Thirty Years of Research in the History of Sino-US Relations in China

The history of Sino-US relations is an interdisciplinary subject, a sub-discipline of the history of Chinese foreign relations and also a branch of international relations and American studies. Since China’s reform and opening up policies began, this discipline has boasted a galaxy of talents, rich achievements, active academic exchanges, and sustained prosperity.

I. Overview

i. The Research Team

From the beginning of reform and opening up, Chinese scholars took a keen interest in the history of Sino-US relations. A Chinese Sino-US relations research team quickly took shape, and included researchers from four disciplines: Chinese modern history, world history, CCP party history, and military history and international relations. Over time, growing numbers of researchers from these disciplines have joined the Sino-US relations research team. One particularly encouraging development is that ever more young researchers have chosen to do master’s or doctoral dissertations on Sino-US relations. While these statistics are incomplete, during the 1990s at least thirteen young scholars graduated from Fudan University (Shanghai), Sun Yat-sen University (Guangzhou), and Nankai University (Tianjin) after completing dissertations focusing on or closely related to Sino-US relations. This continuous flow of fresh talent into the Sino-US relations research team is one major reason for this discipline’s sustained success.

ii. The Chinese Association for Sino-US Relations and Academic Exchanges

As early as 1985, during China’s First Sino-US Relations Conference (jointly sponsored by the Editorial Board of the Sino-US Relations Series, the Department of History of Fudan University, and the American Studies Center of Fudan University), some scholars recommended the establishment of a national academic association. During the Second Sino-US Relations Conference, sponsored by the Sino-US Culture Study Center of Nanjing University, the establishment of such an association was reconsidered. Despite the temporary cooling of research in Sino-US relations in 1989, after the political disturbances in Beijing, the discipline speedily regained its popularity. In 1993, the Chinese Association for Sino-US Relations became an affiliated branch of the Chinese Association for American Studies, with Zi Zhongyun serving

---

as Chair, Wang Xi, Jiang Xiangze, and Wang Zhigang as Vice-Chairs, and Tao Wenzhao as Secretary-General of the Chinese Association for Sino-US Relations. In 1997, the Association selected new leaders, with Tao Wenzhao as Chair, Chen Yongxiang, Liang Biying, and Wu Xinbo as Vice-Chairs, and Niu Jun as Secretary-General. In April 2001, this leadership was reelected and remained in place until 2005, when Tao Wenzhao and Wu Xinbo retained their respective positions while Cai Jiahe and Zhu Weibing were elected Vice-Chairmen.

Since the establishment of the Chinese Association for Sino-US Relations, eleven conferences which have greatly promoted the development of studies of the history of Sino-US relations have been held:

- A workshop on “The Study of the History of Sino-US Relations: Retrospect and Prospect” (March 1994, co-sponsored by the American Studies Center of Beijing Foreign Studies University), that reviewed the study of the history of Sino-US relations in China from 1979 to 1993. The participants reached a consensus that studies of history and current affairs should be integrated, meaning that researchers in history should follow current affairs while remaining sensitive to history. The papers from this workshop were subsequently published as *An Introduction to a New Bridge of Mutual Understanding: Review and Forecasts of the History of US-China Relations* (《架起理解的新桥梁——中美关系研究回顾与展望》) (Zi Zhongyun and Tao Wenzhao, eds., Anhui People’s Press, 1996).

- A workshop on “America and China’s Modernization” (November 1995, co-sponsored by the History Department of Sun Yat-sen University and the History Association of Guangdong Province), featuring papers dealing with this subject from different perspectives, from the macro-strategic level to case studies of historical figures and events, from in-depth studies of traditional topics from new angles and on new levels to studies of often neglected topics. These papers were published as *America and Modern China* (《美国与近代中国》) (Tao Wenzhao and Liang Biying, eds., Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1996).

- A workshop on Sino-US Economic and Trade Relations (May 1997, co-sponsored by the American Studies Center and the Department of History of Fudan University), with papers covering a lengthy time span (from the beginning of Sino-US trade relations to the opening of a Walmart supermarket in Shenzhen) and a wide variety of topics, including different fields of economic relations and the relationships between economics and culture and economics and politics. These were later published as *Foresee the Future by Reviewing the Past: Reviews of A Century of Sino-US Economic and Trade Relations and Future Prospects* (《鉴往知来：百年来中美经济关系的回顾与前瞻》) (Gu Yunshen, Shi Yuanhua, and Jin Guangyao, eds., Fudan University Press, 1999).

- A workshop on Sino-US Cultural Relations (July 1998, co-sponsored by the Center for Chinese and American Studies of Nanjing University), where participants discussed such topics as political culture and thought, society and culture, and literature and art, and many papers explored entirely novel topics. These were published as *Collected Articles on Sino-US Cultural Exchange* (《中美文化交流论集》) (Tao Wenzhao and Chen Yongxiang, eds., Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1999).

- A workshop on “A Hundred Years of Sino-U.S. Relations” (October 1999, co-sponsored by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Foreign Languages University in Luoyang), the first time that the Association co-sponsored a workshop with a PLA university. The numbers of
both participants and papers were unprecedentedly high, and for the first time, more papers were presented on Sino-US relations since the founding of the PRC than on the first half of the twentieth century. These were compiled in *A Hundred Years of Sino-US Relations* (《中美关系一百年》) (Tao Wenzhao and Zhong Zhangsheng, eds., Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2001).

- A workshop on “The Cold War and Sino-US Relations” (April 2001, co-sponsored by Xi’an International Studies University), where participants probed such topics as the media and the origins of the Cold War, Sino-US relations in the 1940s during the War of Liberation, the impact of the Korean War and the Vietnam War on Sino-US relations, the evolution of America’s China policy and China’s America policy from the 1960s to the early 1970s, the China policies of President John F. Kennedy and President Richard Nixon, the Soviet factor in Sino-US relations, and the Taiwan factor in Sino-US relations.

- A workshop on “Sino-US Relations in the Context of International Relations in East Asia” (October 2002, co-sponsored by the American History Research Center of Xiamen University), that sought to situate Sino-US relations against the wider international background and study those international factors that affected Sino-US relations and the interaction between Sino-US relations and broader international relations in the Far East. The articles of this and the previous workshop were published in one volume, *Sino-US Relations and International Structures in East Asia* (《中美关系与东亚国际格局》) (Tao Wenzhao, Du Ruiqing, and Wang Xu, eds., Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2001).

- A workshop on “America and Twentieth Century Conflicts and Wars in Asia” (January 2005, co-sponsored by the School of Humanities of Harbin Institute of Technology), where discussion revolved around wars and major confrontations, including the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Taiwan Straits crises. The papers were published in *America and Twentieth Century Conflicts and Wars in Asia* (《美国与 20 世纪亚洲的冲突和战争》) (Tao Wenzhao and Jiang Zhenhuan, eds., Chongqing Press, 2006).

- A workshop on “Historical Figures in Sino-US Relations” (June 2006, co-sponsored by the Department of History of Sichuan University and the Editorial Department of *Social Science Front Monthly*), where participants discussed historical figures who had played some role in the evolution of Sino-US relations.

- A workshop on “America’s China Policy and American Domestic Politics” (March 2007, co-sponsored by the School of Foreign Languages of Zhejiang University of Technology), that featured extensive discussions of American domestic actors that influenced America’s China policy, including Congress, the media, think tanks, interest groups, and transnational corporations.

- A workshop on “Sino-US Relations and the International Structure” (June 2008, co-sponsored by the Department of English of Beijing International Studies University and the School of Foreign Languages of Ludong University), that discussed topics including the impact of the international structure on Sino-US relations, America’s Asia-Pacific strategies, multilateral cooperation in East Asia and Sino-US relations, and Sino-US relations in the age of economic globalization.
To commemorate the centennial of Mao Zedong's birth, the Foundation for International and Strategic Studies, the Institute of International Relations of Peking University, and the Editorial Department of the journal *World Affairs* co-sponsored a conference on “The International and Strategic Thought of Mao Zedong and the Old Generation of Revolutionaries”, focusing on China’s American strategies and Sino-US relations. The papers were published as *The Same Warmth and Cold throughout the Globe: International and Strategic Thinking of Chinese Leaders* (《环球同此凉热：一代领袖们的国际战略思想》) (Foundation for International and Strategic Studies, eds., Zhongyang Wenxian Press, 1993).

In terms of international exchanges, the following events were noteworthy:

- In 1986, Yuan Ming of the School of International Relations of Peking University and Harry Harding of George Washington University cooperated to involve both Chinese and American scholars in a joint study of Sino-US relations from 1945 to 1955. This joint venture was remarkable because it was one of the earliest collaborative academic efforts by scholars from both countries, it focused on the most sensitive period in the history of Sino-US relations, and its scope went beyond the dividing line of 1949 at a time when very few Chinese scholars had ever endeavored to study post-1949 Sino-US relations. After the conference, scholars from both countries were received by Li Peng, then the Director of the State Education Commission. Even today, the seventeen papers by Chinese and American scholars from this meeting published in the conference volume are still of considerable value.²

- In May 1991, the Chinese Association for American Studies and the Institute of American Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences jointly sponsored an international academic workshop on “America and the Asia-Pacific in the Twentieth Century”, the first major international academic conference held in Beijing after the political disturbances of 1989. In all, 146 scholars, from the United States, countries in the Asia-Pacific area, Taiwan and Hong Kong, attended the workshop, which focused on various aspects of American studies, including two panels on the history and current situation of Sino-US relations.

- In a cooperative effort between the Party School of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Harvard University, initiated by Jiang Changbin, the late Director of the International Strategic Studies Institute of the Party School, and Robert Ross, a guest researcher at Harvard University’s Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, two academic workshops were held in Beijing and Boston in October 1996 and May 1998 respectively, attended by both Chinese and non-Chinese (mostly American) scholars. These workshops studied a series of major issues in Sino-US relations from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, including the two Taiwan Straits crises, the ambassadorial talks between China and the United States, the Vietnam War and Sino-US relations, and the Sino-Soviet split and Sino-US relations. Most of the Chinese participants in this collaborative effort were researching Chinese Communist Party history or the history of the People's Republic of China. Two volumes of these papers were published.

II. Summary of Research Topics

i. General Topics

An article coauthored by Zhang Zhongli and Huang Renwei surveyed Sino-US relations from the

---

political and economic perspectives, dividing the one hundred and fifty years period since the signing of the Treaty of Wangxia in 1844 into six stages, and concluding that the two decades of the 1950s and 1960s witnessed the most severe antagonism between the two countries and that the history of cooperation and mutual benefit was far lengthier than that of conflict and hostility. The two authors argued that antagonism can only hurt both sides. The article also pointed out that, although the “China Market” has always stood at the core of America’s China policy, this goal has never yet been reached. In the future, the foundation of the triangular relationship between America, China and Japan will no longer be strategic cooperation but interdependence resulting from the integration of markets. ³

Zi Zhongyun took a cultural approach to Sino-US relations, pointing out that ideology, including the promotion of democracy and human rights overseas, has always played an important role in American diplomacy. Driven, however, by considerations of strategic and economic interests, in actual practice America has always adopted double or multiple standards toward different countries. The democratic system and relatively advanced social organization of the United States appeal to Chinese to varying extents, but American condescension and domineering attitudes and its adoption of the practices of power politics offend China’s national self-esteem and provoke resentment among the Chinese people and intellectuals. On the ideological level, the bilateral relationship has been affected by many additional complex factors.⁴

Shi Yinhong and Lu Lei studied the routes whereby United States and China joined international society. They argued that existing international society is the result of hundreds of years of global expansion by different states, and that its power structure, norms, and organization largely reflect the interests and values of Western nations. China’s foreign relations in the two decades after since 1949 were characterized, in essence, by a mutual boycott between China and the American-dominated international society. Since its reform and opening-up began, China has dropped its rebellious attitudes toward international society and begun to follow the common rules of international society. At present, there is still a fundamental question lying between America and China, that is, what kind of international society shall there be?⁵

ii.  Early Sino-U.S. Relations

Before they signed the Treaty of Wangxia in 1844, China and the United States had no official diplomatic relationship. The bilateral relations between the two countries before 1844 are termed early Sino-US relations. Liang Biying’s Dragon and Eagle: A Historical Survey of US-Chinese Interactions (《龙与鹰：中美交往的历史考察》),⁶ and Qiu Huafei’s A Study of Early Sino-US Relations, 1784-1844 (《早期中美关系研究, 1784-1844》)⁷ explored early Sino-US relations in detail. Scholars generally agreed that bilateral trade was in essence non-governmental on equal and friendly terms.⁸ In an article on China’s foreign trade, Xiong Zhiyong argued that China and foreign countries had different objectives: foreign merchants respected the rules of China’s tributary state system in order to maximize trade benefits; the Qing Dynasty Government

---

⁵ Shi Yinhong and Lu Lei, America and Modern and Contemporary China (《美国与近现代中国》), pp. 1-17.
⁸ Zi Zhongyun and Tao Wenzhao, eds., An Introduction to a New Bridge of Mutual Understanding (《架起理解的桥梁》), p. 27.
tolerated foreign trade not just for its economic benefits but also for political reasons, namely, to demonstrate the dignity of the heavenly dynasty, flaunt China’s power, and prove that the virtues of the Qing Dynasty could civilize four seas.9

Hu Lizhong examined early missionary work by Americans and concluded that American missionaries brought passion to China but were coldly received in China for the following reasons: firstly, the Qing Dynasty’s official policy of banning religions; and secondly, the repulsion between the Chinese traditional culture based on Confucianism and the Christian culture of the west. American missionaries therefore changed their strategy and tried to open doors to Christianity through secular means. The three pillars of their missionary work were translating books and publishing newspapers, sponsoring schools, and establishing hospitals.10

iii. Establishment of the Treaty System

1. The Treaty of Wangxia, 1844

The Treaty of Wangxia, the first treaty between China and the United States, was the foundation of their official bilateral diplomatic relationship. In a comprehensive study and analysis of the background, content, and influence of the Treaty of Wangxia, Qiao Mingshun pointed out that Caleb Cushing, its American negotiator, coerced the Qing Government to sign the document even though the Qing Government had already agreed to grant most-favored-nation treatment to American traders before Cushing arrived in China. During the negotiations, the Qing Government attached greater importance to preventing Cushing from coming to Beijing and was willing to satisfy Cushing’s basic demands on “an equal footing”, so no serious disagreements disrupted the negotiations. Due to its isolation, however, the Qing Government failed to foresee the serious consequences of this treaty and so was mistakenly satisfied with it.11 Xiong Zhiyong argued that the signing of the Treaty of Wangxia was a typical example of the feudal suzerainty of the Qing Government, which sacrificed sovereignty to maintain the “established system,” that is, to prevent non-tributary foreign missions from entering Beijing, a rather obsolete guiding principle in foreign relations.12

2. The Burlingame Treaty, 1868

The Burlingame Treaty was a rather important late Qing dynasty treaty between China and the United States, but no consensus on it exists among Chinese scholars. Shi Yinhong and Pan Yining explored this subject from the perspective of the evolution of modern Chinese diplomacy. Shi Yinhong argued that after the Second Opium War of 1856-1860, the Qing Government was forced to abandon its exclusionist policies and tried half-heartedly to observe Western norms in an effort to become a member of civilized western society. Burlingame was an active advocate of this course, since the precondition for cooperation he put forward was that the Qing Government must follow the code of conduct in foreign affairs set by external states, the ultimate goal of which was to safeguard the privileges foreign powers enjoyed in China. Pan Yining points out that the cooperation policy in essence represented an effort to force Chinese diplomacy to evolve

---

9 Article by Xiong Zhiyong in America and Modern and Contemporary China (《美国与近现代中国》), pp.1-2, 14-20.
10 Hu Lizhong, From the Treaty of Wangxia to Clinton’s Visit to China (《从望厦条约到克林顿访华》), Fujian People’s Publishing House, 1996, p. 27.
according to western cultural norms using cooperative and coercive means alike. An important breakthrough of the Burlingame mission was that it shook the very foundations of China’s diplomatic Yizhi ritual and etiquette system, symbolizing the collapse of the China vs. barbarians system. The Burlingame Treaty was the first international agreement of equivalent form and content negotiated between China and any Western country on relatively peaceful terms since the Opium War had ended, and in practice it impelled the Qing Government to establish foreign consulates to protect overseas Chinese.\(^\text{13}\)

3. The Open Door Policy

Put forward by the United States in response to the partition of China by foreign powers, the Open Door policy was vitally important in Sino-US relations. In the past, Chinese academics generally treated this policy as an invasive one intended to secure a share of the spoils for America. In 1979, Prof. Wang Xi published a series of articles, putting forward his opinions, which differed greatly from the conventional consensus, on some issues in Sino-US relations, such as the absence of American territorial ambitions in China, American missionary work, and Chinese laborers in the United States. Prof. Wang argued that the Open Door policy did “have an element of conflict of interest between American and European imperialist powers in the Far East and in practice to some degree it checked or suspended imperialist invasions of China.” These articles set the cat among the pigeons, with many scholars writing articles criticizing his arguments from every angle.\(^\text{14}\) Since well-established scholars took both sides in this debate, it immediately attracted wide attention within Chinese academia. In subsequent years, numerous articles on it were published in academic journals. The Open Door policy became the subject of heated debate among both senior researchers and young students, and these arguments played an important role in the development of the study of Sino-US relations in subsequent years. Firstly, thanks to this debate, Sino-US relations attracted much academic interest; secondly, the debate demonstrated that a relatively vigorous academic atmosphere for the study of Sino-US relations existed, in which different opinions could be heard; thirdly, this debate was actually a small-scale movement to liberate people’s minds, which led scholars to realize that it is sometimes possible to reconsider and re-study conventional ideas; fourthly, scholars generally agreed that in historical research, it was necessary to respect both history and the creation of a country’s history by its people.

iv. The First Three Decades of the Twentieth Century

1. US-Japanese Competition in Northeast China

After the Russian-Japanese War, US-Japanese competition in the Korean Peninsula and Northeast China was a pronounced feature of international relations in Northeast Asia. Tao Wenzhao pointed out that there were three landmarks in the twenty years of US-Japanese competition, namely the Taft-Katsura Agreement of 1905, the Root-Takahira Agreement of 1908 and the Lansing-Ishii Agreement of 1917. Since American power could not compete with that of Japan, in each of these three agreements it was the United States that made concessions.\(^\text{15}\) Liang Biyin has re-investigated the Lansing-Ishii Agreement, pointing out that this accord finally led

\(^{13}\) Articles by Shi Yinhong and Pan Yining in *America and Modern and Contemporary China* (《美国与近现代中国》), pp. 1-17, 21-39.


the Chinese people to realize that the United States had made major concessions to Japan in exchange for the renewal of the Open Door policy and in order to protect American interests, especially from Japanese infringement. Although this agreement was shortlived, American concessions to Japan and aggressive Japanese ambitions left their marks on the history of China’s foreign relations.16

2. The China Policy of the Theodore Roosevelt, Taft and Wilson Administrations

President Theodore Roosevelt disliked both the Chinese and the Japanese but followed different policies toward each. In a comparative study, Zhu Weibin revealed that Roosevelt, a racist and social Darwinist who believed in the racial superiority of whites, demonstrated totally different attitudes toward the Japanese and the Chinese, despising the latter while having a high opinion of the former. Roosevelt supported and strictly implemented Chinese exclusion legislation and limited the number of Chinese immigrants to America through bilateral treaties; meanwhile he undertook pacification policies toward Japanese immigrants and reached “gentlemen’s agreements” with the Japanese Government to restrict Japanese immigration. Roosevelt held differing opinions of the Chinese and the Japanese because the core of America’s Asia-Pacific policy was US-Japanese rather than US-Chinese relations and Japan was powerful enough to pose a threat to American security.17

Wu Xinbo studied President William Howard Taft’s “dollar diplomacy” policy, discerning the following characteristics: firstly, the policy was colored by religion and morality; secondly, it differed significantly from Japanese and Russian policies toward China; thirdly, the policy was not backed up with sufficient power; fourthly, it was the result of flawed foreign policy making; and fifthly, this policy reflected an absence of understanding of or sympathy for Chinese nationalism. Nevertheless, this policy still had due influence on America’s Far Eastern policy and international relations in Asia, where it shifted the focus of America’s Far Eastern policy from Japan to China and further developed the Open Door policy and new expansionist thinking in American foreign policies.18

3. The Paris Peace Conference and the Washington Conference

With no exceptions, Chinese scholars have criticized President Woodrow Wilson’s pro-Japanese and anti-Chinese behavior at the Paris Peace Conference, but have demonstrated differing opinions of the Washington Conference. Whether the Washington Conference was a diplomatic victory or failure for China and the United States and the historical significance of the Nine-Power Treaty still remain controversial topics.19 Xiang Liling believed that the Paris Peace Conference was a turning point in American policy toward China and Sino-US relations, while American assistance to China at the Washington Conference renewed Chinese confidence in the United States.20 Jiang Xiangze argued that at the Washington Conference, for the first time ever China did not lose further rights or interests in its interactions with foreign powers and even regained some.21 Jin Guangyao gave his own views on diplomatic compromises, pointing out

17 Chapter by Zhu Weibin in A Hundred Years of Chinese-US Relations (《中美关系一百年》), pp. 79-89.
19 Zi Zhongyun and Tao Wenzhao, eds., An Introduction to a New Bridge of Mutual Understanding (《架起理解的桥梁》), pp. 66-69.
21 Jiang Xiangze, “China and the Washington Conference” (《中国和华盛顿会议》), Collected Works on the History of
that historians of later generations are generally overcritical toward diplomats of earlier
generations, when in practice their diplomatic attainments reflected their own countries’ national
power. It was therefore impossible for China to invalidate the unequal treaties and recover all its
rights at one international conference. Chinese diplomats made every possible effort at the
Washington Conference and achieved the best results possible at that time, and their efforts and
achievements therefore warrant recognition.22 Wang Jianglang also believed that the Washington
Conference was the first occasion when Western powers sat around the table to listen to Chinese
plans for regaining sovereignty, a process that itself represented progress. Although many
problems remained unresolved, progress had been made in some respects, laying the foundations
for these problems’ later resolution. The Nine-Power Treaty was eventually transformed into
something of an amulet to ward off aggression by other powers, especially Japan, and for seeking
international assistance in this, making it implausible to regard it as simply another unequal
treaty.23

v. The Anti-Japanese War and the War of Liberation

The richest historiographical accomplishments are to be found in studies of the history of Sino-
US relations during the 1930s and 1940s. During the Anti-Japanese War, China and America
established a special relationship through their alliance against Fascism. Both the depth of
American involvement in Chinese domestic politics and the importance of Sino-US relations to
China were unprecedented.

1. American Policy toward the September 18, 1931 (9/18) Incident

In the 1980s, Chinese scholars engaged in heated discussions over whether American policy
during the 1930s should be regarded as one of appeasement. Some scholars argued that Secretary
of State Henry L. Stimson’s “non-recognition” of Manchukuo in the early 1930s was undertaken
to appease, conciliate and compromise with aggressors while sacrificing the interests of the weak
under the guise of “neutralism” and “non-interference”.24 In recent years, few articles have been
published on this issue, but arguments over it have continued in full-length books. Tao Wenzhao
pointed out that Stimson’s note to Japan on the subject employed clear language condemning the
Japanese use of violence to invade Chinese territory and impair China’s sovereignty, and refused
to recognize the so-called “achievements” of Japanese invasion. This was undoubtedly an effort
to contain Japanese aggression in China. In the note, the American Government also warned the
Chinese Government not to sign any treaty with Japan that might surrender China’s sovereign
rights on humiliating terms. This should be regarded as both support for the Nationalist
Government (if China fought against Japan) and a constraint (if China intended to surrender its
sovereign rights), although the constraining effort of this note was very limited because of the
lack of determined measures of punishment on the American side.25 Xiong Zhiyong argues that
after Japanese hostilities began on September 18, 1931, America generally opposed further
Japanese aggression in China but was unwilling to risk punitive military action against Japan.
Meanwhile, the Nationalist Government, preoccupied with fighting its civil war against the

---

23 Wang Jianglang, The Course of Abolishing China’s Unequal Treaties (《中国废除不平等条约的历程》), Jiangxi People’s
24 Zi Zhongyun and Tao Wenzhao, eds., An Introduction to a New Bridge of Mutual Understanding (《架起理解的桥梁》), pp.
72-74.
Communists, disregarded national interests and relied on American actions to deter any Japanese invasion. Consequently, the policies adopted by both the Chinese and American governments facilitated Japanese expansion in China.26

2. American Policy toward the Chinese-Japanese War before the Pacific War

There has been a long-standing view that America’s Far Eastern strategy resembled the Munich stance, the British policy of appeasement in Europe.27 In recent years, most Chinese scholars have expressed their disagreement with this outlook, arguing that American policy toward the Chinese-Japanese War underwent a process of change and therefore should not be simplified as a policy of “appeasement”. From passive compromises with the Japanese invasion to active support of China against Japan, the development of American policy was full of twists and turns rather than being linear. The most important development was the half-year of negotiations between Japan and America in 1941, whose purpose was not to appease Japan but rather to win time to prepare for war against Japan. Neither America nor Japan changed their predetermined policies despite their talks around the negotiating table; Japan did not slow down its invasive actions while the American policy of constraining Japan and supporting China was not affected. These negotiations, therefore, did not represent a “Munich Conspiracy in the East”. Broadly speaking, during the 1930s, American policy leaned more and more toward supporting China so as to constrain Japan.28

3. Relations between Four Parties in Three Countries during the War of Liberation

A number of articles and books studied in depth the relations between four parties in three countries during the War of Liberation, among them Zi Zhongyun’s The Origin and Evolution of US Policy toward China, 1945-1950 (《美国对华政策的缘起和发展（1945-1950）》)29; Tao Wenzhao’s Sino-US Relations, 1911-1950 (《中美关系史，1911-1950》)30; Niu Jun’s From Hurley to Marshall: The Impact of the CCP on American Foreign Policy in China (《从赫尔利到马歇尔——美国调处国共矛盾始末》) and From Yanan to the World (《从延安走向世界》)31; and A Heavy Page in the History of Sino-US Relations (《中美关系史上沉重的一页》), edited by Yuan Ming and Harry Harding.32 Scholars basically agreed that, given the international Cold War background, at the end of the 1930s American hostility to the Chinese revolution and antagonism between the United States and China were historically inevitable. Articles by Yang Kuisong explored the impact of the Cold War on the Chinese revolution.33

4. Reconsidering the Policy of “Leaning to One Side”

Niu Jun pointed out that the policy of “leaning to one side” was the product of more than twenty years of revolution approaching the threshold of victory, reflecting the CCP leadership’s general understanding of the distribution and prospects of global political power, a perspective deeply

26 Xiong Zhiyong, China and America (《美国与中国》), p. 137.
27 Zi Zhongyun and Tao Wenzhao, eds., An Introduction to a New Bridge of Mutual Understanding (《架起理解的桥梁》), pp. 85-86.
rooted in history and intensified by the international environment of the early Cold War years. The policy of “leaning to one side” was advanced as an overarching guiding principle, against the background of the existence in the world of two political and economic systems, and was the result of coordination between the CCP and the Soviet Union. Consequently, from its very beginning the PRC became part of the international political and economic system centered upon the Soviet Union. In any case, once adopted, the policy of “leaning to one side” made PRC diplomacy intensely revolutionary, determining the basic structure of New China’s diplomacy and shaping its diplomatic thinking and behavior.34

vi. From Hostility to Reconciliation

1. The Reasons for Sustained Sino-US Antagonism

Zhao Xuegong’s America and China in the Korean War (《朝鲜战争中的美国与中国》)35 and Lin Limin’s Containing China: The Korean War and Sino-U.S. Relations (《遏制中国：朝鲜战争与中美关系》)36 studied the origins and development of American containment policy toward China, especially the impact of the Korean War on Sino-US relations and how, as the Korean War progressed, the American containment policy gradually came into full swing. Some scholars, however, argued that the impact of the Korean War upon Sino-US relations was not exclusively negative. On the one hand, the Americans were forced to recognize the resolution and determination of the Chinese leaders, their ability to mobilize popular support behind their war effort, and the Chinese army’s superb command of the art of war and fighting capacities. On the other hand, the Chinese realized that in modern warfare, weapons, equipment, and technology would play a greater role than they had anticipated in determining the outcome of any war. Overall, both Americans and Chinese concluded that they should not go to war again with each other in the future.37

Some scholars emphasized the conflicting interests and nationalisms dividing the two countries, arguing that these made inevitable the antagonism that developed between them. Others paid greater attention to ideological factors. On the one hand, American anti-communism was deep-rooted, while on the other hand, it was unlikely that American decision makers possessed the ability to understand China’s determination to resist foreign intervention and invasion. Other scholars, meanwhile, believed that it was the combination of nationalism and socialism that led to the victory of revolution in both China and Vietnam. In the 1950s, a new development in Chinese foreign policy that the United States found unacceptable occurred when China established close economic and political connections with some nationalist but neutral states.38

2. The Two Taiwan Strait Crises

During the 1950s, the two Taiwan Strait crises were the most significant events in Sino-US relations. Scholars discussed extensively the causes and courses of the two crises, the conclusion of the 1954 Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and Taiwan, relations between America and Taiwan during the crises, the military and diplomatic policies followed by Chinese

38 Zi Zhongyun and Tao Wenzhao, eds., An Introduction to a New Bridge of Mutual Understanding (《架起理解的桥梁》), p. 135.
leaders (at the Geneva Conference and the Bandung Conference, for example), and changes in Chairman Mao’s thinking during the second crisis. These scholars pointed out that leaders from both sides of the Taiwan Strait collaborated to protect the unity of China.\(^{39}\) Other scholars argued that Eisenhower’s East Asian policy represented a dual effort to contain both socialist China and nationalist Asian countries.\(^{40}\)

vii. A New Age of Sino-US Relations

1. Breaking the Ice in Sino-US Relations

Gong Li pointed out that, given the actual national interests of both countries, in the 1970s China and America managed to bridge the gap between their ideologies and social systems and establish diplomatic relations, which represented historical progress. China’s policy toward America was based on its scientific assessment and accurate judgment of actual developments in the global situation. The development of the Sino-US bilateral relationship owed much to both the external factor of the common threat from the Soviet Union and to internal reasons. On the Chinese side, better relations with America, the most powerful western country, could help China to renew and strengthen its international relations with other states around the world. Naturally enough, the rapprochement between China and America became the forerunner of China’s subsequent opening-up policy.\(^{41}\) Wang Jisi argued that during the Nixon-Kissinger era, profound and historic changes took place in American diplomatic thinking, with realism taking the dominant position in the making of American foreign policies, while for the first time idealism failed to explain or guide America’s China policy.\(^{42}\) Xu Yan and Gong Li believed that Chairman Mao abandoned his slogans and teachings from previous periods, which had not accorded with reality, and decided to open the gate for improved Sino-US relations because of the genuine need to safeguard national security, a major and historic decision on his part.\(^{43}\) Huang Renwei emphasized that before the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué, Chinese diplomacy was revolutionary and defined friends and foes along ideological lines. Beginning with the Shanghai Communiqué, however, the process of normalization of Sino-US relations overcame the two countries’ differing social systems and ideological disagreements, and Chinese diplomacy was set on course in a new

---


43 Xu Yan and Gong Li, “A Tentative Study of Mao Zedong’s War Preparedness Thinking” (《试论毛泽东的战备思想》), The Same Warmth and Cold throughout the Globe (《世界同此凉热》), p. 251. For Chinese-US relations during this ten-year period, especially in terms of detailed study of Chinese policies, see Gong Li, Bridging the Gap (《跨越鸿沟》).
direction. Zhang Yebai, Ding Xinhao and others studied the triangular relationship between China, America and the Soviet Union and the impact of the Soviet factor on Sino-US relations. In *Nixon and China: Half a Century of Irrevocable Commitment* (《尼克松和中国——半个世纪的不解之缘》), He Hui studied this complicated political figure’s changing views on China and his contribution to the bilateral relationship.

2. The Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between China and America

Tao Wenzhao pointed out that the coincidence of the normalization of Sino-US relations and the reform and opening-up policies was far from accidental. In Deng Xiaoping’s blueprint for reform and opening-up, the establishment of diplomatic relations with America occupied an important position, as this would help to establish the favorable external environment necessary for the construction of China’s modernization and enable the United States to become an important economic partner of China. Neither party, however, realized all of its goals: the United States failed to make China promise not to use force against Taiwan while China could not prevent America from selling weapons to Taiwan. The establishment of diplomatic relations was therefore the result of compromises on both sides. Gong Li’s *Deng Xiaoping and America* (《邓小平和美国》) was a detailed study of Deng’s contribution to the development of Sino-US relations. In *A Special Agency: Demystifying the American Liaison Office in China* (《特殊机构——美国驻华联络处揭秘》), Yang Xian scrutinized how this peculiar new agency performed its specific functions and promoted the normalization of bilateral relations during the particular period it existed from 1973 to 1978.

vi. Sino-US Relations in the Post-Cold War Era

Chu Shulong’s *Trends in Sino-US Relations during the Post-Cold War Era* (《冷战后中美关系的走向》) made a systemic study of Sino-US relations during the 1990s in terms of security, politics, economy and trade, and culture and society. In *Sino-US Relations in the Post-Cold War Era* (《后冷战时期的中美关系》), Yang Jiemian systematically reviewed America’s China policy and China’s America policy, the decision making process in each country, and factors affecting both countries’ policies during the 1990s. America’s China Policy in the Post-Cold War Era (《冷战后美国对华政策》), edited by Tao Wenzhao, systematically elaborated American policies toward China during George W. Bush’s first term in terms of security, economics, Taiwan, and human rights, emphasizing those internal factors affecting these policies, such as Congress, think-tanks, interest groups, and the media. American Think-tanks and Their Attitudes

---

toward China (《美国思想库及其对华倾向》),^53 edited by Yuan Peng and Fu Mengzi, provided a comprehensive introduction to those American think-tanks involved in China policy. *Sino-US Relations: A Strategic Analysis* (《中美战略关系新论》),^54 edited by Fu Mengzi and Yuan Peng, was a comprehensive study of America’s China policy during the younger Bush’s first term.

1. Taiwan Issue

The Taiwan issue has long been a troubling irritant in Sino-US relations. Scholars have pointed out that the influence of the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis was multifaceted and complicated. On the positive side, the crisis made the American Government realize the sensitivity and potential danger of the Taiwan issue and impelled the Clinton Administration to shift its policy making emphasis in the following years to the stabilization of Sino-US relations. This crisis also had negative effects, however, in terms of strengthening American military cooperation with Taiwan, leading the Pentagon to make planning for a war with China a priority, as the American armed forces came to realize the potential for military conflicts with China, and redefining the US-Japan security alliance due to the impact of the crises on America’s regional security strategy.^55

2. Crisis Management in Sino-U.S. Relations

In the post-Cold War era, Sino-US relations have been affected by a succession of emergencies, meaning that crisis management has for obvious reasons attracted attention within Chinese academia. For years, the Chinese Foundation for International and Strategic Studies in Beijing has cooperated with scholars studying Sino-US relations and international strategy. From 2001 onward, the Foundation worked with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in a joint effort to study crisis management. During the past seven years four conferences have been held, resulting in the publication of a collection of papers, including twelve articles by Chinese and American scholars, scrutinizing such controversial and divisive episodes as President Lee Teng-hui of Taiwan’s 1995 visit to America, the 1999 American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, and the collision of Chinese and American airplanes in 2001, analyzing the crisis management behavioral modes of both America and China, and abstracting their basic principles of crisis management.^56

ix. Missionary Work and Education

Quite a number of works have been published in this area, as scholars have dropped the indiscriminately negative approach of the past and focused instead on conducting concrete studies, especially case studies. Most scholars in this field agree that: 1) in the very beginning, missionary work was inevitably intertwined with colonialism, with some missionaries taking a direct part in imperialist aggression; 2) the influence of missionaries on Chinese society was complicated, since these missionaries were dissatisfied with feudalism but endorsed the reform of modern China; 3) the most important tool for remolding China employed by the missionaries

---

^54 Shi Shi Publishing House, 2005.
was modern western capitalist culture in the guise of Christianity, as they established schools, published books, and ran newspapers, thus playing the role of a “broker” of western culture; 4) although western missionaries found it impossible to modernize education in China, their activities provided inspiring and instructive examples as China itself established a new educational system.57

(Authored by Prof. Tao Wenzhao, Institute of American Studies, CASS).

---