CJAS
Cappadocia Journal of Area Studies

KAPADOKYA ÜNİVERSİTESİ
Akıl - Ahlak - Adalet - Adap

Research Article

US Refusal to Recognize China (1949–1979)

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Received: 21.04.2020; Accepted: 12.06.2020. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.38154/cjas.35

Abstract: This paper scrutinizes why the United States (US) refused to recognize the People's Republic of China (PRC) for three decades after its foundation by Mao Zedong in 1949. The traditional national character influenced the position of the US toward the PRC, especially in light of its abhorrence of communism and its doctrine to contain its spread. For both domestic and foreign reasons, the US argued that China was not a responsible member of the world community, and thus deserved no recognition. For more than two decades, the US applied political, economic and diplomatic pressure on the United Nations to refuse the PRC the right to represent China. The situation only began to change when the Nixon administration realized how its non-recognition policy was becoming increasingly outdated and self-defeating, given China's growing importance in international affairs. This paper will use a variety of primary and secondary sources to analyze the US policy of non-recognition of the PRC, providing the background for a better comprehension of contemporary Sino-American relations.

Keywords: People's Republic of China, US foreign policy, US-China relations, Cold War politics

ABD'nin Çin'i tanımayı reddetmesi (1949-1979)

Öz: Bu çalışma Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin (ABD) Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'ni (ÇHC) Mao Zedong tarafından 1949 yılında kuruluşunu takip eden otuz yıl boyunca tanımayı neden reddettiğini incelemektedir. ABD'nin geleneksel milli karakteri, bu ülkenin ÇHC'ye karşı olan tutumunu etkilemiştir. ABD, Çin'in dünya toplumunun sorumlu bir ferdi olmadığını, bu nedenle tanınmayı hak etmediğini iddia etmiştir. Yirmi yıldan daha uzun bir süre boyunca ABD Birleşmiş Milletler nezdinde ÇHC'nin Çin'i temsil etmemesini amaçlayarak üye ülkeler üzerinde siyasi, iktisadi ve diplomatik baskı oluşturmuştur. Bu durum Nixon iktidarı zamanında Çin'in dünya siyasetindeki artan önemin paralel olarak "tanımama" politikasının miadını doldurduğunun ve ABD'ye zarar verdiğinin anlaşılmasıyla değişmeye başlamıştır. Bu çalışma, birincil ve ikincil kaynaklar üzerinden ABD'nin ÇHC'yi tanımama politikasını analiz ederek günümüzde ABD-Çin ilişkilerinin daha iyi kavranmasına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti, ABD dış politikası, ABD-Çin ilişkileri, Soğuk Savaş siyaseti

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Introduction

Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949. To fully understand why the United States refused to recognize the PRC for almost three decades, it would be useful to first clarify the background role of the US national style (national character) (Hook and Spanier 2019; Hofstadter 1965; Dallek 1983) and its Open Door Policy toward China, which the US considered a specific extension of its general moralistic national style. For most of its history, the US national style was characterized by isolationism in terms of its political entanglements in foreign policy, along with a self-righteous, almost missionary emphasis on its own exceptionalism, and an aversion to power politics (Fairbank and Goldman 2006; Spence 1990). War, of course, constituted a necessary exception to such isolation, but as soon as peace returned, the national style demanded a return to the traditional stance of political detachment toward the rest of the world. Only the changed international balance of power after World War II would bring an end to this traditional state of affairs and force the US into a more normal involvement in world affairs.

Nevertheless, its traditional national style long continued to influence its foreign policy positions, and compelled the US to take what it considered to be a morally appropriate position toward the PRC, especially in light of its abhorrence of communism and its recently declared Doctrine aimed at containing its spread (Kennan 1951). More particularly, its Open Door Policy toward China declared by Secretary of State John Hay in 1899, stressed that other states should guarantee the territorial and administrative integrity of China, and that no state should have exclusive trading rights in any part of China (Bemis 1965, 484–485). Thus, the US believed that it brought a particularly moralistic understanding of foreign policy in general, while its Open Door Policy in particular stamped it as a special friend of China, unlike the other foreign powers that strove to profit at the expense of China.

Given the shock of the Chinese Communist victory in 1949 after having long recognized the Nationalists (Kuomintang/KMT) as the official government of China, and its fear of world Communist expansion after World War II, the US hesitated in recognizing the new PRC. The success of the domestic political efforts in the US of the so-called "China Lobby" to denounce the US Truman administration for supposedly selling Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) "down the river" to the Communists and the lobby's demands that the US continue to recognize the now exiled Nationalist government in Taiwan also played a significant role. This initial US policy decision became locked into position given the bitter US experience with China during the Korean War (1950–1953). Thus, for both domestic and foreign reasons, the US argued that "Red China" or "The Peiping Regime" was not a responsible member of the World community and so did not deserve recognition – a policy that the US had used for more than 20 years to block the PRC representing China in the UN. This policy only began to change when the Nixon administration realized how its non-recognition policy was becoming increasingly outdated and self-defeating, given China's growing importance in international affairs. The US finally recognized the PRC in 1979.

Interestingly, the US had earlier followed a somewhat analogous path towards the eventual recognition the Soviet Union. Due to the so-called "Red Scare" after World War I and the very conservative 1920s – somewhat similar to the 1950s – recognition of the Soviet Union became a very controversial issue and did not occur until 1933 (Bemis 1965). This paper will use a variety of primary and secondary sources to analyse the US policy of non-recognition of the PRC, which can be considered important in providing a background for a better comprehension of contemporary Sino-American relations.

Recognition in international law

Recognition, in political terms, means simply the willingness to deal with another state (Malanczuk 1997). However, it can be one of the most difficult areas in international law due to its many confusing political and legal aspects. Often, it is political rather than legal factors that influence the process. Adding additional complexity to the mixture, a distinction must be made between the recognition of a state and the recognition of a government. Recognizing a state means that the entity in question is deemed to possess the criteria of statehood, namely possessing a population, territory and the capacity to enter into diplomatic relations with other states. On the other hand, the recognition of a government requires it to be seen as in effective control of the state. The US never questioned the existence of China as a state, and indeed has always recognized China as a state. What the US questioned was who was governing China.

The US has often used the recognition of governments as a sign of approval rather than as a mere statement of fact. Thus, for example, the US often declined to recognize Latin American governments it did not approve of, as is still the case today with the regime of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela. As in the case of the PRC, US policy towards the recognition of governments tends to be in diametric contrast to its long-time ally, Britain, which will usually recognize any government that is in actual control of a state's territory, whether or not it approves of that government. Thus, Britain recognized the PRC as the government of China almost immediately on January 6, 1950, while the US continued to recognize the Nationalists based in Taiwan as the government of China, right up until January 1, 1979. Although the US position was purely a political, and seemed to contradict the legal facts, there is no rule in international law that mandated the British position or prohibited that of the US.

Immediate origins

The US became involved in World War II to a significant degree due to its support of the Republic of (Nationalist) China against Japanese aggression. While this narrative lies clearly beyond the scope of this paper, it serves to explain why the US was so shocked, and even felt somehow betrayed, when the Communists took control of China a few years after the successful conclusion of the war.

Although the US recognized Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists as the legal government of China during the war, some US officials felt that the Nationalists lacked the necessary competence and were too corrupt to put up an effective fight against the Japanese (Schaller 2002; Dallek 1979; Feis 1953; Tuchman 1971). US General Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell, for example, maintained that it was in the

interest of the US to establish relations with the Communists to combat the Japanese enemy more effectively. The Dixie Mission to Yenan in 1944 was the first official US contact with the Communists, comprising such Foreign Service officials as John S. Service, military personnel, weather specialists and translators, who engaged in successfully interactions with the highest level Communist leaders. Mao, for example, quizzed the Service closely about the position of the US toward his movement, and even declared that, "even the most conservative American businessman can finding nothing in our program to object to" (Schaller 2002, 92).

However, other US officials, such as Generals Claire Lee Chennault and Albert Coady Wedemeyer, as well as Ambassador Patrick J. Hurley, strongly opposed cooperation with the Communists, and their position prevailed. For example, Ambassador Hurley pressed the Communists to disarm and accept a subordinate role to the Nationalists, being either ignorant of Chiang's bloody purge of the Communists during their supposed coalition in 1927, or confident that Mao would somehow willingly be led to the slaughter. Privately, Hurley insultingly referred to Mao as "Moose Dung" and Zhou Enlai as "Joe N. Lie." (Schaller 2002, 94). During an impromptu visit to Yenan in November 1944, Hurley astonished his Chinese hosts by shouting out an American Indian war cry while alighting from his plane, and other weird outbursts followed. The Communists began to refer to the US ambassador as "the clown", and Hurley would eventually resign in November 1945. In a precursor to the conspiracy theories of the so-called China Lobby discussed below, the US ambassador ludicrously denounced the "Hydra-headed direction" of US China policy directed by the State Department officials who "sided with the Communist armed party … against American policy" (Schaller 2002, 103).

In December 1945, US president Harry S. Truman sent a new representative to China to mediate between the contending sides – the most respected General George C. Marshall. Given the enormity of the problems, the growing strength of the Communists and the obvious US preference for the Nationalists, Marshall's mediation attempt failed (Kurtz-Phelan 2018; Baijia 1998; Zhongyun 2003). The renewed struggle between the Communists and Nationalists soon resumed, but by 1949, the Communists' will had prevailed, while the Nationalists fled into exile to Taiwan. The US was now faced with a completely new conundrum – who would they now recognize as the government of China.

US White Paper

To attempt to explain US policy and to respond to the domestic claims against the Truman administration that it had lost China, or worse, Secretary of State

Dean Acheson oversaw the publication of the China White Paper (Acheson 1969, 302–307). In this important document of more than 1,000 pages, Acheson attempted to explain that the Communists had won the civil war due to their superior abilities, power and morale, and not through perfidious US support: "The unfortunate but inescapable fact is that the ominous result of the civil war in China was beyond the control of the government of the United States" (Acheson 1969, 303). However, the Secretary of State added sarcastically that this obvious conclusion "was unpalatable to believers in American omnipotence, to whom every goal unattained is explicable only by incompetence or treason" (Acheson 1969).

Acheson also advised that the US should wait "until the dust settles" (Acheson 1969, 306) before recognizing the new government. Interestingly, Dean Rusk, the next secretary of state, under a Democratic president following the Eisenhower years (1953–1961), agreed with Acheson: "After Mao succeeded on the mainland, we flirted with the idea of recognizing Communist China … But our prevailing attitude was, Let's wait and see how the new Chinese Communist government acts before we grant recognition" (Rusk 1990, 158). Unfortunately, as the civil war was drawing to its Communist victory, Mao began to speak and write more negatively about the US (Schaller 2002, 117), accusing the few US diplomats remaining in China of organizing an "imperialist conspiracy" to foment opposition toward his new government. Apparently, the Chinese officials felt "that the continued presence of US diplomats, businessmen and missionaries in Chinese cities encouraged counterrevolutionaries." In his memoirs, Acheson declared that, "the treatment of Angus Ward, our Consul General in Mukden, by the Chinese Communists and their attitude toward our rights and Chinese obligations were precluding recognition" (Acheson 1969, 340). The Chinese charged the US consular staff with espionage, holding him and his staff under house arrest for several months, or according to Acheson, "for over a year" (Acheson 1969, 344). However, in a road not taken, a few months later in May 1949 some close aides of Mao invited US Ambassador John Leighton Stewart, who had remained in Nanjing despite its capture by the Communists, to Beijing for talks. Although the ambassador wanted to go, President Truman, fearing damaging domestic Republican criticism, and citing the ill treatment of US consul Angus Ward in Mukden, ordered that "under no circumstances" (Schaller 2002, 117) should the ambassador accept the invitation.

Shortly afterwards, Mao declared that, henceforth, the new China would lean to one side in foreign affairs, that is, toward the Soviet Union. At the end of 1949 he journeyed outside of China for the first time in his life to visit Moscow where he entered into painstaking negotiations with Joseph Stalin, the Soviet

leader. The two communist leaders finally signed a Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship on February 14, 1950, which, of course, in US eyes was a further reason not to immediately recognize the new regime. In January 1950, the new Chinese government announced that it would seize the consular property of foreign governments that had not yet recognized it. In a tit-for-tat move, the US froze all Chinese assets in the United States following its entry into the Korean War in November 1950, while a month later the PRC seized all US assets in China totalling, $196.8 million (Redick 1973, 728).

The Korean War[1]

By the beginning of 1950, Truman seemed to be divesting the US of any further interest in defending Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists, announcing that the US would not intervene in the event of any expected PRC attack against Taiwan. However, Truman quickly reversed this decision when communist North Korea suddenly attacked non-communist South Korea on June 25, 1950. As already mentioned, the resulting, bitterly fought Korean War (1950–1953) turned what might have been a much shorter period of diplomatic estrangement into a permanently locked US policy of non-recognition that would last for almost 30 years.

The US immediately saw this invasion as an example of the Munich analogy when the West had appeased Hitler's demands on Czechoslovakia only to whet the aggressor's appetite for more. Not responding to the Korean attack would lead to larger wars to the detriment of the West, and so Truman used the US influence in the UN to have it grant permission to respond. Within mere days, the US president committed his country to the defence of South Korea, to the protection of Taiwan, and to the increase in aid to the Philippines and the French in Indochina. Mao believed that the US intended to surround and even overthrow the newly established PRC, and so as US-led UN forces approached the Chinese border, Chinese troops massively intervened, dealing the US its worse military defeat in history until the US troops managed to stabilize the situation at the original border. The bloody stalemate lasted until an Armistice Agreement was finally signed on July 27, 1953.

Both sides suffered considerable losses. The US lost more than 54,000 soldiers, while Chinese fatalities exceeded 180,000, including Mao's eldest son, Mao Anying. The two Koreas suffered even more, with a combined 352,000 deaths. The US had the UN pass a resolution condemning China as the aggressor in Korea, while the Chinese launched a mass anti-US propaganda "Resist

[1] For background, see Casey 2008; Merrill 1989.

America, Aid Korea" campaign among its civilians. Although details of the war fall beyond the scope of this article, the fallout from the Korean War for many years served to prevent the US' recognition of the PRC. As Dean Rusk, Kennedy and Johnson's secretary of state (1961–1969), wrote much later: "Many people, myself included, toyed with the idea of recognizing the People's Republic of Chinas in the late 1940s, but that idea died on November 26, 1950, when tens of thousands of Chinese 'volunteers' poured across the Yalu River to join battle with MacArthur's Eighth Army … The Korean War hardened American attitudes toward Peking" (Rusk 1990, 284).

The China lobby[2]

The China Lobby was a broadly based, well-financed network of domestic right-wing Republicans and private citizens, as well as Nationalist Chinese officials, who used demagogic tactics to influence the US political system's support of Chiang Kai-shek's recapture of China. In concert with the more widely based, character-slandering and red baiting anti-communism of US Republican senator Joseph R. McCarthy (Rovere 1959; Purifoy 1976), the China Lobby long enjoyed considerable success in influencing US foreign policy toward China, and preventing the US from recognizing its Communist government.

Through a multitude of activities, the China Lobby benefitted from the US' fear of the spread of communism and the belief that it had been aided by inept or even treasonous elements within the US government. Indeed, many Americans had come to associate Chiang Kai-shek's regime with efforts to establish democracy in China, and Chiang's conversion to Christianity furthered this sympathy. Americans also viewed Chiang's defeat as a victory for its arch Cold War enemy, the Soviet Union. Important right-wing elements in the Republican Party supported the China Lobby, largely as a political tactic against the Democratic Party of President Harry S. Truman and the members of his administration who had been associated with US China policy when the Communist had won. The China Lobby came to develop an extraordinary ability to discredit US State Department officials and others for their reputed betrayal and even treason regarding China.

The Korean War and Truman's removal of General Douglas MacArthur from his command in Korea after he advocated expanding the war to China, in going against Truman's more limited policy, added to the Lobby's influence. Indeed, MacArthur went so far as to argue that General George Marshall's

[2] For background, see Koen 1974; Blackwell 2000.

mission to China in 1945–1946 had been "one of the greatest blunders in American history" (White 1951). According to this conspiratorial line of thinking, Marshall had attempted to force Chiang into a political alliance with the Communists in 1946, and later, as secretary of state, sabotaged US aid to Chiang, leading to the loss of China.

Alfred Kohlberg– a wealthy New York executive, fanatical anti-communist and pro-Chiang supporter – published over a dozen articles attacking the US' failure to intervene in China in his pro-Chiang magazines *The China Monthly* and *Plain Talk*. Henry R. Luce and his wife Claire Booth Luce, publishers of the famous *Time* and *Life* magazines, were probably even more influential. The Luces placed Chiang's photo on the front cover of *Time* a record 10 times over the years and made him the sympathetic featured cover story.

The China Lobby also laboured successfully to help discredit and have fired prominent US China academic experts like Owen Lattimore and John Paton Davies, Jr., among others. Davies was fired from his job in the State Department in the mid-1950s by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles for his "lack of judgment" after suggesting that the likelihood of Chiang being victorious over the Communists on the mainland was doubtful. He went on to become a businessman engaged in furniture manufacture and design. (Davies 1964). A decade later, the author of this paper passed the difficult US State Department written exam, only to fail the final oral exam when he ventured the opinion in 1965 that the US should recognize the Communist government in China. The examiners told him that he was "naïve", and he went on to become an academic.

Earlier, the notorious US senator Joseph McCarthy, while attempting to smear US Foreign Service officer John S. Service, questioned him about how curious it was that three China specialists (Service himself, John Paton Davies and John Carter Vincent) all had the same first name (Schaller 2002, 123–125), asking if it was a mere coincidence that "three Johns lost China?" Service replied that actually "four Johns lost China". McCarthy, about whom one wit earlier quipped, "couldn't find a communist in Red Square", when demanding to know the identity of the fourth John, was told "John K. Shek". Although the senate audience chuckled, Service lost his job, and eventually became a trap company employee and later a library curator.

For all these reasons, the China Lobby long enjoyed considerable success in the US. Although failing in its ultimate goal of returning Chiang Kai-shek to power in China, it did play a significant role in postponing the eventual US recognition of the new China for many years. It also managed to damage and even ruin the reputations of many scholars, journalists and politicians who did not agree with its positions. Although he had originally gained recognition as a

vociferous member of the Lobby, US president Richard Nixon's trip to China in 1971 ended most of the Lobby's influence, although even today, it still lobbies with some success in the US Congress on behalf of Taiwan.

Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson

The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson presidencies (1953–1969) proved to be largely fruitless in making any progress toward US recognition of the PRC, as both sides almost seemed to outdo each other in their mutual hostility. US secretary of state John Foster Dulles' refusal to shake Chinese premier and foreign minister Zhou Enlai's proffered hand at the Geneva conference on Indochina (April 26–July 20, 1954) perhaps best symbolized the US' barren approach.[3] Dulles, a dour moralist and Presbyterian Church lay activist described the PRC "as a godless, illegal regime that did not conform to the practices of civilized nations" (Schaller 2002, 142), and even hoped to restart the civil war in China and eliminate the PRC, albeit without US participation. The Eisenhower administration sanctioned China with strict trade controls, while also negotiating new or expanded security pacts with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Taiwan.[4]

Radical Chinese domestic policies, such as the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s and the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s, served to isolate China, and did not help the situation. Neither did China's reference to the US as the most dangerous imperialist power and, paradoxically, a mere paper tiger. Indeed, on two separate occasions (1954 and again in 1958) they even approached "the brink" of war over the Nationalist-held offshore islands of Matsu and Quemoy. The long-lasting and complicated Vietnam War during the 1960s, in which the US and China supported opposing sides, added to the diplomatic impasse.

The US and China held 136 on-again, off-again ambassadorial level meetings, starting in 1955, first in Geneva and then from 1958–1970 in Warsaw, but they proved largely to be dialogues of the deaf (Goldstein 2002). Taiwan's status was the major obstacle preventing any real understanding, although the

[3] For a discussion of this incident, see Suyin 1994, 233-236. However, Walter Bedell Smith, who took over the US delegation after Dulles left the conference early, gripped Zhou's left arm while holding a cup of tea in his right hand, and told the Chinese leader: "It's been an honor and pleasure to meet you here." Zhou replied: "The American and Chinese people will always keep a deep affection for each other." Unfortunately, these two gestures of respect, if they really did occur, proved to be a road not taken for many years.

[4] The author of this paper remembers in his youth as a stamp collector how it technically was illegal in the US to acquire Chinese stamps, but how satisfying it was to get around the regulations while in Canada!

talks probably helped the two prevent their major difficulties from escalating into actual war until the eventual Nixon/Kissinger breakthrough in 1971.

Interestingly, one of Kennedy's close advisors claimed after his assassination in November 1963 that the US president had "felt dissatisfied with his administration's failure to break new ground in this area … [and had] asked the State Department to consider possible new steps and did not regard as magical or permanent this country's long-standing policy of rigidity". [5] However, the source claimed that "since the day of his inauguration the Red Chinese – unlike the Soviets – has spewed unremitting vituperation upon him." Thus, "even if Red China had not become an emotional and political issue in the United States, he [Kennedy] said, any American initiative now toward negotiations, diplomatic recognition or UN admission would be regarded as rewarding aggression". Accordingly, "he was prepared to use whatever means were available to prevent the seating of Red China in Nationalist China's seat at the UN".

This reference to the UN was an emotional and internationally important extension to the question of US recognition of the PRC (Bennett and Oliver 2002, 88–89). The UN question was a matter of mere recognition, not one of China's existence as a state. Indeed, the US always referred to China as an original member of the UN with a permanent seat on the Security Council. The question was who represented China – the old Nationalist government now exiled on Taiwan, or its successor, the PRC, which clearly controlled and represented mainland China. However, the whole issue of recognizing the PRC seat in the UN became wrapped up in the same imbroglio of the US recognizing the PRC itself. For example, Dean Rusk – Kennedy and Johnson's secretary of state – pointed out that "just before Dwight Eisenhower left office, he told Kennedy that although he would support him on foreign policy in general, he would strongly oppose any attempt by the new administration to recognize Peking and seat mainland China at the United Nations" (Rusk 1990, 283).

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[5] This and the following citations were taken from Sorensen 1965, 665.
Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., another close advisor to Kennedy and the author of an equally important biography published shortly after of the president's assassination, agreed with Sorensen when he wrote that Kennedy "considered the state of our relations with Communist China as irrational … [and] did not exclude the possibility of doing something to change them in the course of his administration" (Schlesinger 1965, 479). Similarly, Dean Rusk, Kennedy's secretary of state, declared that "had Kennedy lived and been reelected in 1964 with a strong mandate, I am sure he would have eventually reopened the China question" (Rusk 1990, 284). However, earlier in 1949, "Kennedy was one of a handful of Democrats who accused President Truman and the State Department of deserting [Nationalist] China." (Schaller 2002, 153).

For more than two decades (1950–1971), the US applied political, economic and diplomatic pressure on the other UN members in an annual struggle to deny the PRC the right to represent China in the UN, even though the PRC controlled approximately 99 percent of China's territory and population. From 1951 to 1960, the US used a procedural device to deny the PRC representation by keeping the issue itself off the General Assembly agenda by a mere majority vote. As this gradually became more difficult to achieve, the US switched to the tactic of having the issue treated as an important one requiring a two-thirds vote to seat the PRC (That said, important items requiring a two-thirds vote can be removed at any time from this category by a mere majority decision in the General Assembly, and this is exactly what finally occurred). Although a very impressive example of US influence, the entire exercise became increasingly difficult to pull off, given China's growing influence in international relations. In addition, the UN recognition question became caught up in US president Nixon's decision to seek rapprochement with, and clearly eventual US recognition of, the PRC. When the US finally switched its position in 1971 to recognize the PRC as China's UN representative, while attempting to maintain at least a seat in the General Assembly for Taiwan – a two-China solution which the PRC would have none of – the UN General Assembly at last recognized the PRC as the sole representative of China, while the Nationalists were completely expelled. Indeed, the Shanghai communique signed by the US and China following Nixon's visit to the country in 1971 both recognized the PRC as the sole representative of China and Taiwan as part of China, but insisted that the PRC would not use force to unify the two.

The Nixon/Kissinger breakthrough

The Sino-American rapprochement was one of the most stunning events in recent international political history. This was especially true, given Mao's implacable anti-imperialist and anti-American standpoint, and Nixon's virtual status as a card-carrying member of the China Lobby. The only similarly analogous earth-shaking event in recent history that this author can think of was the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact reached in August 1939. Fortunately, the results of the Nixon/Kissinger and Mao/Zhou breakthrough proved to be much more peaceful and successful!

Both foreign and domestic events made this sudden demarche possible. In 1967, the future American president published an article in the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs* in which he declared that in the long haul, the US "simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbours. There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live

in angry isolation" (Nixon 1967, 121).[6] A little more than a year later, the PRC reciprocated by publishing Nixon's presidential inaugural address of January 20, 1969 in full in two major Chinese newspapers – an unprecedented act. Mao further signalled his wish for rapprochement by inviting American journalist Edgar Snow—the author of a classic book (Snow 1968) praising the Chinese communists – to stand beside him in Tiananmen Square for the annual National Day parade on October 1, 1970. The Chinese press then published a photo of the two together as a further signal to the US and the Chinese people. For the first time ever, Nixon, in a speech delivered in March 1971, referred to China by its formal name, the People's Republic of China. Then in April 1971, ping-pong diplomacy between the two sides gave tangible international publicity to what was occurring. Indeed, Henry Kissinger, Nixon's erudite national security advisor and future secretary of state, had already made his first secret mission to Beijing where he had met Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, doing the groundwork for Nixon's ground-breaking visit to China on February 21, 1972. Zhou and Kissinger expressed mutual respect and appreciation for each other, which was in stark contrast to Dulles' refusal in 1954 even to shake Zhou's hand at the Geneva conference. So, what led to this truly extraordinary turn of events?

Although a complete analysis of this is beyond the scope of this article, the mutually perceived Soviet threat was certainly one of the main factors behind this monumental breakthrough (Kissinger 2011, 202–235; Nixon 1978, 544-580; Kissinger 1979, 684–787). In March 1969, Soviet and Chinese troops had come close to war when they clashed on Zhenbao (Damansky) Island in the Ussuri River that formed their border in the north. Several months later in August, a large-scale Soviet attack killed hundreds more in the Xinjiang province on China's far western border near the Chinese nuclear weapons test site. Looking back on these events, Kissinger would later write "having since seen many documents published by the main parties, I now lean toward the view that the Soviet Union was much closer to a pre-emptive attack than we realized and that uncertainty about American reactions proved to be a principal reason for postponing that project"(Kissinger 2011, 219). Both China and the US believed that their budding, tacit alliance would check the Soviet threat, while contributing usefully to their own domestic political and economic stability. Furthermore, domestically, Nixon felt that success with China would help him

[6] *Foreign Affairs* was the very journal in which George F. Kennan had published his famous containment article 20 years earlier.

win re-election in 1972, as indeed it did, while Mao felt a need to calm the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution.

Ford/Carter: Final stages toward recognition

The Nixon/Kissinger breakthrough in relations with China did not lead to immediate US recognition of the PRC, due largely to the Taiwan issue. However, the Shanghai Communique did pledge that both states would work toward the full normalization of diplomatic relations. The US also agreed with the PRC position that there was only one China, and that Taiwan was part of that China. For its part, the PRC agreed that it would not employ force to unify with Taiwan. On other important matters, the US and the PRC agreed to take action against any state that would attempt to establish "hegemony" in the Asian-Pacific, in a clear reference to the Soviet Union.

To facilitate the final establishment of formal diplomatic relations, the two sides first opened reciprocal liaison offices in Beijing and Washington. From May 1973 to the end of 1978, David K.E. Bruce, George H.W. Bush, Thomas S. Gates, Jr. and Leonard Woodcock – all distinguished officials – served as chiefs of the US liaison office in Beijing with the rank of ambassador. While visiting China in 1975, the new US president Gerald Ford (1974–1977) reaffirmed the US commitment to formally recognize the PRC, and his successor, Jimmy Carter (1977–1981), would repeat this determination.

However, quick recognition threatened to cause difficult domestic political problems for both Presidents Ford and Carter from long-time conservative supporters of Taiwan. Carter, for example, wrote how "the difficulty would lie in assuring China's willingness to accommodate our requirements for unofficial relations with Taiwan and our permanent interest in its peaceful existence" (Carter 1982, 191). In his memoirs, Cyrus Vance, Carter's secretary of state, specifically identified the problem of Taiwan as preventing earlier "normalization": "We were determined not to jeopardize the security of Taiwan" (Vance 1983, 77). President Carter stressed that Vance also felt "it would be unwise to take on an issue as politically controversial as normalization with China until the Panama issue was out of the way" (Vance 1983, 79).[7] At first, Ford and Carter were wary of establishing military relations with the PRC, as they

[7] Vance was referring to the emotional status of the Panama Canal Treaties that would remove the US from controlling this important waterway connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

might threaten US-Soviet relations, including the SALT II arms control negotiations.

However, finally, on December 15, 1978 the two sides reached an agreement to end almost three decades of diplomatic estrangement, and formally establish diplomatic relations on January 1, 1979. Vance referred this to be "one of the enduring achievements of the Carter years" (Vance 1983, 119). President Carter himself averred that, "my foreign policy team and I, very proud of our accomplishments, were in a happy and expansive mood" (Carter 1982, 200), and added, that "most countries recognized this development as a historic one, which would contribute to peace and would open China further to the outside world."

Vice Premier and Paramount Leader, Deng Xiaoping's well publicized visit to the US in January 1979 launched a series of very important political and economic exchanges in many different fields. Even Sino-US military cooperation was on the table, given the Soviet threats in Afghanistan and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The US sold "non-lethal" arms to China, and in 1981 the two announced that a joint Sino-US listening post had been operating in Xinjiang near the Soviet border.

The long journey taken by China and the US culminated in the eventual US recognition of the PRC. Perhaps symbolizing this new era, Deng good-naturedly donned a ten-gallon, Texas-style cowboy hat during his visit to the US in January 1979. President Carter wrote enthusiastically that "The Deng Xiaoping visit was one of the delightful experiences of my Presidency. To me, everything went right" (Carter 1982, 202). *Time* magazine even named Deng its prestigious "Man of the Year" at the end of 1978, and his portrait appeared on the magazine's front cover, a position that had in the past been reserved for Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek.

Conclusions

Considerable time has elapsed since the US finally recognized the PRC in 1979, and to the astonishment of many who remember the old China, the PRC has become second only to the US as the most powerful economy in the world. China's National Day celebrations in Beijing on October 1, 2019 demonstrated to all its military might. Many new crises have come and gone, the most recent being the 2019 so-called trade war between the two frenemies, which threatens not only their mutual prosperity, but also that of the world. Henry Kissinger, now 96, recently warned that the US and China are "in the foothills of a cold war" (Bloomberg 2019; Friedman 2019). Hopefully, their now 40-year-old diplomatic relationship will help them avoid the Thucydides Trap of devastating war caused by a new power challenging the old, established one.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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