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*The CCP's legitimacy crisis and Sino-American rapprochement.* [MSc]

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# **The CCP's Legitimacy Crisis and Sino-American Rapprochement**

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Part I – The CCP's Legitimacy Crisis and Sino-American Rapprochement.....	8
The Sino-Soviet split.....	10
The Vietnam War.....	11
Taiwan.....	12
Elite Politics.....	12
Part II – The Decline of Maoism.....	15
The fading 'revolution' and crumbling security.....	15
First steps and the Four Marshals study group.....	17
Opening gambits.....	19
The influence of Edgar Snow.....	21
Ping-Pong Diplomacy.....	23
Kissinger's secret visit.....	25
The Lin Biao incident.....	28
Final moves.....	29
Part III - Conclusion.....	32
Bibliography.....	35

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## Abstract

Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972 was the result of several years of negotiating between China and the United States. Before 1989, Sino-American reconciliation was the most important event of the cold war. The conventional explanations of Sino-American reconciliation point to America's loss in Vietnam, the crises in Taiwan and of course; the Sino-Soviet split. This dissertation argues that in addition to these factors, the CCP's legitimacy crisis had large part to play in the course of Sino-American rapprochement. By examining the process chronologically, the conclusion is drawn that the collapse of the CCP's legitimacy (as a result of the Cultural Revolution) led Mao to open negotiations with the West.

## Introduction

At the beginning of 1969 it appeared that the latent conflict between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States of America had reached boiling point. President Richard Nixon's landmark visit to China in February 1972 marked a Sino-American rapprochement, as well as the beginning of the path towards normalisation of relations. This came more than two decades after mainland China declared itself a Communist state and, less than a year later in 1950, attacked American-led UN forces in Korea. After this a key aspect of U.S. Cold War policy was to contain Communist China through means of military bases in East Asia and bilateral alliances; and to isolate the PRC by means of severing trade, travel, diplomatic contacts, and in refusing to recognise the new regime. The next twenty years were characterised by American opposition to mainland China's UN membership, three crises in the Taiwan Straits, threats of nuclear attack, offensive rhetoric and the fighting of a proxy war in Vietnam. In ending this hostile climate in 1972, both sides instigated a dramatic reversal of foreign policy. The Sino-American rapprochement was the most significant event of the Cold War prior to 1989. As Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger (1989, p. proclaimed, the reconciliation "changed the world" by transforming a Cold War international system composed of two opposing sides into a tri-polar affair; one in which foreign policy was conducted on the basis of power-balancing and national interest.

On a list of challenges facing the CCP, one may be forgiven for assuming that ideological consistency is not an issue. However there are many in the party that even today still believe that their continued leadership (along with their economic, organisational and political reforms) requires an ideological rationale. Since the victory of the 1949 revolution, the continued rule of the CCP has been characterised by a practically relentless struggle to legitimise their monopoly on political power. During the Mao era, attempts to derive legitimacy were centred on a combination of a blend of nationalist and Marxist ideology, mass participation in political affairs, and the charismatic authority of Mao Zedong; which was reinforced by the widely propagated Cult of Personality. The dramatic failure of the

Cultural Revolution was the most dangerous threat to this legitimacy; so much so that Mao was forced to reconsider his approach to the United States: what better way to regain legitimacy than by opening up relations with the West and showing them the error of their ways?

The Cultural Revolution is perhaps the most extraordinary event in China's post-1949 history. Originally conceived by Mao as a radical movement to reverse the pattern of revisionism in Chinese society and politics, it quickly spiralled out of control until in 1967, China was on the verge of civil war. The key aggressors were the Red Guards, millions of young students drawn from China's universities and schools. The victims however came from a much wider background: from top party and government officials to parents; some were verbally abused, others were beaten and incarcerated. Some were even executed, or simply gave up hope and took their own lives. The drama and complexity of the events that unfolded during the Cultural Revolution can make it difficult to comprehend exactly why Mao launched the initiative in the first place. Some academic interpretations dismiss the movement as a sinister plot by Mao to overthrow some members of the party leadership (for example Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi) who were determined to block his radical policy ideas (Leys, 1977; Jung Chang and Halliday, 2005). The Cultural Revolution was therefore a smokescreen behind which Mao tried to regain the absolute control and power that he had lost during the Great Leap Forward. Another interpretation contextualises the movement as a struggle between two sides of the party: Mao headed the radical wing of the party and Liu Shaoqi represented the more moderate wing (Dittmer, 1974).

The backbone of the ideological legitimacy of any communist regime is a perception among the masses that the regime is righteous and moral, and leads by example. Furthermore in-keeping with its role as the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat", the ruling party must act exclusively in the interests of the people, not themselves. The chaos that was the Cultural Revolution exposed the CCP as a party that was more concerned with factional infighting and political differences than the welfare of the people, had failed to stop one man from monopolising power, and had allowed the country to sink into turmoil. Amongst the Chinese youth in particular, these factors, and the fact that many of them lost years of their lives in rural exile, saw them lose their faith in the CCP. Moreover, this must

have led many to question whether the party was still fit to run the country at all. As Harry Harding (1997), p. 245) notes, the fact that such a “calamitous...event was launched in the name of Marxism served to undermine their faith in ideology, and the inability of the Party to prevent the Cultural Revolution served to weaken their confidence in the existing political system”.

This dissertation is divided into two parts, with the overall aim being to explore the links between the CCP's legitimacy crisis and Sino-American rapprochement.

✧ Part one focuses on the fallout of the Cultural Revolution (both economic and political), and then moves on to the more conventional explanations of Sino-American rapprochement. This includes the Sino-Soviet split, elite politics and the war in Vietnam.

✧ Part two is the larger of the two sections and focuses on the links between the legitimacy crisis and Sino-American reconciliation, chronologically. It begins by examining China's deteriorating security situation, before moving on to the first steps towards rapprochement. It then devotes a chapter to the important legitimising role Edgar Snow had in the process. After this we will examine the so-called 'Ping-Pong Diplomacy' and Kissinger's secret visits. Finally we will look at the Lin Biao affair before finishing with the final steps towards Nixon's visit.



## Part I – The CCP's Legitimacy Crisis and Sino-American

### Rapprochement

This dissertation contends that the Sino-American rapprochement has close ties with the CCP's legitimacy crisis. Its legitimacy began to erode in the late 1960s with the political discontent created by the Cultural Revolution, which saw the CCP lose a significant part of the political and social stability they had worked so hard to foster. It was here that the Chinese people began to lose some of their ideological fervour and replace it with cynicism and bitterness (Haus and Hausman, 2012, p. 276). Linked to this was the severe damage done to the Chinese economy – economic production was halted in many areas during the first three years of the Cultural Revolution, and normal economic activity was seriously disrupted during the whole affair. Indeed between 1966 and 1968, agricultural and industrial output dropped 13% (MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 2008, p. 267-8). After around twenty years of socialist rule, the Chinese economy had failed to develop as hoped. As a result the CCP found it increasingly hard to fulfil on the promises they had made during the revolution. Living standards were dropping rather than improving, rationing became a permanent feature of life, and even low-quality consumer products were hard to come by. China found itself lagging behind its Asian neighbours, all of which were ideological rivals (Yang, 1996, p. 208).

After the summer of 1967 Mao (under pressure from the army) realised that if the CCP had any hope of regaining its grip on power, the Cultural Revolution must be abandoned. In Wuhan the more radical Red Guards gained control of several government buildings and in an effort to wrestle control back, Chen Zaidao (the head of the Wuhan PLA) helped the more conservative Red Guards launch a counter-attack. Beijing responded by sending two messengers down to Wuhan in an effort to put a stop to the siege, but Chen immediately arrested the two envoys and refused to allow Zhou Enlai's plane to land when he attempted a personal visit a few days later (Robinson, 1971, p. 426). This led to an episode close to civil war in which PLA battalions loyal to Mao and Zhou were sent down the Yangtze river to attack the pro-establishment Wuhan PLA and rescue the two arrested

messengers (Robinson, 1971, p. 426).

Indeed it was chaotic events such as this that forced Mao to issue a directive demanding the Red Guards lay down their arms and cease factional in-fighting – the PLA was now in charge. The following months were dedicated to consolidating this power, and controlling further outbreaks of violence between Red Guard factions. In July 1968 millions of Red Guards were arrested by the military and sent down to the countryside, which was initially only meant to be an exercise in purification (Brugger, 1981, p. 152). It was thought that rubbing elbows with the peasants would give the more radical Red Guards a dose of reality. In practice however, although most peasants were largely untouched by the Cultural Revolution (Baum, 1971), they were well-informed of and hated the Red Guards. As a result the peasants were unwilling to share their hard-earned food with these young, irresponsible troublemakers who had caused so much upheaval in China. This in turn led to untold suffering on the part of the Red Guards, often leading to death from starvation (Bernstein, 1977).

The Ninth National Party Congress in 1969 is regarded by many as the end of the violence of the Cultural Revolution (however not its radicalism). By the Spring of that year most Red Guard groups had broken up and the PLA was functioning as China's government; something that was reflected in the structure of the Congress. Of the 1500 delegates around 65% came from the military, and near 50% of the elected Central Committee were the same. Another 20% of the Central Committee were drawn from mass organisations, who's representatives were older, more conservative and sympathetic to the PLA (Harding, 1997, p. 229). But if the Cultural Revolution was officially over, the future was far from certain. The composition of the newly-elected Politburo did not represent a victory for the chairman. Yes, he and Lin Biao were in a stronger position than they had been before the Cultural Revolution, but within the Politburo were several factions and groups with their own interests. Moreover, there were six members of the Cultural Revolution Group, all of whom were dedicated to continuing the Cultural Revolution (Myers et al, 1986, p. 96). This, paired with the uncertainty over the future direction of policy and party-state apparatus, led to a period of instability and infighting that defined the last few years of Mao's life.

As we will see the CCP failed to recoup their losses in the aftermath of the Cultural

Revolution. In an effort to regain full power, Mao decided to try and normalise Sino-American relations. This dissertation argues that the CCP's legitimacy crisis and Sino-American rapprochement are closely linked. Before considering this though, it is necessary to analyse the more conventional explanations of Sino-American rapprochement.

## The Sino-Soviet split

William Burr (2001) argues that while the goals of the two governments made rapprochement compelling, the process was certainly not a straight line. Nevertheless, increasing pressures from the Sino-Soviet border dispute accelerated their efforts to forge closer ties. Furthermore he argues that it was concerns over Beijing's nuclear power and an interest in Chinese markets that led the Nixon administration to signal that they were seeking a new relationship. Both Washington and Beijing would find ways to communicate their interests in this new relationship – a combination of gestures and public statements were critical for raising confidence in the fact that pursuing dialogue was worth it. For instance statements by PRC officials and actions such as the release of American captives aided the Nixon administration in understanding that Chinese policy was moving in new directions. Similarly; statements made by American officials, as well as the withdrawal of destroyers helped abate Chinese fears of U.S.-Soviet collusion.

Evelyn Goh (2005) suggests that in fact Henry Kissinger played up the Soviet threat and the value of a relationship with America. She claims that the U.S.'s immediate goal in pursuing a relationship with China was to boost the momentum of a *détente* with the Soviets – it was conceived as leverage to improve relations with and seek co-operation with Moscow. Yet this idea worked alongside the aim of *containing* the Soviets as well (Goh, 2005, p. 499). Yang Kuisong (2000) turns his attention to the Sino-Soviet border clashes at Zhenbao Island in 1969, and how they are related to rapprochement. Yang postulates that it has been widely accepted by scholars that the incident played an important role in shaping the re-orientation of China's U.S. policy in the late 1960s and early 70s. He discusses the the Zhenbao Island incident within the context of both the development of

the Sino-Soviet border conflict and China's evolving domestic and international policies in the late 1960s. He concludes that by reducing their own hostile stance towards the People's Republic in the aftermath of the crisis, the Nixon administration made it possible for the Beijing leadership to begin a major re-orientation of its foreign relations.

Wang Zhongchun (2005) agrees that the Soviet military threat was the primary reason for China seeking improved relations with America, and argues that it would have been “unimaginable” for this to happen otherwise. He adds though that in splitting USSR forces east and west, America's strategic position was greatly improved – China played a unique and indispensable role in U.S. security policy (Wang, 2005, p. 172). He also argues that changes in China's policies towards the United States in the late 1960s and early 70s transcended ideological differences and reflected a strategic adjustment (the relaxation of tensions between China and America). This played a significant role in improving China's security environment, maintaining peace and stability and furthering China's policy of economic opening and reform. He concludes by noting that containing the Soviet threat was not the only area that China and America co-operated on. Indeed, both Chinese and American strategic analysts increasingly realised that healthy development of relations between the two countries had great significance for global peace and development. As such, even after the end of the cold war and the dissolution of the Soviet Union removed the original foundation for rapprochement (and despite some continuing tension), the relationship between the two countries has continued to progress.

## The Vietnam War

Much has been written about the Vietnam War and how it affected rapprochement. Li Danhui (2005) argues that in relaxing tensions with America, China was presented with a dilemma – they had to readjust their relations with Vietnam, the enemy of the United States. Therefore the adjustment of China's foreign policy worked around two competing ideas: to improve relations with America, while at the same time continue to aid North Vietnam. Li observes that over the course of just a few years Chinese foreign policy shifted

from being revolutionary to pragmatic. As a result of this, when the war ended and a new balance of power established itself, Vietnam became all the more prominent. For instance in the early 1970s, after China began to work with the States to counter the Soviet Union, Vietnam formed an alliance with the Soviet Union to offset China and the U.S. (Li, 2005, p. 208). John Garver (1981) agrees with Burr, but also postulates that the Sino-Vietnamese conflict had a large influence on rapprochement. As the U.S. and China developed their relationship, Chinese relations with Vietnam became increasingly strained. Indeed, Hanoi played on both the Soviets and the Chinese in order to compel both of them to aid Vietnam's fight against America. However Chris Connolly (2005) notes that it is too simplistic to say that China 'sold-out' Vietnam when pursuing relations with America – it also continued to support North Vietnam's war effort. The direct consequences of Sino-American rapprochement were positive for Hanoi, in the form of increased Chinese aid and Chinese non-interference with peace negotiations (but what they really wanted was for China to postpone rapprochement until the end of the war). On the basis of hundreds of interviews with North Vietnamese POWs, Connolly (2005, p. 523) argues that one should consider not “what they had done...but what they had not done”.

## Taiwan

A factor that has been seen to influence heavily rapprochement was the Taiwan Issue. Evelyn Goh (2009) observes that the issue was divided into three parts – America's military presence on the island, the U.S.-ROC Mutual Defence Treaty, and the political status of Taiwan with regards to the PRC. Goh (2005, p. 193) notes that as U.S. bases on Taiwan were arguably not crucial to force deployment strategy in Asia they were negotiable, and American troops withdrawals would serve as a symbolic gesture to downgrade Taiwan as a roadblock to rapprochement. Nancy Tucker (2005) puts forward that when Nixon first spoke with Zhou Enlai in 1972 he immediately raised the issue of Taiwan, hoping to set the issue aside and focus on matters than interested him more. Indeed he and Henry Kissinger saw Taiwan as expendable and less valuable than the political and strategic advantages

offered by an improved relationship with the PROC. As a result, the U.S. decided to give China what they wanted in order to make a deal. However as Tucker (2005, p. 135) notes, in the process they misled China's rulers into thinking that America would simply step aside and allow Taiwan to fall apart - when this did not happen Beijing felt betrayed.

## Elite Politics

Another factor a number of scholars have written about is the influence of China's elite politics and Zhou Enlai. In 1969 political conditions in China were improving after the chaos that was the Cultural Revolution, which ended in April of that year. Both Mao and Zhou Enlai wanted to improve relations with America and encountered no opposition in doing so, but Mao was mindful of the need to prepare the CCP for the dramatic changes in Chinese foreign policy. In sending China's ping-pong team to Japan, and inviting the U.S. team to China in 1971, Mao overruled the recommendations of the PROC Foreign Ministry. As Yafeng Xia (2006, p. 25) notes, Mao saw this 'ping-pong diplomacy' as a useful way to prepare the Chinese people and elites for rapprochement. Indeed, throughout this period Mao made all the important decisions regarding China's foreign policy towards America.

However Terry Otis (1989) presents a different position. He argues that Zhou Enlai was unique in Chinese internal and foreign policy annals, at times even eclipsing Mao as the architect of policies to relate China to the rest of the world. He argues that the timing of China's opening was compelled equally by Soviet military pressure and China's internal leadership struggle following the Lin Biao incident. Indeed, Henry Kissinger recalls that he and Zhou were brought together by "necessity" (Kissinger, 1988). Qiu Jin (1999) notes an unexpected political crisis in the CCP leadership in 1971 made Kissinger's visit easier to sell to the party. The Chinese defence minister Lin Biao, who was Mao's designated successor, was accused of plotting to assassinate Mao. His downfall boosted the position of Zhou, who as we have discussed was a strong supporter of opening China's relations with America. Moreover, Mao himself was even more eager to have a major breakthrough in China's foreign relations to offset the domestic political crisis and salvage his declining

reputation and authority.

Gong Li (2001) notes however that even as U.S.-China relations improved, public speeches and the media in China were full of controversial rhetoric. Moreover Li supports Evelyn Goh (2005) by arguing that the Chinese overestimated the Soviet military threat to China's security. On his second visit to China, Kissinger found in his hotel room a leaflet that read "People of the world, unite and defeat U.S. imperialism and its lackeys". This was done in order to safeguard China's external revolutionary image while at the same time develop pragmatic policies to protect national security. In his meeting with Kissinger in February 1973 Mao remarked, "We sometimes criticise you, and you do us. Sometimes we have to say so. If we don't say so, it will not do" (Gong, 2001, p. 359). In other words, a superficial hard-line image, combined with policy pragmatism characterised Chinese diplomacy. He observes that the politics of the Cultural Revolution concentrated all decision-making authority into the hands of Mao Zedong, and it is fortunate that after 1969 Mao increasingly depended on Zhou Enlai. Thereafter, with the advice of Zhou, his decisions on China's foreign policy towards the United States were for the most part correct. Otherwise, given Mao's absolute authority, the results could have been very different.

## Part II – The Decline of Maoism

### The fading 'revolution' and crumbling security

China in 1968-69 was facing a rapidly deteriorating security situation. The dispute between China and the United States (which began as soon as the PRC was created) had escalated and seemed more intense than ever before. For instance with the increasing involvement of America in Vietnam, China dispatched large numbers of anti-aircraft forces and engineers to North Vietnam, and at the same time provided the Vietnamese communists with significant military support (Zhang, 1996, p. 741). The situation was fast becoming a repeat of the Korean War, when both sides were dragged into a conflict that was not their own. This security threat was made worse by the continued military conflict between the CCP and the GMD along the Taiwan Strait. China's Western border with India was faring no better – although India had been easily defeated by China in 1962, it was still able to pin down Beijing's valuable resources and attention (Malik, 1995, p. 318). However by far, the worst threat to China's border security existed in the north with the Soviet Union, as we have already discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

With the remarkable deterioration of China's border security from 1968, it is not surprising that its leaders had to improve their security situation by making dramatic changes in China's foreign policy. Those who have argued that Sino-American reconciliation was the product of a calculated effort from Beijing to counter the serious Soviet threat have strong historical evidence on their side. However, while this argument shows us why it was *necessary* for Beijing to make changes to their foreign policy, it does not explain how it became *possible* for China's leaders to make such drastic changes in the late 60s and early 70s. Nathan and Ross (1998) and many others have argued that in any country, ideological beliefs do not matter if national security is at stake. In other words, in China's case, Mao and his comrades were willing to sacrifice their Marxist-Leninist ideological preferences in foreign policy if they were in conflict with their security interests.



However these arguments neglect two important factors. First of all, China's leaders were pursuing rapprochement with America within the context of completely redefining their concept of imperialism. They not only identified the Soviet Union as a “social-imperialist country”, but also argued that Moscow had replaced Washington D.C. As the hub of “reactionary forces in the world”. Secondly, with regards to the relationship between security concerns and ideology, we will see that it was not simply the latter yielding to the former. Rather, Chinese foreign policy was re-shaped by subtle (yet significant) structural changes as the result of the declining status of Mao's continuous revolution. This all provided the much-needed ideological room for China to justify a reconciliation with America. Maoism draws heavily on traditional Chinese political culture, which emphasises “borrowing the strength of the barbarians to check the barbarians” (Chen, 2001, p. 243); meaning it was acceptable to unite with a less-dangerous enemy to focus on defeating the main enemy. Since China now identified the USSR as their most dangerous enemy, a rapprochement with America became much more justifiable and feasible than it had been only a few years before.

Furthermore, Beijing was able to pursue a reconciliation with the United States because, for the first time the PRC's history, Mao's “continuous revolution” was fast losing momentum. Historically the Cultural Revolution was the result of Mao's drive to transform China's society through vigorous mass-mobilisation. He hoped that it would allow him to recover his much-weakened reputation and authority in the aftermath of the catastrophic Great Leap Forward, but he also wanted to turn China into a land of universal justice, equality and prosperity (Gittings, 2006, ch. 2). The Cultural Revolution certainly achieved the first aim – his authority and power once more became absolute. However he was unable to attain his second goal: although the Revolution certainly destroyed Mao's opponents and the old party-state system, it was completely unable to create the haven that he so desired for China (Gittings, 2006, ch.2). By 1968-9 Mao was ready to stop his “continuous revolution”.

In the summer of 1968 Mao sent the “Workers' Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team” to several universities around Beijing to re-establish the order that had been eroded by the “revolutionary masses”. The Red Guards (who had once been Mao's main tool for carrying

out the Cultural Revolution) during a visit to Qinghua University responded by firing upon the propaganda team. It was after this that Mao decided it was time to liquidate the Red Guards movement; something that marked a huge turning point for his “continuous revolution”. For almost twenty years mobilising the people had been the key ingredient in supporting his revolution; but now Mao was openly standing opposed to mass mobilisation in an attempt to re-establish the CCP's control over the country (Chen, 2001, p. 244). The Maoist notion of China being the centre of the world revolution (something that had been very prevalent since the start of the Cultural Revolution) began to disappear from Beijing's rhetoric). Similarly, Mao completely stopped talking about stirring up a revolutionary environment and spirit. In its place he spoke of focusing on the triumphs of the Cultural Revolution; something which furthered his own political power and authority (Chen, 2001, p. 244).

All of this was a sign that Mao's China, once an unflinching challenger to the “old world” of capitalism, was now showing a willingness to live in this world order. During Mao's era, attempts to derive legitimacy focused mainly on a blend of Marxist and nationalist ideology. Clearly if this is being sacrificed for security interests, a legitimacy crisis is occurring. Indeed it was within this context that when the security threat from the Soviets increased significantly in 1969, Mao began to contemplate a new approach towards America.

### **First steps and the Four Marshals study group**

In November 1968 the first moves were made when America attempted to continue Sino-American ambassadorial talks in Poland. As if they were waiting for such an olive branch, China responded positively with remarkable speed (Holdridge, 1997, p. 25). However, when the U.S. provided asylum for a Chinese official who defected in February 1969, Beijing cancelled the talks. While it is difficult to imagine what Mao's thought process was when he showed interest in dealing with America, he was focusing more of his attention on international issues, trying to understand Washington and Moscow's policy

processes.

It was within this context that Mao asked four of his veteran commanders, who had been cut off from the decision-making process during the Cultural Revolution, to keep a close eye on international affairs. These four marshals had their first meetings in March 1969, which were primarily about the Sino-Soviet border clash at Zhenbao Island. In their reports they were doubtful that the Soviets were prepared to wage all-out war against China, and noted that the USSR's dispute with Washington was over the oil resources in the Middle East. As a result, Moscow would not be able to turn their strategic attention to China until this had been resolved (Xia, 2006, p. 6). While their main suggestions were increasing military training and China's national defence, nowhere in their reports did they mention adjusting Beijing's policy towards America. Later when the four marshals met in June, they submitted a report that argued that America and the USSR were the two sides of the coin of the bourgeoisie; and while seeing China as their enemy, they saw each other as an enemy as well. As both countries were facing several difficulties at home and abroad, it was unlikely that both countries would wage war against China individually, much less unite and fight together (Chen, 2001, p. 247).

After the study group adjourned in July, there were several indications that subtle changes were being made to Washington's attitude to China. Near the end of July the U.S. State Department announced that it was relaxing its restrictions on U.S. citizens travelling to China. Separately, American senator Mike Mansfield wrote a letter to Zhou Enlai expressing his wishes to visit China and try and end the 25-year confrontation between the two nations (Bush and Chen, 2003, p. 17). Indeed after these developments the study group resumed their discussions, and concluded that China should still resist American advances, and recommended that Mansfield be denied visiting rights. However before they could put it in writing another significant Sino-Soviet border clash occurred at Xinjiang, where an entire Chinese platoon was killed (Xia, 2006, p.7). Beijing reacted immediately and ordered the bordering regions to mobilise and, while the marshals had argued it was unlikely that the Soviets would wage war, they believed China should prepare for the worst-case scenario. They recommended here that China should reach out to America and use negotiation against the Soviets – in other words the ambassadorial talks in Poland should

be resumed.

While it is unknown how much Mao himself paid attention to all of these recommendations, the fact that he (through Zhou Enlai) encouraged the Four Marshals to foster ideas that may not have been with the party line is telling enough. According to Mao's own doctor, the chairman remarked that China had “the Soviet Union to the north and west, India to the south, and Japan to the east. Beyond Japan is the United States. Didn't our ancestors counsel negotiating with faraway countries while fighting with those that are near?” (Li, 1994, p. 514). With these unorthodox thoughts in mind, it seems that Mao was determined to explore the possibility of opening up relations with America. His main challenge now was figuring out through which avenue Beijing could establish communication. He would find that, and not just through happen-stance, that Nixon was asking himself the same question.

## Opening gambits

When Nixon wanted to show his “readiness to open communication with Peking” (Kissinger, 1988, p. 180), he had to tread carefully. Washington took the first step in December 1969, when American ambassador to Poland Walt Stoessel (following Nixon's orders) approached a Chinese diplomat at a fashion show in Warsaw. While the diplomat quickly fled the scene, the ambassador was able to catch the Chinese interpreter and convey that he had an important message for the Chinese embassy. With the Chinese report on the American ambassador's behaviour, Zhou Enlai immediately went to Mao and remarked that the “opportunity now is coming...to knock on the door [of the Americans]” (Han, 1995, p. 325) – the premier acted immediately to let Washington know of Beijing's interest. Two months previously in October the U.S. consulate in Hong Kong had requested the release of two citizens being held in China, who had drifted accidentally into Chinese waters in their yacht. The Chinese Foreign Ministry saw the request as a deliberate move to see how Beijing would respond, and proposed that the Americans be released when the time was right. The recommendation sat on Zhou Enlai's desk until the following month,

until he heard about the incident at the fashion show in Warsaw. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, after Mao ratified Zhou's decision, the two Americans were released (Kissinger, 1988, p. 191).

Around a week later Walt Stoessel had an informal meeting with senior Chinese diplomat Lei Yang and, in addition to proposing a recommencement of the ambassadorial talks, he encouraged the Chinese to pay attention to a “series of positive measures” (Kissinger, 1988, p. 188-9) that America had taken recently. While Zhou advised Mao not to act immediately and resume the talks, he let Washington know that if Nixon wanted to resume discussions, he should continue to use the channels in Warsaw. Over the next two months two carefully planned meetings were held between Lei and Stoessel, with a variety of subjects discussed. The Chinese even went so far as to discuss the Taiwan issue, seeking a resolution that would solve the problem while at the same time nurturing Sino-American relations. Most significantly, Lei informed the American ambassador that the Chinese government would be willing to receive a high-ranking American representative in Beijing (Chen, 2001, p. 251). These meetings would turn out to be the final ones in the decade-long engagement between the Chinese and American ambassadors. Eager to make contact with Beijing, Nixon conveyed his interest, guaranteeing it would be kept secret until both parties decided otherwise.

However this message came at a bad time. A few days before the message arrived a pro-American general Lon Nol overthrew Prince Narodom Sihanouk, and became the head of Cambodia's government. Sihanouk went on to establish an exiled resistance government in Beijing, and such developments hindered China and America's attempts to reconcile (Hanhimaki, 2004, p. 80). Indeed in a report to Mao and Lin Biao, Zhou Enlai recommended that the talks be postponed until after mid-April; which Mao approved. Similarly, because the son of Taiwan's premier was scheduled to visit Washington around the same time, the State Department decided it would be unwise to schedule talks so close to the time, and so they were postponed again until May (Kissinger, 1988, p. 692).

Problems continued when Nixon ordered American troops in South Vietnam to cross the border and destroy Communist bases inside Cambodia. Zhou Enlai and the Politburo decided the May talks should once again be postponed and that a statement would be issued in Mao's name that would condemn imperialist America (Li, 2001, p. 325). However

despite this propaganda, the Nixon administration did not give up. Henry Kissinger (1988, p. 695) when analysing Mao's statement told Nixon "it is not personally abusive towards you, and avoids positions on contentious bilateral issues". But at this stage Beijing was not ready to come back to the table, and at another Politburo meeting chaired by Zhou Enlai; they decided although the Chinese liaison personnel would continue to maintain contact with America, the ambassadorial talks would be postponed further. However Beijing did not want reconciliation to lose its momentum completely, and so they released James Walsh, a pastor who had been imprisoned on espionage charges in China since 1958 (Li, 2001, p. 339).

It is important to note however that Beijing slowed the pace of opening communications with Washington not because Nixon ordered the invasion of Cambodia. Rather, a storm was brewing between China's two most powerful men: Mao and Lin Biao. This forced the chairman to turn his attention back to domestic politics, specifically inner-party affairs. In the Spring of 1969 Lin's relationship with the chairman turned sour, and continued to deteriorate rapidly over the course of the next year. By focusing on the triumphs of the Cultural Revolution, Lin argued that Mao should reclaim the position of Chairman of the State. However Mao believed this was a reflection of Lin's own ambition to claim the position for himself (Chen, 2001, p. 253). Indeed after the Summer of 1970 the situation reached a critical point during the Central Party plenary session held near the end of August. At one point it seemed that Lin and his supporters had gained the following of most of the members, and only when Mao took the floor did he take back control of the situation (Bridgham, 1973, p. 434). This power struggle obviously took up much of Mao's focus, making it very difficult for him to think about American reconciliation. As a result, talks with Washington were stalled once again.

### **The influence of Edgar Snow**

After Mao had quelled the fires of rebellion, he began to turn his attention back to the Americans. However, while Mao was open to establishing secret talks with the United

States, he did not want to follow a pace and method set by Washington. In the Winter of 1970 Beijing received more advances from Washington through various envoys indicating that Nixon remained willing to dispatch a high-ranking representative to China (Barnett, 1977, p. 195). Beijing once again responded positively to these overtures, and Zhou Enlai conveyed that the China was eager to improve Sino-American relations, and that U.S. was welcome to discuss the Taiwan problem with Chinese representatives. However it is important to note that there was a small delay in relaying this message, something that Henry Kissinger (1988, p. 700-3) found puzzling. The likely reason was that Mao, for the purpose of legitimising the coming developments in the Sino-American relationship, was planning an initiative of his own that was influenced heavily by the American writer Edgar Snow.

Snow had been a long-time friend of Mao and the CCP since before the Second World War, when he interviewed the chairman and other leaders and followed them for several months. The end result was his critically-acclaimed book *Red Star over China*, which nurtured a positive image of the revolution both inside and outside China. After the establishment of the PRC Snow visited China again in the 60s in order to write about Mao's long revolution (Snow, 1972). During the Cultural Revolution he was denied a Chinese visa, but he was invited back in 1970. A great spectacle was made of this, so much so that a photograph of Snow and Mao was printed on the front page of several major Chinese newspapers (Xia, 2006a, p. 150). It is clear that Mao was sending a message to not only the Americans, but the Chinese people as well. Kissinger (1988, p. 698) noted though in his memoirs that America completely ignored this message because the Chinese "overestimated our subtlety". However for once, as far as Mao was concerned, it was far more crucial that the Chinese people received the message. For over twenty years the United States had been thoroughly vilified in the minds of the Chinese via CCP indoctrination and propaganda. As the chairman was pursuing a complete overhaul of policy towards America, he would need to instigate a similar change in the minds of Chinese citizens. Indeed, a subtle sign such as this would help slowly prepare the Chinese psychologically for significant changes in Sino-American relations.

However Mao also had other ideas for Snow. During a lengthy interview regarding Sino-

American relations, Mao stated he was willing to receive Nixon himself in Beijing; and moreover, that China was considering allowing Americans from all political persuasions to come to China, emphasising that Nixon was a man with whom he could “discuss and solve the problems” (Snow, 1971, p. 50) between America and China. After the interview Snow was given a transcript of the discussion, but was advised not to publish it immediately, which he didn't until April 1971, but Washington still managed learn of Mao's statements within days after he made them (Nixon, 1978, p. 547). Mao's concerns were once again over domestic issues – in addition to Sino-American relations, there was much talk of the Cultural Revolution. In a remarkable display of honesty, Mao stated he did not approve of two features during it: the “maltreatment of captives” and “not telling the truth” in an “all-out civil war” (Snow, 1971, p. 49). These statements on the fading nature of the continuous revolution were linked to his ongoing struggle with Lin Biao - he stated that it was over-zealous to regard Lin as a great leader or teacher (Snow, 1971, p. 50).

What we can see is that Mao was comfortable with Edgar Snow; freely discussing both domestic and international issues. This implies that reconciling with America would have to be intertwined with changes in China's social and political life. The content of this message was different from anything that had come before it – rather than encouraging his people to revolt, he was trying to convince them of the need to stop. Given his history with the Party, Edgar Snow was the perfect candidate to relay this message: by using a well-known American sympathiser of the CCP he hoped to justify rapprochement with the party elites. However a dramatic event would unfold in the next few months that did more for rapprochement than any message or statement could ever do.

## **Ping-Pong Diplomacy**

In the beginning of 1971, although both sides were willing to take their discussions to the next level, neither knew exactly how to proceed. A key obstacle was the agenda of such discussions – the main concerns were the Taiwan issue, Korea, Vietnam and how to deal with Japan's growing economic power. During the early conversations in Warsaw, it was



clear that both sides differed significantly on several issues (Roberts, 2006, p. 226). In the meantime both sides were at a stalemate and waiting for the other to make a move. From Mao's point of view, he needed an event that would allow the CCP to gain the people's support for overhauling their relationship with America. It was within the context that he found his event, and in the most unlikely of places: the 31<sup>st</sup> World Table Tennis Championships in Nagoya, Japan.

In the early 1970s table tennis was the most popular sport in China, primarily due to the fact Chinese players could easily beat anyone in the world. Through significant media coverage of the event, several million ordinary Chinese people were following Nagoya with feverish interest (Hanhimaki, 2004, p. 122). Over the course of the tournament the Chinese and American players had several casual encounters, reporting to Beijing that “some American players were very friendly...and had talked a lot” (Chen, 2001, p. 259). Three days later Graham Steenhoven (the manager of the American delegation) ran into Song Zong (his Chinese delegation counterpart) at an International Table Tennis Association meeting break. Steenhoven mentioned that the U.S. State Department had removed all the restrictions on American passports for visiting China, and asked Song if the American team could have the chance to “visit China to learn from the Chinese players” (Close et al, 2007, p. 154). When reporting to Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Foreign Ministry noted that although the timing was not quite right for the Americans to visit, they should be advised that “there will be other opportunities in the future” (Barnouin and Yu, 2006, p. 291). Zhou himself was unsure what action to take and sent the report to Mao for the chairman to make the final ruling.

However while Zhou was preparing his remarks for the chairman, an important incident occurred between the American and Chinese players. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, American player Glenn Cowen accidentally boarded the bus carrying the Chinese players. The Chinese all smiled, but none extended a greeting until three-time world champion Zhuang Zedong approached and presented him with a scarf as a gift. While the manager of the Chinese delegation tried to stop him, Zhuang told him: “Take it easy. As the head of the delegation you have many concerns, but I am just a player. It does not matter” (Engel, 2008, p. 60). Several minutes later Cowen and the Chinese team got off the bus and were met by a

crowd of journalists, eager to document American and Chinese players being friendly to one another. The following afternoon, Cowen returned the gesture by offering Zhuang a Beatles t-shirt (Cha, 2009, p. 76), an exchange that was again caught by the cameras. Back in Beijing, when Mao heard about this exchange he reportedly remarked that Zhuang “not only plays good Ping-Pong, but knows how to conduct diplomacy as well” (Li, 2001, p. 343). Immediately following this he made a call to the Foreign Ministry, and instructed them to invite the American team to China – an invitation that Washington approved straight away.

Unsurprisingly the American team's visit to China was widely covered by the Chinese press, their ping-pong matches even received live radio and television coverage (Xia, 2006a, p. 153-4). Undoubtedly the highlight of the trip was their meeting on April 14<sup>th</sup> with Zhou Enlai, who remarked that the American's visit “opened a new chapter in the history of [Sino-American] relations” (Xia, 2006a, p. 154). Mere hours later, Washington terminated their twenty-two-year-old trade embargo against China. What we can see is that in a few short days, a simple exchange of gifts had transformed the political atmosphere between the United States and China. As Henry Kissinger put it, Sino-American rapprochement had become an “international sensation” and had “captured the world's imagination” (Kissinger, 1988, p. 710).

Once again, Mao came to his decision weighing both international and domestic affairs. When the Americans were engaging in China's most popular sport in front of a live audience, one could argue it was an updated version of the age-old Chinese tribute system. The Chinese players themselves were very friendly to the Americans, even letting them win a few matches. However in the eyes of the Chinese people this was not an indication of friendship so much as superiority (Murphy, 2010, p. 31). Mao's efforts to steer popular opinion on the issue reached a culmination in the media coverage of Zhou Enlai's conversation with the American player Glenn Cowan. According to the media, when Cowen asked Zhou for his opinion on hippies, seemingly Zhou provided him with sage advice and attributed the movement to the “desire on the part of youth to try new things”. Following this Zhou received flowers from Cowen's mother, thanking him for educating her son (Xu, 2008, p. 138) – one could not ask for a more powerful example of a member of the decadent, capitalist America finding life's answers in socialist China.

To build on the momentum of this whole affair, Mao turned to Edgar Snow once again. Not only did he permit him to publish his interview for the West, he also requested a complete transcript (in which he said he was open to receiving Nixon in Beijing) be relayed to the entire country (Komine, 2008, p. 143). Mao's expert tactics further prepared the Chinese population both psychologically and politically for the looming changes in Sino-American relations.

### **Kissinger's secret visit**

In the aftermath of Ping-Pong diplomacy both sides started on plans for a high-level meeting that had been on the table since the end of 1970. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1971 Beijing conveyed a message to Washington stating that Taiwan was still the main obstacle, which “had to be resolved before any relations could be restored”. However they also remarked that they were eager to accept a “special envoy of the president of the United States (for instance Mr. Kissinger)...for a direct meeting and discussion” (Komine, 2008, p. 151). When they received the message Nixon and Kissinger straight away began to work on their response, but for their own domestic political considerations they decided to keep their contact secret until Nixon himself would visit – for now Kissinger would be the best man for the job (Komine, 2008, p. 152). After China received their response Mao instructed Zhou Enlai to hold a Politburo meeting to work out the Chinese response. In the context of these dramatic developments they made an extensive assessment of possible scenarios and developed various responses for their diplomats as the negotiations unfolded.

The eight principles they came away with embodied three noticeable changes in China's attitude. First of all, while demanding that U.S. troops leave Taiwan, China no longer asserted that the America openly sever diplomatic relations with Taiwan as a condition for rapprochement. Secondly, although China continued to assert that the “liberation” of Taiwan was an internal affair, the issue would be resolved peacefully or not at all. Finally if the problem could no be resolved, China put forward the idea of both themselves and America establishing liaison offices in Taiwan for the foreseeable future (Ross, 1995, p. 52).

However these principles also show that Beijing was not quite ready to make *major* concessions, especially over Taiwan – hardly surprising considering that the GMD and CCP had been mortal enemies since 1927. Moreover Beijing was well-aware that the talks could break down, but acknowledged that the talks could do not harm to China (Xia, 2006a, p. 157).

If we turn our attention to the rhetoric of the Politburo report, we can see that it was filled with Cultural Revolution-era diatribes, despite the sensitivity of the issue. The report emphasises that the pursuit of Sino-American rapprochement would not hinder the American people's struggle against the “monopoly capitalist ruling class”. Furthermore they emphasised that the opening of Sino-American discussions was the “victorious result of [China's] struggles against imperialism, revisionism and reactionary forces”, as well as the “inevitable outcome of the internal and external crises facing the U.S. imperialists and the competition”. If the talks failed the “competition between the two superpowers” would be more intense. If they succeeded the “reactionary face” of U.S. imperialism would be further revealed and the Chinese people's “consciousness would be elevated” (Xia, 2006, p. 20). The fact that the report was filled with this ultra-leftist oratory was a clear sign of the difficulty that Chinese leaders were having in deciding how to present this new relationship with America. Despite the lurid language however, the report provided a political foundation for China's reconciliation with the United States.

Mao approved Zhou's draft of the report at the end of May – although he had not attended the meeting he still had final say on the report. Finally after careful planning, Henry Kissinger touched down in Beijing on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, 1971. During the two days he stayed there he met with Zhou and many other high-ranking Chinese officials in meetings that lasted for a total of seventeen hours (Schaller, 2001, p. 374). The most important breakthrough was achieved on the first day when Kissinger stated the U.S. would be willing to withdraw two thirds of their troops from Taiwan when the Vietnam War ended, and more still would be withdrawn as Sino-American relations improved. Moreover he said that America would not support Taiwan's independence, and re-iterated the desire to solve the Taiwan problem in a peaceful manner. While Zhou continued to stress that all American troops must leave Taiwan and that the U.S.-Taiwan treaty be abolished, he remarked that

the differences of their two sides should not get in the way of living in equality and peace (Schaller, 2001, p. 374-5).

Immediately following this meeting Zhou reported back to the Chairman. Upon learning of the breakthrough Mao instructed the premier not to focus on specific issues the next day, but rather “brag” about China's situation. In particular, Mao instructed Mao should tell Kissinger that China was prepared “to be divided by the United States, the Soviet Union and Japan, with them all coming together to invade China” (Chen, 2006, p. 53). Using aggressive rhetoric, the next day Zhou presented Beijing's beliefs on a series of issues; including Vietnam, India, Korea and Taiwan, challenging Washington's policies towards them all. Zhou's “fierce litany” (Kissinger, 1988, p. 750) however was not designed to stall negotiations. Rather it was done to complete a particular tradition that was needed for socialist China to reach compromises with imperialist America. Therefore when Kissinger returned with a point-by-point rebuttal of Zhou's arguments, the premier's attitude reverted back to the more friendly position that had been displayed the day before. Towards the end of the meeting Zhou proposed the two sides discussed the date of Nixon's visit and, with very few compromises, the agreement was reached: Nixon would come to China in the Spring of the following year (Kissinger, 1988, p. 750). The following day a report was presented to Kissinger that stated Zhou Enlai extended an invitation, “knowing of President Nixon's expressed desire to visit the People's Republic of China” with the purpose of “[seeking] the normalization of relations between the two countries” (Barnouin and Yu, 2006, p. 293). Kissinger proceeded to send a telegram to Washington that simply read “Eureka” - the pre-agreed upon signal that his trip had been a success (Hanhimaki, 2004, p. 141). On the 15<sup>th</sup> of July Washington and Beijing announced simultaneously that Richard Nixon was to visit China the following Spring.

### **The Lin Biao incident**

This was all not without consequences however - Henry Kissinger's visit to Beijing incurred tension and suspicion between China and its Asian allies. Days after Kissinger left,

Zhou Enlai travelled to Hanoi to inform the Communist leaders in Vietnam of Beijing's connection with the U.S. He reassured them that their improved relations with the West would eventually enable American policy-makers to see that America's international strategic emphasis lay in Europe, not Asia, and so Hanoi's bargaining power at the negotiating table would be increased (Chen, 2006, p. 53). He also consulted with the North Koreans as well as Cambodia, and informed them of the same long-term plan. Although he must have tried his very best to justify Sino-American reconciliation to China's Asian allies, it seems he had barely convinced those who had listened. For instance the Vietnamese saw Beijing's new relationship with the West as China "throwing a life buoy to Nixon, who almost had been drowned" (Chen, 2006, p. 53).

However these international problems must have been of scant concern for Mao, who was weathering an intense domestic political storm that was brewing during the same time. Chinese defence minister Lin Biao, who was Mao's designated successor and was regarded as his best and most loyal student (Barnouin and Yu, 2006) was accused of plotting a coup to assassinate Mao. In reality it is unclear if this was really the case, but on September 13<sup>th</sup> his wife and son boarded a plane to flee from Beijing, which crashed a few hours later in Mongolia. Whatever the reality of the situation, the Lin Biao affair had influenced the development of Sino-American rapprochement in two significant ways. First of all, his downfall represented one of the biggest crises in the PRC's history – although his alleged coup was defeated, this was not a victory for Mao. As established, Lin was Mao's heir and successor and his closest comrade. His 'betrayal' not only completely dashed the myth of Mao's "eternal correctness", but also (and much more seriously) further eroded Mao's fading continuous revolution. After the incident Zhou started to de-radicalise China's domestic and foreign policies. With Mao's approval he launched a political education drive, toned down anti-American propaganda and restored the names of old shops and stores; many of which had either been altered or shut down since the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (Xia, 2006, p. 69).

Secondly, Lin Biao's ruination might have removed a political obstacle, as well as have provided more justification for China to improve relations with America. Although our knowledge of how Lin really felt about Sino-American reconciliation is hampered by the

lack of reliable resources, several official Chinese sources have noted that Lin was opposed to the whole endeavour (Garthoff, 1994, p. 264), a claim that has the support of other circumstantial evidence. For instance, although Zhou Enlai sent the vast majority of his reports on America to both Mao and Lin for ratification, we almost never see any kind of response from Lin. Indeed if his silence implies objection, Lin's downfall certainly meant that a key opponent to Sino-American reconciliation had been dispatched. What is certain, however, is that Lin's elimination greatly expanded the position of Zhou Enlai, a strong supporter of rapprochement. What we can conclude therefore, is that although the Lin Biao incident began as (and proved to be) a serious challenge to CCP legitimacy, and Mao and his continuous revolution, it turned out to be beneficial to the Sino-American reconciliation.

## Final moves

Although the Lin Biao incident brought China's domestic political situation into unprecedented chaos, Mao (with Zhou's help) pressed on toward reconciliation with the United States. Indeed the communication between the two sides became increasingly direct after Kissinger's visit: Huang Zhen and Vernon Walters, the Chinese and American ambassadors to France, were appointed to serve as messengers (Davis and Trani, 2009, p. 323). Kissinger visited Beijing again near the end of October to sort out the important details of Nixon's visit. In addition to once again exchanging their beliefs on various international issues, he and Zhou experienced some friction over the draft summit communiqué. By the time Kissinger left the two sides had agreed on all points except the Taiwan section (Tucker, 2009, p. 84). It is important to note here that while Kissinger was in Beijing the United Nations General Assembly voted (with the support of an overwhelming majority) to let Beijing have China's seat at the UN, instead of Taipei. This was immediately lauded throughout China as a "great victory" (Chen, 2001, p. 272) of Chinese foreign policy, as well as a representation of the PROC's increased reputation and status. At a time when Mao's continuous revolution had suffered the loss of his people's inner support in the

aftermath of the Lin Biao affair, the fact that Beijing's leaders could proclaim that Mao's revolution had indeed turned China from a unstable and weak country into a significant world power, played a huge role in supplying credibility for Mao's Communist regime.

It was within this context that Alex Haig, Kissinger's deputy on the national security staff, accidentally offended the Chinese hosts. At a meeting with Zhou Enlai on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1972, Haig reported on Nixon and Kissinger's assessment on the recently-settled India-Pakistan crisis. In the report it was made very clear that they were concerned about China's viability, and that maintaining it was in the fundamental interests of the United States (Li, 2001, p. 352-3). When Zhou reported to the chairman he remarked: "Why [should this be] America's concern? ...If China's independence and viability should be protected by the Americans, it is very dangerous [for us]" (Xia, 2006, p. 183). A few days later, Zhou formally told Haig he was surprised that the Americans were so interested in protecting China's viability and independence, and that he firmly believed no country should depend upon a foreign power for this. Doing so would mean the dependant country would become the other's subordinate (Engel, 2008, p. 440). Such importance – or perhaps over-emphasis – on Beijing's determination to uphold its own self-esteem and independence showed that the CCP leaders understood the importance of viability in validating their Communist regime.

On February 21<sup>st</sup> 1972, Richard Nixon touched down in Beijing. He had barely put his feet on the ground when Zhou informed him that Mao was ready to meet him. In this initial conversation Mao refused to go into any specifics, rather he wanted a general discussion about philosophy. He was eager to show Nixon his general perspective – this was to show America he was in total control of Chinese matters, but also that he had a great understanding of anything of significance in the world (Terrill, 1999, p. 393-4). One could even argue that what was so meaningful to Mao was not the subjects of the discussion he was having with Nixon, but the fact that he and Kissinger came to his private residence to listen to *his* philosophies. In a stark revelation about the fading status of his continuous revolution, he admitted to Nixon that he had "only changed a few places in the vicinity of Beijing" (Xia, 2006a, p. 194). However deep down he truly believed he had changed the world. Indeed had he not, the "head of international imperialism" would certainly not have



visited his country.

Of course, the Taiwan issue remained key to finalising the text of the joint communiqué, which Kissinger and his Chinese counterpart were responsible for putting together. The most important issue was finding an expression of America's stance on their agreement to withdraw troops from Taiwan, and Beijing's pledge to a peaceful resolution, that both sides could agree upon. Although this was clearly a delicate case as far as the Chinese were concerned – they had to maintain that everything regarding Taiwan was a Chinese affair – they showed remarkable flexibility by allowing compromises to be reached (Holdridge, 1997, p. 94). On the 28<sup>th</sup> of February the Sino-American joint communiqué was signed in Shanghai. It was an interesting piece that not only emphasised common ground, but areas where the two sides diverged – each side expressed in their own way their basic principles towards important international issues. From China's point of view, such an arrangement benefited their fundamental interests. Furthermore, Nixon's visit established the framework through which a strategic partnership between Washington and Beijing could be formed. The Shanghai communiqué loudly announced that neither side would “seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and each is opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony” (Blum, 2003, p. 240) – a not-so-covert shot at the Soviet Union. More importantly (especially for Mao) the unique layout of the communiqué allowed China to not only remain a revolutionary country, but one on equal footing with America. Indeed, not just for propaganda reasons did Beijing proclaim that Mao had won a great diplomatic victory.

## Part III - Conclusion

The destructive nature of the Cultural Revolution makes it hard for us to remember exactly what Mao had in mind when he began planning the endeavour back in 1962. It is easy however to focus on the chaotic events in Wuhan and Qinghua University, and for this to detract from a clear understanding of Mao's rationale for starting the movement. Of course, Mao cannot escape blame for some of the catastrophic failures of the period, but concentrating on what the movement *became* creates an unbalanced picture. Mao never intended the Cultural Revolution to wreak such havoc upon the country, but once the movement developed a momentum of its own he found it impossible to control, short of abandoning it altogether. The party (and Chinese socialism in general) were undergoing a crisis of legitimacy – Mao saw the PRC drifting further and further away from its revolutionary socialist roots. On top of this, in his eyes, the CCP was becoming increasingly bureaucratic and the population increasingly apathetic. China was following their Soviet neighbours down the path towards capitalist restoration – the very existence of Chinese socialism was at stake. Therefore, for Mao, the Cultural Revolution was a means of restoring the legitimacy of the CCP and Chinese socialism. Through direct political action the masses would once again feel that they shared a common cause with the party, and that they were still an essential feature of China's political system. This in turn would foster the notion that the CCP was the only legitimate ruler of China.

If Mao's objective in launching the Cultural Revolution was to re-legitimise socialism and the party, he failed miserably. If anything, the opposite was achieved – the suffering endured by many people during the movement destroyed what faith they had in the CCP. According to numbers released during the trial of the Gang of Four in 1980; 142,000 teachers, 53,000 scientists and technicians and 2,600 artists and writers were victimised by the Red Guards, and it is unknown how many of those people died (Harding, 1997, p. 242). Ironically however, those who were probably the most disaffected by the Cultural Revolution were the Red Guards themselves. Called upon to carry out the campaign in 1966, the Red Guards must have experienced an unimaginable sense of pride and honour,

as they were essentially given free reign to change the face of Chinese socialism by overthrowing corrupt leaders of an apparently corrupt party. Within a few months though they had turned from heroes into villains. After Mao (under pressure from the PLA) decided to abandon the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards were summarily dropped and blamed for the failures of the campaign and ultimately punished for their over-enthusiasm. After they were sent into the countryside many were unable to return home until the late 1970s, by which time they had lost out on their education. For this reason they are often referred to as China's "lost generation" (Luo, 1990).

This dissertation has shown that Sino-American rapprochement had close links with the CCP's legitimacy crisis. China's security concerns along its borders, especially in the North, forced the CCP to sacrifice parts of their ideology with regards to foreign policy. Beijing pursued rapprochement at the same time as overhauling their idea of imperialism; a clear characteristic of a party that is unsure of itself and willing to adapt when its security is at stake. Re-defining the USSR as China's greatest enemy was a convenient way to legitimise rapprochement with America. Furthermore they were able to pursue reconciliation because Mao's "continuous revolution" was losing momentum as a result of the disastrous Cultural Revolution. The power struggle between Mao and Lin Bao during the Summer of 1970 highlighted the internal conflicts of a party struggling with its own legitimacy, something that stalled the Sino-American discussions. Indeed, only when Mao took the floor did the Party regain control.

Utilising Edgar Snow was a calculated move on the part of the Chairman. The use of a well-known CCP sympathiser would go a long way to legitimise Sino-American reconciliation for those in the party who were resistant to the project. More importantly though, this move showed the Chinese people that the Americans were no longer the 'barbarians' they once were. For over two decades the United States had been the target of negative propaganda and CCP indoctrination. A dramatic change in foreign policy would require a similar overhaul in the minds of Chinese citizens. The picture of Mao and Snow on the cover of every major Chinese newspaper was a tool that helped gradually prepare the Chinese mentally for momentous changes in Sino-American relations.

Neither side could have predicted the events that unfolded during the 31<sup>st</sup> World Table

Tennis Championships in Nagoya, never mind the impact they had on rapprochement. It was almost too perfect that the tournament displayed a sport in that the Chinese were unmatched. Moreover the level of exposure was unprecedented – not only was the tournament covered extensively, but the exchange of gifts between the Chinese and American players received significant attention. Unsurprisingly much coverage was given to the matches played between the U.S. and China when the Americans visited. When the Chinese players let the Americans win a few matches, rather than dominate them outright, this was a sign of superiority to the Chinese people. Furthermore, the remarks from Zhou Enlai on hippie culture received much attention from the Chinese press – Mao could not have asked for a better example of Chinese superiority - the indulgent, capitalist West finding philosophical answers in socialist China.

The Politburo report created in preparation for Kissinger's visit is a prime example of a party uncertain of its course and still unsure of how to present Sino-American reconciliation to the masses. However although it was filled with inflammatory rhetoric, it nonetheless laid the foundations for reconciliation. While this was happening however, the Lin Biao affair proved to be one of the biggest crises the CCP had ever faced. His alleged betrayal dashed the myth of Mao's eternal correctness, and further eroded the CCP's legitimacy and the continuous revolution. Indeed following the incident the troubled party were forced to tone down their radical domestic and foreign policy.

As one of the most important events in the entire Cold War, Sino-American reconciliation (along with the deterioration of relations between Moscow and Beijing) caused the most fundamental shift in the international balance of power between the two rival superpowers. While the Sino-Soviet conflict further reduced Moscow's ability to wage a full global war with America, the Sino-American rapprochement greatly enhanced Washington's strategic position in its rivalry with the USSR. The causes of this development had as much to do with China's internal politics as with international developments.

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