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Introduction

Discourses of Reconciliation

> Your handshake came over the vastest ocean in the world – twenty-five years of no communication.
>
> Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai to President Richard Nixon, Beijing, 21 February 1972

> It was the week that changed the world.
>
> Nixon, Shanghai, 27 February 1972

President Richard Nixon's historic visit to the People's Republic of China in February 1972 marked a Sino-American rapprochement and the beginning of the route to normalization of relations. This came more than twenty years after mainland China was "lost" to the communists and, less than a year later in 1950, attacked American-led United Nations forces in Korea. Thereafter, a key tenet of U.S. Cold War strategy was to "contain" Communist China by means of bilateral alliances and military bases in East Asia, and to isolate it by severing trade, travel, and diplomatic contacts and refusing to recognize the communist regime. The next twenty years were characterized by American opposition to UN membership for mainland China, three crises in the Taiwan Straits, offensive rhetoric, threats of nuclear attack, and the fighting of a proxy war in Vietnam. In ending this hostile estrangement in 1972, Nixon thus executed a dramatic reversal of U.S. China policy. The U.S.–China rapprochement was the most significant strategic shift of the Cold War prior to 1989, more so than the Sino-Soviet split. As Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger claimed, the rapprochement "changed the world" by transforming a Cold War international system made up of two opposing

ideological blocs into a tripolar one in which great-power foreign policy was conducted on the basis of "national interest" and power balancing.

This reversal of policy, while dramatic, is not generally considered difficult to explain.[1] The U.S.–China rapprochement is understood as the result of the operation of the realist logic of balance-of-power.[2] Washington and Beijing were brought together by a shifting balance of power, which saw the former's military superiority reduced in relation to Moscow, and the latter no longer an ally but a significantly weaker adversary facing a possible war with the Soviet Union.

The Sino-Soviet relationship was characterized from the start by ideological tension, which developed as the two states competed for leadership in the international communist movement.[3] This conflict was evident not only in the fierce disagreements about issues such as the communist revolutionary struggle and relations with the United States, but also in Moscow's declining support for its ally.[4] By the late 1960s, the conflict had developed military dimensions, with troop build-ups on the Sino-Soviet border. The Chinese decision for rapprochement with the United States was motivated by two sets of reasons. First, at the national security level, Beijing needed the U.S. opening to deter a Soviet attack. China's strategic position in relation to its militarily superior neighbor worsened

[1] The best accounts of the rapprochement are found in Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972* (Washington, DC, 1992), pp. 35–40; Robert Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation: The United States and China, 1969–1989* (Stanford, 1995), pp. 1–54; John Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement with the United States, 1968–1971* (Boulder, 1982); and William Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York, 1998). A detailed but journalistic account based on new documents and interviews is provided by Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China* (New York, 1999), pp. 45–180. For a succinct recent account of the Chinese decision based on new documents, see Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, 2001), Chapter 9.

[2] Realist and neo-realist schools of thought perceive the international system to be anarchical, causing states to be preoccupied with ways to enhance their relative military power in order to secure themselves against threats from other states, including forging alliances to balance against another powerful state. See Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York, 1949); Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Relations* (Reading, 1979); and Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, 1987).

[3] See Steven Goldstein, "Nationalism and Internationalism: Sino-Soviet Relations," in Thomas Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1994).

[4] Moscow's qualified military support for Beijing had been evident as early as the 1950s, when, anxious to avoid a conflict with the United States, it tried to dampen Chinese bellicosity during the Taiwan Straits crises. See Gordon Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China and the Soviet Union, 1948–1972* (Stanford, 1990), pp. 187–8, 199–200.

dramatically in 1968, when Soviet forces invaded Czechoslovakia and the Kremlin used the Brezhnev Doctrine to justify its use of force to defend socialism in neighboring communist states. Soviet escalation of border clashes in 1969 and hints of an attack on Chinese nuclear installations convinced Beijing that Moscow harbored imperialist intentions toward a China weakened by the Cultural Revolution.[5] Second, at the international level, Beijing wanted to preempt a superpower collusion intended to contain China in the context of the developing Soviet-American détente. At the same time, China's strategic position vis-à-vis the United States was also changing: the 1969 Nixon Doctrine portended a relative American withdrawal from the region after Vietnam, which would reduce the scope of immediate Sino-American conflict. This rendered the United States a potential ally with whom China could cooperate as a balance against the primary Soviet threat.[6] This Chinese maneuver reflected the flexible alliances of classic realist politics; indeed, China is recognized as one of the most explicitly and consistently *realpolitik* of regimes.[7]

The American desire for rapprochement can similarly be placed within a realist framework. The late 1960s saw the United States in a weakening position vis-à-vis its superpower rival: the Vietnam conflict had sapped American military, political, economic, and psychological strength, allowing relative Soviet ascendance, notably in the form of a closing of the "missile gap." China's weakness was an opportunity for the United States to turn the Sino-Soviet split to its advantage by enlisting China in an implicitly anti-Soviet alignment. The United States was already seeking détente with the Soviet Union, and rapprochement with China supplemented this overall strategy of reducing tensions. At the same time, it was thought that the prospect of closer relations between the United States and China would alarm the Soviets into quickening the détente process. Washington also hoped that China would put pressure on Hanoi to negotiate peace with the United States, or if not, that the rapprochement itself would raise doubts in Hanoi about the reliability of its Chinese ally and predispose the former to negotiating a settlement.[8]

[5] Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement*, Chapter 2; Lowell Dittmer, *Sino-Soviet Normalization and Its International Implications, 1945–1990* (Seattle, 1992), pp. 188–91.
[6] Garver, *China's Decision for Rapprochement*, Chapter 1; J. D. Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine* (Berkeley, 1977).
[7] Alastair Johnston, "Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China," in Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York, 1996).
[8] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), pp. 685, 182, 190; Harding, *A Fragile Relationship*, pp. 35–40.

Thus, the rapprochement was brought about by strategic developments and shrewd leaders skilled in *realpolitik*: since, in the realist model, a key aim of states is to prevent the rise of a potential hegemon in the international system, Washington and Beijing lay aside their mutual antagonism in order to cooperate in curbing the rising power of Moscow. However, this account is conceptually problematic because it implies that structural changes automatically induce appropriate, rational responses from states. This leads to two key shortcomings.

First, the account lacks historical context. This stems in part from the fact that until recently, the key primary sources were Nixon, who took office in 1969, and Kissinger, who had a personal academic penchant for *realpolitik*.[9] Yet even if one accepts the primacy of the realist explanation, there remains the question of why reconciliation did not happen earlier. The strategic implications of the Sino-Soviet split became publicly apparent in 1962, when their ideological quarrel moved into the realm of interstate relations.[10] Why did the balance-of-power response from Washington and Beijing take so long? What other factors were involved in determining the timing and the nature of rapprochement?

The 1960s is sometimes regarded as a decade during which China policy was moribund because U.S. officials remained locked into a rigid Cold War ideology.[11] Yet during the 1960s, the informed public was already pushing for a relaxation of the policy of isolating China. There were two distinct sets of public arguments for conciliatory moves toward China. The first – issuing from religious groups, "old China hands," "Chinese friendship" groups, scholars, and others of a liberal-humanist persuasion – was moralistic, arguing for reconciliation in order to reverse an unjust U.S. policy. The second set of arguments stemmed from the mass public's worry about the Chinese threat to American security interests. The hope here was that rapprochement would help to reduce tensions with China and limit American commitments in Southeast Asia.

[9] For a trenchant analysis of Kissinger's *realpolitik* convictions in theory and practice, see Stanley Hoffman, *Primacy or World Order: American Foreign Policy since the Cold War* (New York, 1978), Chapter 2.

[10] In 1960, Moscow withdrew its technicians, suspended all agreements for scientific and technical cooperation, and radically reduced trade with China. By 1962, it had closed all its China consulates. Their reactions to each other's major foreign adventures in 1962 – the Chinese openly criticized the Soviet handling of the Cuban crisis, while the Soviets covertly offered help to India in the Sino-Indian war – portended the death of their alliance.

[11] Kissinger was the most dismissive – see his *White House Years*, p. 685.

This trend became increasingly marked as the 1960s wore on and the public sense of "Vietnam fatigue" heightened.[12]

There were similar trends within policy-making bodies. Rosemary Foot has described the arguments among some midlevel American officials that the dangers of dealing with China had diminished because it had been weakened by the Sino-Soviet split and by the failure of its ambitious economic programs. A second argument was based on the continuing need to limit Chinese power. Given China's huge standing army and growing nuclear capability, international arms control regimes would require Chinese participation if they were to be effective. The third argument stemmed from the realization that Washington's policy of isolating China was being seriously challenged in the international arena.[13] How did these other ideas of reconciliation with China relate to Nixon's rapprochement? If there were significant changes in China policy thinking prior to 1969, how can we account for the timing of the rapprochement, occurring as it did only during Nixon's first term and not before?

The second main shortcoming of orthodox accounts of the rapprochement is that they have been occupied with explaining *why* but not *how* reconciliation was achieved. Insufficient attention has been paid to the policy-making and policy advocacy processes, which can offer important insights that will aid in setting the context for and facilitating understanding of the "why" questions.[14] While memoir accounts of the rapprochement incorporate the role of agency, they do not deal systematically with how ideas affect the policy-making process. The most significant puzzle of the time is how the rapprochement could have happened. The existing

[12] Leonard Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: America's China Policy, 1949–1979* (Westport, 1984), pp. 115–17; A. Doak Barnett, *Communist China and Asia: Challenge to American* Policy (Oxford, 1960); Akira Iriye, ed., *U.S. Policy Toward China: Testimony Taken from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings 1966* (Boston, 1968).

[13] Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: US Relations with China since 1949* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 207–18, 32–46. See also Arthur Waldron, "From Nonexistent to Almost Normal: US-China Relations in the 1960s," in Diane Kunz, ed., *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade: American Foreign Policy during the 1960s* (New York, 1994); Rosemary Foot, "Redefinitions: The Domestic Context and America's China Policy in the 1960s," in Robert Ross and Jiang Changbin, eds., *Re-examining the Cold War: US-China Diplomacy, 1954–1973* (Cambridge, 2001).

[14] Robert Ross is a notable exception. He sees the common Soviet threat as the force that drove Washington and Beijing to cooperate, but directs his attention to the issue of how, through "continuous negotiations and mutual adjustments," the two sides were able to cooperate by managing their fundamental conflict of interest over the Taiwan issue. See Ross, *Negotiating Cooperation*, pp. 1–2.

U.S. Cold War strategy and policy was based on the identification of China as an implacable communist foe, worse even than the Soviet Union because more unpredictable and irrational. Wars had been, and were being, fought based upon this conviction. How was it possible that under Nixon, China shifted from being the United States' worst enemy to being its friend and even tacit ally? This suggests a serious alteration in perceptions and representations of China, a process with which available accounts do not engage in a sustained manner. These accounts are also silent on the issue of how and why Nixon and Kissinger managed to convince others of the rationality of their new policy. Policy changes do not occur automatically – the gap between the convictions of the policy elite, on the one hand, and policy output, on the other, is mediated by a political advocacy process that is often ignored by those who assume either universal rationality or an "imperial presidency." In Nixon's case, various bureaucratic, national, and international constituencies had to be convinced: among them, the China lobby and anticommunist conservative elements; the left wing, concerned with protecting détente with the Soviet Union; U.S. allies in Asia, worried about U.S. defense commitments; and even the Chinese leaders themselves.

This study aims to overcome the shortfalls of the available accounts of the Sino-American rapprochement using an approach that may be termed conceptual history. Rather than investigating the history of U.S. China policy or Sino-American diplomatic relations per se, it is primarily interested in identifying and tracing the changing perceptions of China and ideas about China policy associated with the rapprochement. The focus is on the themes and concepts within the debates about alternative policy positions in official American policy-making circles, and on the justification and implementation of the chosen policies from 1961 to 1974. The analysis of the official U.S. China policy discourse across the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations is a significant departure from many available works on post-1949 U.S.–China relations, which tend to treat 1960s China policy thinking as an extension of that of the 1950s, and the Nixon administration as a watershed marking a new era in China policy.[15]

The alternative questions posed in this study may be recognized as the "how possible" queries emphasized by constructivists, in contrast

[15] See, for instance, Warren Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations* (New York, 2000); Chang, *Friends and Enemies*; Harding, *A Fragile Relationship*; and James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York, 1998).

to the basic "why" questions that realists try to answer.[16] Constructivist approaches prioritize ideas and identity in the creation of state interests because they work from the basis that all reality is socially constructed.[17] The international system, for instance, does not exert an automatic "objective" causal influence on states' actions. Rather, state policy choices result from a process of perception and interpretation by state actors, through which they come to understand the situation that the state faces and to formulate their responses. Furthermore, actors may, by their actions, alter systemic structures and trends.[18] Even beyond that, some constructivists argue that actors themselves change as they evolve new ideas and conceptions about identity and political communities. Thus, the constructivist understanding of "reality" centers upon the interaction of the material and the ideational.[19] The forging of this intersubjective context is a contentious process, but often particular representations are so successful that they become a form of "common sense," encompassing a system of understanding about a body of subjects, objects, and issues with implicit policy consequences. This structure of representation may be termed a discourse, and a radical change in policy occurs when the prevailing discourse is challenged and altered.

The key conceptual focus in this study is on discourses, rather than on ideas, belief systems, or ideology, because the former conveys more effectively the multifaceted process by which meaning is constituted by policy actors and by which policy choices are constructed, contested, and implemented. Discourses may be understood as linguistic representations and rhetorical strategies by which a people create meaning about the world, and they are critical to the process by which ideas are translated into

[16] On constructivist approaches in international relations, see Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23(1) (1998), pp. 171–200; Vendulka Kubálková, Nicholas Onuf, and Paul Kowert, eds., *International Relations in a Constructed World* (London, 1998); and Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, 1999).

[17] On this theme, see especially Ralph Pettman, *Commonsense Constructivism, or the Making of World Affairs* (New York, 2000).

[18] See Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46(2) (Spring 1992), pp. 391–425; and Katzenstein, ed., *Culture of National Security*.

[19] On this school of constructivism, see Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia, 1989); and Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge, 1989).

policy in two ways.[20] First, they perform a constraining or enabling function with regard to state action, in the sense that policy options may be rendered more or less reasonable by particular understandings of, for instance, China, the United States, and the relations between them.[21] Second, discursive practice is an integral element of sociopolitical relations of power.[22] As a key means of producing the categories and boundaries of knowledge by which reality is understood and explained by society, discourses are often deliberate and instrumental. In representing subjects and their relationships in certain ways, political actors have particular objectives and specific audiences in mind.

Here, the focus on changing discursive representations of China and China policy in official American circles allows us to study in particular the policy advocacy process – within internal official circles, to the public, and to the other party in the bilateral relationship – in a significant policy reversal. Bringing to bear the understanding that the creation of meaning by discursive practice is an essential means of influencing political action, this book investigates the contested process by which the different actors and parties defined and redefined identities, generated new knowledge, and created new meanings in order to construct and maintain a new U.S.–China relationship.

In this study, each discourse about China may be understood to encompass the following elements: an image or representation of China; a related representation of U.S. identity; an interpretation of the nature of U.S.–China relations; and the "logical" policy options that flow from these representations. For ease of reference, each subdiscourse that is identified here is centered upon the core image of China upon which it is built. An image is simply the perception of a particular object or subject, the normative

[20] Karen Litfin, *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Cooperation* (New York, 1994), p. 3. The concept of discursive formations and practices originates in Foucault's work on power/knowledge; see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London, 1972). See also Henrik Larsen, *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis: France, Britain and Europe* (London, 1997); and Gearoid Tuathail and John Agnew, "Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in American Foreign Policy," *Political Geography* 11(2) (1992), pp. 192–3.

[21] See Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction"; and Jutta Weldes and Diana Saco, "Making State Action Possible: The US and the Discursive Construction of 'The Cuban Problem', 1960–1994," *Millennium* 25(2) (1996), pp. 361–96.

[22] Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder, 1994), pp. 29–31; Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European Journal of International Relations* 5(2) (June 1999), pp. 225–54.

evaluation of it, and the identity and meaning ascribed to it.[23] The concept of images is employed here mainly as an analytical shorthand, as the image is but one of four subcomponents of each discourse.[24]

Discourses or images are not advanced as alternative explanatory variables for the U.S.–China rapprochement. Rather, this is an investigation of the existence and influence of groups of ideas of reconciliation with China, and of how these affected the ultimate policy outcome of rapprochement. In this sense, we are interested, above all, in the rapprochement as a process of change. The focus on discourse and process necessitates establishing a historical context and thus expands the temporal scope of this study to include the China policy debates in the 1960s and the implementation of rapprochement policy during the last two years of the Nixon administration. This book investigates official U.S. discourse on China during the period 1961–74 as a whole, focusing on alternative systems of representation, how one or more became dominant, and to what effect.[25] In contrast to the existing literature, this constructivist, discourse-based approach situates the prevailing *realpolitik* account of the rapprochement within the context of other ideas about reconciliation with China over a fifteen-year period. In the process, it offers new insights into critical issues of historical interest relating to the timing of, the motivations for, the bargains surrounding, and the evolving nature of the Sino-American rapprochement.

In 1969, there were, without doubt, significant material changes in relative international power that prompted strategic reassessments in Washington, Beijing, and Moscow. At the same time, however, these assessments were mediated by ideational factors. This constitutive relationship can be investigated if we first demonstrate that different groups of

[23] See Kenneth Boulding, *The Image* (Ann Arbor, 1956); Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton, 1970); and Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase and Ursula Lehmkuhl, eds., *Enemy Images in American History* (Providence, 1997).

[24] This study may be distinguished from some notable historical-cultural works that emphasize the role of mutual images per se in Sino-American relations. See Tang Tsou, *America's Failure in China, 1941–50* (Chicago, 1963); Harold Isaacs, *Images of Asia: American Views on China and India* (New York, 1968); Akira Iriye, ed., *Mutual Images: Essays in American-Japanese Relations* (Cambridge, 1975); John Fairbank, *China Watch* (Cambridge, 1987); and Harry Harding, "From China, with Disdain: New Trends in the Study of China," *Asian Survey* 22(10) (October 1982), pp. 934–58.

[25] The analysis could have been extended further back to 1949, the year the PRC was formed, which has been the preferred starting point for most post–World War II works on U.S.–China relations. Time and space preclude such a broad time frame for this project.

officials read these same material changes in different ways and recommended different policy responses, depending upon their representations of China, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Based on knowledge about the wider context of U.S. China policy thinking across the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations, we begin by positing that in 1969, Washington had at least four policy options in response to the changing balance of power, all of which could have been justified on power political grounds.

Option 1. Washington could have *done nothing*, allowed the intra-communist dispute to further weaken the opposing camp, and thus increased the relative strength of the U.S.-led Western camp. Indeed, this was the policy effectively adopted by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations when they were faced with evidence of increased Sino-Soviet tensions throughout the 1960s. It was a cautious policy of not wanting to exploit uncertain divisions in the opposing camp in case these efforts should backfire and cause the two communist powers to coalesce again in common opposition to the United States.[26]

Option 2. The United States might have *supported the Soviet Union against China*. Given that part of the Sino-Soviet feud centered on Beijing's more militant and revolutionary views, this stance would have accorded with the perception that China was the greater communist threat. Newly available documentary evidence suggests that Kennedy and Johnson had both considered the possibility of joint military action with the Soviet Union against China's developing nuclear capabilities in 1963 and 1964.[27] Furthermore, it has been suggested that in 1969, Nixon and Kissinger were willing to condone a Soviet attack on China in return for Moscow's help in ending the Vietnam War.[28]

Option 3. This is the option that Nixon and Kissinger claim to have pursued, in which the United States would simultaneously improve relations with both the Soviet Union and China. By creating a *"triangular relationship,"* they attempted to exploit the Sino-Soviet conflict. By maintaining better relations with Beijing and Moscow than they did with each other, the United States would be able exert leverage both ways and to

[26] This was a public posture as well as an internal official policy stance; it was stated most clearly at the end of the Kennedy administration and early in the Johnson years. The documentary evidence and details are discussed in Chapter 2.

[27] William Burr and Jeffrey Richelson, "Whether to 'Strangle the Baby in the Cradle': The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960–64," *International Security* 25(3) (Winter 2000/1), pp. 54–99. This is discussed in Chapter 2.

[28] Tyler, *A Great Wall*, pp. 62–3. This is discussed and evaluated in Chapter 6.