published articles, which had been read all over the world. We should reprint their excerpts in the *Reference News*. If the current circulation of four to five million is not enough, we can add a million more copies." His point was that every local party branch should have

⁴⁰ The conference convened between June 4 and 18, 1971. See Li and Ma, eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu*, 1329.

⁴¹ Xia, "China's Elite Politics and Sino-American Rapprochement," 21.

⁴² Wei Guangyi, "Mao Zedong dingzhu: ban yizhang tianxia duyiwuer de baozhi [Mao Zedong's Urge: Make the World's Most Unique Newspaper]," *Zongheng* [Across Time and Space], no. 4 (2000), 44-46.

Reference News, from which the cadres could learn about the chairman's assessment of the international situation.⁴³ The arrangement greatly enlarged the impact of the *Reference News*. By educating more people about the international situation, Beijing made it easier for them to understand its ongoing rapprochement with the United States.

Between May and June 1971, the *Reference News* published on its front pages six articles written by Snow. On June 19, it ran a special notice that read, "From June 17, this newspaper publishes American friend Edgar Snow's articles about his China trip one piece every other day. Readers, please pay attention." It also reprinted an article from *Life* magazine carrying Nixon's remark to *Time* that he would like to visit China.⁴⁴ The publication of these inside stories in the *Reference News* attracted so much attention in China that the readers' demand could still not be met even though many of its local offices printed copies far above the quota. As it turned out, instead of one million more copies required by Zhou, two and a half million more copies were printed.⁴⁵ Before Kissinger's secret visit in July 1971, millions of Chinese had learned that Nixon wanted to visit China and that Mao was willing to meet with him.

To educate the largest number of Chinese about the new relations with the United States, Beijing conducted "people-to-people" diplomacy, which was based on a separation of the "heroic" or "revolutionary" American people from the "imperialistic" or "oppressive" American government.⁴⁶ By displaying American visitors to the Chinese people through public ceremonies,

⁴³ Wei Guangyi, "Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai he cankao xiaoxi bao [Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the *Reference News*]," *Yanhuang chunqiu* [Yanhuang Spring and Autumn] no.4 (2000), 3-6.

⁴⁴ *RN*, May 2, 1971, 1; June 7, 1971, 1; June 19, 1971, 1; June 20, 1971, 1.

⁴⁵ Wei Guangyi, "Zhou Enlai zongli wenge qijian zhidao ban cankao xiaoxi [Premier Zhou Enlai Guided the *Reference News* during the Cultural Revolution]," *Zongheng* [Across Time and Space], no. 9 (2000), 7. In the 1980s, the circulation of the *Reference News* reached its top of nine million.

⁴⁶ Mao first proposed this distinction in 1965 when he met with a Japanese delegation. He was especially supportive of American civil-rights fighters who opposed their own government. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and Document Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, eds., *Mao Zedong waijiao wenxuan* [Selected Works of Mao Zedong on Diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe and shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1994), 575-6.

banquets, and the intensive coverage of the Chinese media, especially the *People's Daily*, the Chinese government promoted the friendship between the two peoples.

Beijing's "people-to-people" diplomacy started with Edgar Snow. During his stay in China, Snow felt like a "symbol to be paraded" by the Chinese who arranged him to attend so many banquets and ceremonies that he had no real chance to talk to people long enough to learn anything.⁴⁷ During his interview with Snow on December 18, 1970, Mao questioned the policy of not allowing Americans to visit China and said that the Foreign Ministry should study the issue of inviting Americans from the "left, middle, and right." On 17 February 1971, when the Foreign Ministry's report reached his desk, Mao approved it.⁴⁸

After the celebrated Ping-Pong Diplomacy, Beijing invited several American delegations to China. Though the *People's Daily* claimed that the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, a non-governmental organization, made these invitations, its official nature was not hard to discern. Its head Wang Guoquan was the former Chinese Ambassador to Poland, who had been involved in talking with the Americans in Warsaw during the Johnson Administration.⁴⁹

The *People's Daily* provided no information on the identity or occupation of these visitors and simply addressed them as "American friends" or "American visitors of goodwill." A closer look, however, reveals that many of these people were either leftists who had been victims during the McCarthy era or activists of the Civil Rights movement. For example, there was John Service and Koji Ariyoshi, both of whom were members of the Dixon Mission, a group of State Department officials who had worked with the Communists at their headquarter in Yan'an in the

⁴⁷ Snow, *The Long Revolution*, 9, 12; Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 178.

⁴⁸ "Minutes of Snow-Mao Conversation," in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao*, vol. 13, 166; "Instruction on the Foreign Ministry's Report on Inviting Americans to Visit China," in *Ibid.*, 211.

⁴⁹ For example, see *PD*, April 30 1971, 6; September 11, 1971, 6.

1940s. William Hinton, a Marxist journalist and vocal China sympathizer who lost his job during the McCarthy Era, stayed in China for seven months with his wife. During their stay, Zhou Enlai met with them five times and all meetings were placed on the front pages of the *People's Daily*. There were also members of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars and radical students who supported the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Beijing invited as well African American delegations whose "revolutionary struggle" had been applauded in the Chinese media. They included the Black Worker's Congress, the Black Panthers, and prominent communist activists like Bill Epton. The Hinton family and the three leaders of the Black Panthers were treated as state leaders when they were invited to attend the National Day reception hosted by Zhou Enlai in 1971.⁵⁰ Admitting Americans that had been "friendly" to China was good for Beijing because these people were more likely to write positively about China when they returned home.

The *People's Daily's* coverage of these delegations had a common pattern. Neither revealing the contents of the meetings nor elaborating on their significance, it focused on apolitical news such as their tour itineraries. For every American delegation, there were separate news entries covering its arrival or departure when the visitor(s) were received or seen off at the airport or train station by Chinese officials. Though these delegations were non-governmental in nature, Zhou Enlai actually met with almost every one of them irrespective of their numbers. Stories of Zhou's meeting with the American visitors, usually with photos taken, were placed on prominent places in the *People's Daily*. The frequency of coverage was also increased by the fact that Zhou Enlai met with several Americans together after receiving them individually. As a result of this intensive coverage, there was news about American visitors in China in the *People's Daily* every few days, especially during the second half of 1971. At one time during

⁵⁰ *PD*, May 25, 1971, 1; July 20, 1971, 1; July 25, 1971, 1; September 11, 1971, 6; September 19, 1971, 6; September 22, 6; October 2, 1971, 1; October 16, 1971, 1; October 30, 1971, 6; November 14, 1971, 1; December 29, 1971, 1. December 30, 1971, 6.

September and October, there were three or four such stories on a single day. The intensive coverage of so many American visitors in the official newspaper cultivated among the Chinese a friendly atmosphere between the two peoples.

Beijing's people-to-people diplomacy also included its working on U.S. media when it allowed U.S. journalists into China after Ping-Pong Diplomacy. According to Seymour Topping, managing editor of the *Times*, when he, along with William Attwood of *Newsday* and Robert Keatley of the *Wall Street Journal*, attended a dinner hosted by Zhou Enlai in June 1971, the Chinese Premier expressed his belief that American journalists could help to "mobilize their fellow countrymen to bring about the withdrawal of American forces from Taiwan and Indochina." Topping perceived Beijing's effort to "court" American public opinion to realize its foreign-policy aims.⁵¹

After Beijing opened the door to American journalists in April 1971, it treated the *New York Times* with special privileges. As stated in the last chapter, chief of the Hong Kong Bureau Tillman Durbin had been the first American newsman to receive a visa to report in China. Both Durbin and Topping were old China hands who had reported extensively from the country before the Communist victory in 1949.⁵² Max Frankel claimed that the reputation of the *Times* had been established because Topping had married Audrey Ronning, whose father Chester Ronning had been the chargé d'affaires of the Canadian embassy in China between 1949 and 1951 and an "old friend" of Zhou Enlai.⁵³ When talking about foreign-news coverage of China, the *Reference News* especially noted that the number of China stories in the *Times* increased to five times since

⁵¹ Seymour Topping, "Chinese Court U.S. Public Opinion." Hong Kong, June 26, 1971, in *The New York Times Report from China*, by Tillman Durbin, James Reston, and Seymour Topping (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 52.

⁵² Frank Ching, Introduction to *The New York Times Report from China*, 9.

⁵³ Frankel, *The Times of My Life and My Life with the Times*, 348-9; See also Audrey Topping, "Premier Reminisces with an 'Old Friend,' Peking, May 1, 1971," in *The New York Times Report from China*, 20.

Ping-Pong Diplomacy.⁵⁴ Beijing must have been impressed by the influence of the *Times* and especially its generally favorable coverage of China.

In May 1971, James Reston became the third *Times* journalist to receive a visa to enter China. Upon his entrance from Hong Kong, the *Reference News* ran a special entry introducing him as “an influential figure in the American journalistic as well as the political circles” with “close connections” to the U.S. government.⁵⁵ When he got in Beijing, Reston developed an acute appendicitis and underwent surgery in the Anti-Imperialist Hospital. As soon as he recovered, Reston published on the front page of the *Times* an article elaborating on how well he was treated as Zhou Enlai had sent eleven leading medical experts to work on his case, which was not a major surgery. Reston also catered to the imagination of Americans by writing in length about how the Chinese doctor treated his pain with acupuncture, a traditional Chinese therapy that many Americans considered mysterious.⁵⁶

Reston also received the honor of an official interview with Zhou Enlai on August 9, 1971. In the interview, Zhou expressed his admiration for the *Times* because it criticized Nixon’s invasion of Cambodia a year earlier. Reston was proud of the position of his newspaper. When Zhou Enlai praised Nixon’s courage to visit China, Reston did not give him much acknowledgement. While admitting that Nixon’s trend of thought on Vietnam and China was “bold and even right,” Reston criticized his lack of “clarity and definition and boldness” to cut the killing in Indochina and to normalize relations with China. When Zhou expressed his desire to see the solution of the Indochina conflict before the Taiwan issue, Reston’s position was, “We cannot resolve the problems in the world without China... but we can resolve the problems of the world without Taiwan.” Reston also commented on Nixon’s personality as a Californian and his

⁵⁴ *RN*, August 5, 1971, 4.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, July 7, 1971, 4.

⁵⁶ *NYT*, July 26, 1971, 1; July 19, 1971, 2.

ambition to get reelected so that he could “preside over the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.” He described the “Nixon turnaround” as simply a “personal redemption” by which he attempted to repair the damage he had done to Sino-American relations as the alleged chief “red-baiter.” After publishing the interview transcripts, the *Times* optimistically ran an article entitled “Chou’s Views Encouraged U.S. Aides.”⁵⁷ Haldeman, however, claimed in his diaries that Nixon viewed the interview as evidence that the *Times* was attempting to “sabotage” his trip. According to him, Nixon became so furious that he wanted every White House official to enforce his rule that no one should talk to the *Times* people and even threatened not to take them on his China trip.⁵⁸ Reston’s case demonstrated the uneasy relationship between Nixon and the influential *Times*. It also revealed that despite its approval of the president’s tactics, the *Times* did not completely support his foreign policy.

During his three-week stay in China, Reston wrote several columns and commentaries that presented favorable impressions of China. In one of his “Letters from China” series, Reston vividly described the atmosphere after Ping-Pong Diplomacy. As he wrote, “The routine of life for an American visitor in China these days is full of paradox. For example, you live in an atmosphere of vicious and persistent anti-American propaganda, but are treated with unflinching personal courtesy and are free to cable your impressions without censorship from the lobby of your hotel.”⁵⁹ Reston’s stories of China were so positive that the *Reference News* reprinted many of them.⁶⁰ Zhou Enlai’s effort in winning over prominent U.S. opinion shapers like James Reston and his newspaper seemed to have paid off.

⁵⁷ Ibid., August 10, 1971, 14; August 11, 1971, 2.

⁵⁸ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 339.

⁵⁹ *NYT*, August 4, 1971, 33.

⁶⁰ *RN*, July 31, 1971, 4; August 4, 1971, 4; August 12, 1971, 1; August 15, 1971, 1; August 16, 1971, 1.

The Lin Biao Incident and Kissinger's Interim Trip

While the two countries were preparing for Nixon's China trip, a political drama--the Lin Biao Incident--occurred and at one time it seemed to call into question the Beijing summit. What happened on the night of September 13, 1971, whether Lin Biao had plotted Mao's assassination and fled or he was ignorant of the plot and had been forced away by his wife and son, remains a mystery. One certain thing was that after their plane took off, it crashed in Mongolia with no survivors. The death of Lin Biao caused an earthquake in Chinese politics. That very night, Zhou Enlai ordered the grounding of all planes in China for three days. Lin Biao's closest four generals Huang Yongsheng, Wu Faxian, Li Zuopeng, Qiu Huizuo--who occupied the most important posts in the Chinese military and were members of the Politburo--were all arrested. Ye Jiangying, one of the four respected marshals who had studied the international situation during the Sino-Soviet border clashes of 1969, became the new head of the Chinese military. Lin Biao's death also dealt a severe psychological and physical blow to Mao, who was bedridden for a long time thereafter. As a result, Beijing decided to cancel the National Day parade at Tiananmen Square for that year.⁶¹

The unusual military movements, the disappearance of so many top members of the Politburo from public view, and particularly Beijing's unprecedented cancellation of the National Day parade caused wide speculation around the world that a major political crisis might be occurring in China.⁶² As the closest ally of Mongolia, Moscow knew more about the incident. On the eve of the Chinese National Day, Tass embarrassed Beijing by publishing the story of nine

⁶¹ Gao Wenqian, *Wannian Zhou Enlai* [Zhou Enlai's Later Years] (Hong Kong: Mirrorbooks, 2003), 345-56.

⁶² On September 21, the Chinese government informed foreign embassies in Beijing of the cancellation. See *NYT*, September 22, 1971, 1; *WP*, September 22, 1971, A1.

people killed in a Chinese jet crash well inside Mongolia on the night of September 12-13 without releasing their identities.⁶³ The Soviet story added further to the mystery.

Without knowing exactly what happened, U.S. media offered all sorts of speculation. There were rumors that Mao might have been dead or dying and that a power struggle over his succession was going on in Beijing. There was also the possibility that China and Moscow were on the verge of war and even the story that State Chairman Liu Shaoqi might have escaped.⁶⁴

The upheavals in China raised the concern about the stability of China and Nixon's China trip thus came under question. The *Post* argued that the "mysterious events" had shattered China's image of stability displayed in Ping-Pong Diplomacy. Its concern for Nixon's visit could be shown in Joseph Kraft's column "Portents from China," and headlines like "China Uncertainty Clouds Nixon Visit Plans" and "China Events Raise U.S. Concern."⁶⁵ A *Times* editorial speculated that the political crisis in Beijing could have been precipitated by the invitation to Nixon and it worried whether the moderate forces led by Zhou Enlai could prevail over the radical forces if there was indeed a power struggle.⁶⁶ On October 2, Secretary of State Rogers told the media that he hoped what occurred in China did not "signal any change in the possibility of the President's visit." His use of the word "possibility" raised further uncertainties. Both the *Times* and the *Post* regarded his statement as Washington's first official expression of concern. The *Times* interpreted it as an indication that "political changes in Peking could make it

⁶³ *WP*, October 1, 1971, A1.

⁶⁴ *NYT*, September 22, 1971, 1; September 23, 1971, 1; *WP*, September 22, 1971, A1; September 23, 1971, A1; *Newsweek*, October 4, 1971, 31; *Time*, October 4, 1971, 28-9; NBC Evening News, October 1, 1971, Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Record #: 454163 (All newscasts are hereafter cited in the format network, date, record number. All are accessible at Vanderbilt Television News Archive in Nashville, TN).

⁶⁵ *WP*, September 23, 1971, A19; September 24, 1971, A26; October 3, 1971, 25.

⁶⁶ *NYT*, October 4, 1971, 38; *WP*, October 3, 1971, 31.

impossible for President Nixon to carry out his planned visit.” U.S. officials later explained that Rogers’ use of the word “possibility” had no special significance.⁶⁷

Despite the concern of American newspeople, communications between Beijing and Washington on Nixon’s visit continued. Kissinger also thought that the political crisis might have been caused by the sharp turn in China’s policy toward the United States, but he pointed out that Chinese officials never mentioned Lin Biao and U.S. officials never asked.⁶⁸

During Kissinger’s secret visit to Beijing, the two sides had agreed to set up direct communications in Paris through U.S. military attaché Lieutenant-General Vernon Walters and Ambassador Huang Chen. On important matters, he would personally go to Paris to meet with Huang under the cover of negotiating with representatives from Hanoi. Kissinger met with Huang three times between July and September. In their meeting on September 13, Kissinger said he preferred to announce the date of his interim trip on September 21 because it was before Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko’s planned visit to Washington, during which they would probably decide on a date for Nixon’s visit to Moscow. He did not want the announcement of his trip to China to look like a reaction to Gromyko’s visit.⁶⁹

On September 23, Huang informed Walters that his government could not agree on the date because of Bush’s submission of a “two-China” proposal to the UN one day earlier. However, Huang agreed to announce the trip on October 5. What was remarkable, as Walters pointed out, was that Huang put his arm around his shoulder when saying goodbye.⁷⁰ The rapport between officials of the two governments in Paris showed that the Lin Biao Incident did not change Beijing’s decision for rapprochement. To some extent, the incident intensified Beijing’s

⁶⁷ *NYT*, October 3, 1971, 1; October 4, 1971, 38; *WP*, October 3, 1971, 25.

⁶⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 768, 770.

⁶⁹ *FRUS, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, Documents 143, 151, 155, 156.

⁷⁰ *FRUS, 1969–1976, Volume E-13, China, 1969–1972*, Document 25.

feeling of vulnerability. It did not want other powers, particularly the Soviet Union, to take advantage of it. Therefore, the continuation of the Sino-American accommodation served Beijing's interests.

On October 5, Kissinger personally showed up with Press Secretary Ron Ziegler when the latter announced his interim trip. His appearance not only added weight to the announcement, but also reassured worried newsmen. Both the *Times* and the *Post* ran headlines and editorials to elaborate on the steady relationship between Beijing and Washington. The *Times* was so relieved that "the party line now is that there was never any uncertainty." Stanley Karnow, the *Post's* chief China watcher, wrote a column entitled "Kissinger Trip Reflects Accord."⁷¹

When Kissinger went to Beijing in late October, he was deeply impressed by Beijing's commitment to improving relations. On his arrival, he noticed several anti-American slogans on the city walls. When he asked Zhou Enlai about those slogans, Zhou said that was just "firing empty cannon." On the day when he left Beijing, Kissinger noticed that many of the anti-American slogans had gone or had been freshly painted over.⁷²

The other thing that impressed Kissinger was Beijing's effort to get its people "accustomed to" the idea that their government was dealing with a senior U.S. official in a friendly manner. He noticed that about 500 officials were present when his party watched a "revolutionary" performance of the Beijing Opera and that crowds of Chinese spectators looked on when he toured the historical sites in Beijing. His impression was that Marshall Ye and acting Foreign Minister Ji Pengfei "saw to it" that they could be "properly displayed together" before the Chinese people. One of the most remarkable scenarios happened when they were having tea together aboard a boat in the lake of the Summer Palace "in plain view of literally hundreds of

⁷¹ *NYT*, October 6, 1971, 1, 46; *WP*, October 6, 1971, A1, A15.

⁷² *FRUS 1969-1976 Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*, Document 163.

Chinese spectators.” As Kissinger wrote, “The fact that a strong, cold wind was blowing (on an otherwise perfect day) did not deter our hosts; they clearly wanted this boatribe to take place and only a hurricane could have prevented it. When I waved to the crowds of people on the shore, they clapped loudly.”⁷³

Kissinger’s second trip to Beijing was indeed given much publicity in the Chinese media. Besides prominent coverage of his arrival and departure, the *People’s Daily* also published large photos of his meetings with Chinese officials. In reporting Kissinger’s departure, it even mentioned that he had visited tourist sites and watched theatrical shows amid the negotiations. Upon his departure, the two governments issued a joint communiqué, which especially emphasized that preparations for Nixon’s trip have been “proceeding exceedingly well.”⁷⁴ Beijing wanted to show the world how its normal diplomatic activities, especially the Sino-American rapprochement, had not been disrupted despite worldwide speculation about its internal politics.

Another thing worth noting was how Marshal Ye Jiaoping figured prominently in the *People’s Daily’s* coverage of Kissinger’s trip. Ye not only led the party that received and saw off Kissinger at the airport, but also attended all meetings between Kissinger and Zhou Enlai. In the published group photo, Ye stood on one side of Kissinger while Zhou Enlai stood on the other.⁷⁵ As Snow pointed out, “Nothing the Chinese leaders publicly do is without purpose.”⁷⁶ John Holdridge, Kissinger’s aide who accompanied him on both his China trips in 1971, argued that

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *PD*, October 21, 1971, 1; October 27, 1971, 1; October 28, 1971, 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid., October 21, 1971, 1, 2; October 27, 1971, 1.

⁷⁶ Edgar Snow, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1972), 3,

the public appearance of Marshal Ye with Kissinger informed the Chinese audience that the PLA supported Sino-American rapprochement.⁷⁷

The publication of Kissinger's photos with Chinese officials in the *People's Daily* attracted the attention of U.S. media. Both NBC and the *Times* displayed the photos in their news stories. As the *Post* claimed, even though the Chinese audience had grown "accustomed in recent months seeing their leaders pose with groups of visiting Americans," it was the first time the Chinese official press published photos of American officials with the Chinese. The *Times* pointed out that their publication in the *People's Daily* meant they would also appear in newspapers all over China, which showed that Beijing wanted its people to know about the positive developments in Sino-American relations.⁷⁸

China's Admission into the UN

Before Kissinger's return from China, the United States had suffered what the *Times* called a "crushing defeat" in the United Nations on October 25. After the American proposal to make Taiwan's expulsion an "important matter" was defeated by 59 to 55, an Albanian resolution that called for China's admission and Taiwan's expulsion won by the large margin of 76 to 35. All NATO members except Greece, Portugal and Luxembourg, voted against the United States.⁷⁹

U.S. media sympathized with Taiwan. In the ABC story, Nationalist representatives received applause of sympathy when they walked out of the General Assembly before the vote on their expulsion. NBC played the last speech of the Nationalist ambassador to the UN. All three networks featured the wild reception from representatives from countries that supported

⁷⁷ John H. Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide: An Insider's Account of the Normalization of U.S.-China Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 71.

⁷⁸ *NYT*, October 22, 1971, 3; *WP*, October 22, 1971, A20; NBC Evening News, October 22, 1971, Record #: 454417.

⁷⁹ *NYT*, October 26, 1971, 1; October 29, 1971, 40.

China. In a nice touch, they also showed pictures of vacant seats and the flag post waiting for Chinese representatives.⁸⁰ On the front page of the *Times*, a picture of China supporters clapping hands over their victory was contrasted with a picture of Nationalist representatives walking out of the General Assembly. The *Post* had a picture of Taiwan's Foreign Minister Chou Shu-kai listening to the debate with a stern face. Both newspapers also reported that Senator James L. Buckley (R-NY), who reacted sharply, proposed in Congress for "a major reduction" in the American financial contribution to the UN. Both of them deplored the "injustice" to Taiwan and the dangerous precedent of expelling a "member state" in their editorials. The two newsweeklies featured Zhou Enlai on their covers with "The Chinese are Coming" as the headlines of their accounts.⁸¹

Though the Nixon administration felt obliged to address the domestic sentiment over Taiwan's expulsion, it did not want to create an anti-China impression. In their public statements, administration officials reiterated how the government had tried hard to keep Taiwan in the UN, but their condemnation mainly focused on the expulsion and the behavior of small states, instead of the vote. In an official response, William Rogers appearing on TV, accepted "the will of majority" and welcomed the admission of China, but he emphasized that Washington and its co-sponsors had made "an all-out effort" to keep Taiwan in the UN. In order to appeal to conservatives, he said that the administration was not opposed to a reduction in UN allocations because it might be spending too much and "living beyond its sources."⁸² In a press briefings two days after the UN vote, Ron Ziegler told reporters that the President condemned the joyful response of the delegates after the UN vote as a "shocking demonstration" and "undisguised

⁸⁰ ABC Evening News, Oct 26, 1971, Record #: 13037; NBC Evening News, Oct 26, 1971, Record #: 454479; CBS Evening News, Oct 26, 1971, Record #: 213485.

⁸¹ *NYT*, October 26, 1971, 1; October 27, 1971, 46; *WP*, October 26, 1971, 1; October 27, 1971, A20; *Time*, November 8, 1971; *Newsweek*, November 8, 1971, 22.

⁸² *NYT*, October 27, 1971, 16.

glee” and “personal animosity” toward American policy. Calling it “offensive and undignified,” he said the President felt that it “could very seriously impair support for the United Nations in the country and in Congress.” Nixon’s condemnation of the “glee” successfully made headlines in the *Times* and the *Post*.⁸³

In their editorials, both the *Times* and the *Post* criticized the Nixon administration for playing to the irrationality of conservatives and called on the country to move ahead with the Beijing dialogues. The *Post* called retaliation against the U.N. “petty and vindictive” and criticized Rogers for “hardly discouraging” those in Congress who were bent on reducing the U.S. contribution. It argued that the consensus should be “that it was past time to begin pursuing a policy of realistic accommodation with Peking--a policy whose most intense advocate these days is the U.S.” Similarly, the *Times* argued that since the issue had been finally settled, it was a “height of folly” to retaliate against the U.N. and that the solution of China’s UN membership problem might “not be unhealthy in the long run” because it might give Washington a chance to improve its relations with its friends and allies. James Reston claimed that Nixon had “more flexibility” on the world stage than he had before.⁸⁴

The two newspapers also understood Nixon’s approach. The *Post* pointed out that the White House had left Rogers to make explanations “in an apparent effort to keep the President’s personal prestige separated from the voting setback.” In an article entitled “Crushing Defeat ... or a Blessing in Disguise,” the *Times* maintained that Nixon had “put on a calculated display of anger--however genuine his anger may have been--with the primary object of deflecting from himself the sense of outrage in Congress and on the right.” It also pointed out that after all Nixon

⁸³ Ibid., October 28, 1971, 1; October 31, E1; *WP*, October 28, 1971, 1.

⁸⁴ *WP*, October 27, 1971, A20; *NYT*, October 27, 1971, 46, 47.

still had his major “political assets intact” on his road to Beijing and the 1972 election.⁸⁵ When U.S. publications condemned the U.N. for expelling Taiwan, they never mentioned the fact that the Nationalists did not accept the two-China idea either, which meant the admission of Mainland China might have caused the departure of Taiwan, even had the UN wanted it to stay.

Another measure the Nixon administration took to deflate criticism was to coordinate Kissinger’s second trip. In order to avoid the impression that his success in Beijing had caused the American defeat in the UN, Kissinger not only asked Bush to deliver his UN speech after his departure for Beijing, but also delayed his return at the request of Nixon so that he could arrive home after the UN vote.⁸⁶ In the press briefing upon his return, Kissinger described the timing of the UN vote during his stay in China as a “painful experience.” Emphasizing that the visit had been planned during his last trip, he especially reiterated that it “did not affect the outcome of the U.N. decision.”⁸⁷

Nixon’s tactic of delaying Kissinger’s return from China seemed to pay off. On the same front page where Nixon’s denunciation of the delegates’ “glee” was reported, large photos of Kissinger with Zhou Enlai appeared in the two newspapers, which were thrilled because that was the first time when officials of the United States and China posed together for a photo shoot. In an article entitled “China: a Stinging Victory,” *Time* placed a picture of the Nationalist Ambassador walking out from the UN together with the one with Zhou Enlai and Kissinger.⁸⁸ The agenda quickly shifted from the UN to the Sino-American dialogue.

After Kissinger’s October trip to Beijing, the two governments worked on a communiqué announcing the exact date of Nixon’s visit. On November 18, Ambassador Huang Chen told

⁸⁵ *WP*, October 27, 1971, 1; *NYT*, October 31, 1971, E1.

⁸⁶ *FRUS 1969–1976 Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, Document 161.

⁸⁷ *WP*, October 28, 1971, 1.

⁸⁸ *NYT*, October 28, 1971, 1; *WP*, October 28, 1971, 1; *Time*, November 8, 1971, 26-7.

Walters that his government wanted to change the announcement date from November 23 to 30 because it was not “opportune” to make such an announcement when “the chief of government from a neighboring state” was visiting China. When Walters offered to guess that it was North Vietnam, Huang slapped him on the back and said, “You guessed right for the first time.” In his memo, Walters wrote, “all of the foregoing was washed down with jasmine tea and accompanied by the now usual friendly pats on the arm and back.”⁸⁹ The rapport between officials in Paris suggested that the Chinese leadership no longer regarded the United States as its archenemy.

When North Vietnamese premier Pham Von Dong visited China between November 20 and 27, 1971, Beijing launched an enormous propaganda campaign to highlight the “solidarity” between the two communist “comrades and brothers.” The *People’s Daily* devoted extensive and prominent coverage to Vietnam with front-page stories, pictures, and editorials and published an unusually long communiqué between the two governments at the end of Pham’s visit. Three days after Pham left, the *People’s Daily* announced Nixon’s visit with only one sentence placed on the very bottom of the front page, “The governments of the People’s Republic and China and the United States of America have agreed that President Nixon’s visit to China would start on February 21, 1972.”⁹⁰ Beijing’s public enthusiasm for the visit of the North Vietnamese and the “low profile” it gave to the communiqué showed its effort to hold together its ideological friends who were hostile to the United States.

On February 15, 1972, a week before Nixon started his China tour, Edgar Snow died of cancer in Switzerland. The *People’s Daily* made a big deal of the death of “a friend of the Chinese people” by publishing on its front page official condolences from Mao and his wife Jiang Qing, Zhou Enlai and his wife Deng Yingchao, and Madam Sun Yat-sun who was the vice

⁸⁹ *FRUS, 1969–1976, Volume E-13, Documents on China, 1969-1972*, Document 60.

⁹⁰ *PD*, November 21, 1971, 1; November 24, 1971, 1; November 27, 1971, 1; November 28, 1971, 1; November 30, 1971, 1.

state chairman. In addition to the story that Zhou Enlai and Jiang Qing had attended a memorial service in Beijing, Snow received the tribute paid to the head of a state. In his published cablegram of condolence to Mrs. Snow, Zhou called Snow a “witness” of good friendship between the two peoples and expressed his strong belief that “the friendship that Snow had dedicated his whole life to would definitely grow.”⁹¹

American newspapers and networks also gave Snow’s death prominent attention. All three networks covered the story. Both the *Times* and the *Post* ran Snow’s photos with Mao on their front pages and called attention to the “unique tribute” Chinese leaders paid to him in their official media. The *Times* pointed out that Zhou Enlai had sent a medical team of three doctors and a nurse to attend to Snow when he failed to “rally from” his surgery on his spleen. Moreover, it posted a special editorial that praised Snow as a “first class journalist” who had played an important role in maintaining the “tenuous link” between the Chinese leaders and the United States.⁹² By extending special privileges to Edgar Snow, Beijing again highlighted the friendship between the two peoples through the media.

The Show in Beijing

After several months of preparation, Nixon set out for China on February 17, 1972. All three networks stopped their regular programming to cover live his farewell ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House. The front pages of the *Times* and the *Post* both featured pictures of Nixon and his wife waving good-bye in front of their helicopter.⁹³ After stopping in Hawaii and Guam for two days, Nixon’s party set off for Shanghai, where they made a brief

⁹¹ Ibid., February 17, 1972, 1, 2; February 20, 1972, 1.

⁹² NBC Evening News, February 15, 1972, Record #: 462432; ABC Evening News, February 15, 1972, Record #: 19313; *NYT*, February 16, 1972, 1; February 17, 1972, 36, 40; *WP*, February 16, 1972, 1; February 18, 1972, B10.

⁹³ CBS Special Program, February 17, 1972, Record #: 659061; ABC Special Program, February 17, 1972, Record #: 19360; NBC special program, February 17, 1972, Record #: 659443; *NYT*, February 18, 1972, 1; *WP*, February 18, 1972, 1.

stop, picking up Chinese navigators and flew to Beijing. On February 20, Nixon's plane, the "Spirit of 76," landed at the Beijing airport. In the middle of cameras and spotlights, Nixon walked down from the plane and stepped forward to shake Zhou Enlai's waiting hand. This moment became the main story in the media around the world the next day. According to Kissinger, Nixon and Haldeman wanted to make sure the president would be alone for the television cameras in his first encounter with Zhou Enlai. He and Rogers had been instructed several times that they were to stay on the plane until the historic handshake between Nixon and Zhou had been accomplished. Notwithstanding the instructions, Haldeman did not want to leave anything to chance. A burly aide blocked the aisle of the presidential plane when the moment came.⁹⁴

To the dismay of U.S. reporters, only a few dozen Chinese officials and five hundred honor guards showed up at the airport. When CBS's Charles Collingwood in New York asked Walter Cronkite whether there was an air of excitement in Beijing, Cronkite did not think so. NBC's Barbara Walters found an "air of disappointment." NBC's Edwin Newman commented that Zhou Enlai's handshake with Nixon "did seem to be a cordial" one.⁹⁵ James Thomson Jr., a China hand in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and a Harvard professor who worked as ABC's commentator on the Nixon trip, said the receiving ceremony was "low key, but very, very serious." Harry Reasoner, the ABC anchor in Beijing, did not think Beijing tried to downplay its importance considering the presence of a number of high-level Chinese officials and the involvement of the PLA at the reception. The *Times* reported that Nixon received a "quiet greeting," which was "studiously correct but minimally official." It speculated that it was probably because the two governments had no diplomatic relations yet. The *Post* pointed out the

⁹⁴ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1054.

⁹⁵ *Newsweek*, March 6, 1972, 27.

“lack of fanfare” which was in sharp contrast to receptions accorded to other foreign visitors, such as Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, who was greeted by 300,000 Chinese citizens when he arrived a year earlier.⁹⁶

Despite the low profile of the reception, the images at the airport were still powerful. For example, when the People’s Liberation Army band played the Star-Spangled Banner, James Thomson noted that it had been a while since it was last played in China. Reasoner echoed Thomson and said that it was a “startling moment.” Talking about the Zhou-Nixon handshake, Thomson referred to the Geneva Conference in 1954 when John Foster Dulles refused to shake hands with Zhou. Interestingly, when Howard K. Smith criticized China because of its troop maneuvers in the capital, the rumor that China shipped luxurious cars from Hong Kong to prepare for Nixon’s visit, and the three Americans still imprisoned in China, Thomson brushed aside those negative comments and expressed high hopes for the coming summit. Thomson also keenly noted that the appearance of Marshal Ye Jianying behind Zhou Enlai in receiving Nixon showed that the military and the civilian branches were still “holding together.”⁹⁷ Thomson shared an “Emmy” award with the ABC news team for his ten-day service as a television commentator during Nixon’s visit.⁹⁸

The Chinese government did not set up the exact date when Nixon would meet with Mao. As soon as Nixon arrived at his residence, Mao became so excited that he told Zhou that he wanted to meet with the president right away. Winston Lord, Kissinger’s aide who attended the meeting, thought the arrangement was a “typical Chinese example” where the Emperor kept visitors on edge. Nevertheless, Nixon was so thrilled that he rushed to the meeting with

⁹⁶ *WP*, February 21, 1972, 1; *NYT*, February 21, 1972, 1; ABC Special Program, February 20, 1972, Record #: 658981.

⁹⁷ ABC Special Program, February 20, 1972, Record #: 658981.

⁹⁸ James Reed, “In Memoriam: James C. Thomson Jr.” American Historical Association (AHA), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2003/0302/0302mem1.cfm> last updated February 6, 2008.

Kissinger and Lord without bringing William Rogers who, as the Secretary of State, should have been present at the summit but in whom the president had little confidence. The one-hour meeting happened behind closed doors. Only Xinhua News Agency was allowed in briefly for photo shooting. Before the Chinese media released photos of the meeting, Kissinger asked them to cut off the much lower ranking Lord in order not to embarrass Rogers.⁹⁹ Nixon later told Haldeman how he was impressed during the meeting when “at one point Mao reached over, talking, and grabbed my hand and held it for more than a minute while he made his point.” Feeling that scene was significant, Nixon was especially happy that the Chinese film crew covered it.¹⁰⁰ After the Nixon-Mao meeting, Ron Ziegler announced it to the journalists. Though he simply said that the conversation was “frank and serious” when asked for details, the photos and black-and-white film of Nixon with Mao became major stories in the United States. Under a big picture of the Mao-Nixon meeting on its front-page, the *Post* described it as “Mao’s apparent endorsement of an eventual improvement in Sino-American ties.”¹⁰¹ This statement would have pleased Nixon because it would silence conservatives who were worried that Nixon might be slighted in China.

On the night of Nixon’s arrival, Zhou Enlai hosted a state banquet. On television, American audiences could see how Nixon clinked cups with Zhou Enlai and other Chinese officials with the national flags of the two countries on display together and the PLA band playing “Home on the Range “and” America the Beautiful” in the background. As Nixon was delivering his toast, the CBS camera offered a long close-up of the Chinese premier so that the American audience could have a better look at him.¹⁰² Nixon’s remarking “Let us start a long

⁹⁹ MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 65, 71.

¹⁰⁰ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 415-6.

¹⁰¹ *WP*, February 22, 1971, 1.

¹⁰² CBS Evening News, February 21, 1972, Record #: 221667.

march together” was widely quoted in the media.¹⁰³ When he reviewed the news summaries with Haldeman before they went to bed that night, Nixon was extremely pleased with the coverage and especially happy because they got all the images he wanted, such as his use of chopsticks, his toast as well as Zhou Enlai’s, and their glass-clinking. Nixon also told Haldeman that when he clinked Zhou’s glass, the Chinese Premier said he had the band play “America the Beautiful” because it was played at Nixon’s first inaugural. Assuming that was one of his favorite songs, Zhou offered it to Nixon as a toast to his next inaugural.¹⁰⁴

As Ron Ziegler told a UPI correspondent, Nixon’s trip was indeed a “picture story.” There were no regular news briefings and the correspondents had no important news to cover except when the Nixons went sightseeing or Pat Nixon visited Chinese citizens and their families at a model farm, in a kitchen, kindergarten, or factory. While Nixon’s closed-door conversations with Zhou Enlai were totally kept from the media, the Chinese arranged image-makers and photo opportunities so that they would be transmitted home via satellite and played at “prime-time viewing hours.”¹⁰⁵ For an entire week from February 18, the front pages of newspapers ran photos following Nixon’s itinerary until his return to Washington. The magazines, though published after his return, both used the trip as their cover stories and similarly offered many photographs.¹⁰⁶ Nixon’s trip commanded live broadcasting, often in prime time, and the lion’s share of the evening news during the week.

The Chinese media expressed qualified enthusiasm for Nixon’s visit. The day after Nixon’s arrival, the *People’s Daily* on its front page featured several large photos of Nixon’s meeting with Mao and Zhou Enlai. Several U.S. news agencies, newspapers and networks

¹⁰³ *WP*, February 22, 1972, 1; *Time*, March 6, 1972, 11; *Newsweek*, March 6, 1972, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 416.

¹⁰⁵ Spear, *Presidents and Press*, 98.

¹⁰⁶ *Newsweek*, March 6, 1972, 3, 14-29; *Time*, March 6, 1972, 10-28.

included, picked this front page as a highlight in their stories. As they reported, the *People's Daily* had caused a “sensation” in Beijing and was sold out within a few hours when throngs of people crowded the newsstands.¹⁰⁷ They were deeply impressed by Beijing’s effort to publicize Nixon’s visit.

Beijing might have felt that the “unusual” coverage of Nixon’s first day in China had caused too much world excitement. In the days that followed, readers of the *People's Daily* witnessed a subtle change. Photos of Nixon’s activities remained on the front pages, but they became smaller and were placed in less prominent places below stories of domestic matters. Interestingly, while U.S. media ran pictures showing the warm interpersonal relations between the leaders, such as the Nixon-Zhou toast, Nixon’s handshake with ordinary Chinese in Hangzhou, and especially his offer to help the Chinese premier with his coat,¹⁰⁸ the *People's Daily* coverage was more of an official and ceremonial nature, ignoring the “personal” dimensions in the exchanges. As Kissinger said, Beijing faced “a philosophical crisis, torn between the imperatives of Realpolitik and the dictates of ideology.”¹⁰⁹

The *Reference News* provided more political insights than the *People's Daily*. It covered the world response to Nixon’s planned trip to China and the China craze it caused in the United States, U.S. preparatory work including advance-team activities in China and media allocation, how Americans watched Nixon’s tour on TV, and their response to the Shanghai Communiqué. It also reprinted many stories about how Nixon was “diligently” studying the history and culture of China. More importantly, it reprinted the full text of many of Nixon’s TV and radio

¹⁰⁷ ABC Evening News, February 22, 1972, Record #: 19427; NBC Evening News, February 22, 1972, Record #: 462573; CBS Evening News, February 22, 1972, Record #: 221686; *NYT*, February 23, 1972, 1; *WP*, February 23, 1972, 1.

¹⁰⁸ *WP*, February 22, 1972, 1; *NYT*, February 22, 1; February 23, 1972, 1; *Newsweek*, March 6, 1972, 16; *Time*, March 6, 1972, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 776.

announcements and his interviews with the media. While the *People's Daily* covered Nixon's tour with pictures and brief introductions to the itinerary, the *Reference News* printed in detail his talks with the press when he visited tourist sites. It also mentioned the picture that showed Nixon helping Zhou with his coat.¹¹⁰ Beijing wanted its cadres to know more about Nixon and his China policy. These details in the *Reference News* revealed how Beijing valued the trip.

In covering the opponents to Nixon's visit, the *Reference News* seemed to be more objective or comprehensive than the two U.S. newspapers in some respects. In January and February of 1972, for example, it reported twice on Carl McIntire, a minister in the Bible Presbyterian Church sympathetic to the Nationalists, who announced his plan to organize demonstrations in eighteen American cities to protest Nixon's toast with "murders and slave owners."¹¹¹ Interestingly, neither the *Times* nor the *Post* covered the activities of the reverend during that period, perhaps because he was an obscure critic on the right fringe. Another interesting thing was that when Henry Winston and Gus Hall, the Secretary and Chairman of the Communist Party of the United States attacked Nixon's China trip as a "cover" for his Vietnam War, the *Reference News* branded them as "revisionists."¹¹² Obviously, Beijing did not regard the American communists' attack on the Nixon trip as friendly actions considering that the party was a Soviet appendage. The newspaper seemed to be trying to find opposition to show how difficult the demarche was for Nixon.

¹¹⁰ *RN*, September 14, 1971, 4; September 19, 1971, 1; January 28, 1972, 1; February 11, 1972, 1; February 22, 1972, 1; February 24, 1972, 4; February 26, 1972, 2; February 28, 1972, 1, 2; February 29, 1972, 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, January 30, 1972, 4; February 19, 1972, 4. In an ABC footage, when the Chinese ping-pong team visited Detroit in April 1972, using a bullhorn McIntire shouted that Mao killed more Christians than Hitler killed Jews and urged the Chinese players to defect. He was ignored. See ABC Evening News, April 13, 1972, Record #: 20178.

¹¹² *RN*, February 22, 1972, 2.

The Shanghai Communiqué

Nixon's visit to China concluded with a joint communiqué announced in Shanghai on February 27. During Kissinger's visit in October 1971, the two sides had decided that the communiqué would state their agreements to move toward normalization of relations, to reduce the danger of military conflict, and their commitment not to seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific regions and to oppose other countries who might try to establish such "hegemony," which had become the new code word for "Soviet expansionism." With regard to issues with ideological differences such as Indochina, Korea, Japan, and the Indian-Pakistan conflict, they agreed that each side would state their own positions. While Beijing would express its commitment to support for "revolutions and national liberation movements" around the world, Washington would reiterate its support for people around the world in their "pursuit of personal freedom and social progress free from outside interference." However, Taiwan remained a "thorny" problem because it involved principles on both sides. While Washington had to deal with a strong domestic sentiment for the island and a commitment in the form of the mutual security treaty of 1955, Beijing regarded Taiwan and its unification with the mainland as issues of sovereignty. When Nixon arrived in Beijing, the two sides still differed on the wording about Taiwan. The Chinese side wanted the U.S. acknowledgment that Taiwan was a "province" of China and its commitment to withdraw all forces from the island unconditionally. Washington could go no further than to describe the withdrawal as an "objective" and needed conditions attached to it.¹¹³

When the Nixons went sightseeing, Kissinger was still bargaining with Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua. At one time the negotiations reached a deadlock and even Zhou Enlai joined in temporarily. Kissinger explained to him that Washington could not make "unconditional commitments" and that the communiqué had to be "explicable" or "defensible" to

¹¹³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1075.

the American public. His proposal was to link the “final withdrawal from Taiwan” to the “premise of peaceful settlement,” and to tie the “progressive reduction of forces” to the “gradual diminution of tension in the area,” because the United States had an interest in the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue, and the conflicts in Indochina would end in time. The Chinese side promised to consider his proposal but they preferred the “prospect” of a peaceful settlement rather than “premise,” arguing that it had a “more active and more bilateral connotation.” Finally on February 25, less than forty-eight hours before Nixon’s scheduled departure from China, the Chinese accepted the American formulations. Kissinger claims that he even managed to secure the Chinese consent to stating that Taiwan was a “part” rather than a “province” of China, thus avoiding a suggestion of subordination. Though the real American security role on Taiwan was defined by the mutual defense treaty, neither side mentioned it in the communiqué.¹¹⁴

In the final version of the communiqué, the U.S. position on Taiwan was stated as follows:

The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves. With this prospect in mind, it affirms the ultimate objective of the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and military installations from Taiwan. In the meantime, it will progressively reduce its forces and military installations on Taiwan as the tension in the area diminishes.¹¹⁵

As the communiqué came out, U.S. media ignored all others issues and jumped on the U.S. pledge to “withdraw gradually from Taiwan,” terming it a “major concession.” The *Post* headline was “Nixon Pledges Pullout of Forces on Taiwan.” Under a picture where Nixon and Zhou Enlai stood below a giant statue of Mao, there was an article titled “China Trip: Limited

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 1076-80.

¹¹⁵ *WP*, February 28, 1972, A2.

Results.” The *Times* ran a headline, “Taipei is Bitter: Paper Reflecting View of Regime Assails U.S. ‘Cowardice’”¹¹⁶

Responses from the networks were more favorable. They presented Senators Mike Mansfield (D-MT), Hugh Scott (R-PA), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), George McGovern (D-SD), and Representative Paul McCloskey Jr. (R-CA), who praised the communiqué as a forward-looking document, in front of Senators James Buckley (R-NY) and John Tower (R-TX), and Representatives John Ashbrook (R-OH) and Hubert Humphrey (D-MN), who expressed either concern or shock at the American position on Taiwan. The overall response, as described by Howard K. Smith of ABC, was “cautiously favorable for most part, although there were dissenters.”¹¹⁷

During the flight from Shanghai to Alaska, Haldeman noted that their press reports did not include the networks. Even though he tried hard to convince Nixon that the general press was not that negative, the president was still worried about “dealing with a bad story.” He then instructed his aides to work in haste on the plane adding points that could clarify his position in the return message.¹¹⁸ After a long layover in Anchorage scheduled by White House television specialist Mark Goode, Nixon’s plane arrived in Washington during prime TV time.¹¹⁹ Surrounded by a large welcoming crowd, Nixon delivered to the cameras his triumphant return address in which he highlighted what he considered the “heart of the communiqué”—the agreement of both governments to renounce the use of force in dispute settlement and their commitment to prevent the domination of Asia by any power. In terms of Taiwan, he

¹¹⁶ *WP*, February 28, 1972, A1; *NYT*, February 28, 1972, 1.

¹¹⁷ *WP*, February 29, 1972, 1. ABC Evening News, February 28, 1972, Record #: 19504; CBS Evening News, February 28, 1972, Record #: 221782; NBC Evening News, February 28, 1972, Record #: 462696.

¹¹⁸ Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 423.

¹¹⁹ Spear, *Presidents and Press*, 100.

emphasized that the gradual withdrawal of forces was based on the easing of tensions and that the United States would not relinquish its commitment to its allies.¹²⁰

The *Post* changed its tone after Nixon's speech. Its headline the next day was "Nixon back from China Trip, 15,000 Welcome President." Under it was an article entitled "U.S. Communiqué is praised by both Parties on Hill." In its editorial "Sellout' of Taiwan?" it argued that the charge of Nixon's abandonment of Taiwan was "insupportable." Calling the communiqué an "agreement to disagree," the *Times* argued that it offered "no dramatic surprises," but contained "no major disappointments." It praised the "renunciation of force in favor of diplomacy" and highlighted the agreement on exchanges in trade, science, technology, culture, sports and news reporting as a "concrete achievement."¹²¹ The communiqué did not change the status of Taiwan. People may ask what, if anything, Nixon had brought back from Beijing. The answer from *Time* was "the event itself, the fact that it took place." As far as the gains of the Nixon's administration, *Newsweek* pointed out its success in securing from the Chinese not to include in the communiqué its usual propaganda tirade that the American defense treaty with Taiwan was "null and void" and the Chinese agreement to resolve the Taiwan issue by "peaceful means." Similar to *Time*, it argued that the China trip was not a "great leap forward," but it was at least an "important first step," which brought a much better chance of peace in Asia.¹²² Overall, the elite media supported the Shanghai Communiqué and reviewed the significance of Nixon's China trip favorably.

In China, one noticeable development was that when Zhou Enlai returned to Beijing from Shanghai where he saw Nixon off, he received an extraordinary warm welcome at the airport.

¹²⁰ *NYT*, February 29, 1972, 16. Nixon claimed these points as the "heart of the communiqué" in the cabinet meeting the next day, See Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 424.

¹²¹ *WP*, February 29, 1972, 1, A18; *NYT*, February 28, 1972, 30.

¹²² *Time*, March 6, 1972, 10-2; *Newsweek*, March 13, 1972, 18-9.

The *People's Daily* headlined “Resolutely Support and Execute the Revolutionary Diplomatic Line of Chairman Mao: Premier Zhou was Warmly Received by Five Thousand People at the Airport upon his Return to Beijing from Shanghai” with three big pictures showing the welcoming party. Among the party, the article listed several key members of the Politburo including Mao’s wife, who was the head of the radicals, key leaders of the PLA and the government.¹²³ As the crowd was much bigger than Zhou normally received when he returned from somewhere within China, the *Times* argued that the “triumphant welcome” Zhou received marked Beijing’s “satisfaction with the outcome of Nixon’s visit as contained in the joint communiqué.”¹²⁴ Publicizing the ceremony at the Beijing airport not only showed the consensus among the Chinese leadership in supporting the outcome of the Nixon visit. It also sent a positive signal to the United States.

The “TV Spectacle” as Part of the Story

David Broder, a prominent columnist for the *Washington Post*, wrote that television, with its strength in images, creates a “communication loop” that makes the TV coverage “part of the story it is covering.”¹²⁵ In covering Nixon’s China trip, television, or the “TV spectacle,” did become a hot topic. Largely feeling at a disadvantage in the competition or due to their envy, the print media pointed out many problems with their electronic rivals to critique Nixon’s overdoing of the TV drama.

In its editorial entitled “Spectacle and Substance,” the *Times* described Nixon’s departure ceremony as a “genuine drama” with an “elaborately staged fanfare.” It warned of the danger that the spectacle Nixon had “assiduously” created might obscure the differences between the

¹²³ *PD*, March 1, 1972, 1.

¹²⁴ *NYT*, March 1, 1972, 1; See also *Time*, March 13, 1972, 18-19.

¹²⁵ Broder, *Behind the Front Page*, 144-5.

two governments and foster “illusions” about Sino-American relations.¹²⁶ The *Post* similarly maintained that the audience had to tell “show business” from “diplomatic business.” Stanley Karnow, the *Post*’s correspondent in Beijing, called Nixon’s visit an exercise of “TV Diplomacy,” arguing that TV not only helped him maximize public attention, but also helped the Chinese irritate Japan, Southeast Asia, and the Soviet Union. He also surmised that the Chinese leadership might use TV as a “lever” to build up the American expectations that Nixon might return home with some kind of “arrangement” by inflating his image.¹²⁷

Time described Nixon’s trip as an excellent opportunity for “a presidential candidate seeking re-election to make a television appearance.”¹²⁸ It maintained that all was “elaborate scrollwork, hiding content.” In its cartoon, Nixon and Mao stood in the middle of TV cameras and spotlights with a row of saluting guns firing in the background. The caption read, “Just think, all this will have gone to waste if you’re not re-elected!”¹²⁹ In an article “TV: An Eyeful of China, A Thimbleful of Insight,” *Newsweek* showed CBS journalists “huddled together” in the Beijing press room, “bemoaning” their isolation and the lack of “hard” news. As it indicated, CBS president Richard S. Salant decided to cancel live broadcasts on Thursday, saying “we’d had enough picture postcards” from the Great Wall one day earlier. It also mocked the lack of in-depth reporting in television coverage because the networks all sent their most experienced anchors who “made up standard news teams to cover a spectacular in standard American terms,” while their sinologists better equipped with digging information from sources in China were sitting in New York studios “7000 miles from the scene.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ *NYT*, February 19, 1972, 30.

¹²⁷ *WP*, February 20, 1971, B7; March 4, 1972, A19.

¹²⁸ Spear, *Presidents and the Press*, 98.

¹²⁹ *Time*, March 6, 1972, 10-12.

¹³⁰ *Newsweek*, March 6, 1972, 27.

As pointed out in a *Post* editorial, Nixon in his “Man of the Year” interview with *Time* had confidently said, “Where you need a lot of rhetoric, a lot of jazz, a lot of flamboyance, is where you don’t have much to sell.” Using Nixon’s own words, it argued that his effort to “embellish” his trip with “rhetoric and flamboyance and jazz” was to encourage the suspicion that he did not have all that much to sell.”¹³¹ When television coverage was used to this frothy extreme, the media themselves began to question what Nixon could bring back from Beijing.

Conclusion

Ever since Beijing made the decision to reconcile with Washington, it faced great tasks in accustoming the Chinese people to the change in relations. Beijing gradually transmitted Mao and Zhou’s decision from the central leadership at the top to the ordinary Chinese citizen. Through the internal channel of the party infrastructure on the first level, it informed leaders at higher levels to mobilize their support for the departure in China’s foreign policies. On the second level, the insightful news stories and analyses in the *Reference News* kept the communist cadres as well as ordinary party members updated about international developments. It was also through this internal newspaper that the Chinese audience learned about Nixon’s wish to visit China, Mao’s desire to meet with him, and the favorable international response to the visit. On another level, Beijing promoted the friendship between the two peoples through the *People’s Daily* in the form of people-to-people diplomacy. By displaying Americans, such as Edgar Snow, the ping-pong team, the “friendly” visitors, and Henry Kissinger, before Chinese crowds as well as in the official media, Beijing prepared its people for the new relationship with the United States.

Though the U.S. government did not have too much work getting its people used to the change in relations since debates about this topic had been going on in the media increasingly

¹³¹ *WP*, February 20, 1971, B7; March 4, 1972, A19; February 28, 1972, A20.

frequently since the early 1960s, it faced a challenge from conservatives, especially when it came to the Taiwan issue. On UN membership, Washington slowly changed its position from banning China's entry to preventing Taiwan's expulsion. Besides disassociating himself from a possible failure, Nixon asked his aides to tell the media that his administration was fighting hard to keep the Nationalists in the UN.

Nixon also launched a media campaign to maximize the influence of his trip. In order to guarantee the success of the "show" in Beijing, the White House granted the TV networks extraordinary privileges. They not only received more seats in the media plane, but also joined the advance team in tracking every spot Nixon planned to visit so that they got the best camera angles. As Nixon hoped, his one-week trip turned out to be a "TV spectacle," which not only helped him write history by scoring a success of public relations, but also aroused criticisms about the lack of "substance" under the fanfare.

As a *Post* editorial pointed out, although "Nixon overdid the TV bit badly," television "helped educate the American people," showing them that China was not a monster, but a nation "to be dealt with as best one can."¹³² Zhou Enlai must have known what it meant when he agreed to allow an American press corps of one hundred fifty into China, especially when he agreed to the proposal of live television coverage. He knew they would be volunteer promoters of China's image to the world. Although Nixon's visit did not formally normalize relations between the two countries, as journalists and Nixon said during several occasions during that historic week, his presence in China signified a new relationship between the two countries that had been separated for more than two decades. The start of exchanges in trade, education, culture, and news reporting seemed not as significant as the summit. However, the reopening of dialogue through

¹³² *WP*, March 3, 1972, A26.

these channels provided means by which the peoples of the two countries could engage and learn about each other before the formal normalization of relations in 1979.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This dissertation does not ask why the Sino-American rapprochement could happen. Instead, it evaluates “how” it played out in the media in both countries between 1963 and 1972 and what role they played in the evolution of relations. In the Sino-American rapprochement, media in the United States and China made different contributions because of their relationships with their governments. Nevertheless, as means of communication, they were similar in their roles in message sending and preparing the people for the change in relations.

U.S. Media

This study addresses the issue of the relationship between American media and the government in terms of foreign policy. Scholars of communications have developed several theories on this topic. One school of thought, widely known as the “hegemony” school, claims that government manipulates the media when officials “stage events, leak selective information, cover up facts behind a wall of secrecy, overwhelm the media with barrages of press releases,” and of course, lie occasionally to the point that the media become “putty in the hands of the president and his legion of media managers.” A fundamental argument of the “hegemony” theory is that the media have “no independent contribution” to the foreign-policy debate. A contrary school portrays the media as participants in the foreign-policy process. For members of this school, the media play the role of the “fourth estate” of the government with unique influence on policy. The problem with the hegemony theory is that it perceives the media as too “subservient” to the government.¹ The “fourth estate” school, on the other hand, tends to exaggerate the role of the media in the policy-making of the government.

¹ Nicholas O. Berry, *Foreign Policy and the Press: An Analysis of the New York Times' Coverage of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), ix; Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

In my study of the elite U.S. media's coverage of Sino-American relations, I find that they did make an "independent contribution" to the reconciliation between the two countries. They played important roles as transmitters of diplomatic signals and active participants. They also educated the American people about the progress and significance of Sino-American reconciliation.

As transmitters of political information, U.S. media functioned as a "diplomatic signaling system" between the two governments, especially when direct communications did not exist.² When Nixon and other U.S. officials addressed China by its proper name, or emphasized its importance in world affairs, they expected the media to deliver these gestures of friendliness to the American public as well as the leadership in Beijing. However, there were times when the messages did not get across. For example, Beijing's signals through Edgar Snow were not delivered to Nixon at an earlier time because of the media's suspicion of communist sympathizers. Moreover, when Nixon "casually" talked about his intention to visit China, his remarks attracted more media attention in China than in the United States. In both cases, the media's intentional or unintentional underestimation of the signals' importance caused the failure of their transmission. To some extent, they reflect the independence of the media in transmitting the political information.

By participants, Robert M. Batscha means that the media acted as an "advocate" of policy and "representative of the people" in foreign relations.³ U.S. media's advocacy of foreign-policy options caused them to endorse or to criticize government policies. During the Johnson administration, newspapers and newsmagazines acted as powerful critics of the government's

² Patrick O'Heffernan, *Mass Media and American Foreign Policy: Inside Perspectives on Global Journalism and the Foreign Policy Process* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1991), 37.

³ Robert M. Batscha, *Foreign Affairs News and the Broadcast Journalist* (New York: Praeger, 1975), 36-46.

inflexible China policy, especially after the escalation of the Vietnam War and the Chinese nuclear test in 1964. Besides calling on the government to make initiatives to reduce tension with China and incorporate it into the international community, they criticized officials who evoked the “China threat” as an excuse for the American involvement in Vietnam. In both the Johnson and Nixon administrations, journalists urged Washington to be more creative on the issue of China’s UN membership and to move toward a “two-China” solution sooner to prevent the expulsion of Taiwan before it was too late. In these cases, media ran ahead of public opinion and the government in pushing for policy reform.

As the relations between the two countries began to unfreeze, especially after Ping-Pong Diplomacy in April 1971, Beijing admitted members of the U.S. media into China, treating them with extraordinary privileges and displaying them to the Chinese people. By winning over prominent opinion influencers such as James Reston and the *New York Times*, Beijing promoted the image of China among the American people. These journalists not only wrote generally favorable stories about China, but also acted as “cultural diplomats” between the two peoples when official contacts were scarce.

Sometimes the media played the role of participants when they became part of the stories they covered. During Ping-Pong Diplomacy, Vice-President Spiro Agnew accused U.S. media of helping the Chinese government win a “propaganda triumph” over the United States. The use of live television to cover Nixon’s visit was unprecedented in history. While it helped him achieve a public-relations success, the media criticized Nixon for arousing unrealistic expectations because of his overuse of television. By talking about the distinction between “content” and “form,” they questioned how much the President could bring home.

The media educated the American people about China policy by providing forums for public deliberation. The best example was the Fulbright Hearings in 1966 when their prominent and intensive coverage magnified critical voices in the academic community and Congress. It contributed to the relaxation of public hostility toward China. Moreover, when Washington announced new initiatives to China, the media illuminated their significance with phrases such as “the most significant,” or “a major step.” These positive responses helped the government win public support. If the readiness of American people was an important cause for Nixon to make bolder moves toward China upon taking office, the media made a great contribution.

Because the media did not have to worry about political restrictions as the U.S. government did, they had more freedom elaborating on issues that Washington could not openly talk about. The concept of “containment without isolation” had existed in the U.S. media long before the Johnson administration acknowledged it. During the Cultural Revolution, the Johnson team refrained from making comments on the Chinese domestic politics to avoid provoking China or undermining the moderate forces in China. In contrast, U.S. media reported widely the violence in China. Some even reported the U.S. interests in the victory of Mao’s faction. After the eruption of Sino-Soviet border clashes in March 1969, while the Nixon Administration assumed a posture of impartiality in order to avoid provoking the Soviet Union (even though in private it tilted toward China), U.S. media was not worried about upsetting Moscow when they openly wrote and spoke about the benefits of closer ties with Beijing. Similarly, while they made a variety of sensational speculations in response to the Lin Biao affair, Washington neither inquired about it with Beijing nor made comments to avoid sabotaging Nixon’s China trip. In these cases, the media did have independent voices when they provided policy options for the government to consider.

Despite my argument that U.S. media made independent contributions to Sino-American rapprochement, they were far from being completely “independent” players. They relied heavily on the government as the main source in reporting foreign affairs. Kissinger’s secret trip to China is a good example where the government totally denied the media access to the political process. Moreover, there were ample examples where the U.S. government turned a deaf ear to prominent news agencies’ call to admit China into the UN. On the other hand, even though the government initiated policies, media’s abilities to set the agenda of political debates and to influence public opinion make them a restraining force that the government could not manipulate at will or simply ignore. For example, whereas Nixon wanted to illustrate his comprehensive approach to the world situation in his annual foreign policy report, both the *Times* and the *Post* focused on Vietnam in their headlines. In another example, while Nixon wanted to demonstrate the historic significance of his China trip, several journalists focused on his “betrayal” of Taiwan in the Shanghai Communiqué.

Though media comparison is not the focus of this dissertation, I would like to point out some observations based on comparisons among different media agencies. Between the two elite newspapers under study, the *New York Times* appeared much more forthcoming than the *Washington Post* in promoting an improvement in Sino-American relations. During the Cultural Revolution, the *Post* was more graphic in describing the chaos in China and Red Guard brutalities. On Sino-Soviet conflicts in 1969, while the *Times* editorials promoted closer ties with Beijing, the *Post* editorials appeared more detached. When Warsaw talks were renewed in 1970, the *Times* was more optimistic about the prospect of better relations than the *Post*, which showed more suspicion of Beijing’s intention. Between the two magazines, while *Time* was more hostile

to China before the death of Henry Luce, *Newsweek* was more balanced in presenting views from different perspectives.

In comparison to the print media, the three networks devoted less space to news analysis and were generally more neutral in their brief “headline” reporting. As a visual medium with a much larger audience, television had a larger impact, especially when it provided live coverage of the events. They made a great contribution to the success of Ping-Pong Diplomacy in 1971 and Nixon’s visit in 1972. The large amount of videos they provided about China and the friendly exchanges between the two peoples were truly refreshing to the American audience after two decades of alienation between the two countries.

Chinese Media

Different from the independent U.S. media, Chinese media are controlled by the Communist Party to serve its own political interests. The *People’s Daily* and the *Reference News* represented the two levels of information transmission in China: public and internal. During the period under study, the *People’s Daily* mainly worked to propagate China’s image as a fighter against “imperialists” and “revisionists.” The anti-American and anti-Soviet articles aimed not only to mobilize Mao’s domestic struggle against his political enemies, but also to display Beijing’s support for the revolutionary struggles around the world, especially those in Indochina. By attacking the Soviet Union as the “number-one accomplice” of the American “imperialists,” Beijing assumed a moral high ground in its ideological conflict with Moscow.

The propaganda in the *People’s Daily* had nuances. On the conflicts in Indochina, Beijing was radical in words but cautious in deeds. Even though it repeatedly warned against the American “war provocations” and expressed the Chinese determination to support peoples in these areas with all means, readers could see its lack of commitment as it did not specify when

and how it would intervene. When Hanoi decided to negotiate with Washington in 1968, Beijing displayed its unhappiness by remaining silent and lowering the place of Hanoi on its list of “friends” in the media. During the Cultural Revolution, despite Beijing’s fierce attacks on the Soviet Union, the *People’s Daily* was silent on their conflicts on the border. The contrast showed that Beijing did not want to start a real war with the Soviet Union. When it started to report the border clashes after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Moscow had changed from an ideological opponent to a threat to Beijing. When Beijing had made major progress with Washington in improving their relations, its low key in announcing it and its continued attacks on the United States reflected its effort to hold together its ideological friends, particularly those opposed to the United States.

Besides its propaganda function, the *People’s Daily* was an important channel through which Beijing sent diplomatic signals to Washington. It publicized Beijing’s “four points” when the Vietnam conflicts were dramatically escalated. When Beijing decided to move closer to Washington, it publicized the release of American prisoners and the photos carrying Chinese leaders and the “friendly American” Edgar Snow as signals of a new posture. By 1970, even its anti-American tirades in response to incursions into Cambodia and Laos became relatively toothless.

The *People’s Daily* also played an important role when Beijing felt the need to reorient the public’s opinion toward the United States. By keeping the distinction between the American “government” and the American “people,” it promoted the friendship between the two peoples. Moreover, by giving prominent and intensive coverage to the activities of American visitors, Beijing tried to get its people used to the fact that their government was dealing with Americans.

As an internal newspaper, the *Reference News* targeted only a limited number of Chinese Communist cadres as well as intellectuals and constituted the only legal way for them to learn about the outside world. Being less propagandistic, it reprinted foreign news agencies' objective reports about China's diplomatic problems with North Korea, Cambodia, and even North Vietnam during the Cultural Revolution. More importantly, it transmitted friendly signals from Washington in their original forms, usually with comments about their significance for Sino-American relations. When Beijing decided to reconcile with Washington, it reported Chinese signals to the United States, also with comments on their significance.

With the dramatic expansion of its circulation in August 1970, the *Reference News* played a particularly important role in preparing Party members and intellectuals for a change in Sino-American relations. Its reproduction of foreign news agencies' insightful analyses of the benefits of Sino-American rapprochement, especially by considering the impact on the Soviet Union, Japan and Taiwan, and the favorable world response, provided useful perspectives for the Chinese audience to consider. A comparison between the *People's Daily* and the *Reference News* shows that, under its cover of anti-American invective, Beijing had started preparing its cadres for the reconciliation with its former number-one enemy long before it became evident.

For all the differences between the U.S. and Chinese media in terms of their freedom of action and mechanisms of news reporting, they were similar in their roles as deliverers of diplomatic signals and educators of their respective publics for the change in Sino-American relations. The media in both countries were also interrelated because they used each other as the source of information. By reading the *People's Daily* closely, the U.S. media tried to find clues about the domestic and foreign policies of China. Similarly, many news stories in the *Reference News* actually came from the U.S. media. The most important feature they share is their ability to

influence public opinion, although it is admitted that there were few dissenting opinions in China.

Sino-American rapprochement remains a fascinating topic for scholars. The study of the media's role offers interesting but not definitive evaluation of this historic process. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the importance of the media for both governments in presenting their foreign policies to their respective publics. In a broader sense, it provides food for thought in the continuing debate about the government-media relationship in the United States. By showing the unique way by which Beijing handled policy legitimacy within the Party and the general public in particular, moreover, it presents a more nuanced picture of the "propaganda state" of China and challenges the idea that the media in Communist countries were only used for political indoctrination.⁴

⁴ Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 1; Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.

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ABSTRACT**READING THE TEA LEAVES:
THE MEDIA AND SINO-AMERICAN RAPPROCHEMENT, 1963-1972**

by

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This dissertation aims to find out what role(s) the media in the United States and China played in their historic rapprochement from 1963 to 1972. In order to examine how they covered the major events that affected Sino-American relations, I select seven elite U.S. media and two Chinese official newspapers to study. These media include: the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, CBS, ABC, NBC, *People's Daily*, and *Reference News*,

The study is based on the assumption that media, instead of reporting the information “objectively,” have the ability to affect the content they deliver and set the agenda for public discussions. Therefore, I examine how the media in both countries dealt with the events in terms of selectivity, placement, images, and opinions.

The dissertation argues that the U.S. media did make independent contributions to the thaw in relations and that the Chinese media were much more sophisticated than most people think. As important participants in Sino-American relations, U.S. media criticized Washington's rigid China policy in the 1960s. In the early 1970s, American journalists functioned as representatives of the people whom Beijing tried to befriend. The Chinese media were not merely propaganda tools for political indoctrination. Through them, Beijing took calculated steps

to prepare the Chinese people at different levels of the political hierarchy for the reconciliation with its former “number-one enemy.” Media in both countries, despite their differences in freedom of action and operation mechanisms, played important roles as a “diplomatic signaling system” and in educating their respective publics for the change in relations.

This study is important because it enriches the study of Sino-American rapprochement through the lenses of the media, an understudied but vital institution that reflected and influenced the two publics’ perception of the relations. It not only readdresses the issue of government-media relationship in the United States, but also maps out the development of Beijing’s approach to the United States without relying on its highly classified state documents. Essentially, it reveals the “agency” of the U.S. media and the nuances in the “propaganda state” of China.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I was born in a small village in Xiangyang, Hubei province of China in 1976. From 1991 to 1995, I studied Mechanical Engineering at Shanxi No. 1 Technical High School (now Shanxi Institute of Technology) in Xi'an. Between 1995 and 2000, I worked first as a reveter then as a lab tech at a state-owned enterprise in Xiangyang and took my undergraduate education in English through the Self-taught Examination System at the same time. I was admitted to the graduate school of Sichuan International Studies University in Chongqing in 2000 and graduated with an MA degree in English/American Studies in 2003. Between 2003 and 2006, I worked as a full-time lecturer of College English at China Youth University for Political Science in Beijing. I entered the doctoral program of the Department of History at Wayne State University in 2006 on a recruit Rumble Fellowship and studied U.S. foreign relations under the direction of Dr. Melvin Small.