“The Little Ball Moves the Big Ball”:

How a Group of Unlikely Diplomats Brought China and America Together with Ping Pong

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Historical Paper

Paper: 2500 words

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For my topic, I wanted to find something that was both interesting to me and unique. I had heard my parents talk about things like the Cultural Revolution and how that had impacted my grandparents and the rest of my family, so I started looking for a topic in that time period and came across ping pong diplomacy. I was immediately hooked by the story of the United States table tennis team’s trip to China; it was the first time I had heard of a sport being used as a medium for diplomacy and changing the world. I also felt a personal connection to it because I live in America with my parents, my extended family lives in China, and ping pong diplomacy is what brought America and China, my two homes, together. I was excited to share the story of how ping pong, something people don’t usually think of as a diplomatic tool, led to the rapprochement of the U.S. and China.

I started research by looking for sources that would give me a credible account of what truly happened when the U.S. team visited China in April 1971. During this process, I discovered the difference between the Republic of China on Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China that occupied mainland China, and how this was a major obstacle preventing the Sino-American rapprochement. I also found Nixon’s historic trip to China in 1972 and its connection to ping pong diplomacy. This led me to conduct more research on the president’s trip, because it was the most significant aftereffect of my topic and what officially brought the U.S. and China together. I used a variety of primary sources, including legislative documents, newspaper articles and memoirs of people who experienced the events to narrow down the exact story of what happened. Then I started looking for secondary sources that would provide another viewpoint without the influence of the current time period to fill gaps in the story and lay out the background for my topic. In the end, I decided to create my project in essay form because I
wanted to tell the story of ping pong diplomacy in the traditional way, using words on paper to convey feelings and describe things vividly.

Ping pong diplomacy wasn’t just an event, it was an exchange between two separated countries during the Cold War. Everyday athletes were able to become diplomats, connecting nations and relaxing global tensions through their love of sports and friendship. A seemingly simple diplomatic act provided an opportunity for leaders of the U.S. and China to have official talks with each other, debate political issues like the status of Taiwan, and formally reestablish U.S.-China relations. There were also many conflicting views on the idea of opening relations with China in general. Nixon’s China initiative was not unanimously supported, but through strategic diplomatic acts and ping pong, the Cold War hostility between America and China was finally dissolved.
“I was as surprised as I was pleased ... I had never expected that the China initiative would come to fruition in the form of a Ping-Pong team.” - Richard Nixon

**Introduction**

At the 1971 World Table Tennis Championships in Nagoya, Japan, 19-year-old Glenn Cowan from the U.S. team accidentally boarded a bus carrying the Chinese team. After being told to stay away from the Americans before they arrived, most of the athletes kept their distance from the teenager. But one of them, the three-time world champion Zhuang Zedong, stepped forward and offered the American a gift: a silk-screen portrait of the Huangshan mountains in China. Cowan returned the gesture the next day using a T-shirt with a peace sign and the phrase “Let It Be.” The media caught an image of the pair smiling and standing together, and the news quickly spread across the world. When Chairman Mao Zedong heard about it, he took it as a diplomatic opportunity and immediately invited the entire U.S. team to visit China, breaking through the animosity that had stood between the nations for more than two decades. “Zhuang Zedong not only knows good ping-pong, he knows good diplomacy too,” Chairman Mao said. The American team accepted, clearing the way for the rebuilding of U.S.-China relationships. This important political visit, which was later given the name of “ping pong diplomacy,” thawed the hostility of Sino-Soviet-American relations during the Cold War when the U.S.

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athletes visited the People’s Republic of China (P.R.C.). At a time when communism was despised throughout America, the athletes played friendship matches with each other, toured the country and met with high-ranking Chinese leaders, overcoming a diplomatic barrier while reporters helped to alleviate some of the fear surrounding China. Though many people opposed the idea of ping pong diplomacy, it was the first and most significant step in opening U.S.-China relations and led to Nixon’s historic trip to China in 1972, which forever changed relationships between America and the People’s Republic of China.

Sino-Soviet-American Relations Prior to 1971

In the 1940s, China was divided between the Nationalist Party of the Republic of China led by Jiang Jieshi and the Chinese Communist party led by Mao Zedong. The Nationalist Party’s popularity was slowly crumbling after many years of misconduct, and many people believed that it would not be long before Mao’s party defeated them. However, President Truman had declared that the U.S. would assist any country resisting a communist takeover, so the United States continued to support the Nationalists throughout the Chinese Civil War. Despite their best efforts, the Nationalists retreated to the island of Taiwan in 1949 and Mao successfully established the People's Republic of China. America, refusing to have relations with a communist country, never reached out to the P.R.C. and continued to support the remaining Nationalists on Taiwan.

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7Harry Truman, “Recommendations For Assistance to Greece and Turkey,” transcript of speech delivered before Congress, March 12, 1947.
Other than China, the Soviet Union was the main focus of the U.S.’s anti-communism policy. The idea of “containment” that became the foundation of Truman’s foreign policy stated that “the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a…vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.”

Even though the two nations had been allies against the Axis powers during WWII, their differing ideology quickly drove them apart and led to years of hostility known as the Cold War. Under Truman’s administration, the military, intelligence and foreign policy of the U.S. was reorganized to oppose the growing power of the Soviet Union, which further polarized the two nations.

The breakthrough in the standoff between American liberal democracy and communism came in 1969. Sino-Soviet relations had been slowly worsening since Krushchev succeeded Joseph Stalin, denounced the former leader, and in the eyes of Chinese Communists, reduced the Soviet Union’s commitment to communist ideals. After returning from a trip to Beijing, Krushchev declared that “conflict with China is inevitable.” His prediction became true when Soviet soldiers spotted a Chinese patrol moving across the frozen Ussuri River that marked the eastern border between the Soviet Union and the P.R.C. towards the disputed Zhenbao Island. Known as Damansky Island in Russian, it had been the cause of many bloodless border skirmishes in the past, but on March 2nd, the Chinese opened fire on Soviet border guards. Two

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13Sergey Radchenko, “The Island that Changed History,” The New York Times, March 2, 2019; see image in Appendix B.
hours of fighting ensued, leaving 31 Soviet soldiers dead and 14 wounded, with an unknown number of Chinese casualties. Though the border remained contested, the open conflict between the former communist allies changed the direction of the Cold War. As Winston Lord explained, “these clashes gave [the U.S.] an opening with China” since the Russians and Chinese were now more wary of each other than they were of America.

By 1968, it was evident that the U.S.’s main goal was to end the Vietnam War quickly. What had begun as part of the “containment” policy had turned into a costly war to preserve the independence of South Vietnam, with a total casualty count of over 20,000 by the time Nixon started his presidential campaign. He made it his priority to achieve peace as quickly as possible, but with diplomacy instead of a decisive military victory. “The key to a Vietnam settlement lay in Moscow and Beijing rather than in Hanoi,” he wrote. However, after a meeting with the Soviet ambassador Dobrynin, Nixon discovered that the Soviet Union did not want to end the war in Vietnam. The only option left was to open relations with China.

Unbeknownst to Nixon and Henry Kissinger, the President’s National Security Advisor and closest confidant, the Chinese were hoping to do the same. In August of 1969, Mao had asked his doctor, “we have the Soviet Union to the north and the west… and Japan to the east. If all our enemies were to unite…what do you think we should do?” The next day, he answered his own question. “Beyond Japan is the United States.” When Mao learned of the incidental

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19 Griffin, Ping Pong Diplomacy, 168.
encounter in Nagoya, he saw an opportunity to build that relationship by inviting the American ping pong team.

**Ping Pong in China and America**

On April 10th, 1971, after Beijing’s surprise invitation, fifteen athletes and three reporters crossed over the border from Hong Kong, becoming the first American delegation to enter China since the Cultural Revolution.\(^\text{20}\) The visitors marveled at their surroundings, dined on “food you wouldn’t believe,” and toured the Great Wall of China before returning to Beijing’s Indoor Stadium to play their first exhibition match.\(^\text{21}\) Almost all of the Chinese team consisted of top players, so the U.S. team, which was “at best, 25th, in the world,” should have been easily defeated.\(^\text{22}\) But to the Americans’ surprise, each game was very intense and the scores were exceptionally close. “We had the impression the Chinese were trying hard not to embarrass us by lopsided scores,” said Tim Boggan. Following the concept of “friendship first, competition second,” the Chinese only won the men’s games 5-3 and the women’s 5-4.\(^\text{23}\) China often used sports to improve international relationships with other nations, such as during the 1963 G.A.N.E.F.O. event in Jakarta, when one of China’s badminton players gained a comfortable lead before ultimately losing to the Indonesian champion in order to win the friendship of the host country while still showing athletic prowess.\(^\text{24}\) The athletes also exchanged gifts, and the Americans received “double happiness” balls and paddles.\(^\text{25}\)

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\(^{20}\) Ruane, “Fifty years ago, a hippie, a dental assistant and a 15-year-old helped open China with ping pong.”
\(^{22}\) Ruane, “Fifty years ago, a hippie, a dental assistant and a 15-year-old helped open China with ping pong.”
\(^{24}\)Wang, “‘Friendship First,’” 144-145; GANEFO stands for Games of the New Emerging Forces.
\(^{25}\) “Ping Pong Diplomacy,” National Museum of American Diplomacy; TIME, “The Ping Heard Round the World”; see image in Appendix D.
The exhibition matches were just the beginning. That afternoon, the Americans were ushered into the Great Hall of People, where they came face to face with Premier Zhou Enlai. There were politicians who had been in Beijing for years without meeting Zhou, and the Americans had only entered China a few days ago. “What joy it is to bring friends from afar,” said Premier Zhou, quoting a Chinese proverb as he greeted the Americans and athletes from other countries. The U.S. team thought that Zhou spent about ten minutes with each team, but according to one of the Canadians there, “his message was mainly for the Americans. The premier talked…with them for nearly two hours.” There was no doubt that the trip was partially, if not entirely political, when he hinted that their current friendliness could be developed into a more formal relationship.

When the Americans finally left China through Hong Kong on April 17th, a horde of reporters, photographers and journalists waited for them with a barrage of questions. Judy Bochenski recalled that it was chaos, with “cameras and elbows in our faces.” The table tennis team had become celebrities in just a week. Their trip had revealed China to the U.S. and the rest of the world, relieving some of the fear surrounding the communist country. One player explained that the “people are just like us…The country is similar to America, but still very different. It's beautiful.”

In Washington DC, steps were already being taken to “open a new page in the relations of the Chinese and American people,” as Premier Zhou had told the American athletes. The same

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26 Griffin, *Ping Pong Diplomacy*, 219-220; “Ping Pong Diplomacy,” National Museum of American Diplomacy; see image in Appendix E.
27 Schlesinger, “What China’s Ping-Pong diplomacy taught us.”
28 Schlesinger, “What China’s Ping-Pong diplomacy taught us.”
day that the Americans met Zhou, President Nixon announced the end of the twenty-year-old embargo between the U.S. and the P.R.C., which allowed certain goods to be traded with China, and stated that America would welcome visitors from China.\textsuperscript{32} Because the congressional reaction was mostly positive, the decision had been finalized two weeks before, but officials noted that the timing of the news was influenced by Beijing’s invitation to the American table tennis team.\textsuperscript{33}

However, not all of the reactions to Nixon’s China initiative were positive. In San Clemente, members of the Young Americans for Freedom organization had set up a ping pong table outside Nixon’s western house as a form of protest. “We’re challenging President Nixon to come out and play a game of Ping Pong,” their leader, Dick Shirley, announced. “We would show the President our strong opposition to his Ping Pong diplomacy.”\textsuperscript{34} Vice President Agnew held a similar view, calling the ping pong trip “a propaganda beating.” The U.S. was then brutally reminded of the war on April 23rd, when more than a thousand veterans marched up to the Capitol and threw their military medals over the fence.\textsuperscript{35} At this point, the Vietnam War had reached its peak with casualties at over 55,000, more than double what it had been before Nixon’s presidency.\textsuperscript{36}

Despite this criticism from his usual allies, the president continued with his plans. Ten days after the American team returned from China, a message from Premier Zhou Enlai arrived, stating that the Chinese government was willing to receive a representative of the U.S.

\textsuperscript{34}Marcia Abramson and Larry Lempert, “It’s a mad, mad, mad, mad, world,” \textit{The Michigan Daily}, July 16, 1971.
\textsuperscript{35}Griffin, \textit{Ping Pong Diplomacy}, 231.
\textsuperscript{36}Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics,” National Archives.
President. Kissinger was sent to meet with Zhou and arrange a presidential trip, which he accomplished successfully. Then, on July 15th, Nixon announced his intention to visit China, to which the general reaction was immensely positive. In fact, a nationwide poll reported that 78% of households surveyed thought the trip was a good idea.

“The Week that Changed the World” and Afterwards

On February 17th, 1972, Nixon’s plane took off and headed for Beijing. As he stepped off the ramp to shake the hand of Premier Zhou Enlai, he became the first American president to ever set foot on mainland China while in office. Over the next few days, Nixon talked with Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou many times to discuss substantive issues, such as Taiwan and Vietnam. “No agreement concerning Taiwan could be reached at this time,” Nixon wrote. “We could only…reflect our differences in the communique.”

The joint statement, known as the Shanghai Communique, was structured differently from diplomatic documents in the past. It stated the differences of each side on major issues instead of making it seem like the two sides were in complete agreement, effectively expressing the distinct opinions of each nation while still conveying the feeling of rapprochement. The document covered a variety of topics, including Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. The Chinese stated their claim that Taiwan was a province of the P.R.C., which the U.S. did not challenge. Both nations declared support for peace in Vietnam, agreed that the reconciliation of America and China was in the interest of all countries as it would relax global tensions, and

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expressed hope that the progress made during the visit would open up more possibilities for better relations between the two countries.\textsuperscript{41}

When the document was released, the government of Taiwan continued to assert that the regime currently occupying most of China were rebels who should not be allowed to represent the Chinese people.\textsuperscript{42} But many other countries supported the improvement of U.S.-China relations, such as North Korea, whose leader said, “while the movement of Chinese-American relations has no direct bearing on us, we welcome the easing of international tensions.”\textsuperscript{43} Thanks to Nixon, U.S.-China relations were closer to normal than ever before.

Fearing a U.S.-China alliance against them, the Soviet Union promptly invited Nixon to visit Moscow, where he held meetings with Soviet leaders and signed several treaties and agreements. These reduced the threat of nuclear war and ensured good relationships with the Soviet Union without antagonizing China.\textsuperscript{44} Then on January 27, 1973, a settlement regarding Vietnam was reached, allowing the U.S. to peacefully withdraw from the war.\textsuperscript{45} In 1974, Nixon’s administration ended with his shameful resignation, but he was still remembered as the person who opened diplomatic relations with China.\textsuperscript{46} Relations continued to develop under his successor, President Carter, who acknowledged the “One China” policy and granted China full diplomatic recognition in 1979. Two decades after that, President Clinton signed the U.S.-China

\textsuperscript{41}Joint Communiqué, February 28, 1972, Shanghai, People’s Republic of China.
Relations act of 2000 in October, which finally established normal trade relations with the P.R.C.  

**Conclusion**

Although U.S.-China relations are not at their best fifty years after ping pong diplomacy and Nixon’s trip, they would be far worse if Cowan had not missed his bus, met ping pong diplomat Zhuang Zedong, and shocked the world by getting the American team invited to China. In playing friendly matches with the Chinese, touring the country and meeting with Zhou, the American athletes were able to accomplish as inexperienced diplomats what the government had been unable to do: open America’s relationship with China and pave the way for Nixon to shake the hands of both Premier Zhou and Chairman Mao in February 1972. The Chinese also visited the United States that April as a reciprocal visit, completing the exchange of ping pong diplomacy and furthering cultural understanding between the two nations. As Chinese Ambassador Qin Gang remarked at the 50th anniversary commemoration of the American team’s visit, “a small ball moving the big ball’ ushered in the normalization of China-US relations, and profoundly changed the international political landscape.” An unexpected encounter on a bus became the catalyst for events that would “turn a page in history” and have a lasting impact on U.S.-China relations today.

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50 Qin Gang, “Remarks by Ambassador Qin Gang at the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of ‘Ping Pong Diplomacy.’”
Appendix A

Cowan and Zhuang Zedong.

Appendix B

Map of Zhenbao (Damansky) Island.

Appendix C

The U.S. Table Tennis team poses on the Great Wall, April 1971.

Appendix D

“Double Happiness” Paddle.


*U.S. Table Tennis player Connie Sweeris shakes hands with Premier Zhou Enlai.*
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources


This newspaper article from The Michigan Daily on July 16, 1971 has an example of protests done by people who didn’t support ping pong diplomacy. Members from the Young Americans for Freedom group set up a ping pong table outside of Nixon’s house in San Clemente. This source helped me to understand one side of the debate over opening relations with China and how people expressed their disagreement.


This journal article was written by the wife of the chairman of the National Committee on United States-China Relations. She experienced many of the events that happened on the Chinese table tennis team’s reciprocal trip to the U.S., including some that were overlooked by secondary sources. This source gave me detailed information on the second ping pong trip and helped me to understand how ping pong diplomacy was actually an exchange, not just one event.


I found this interview/memoir by Marshall Green through the Library of Congress. He recorded his experience as the Assistant Secretary of State during Nixon’s administration, which had details on Nixon’s trip to China in 1972, U.S. foreign policy at the time, and efforts to open relations with China. I used this source to understand U.S.-China relations before and after ping pong diplomacy.

This document is the original communique that was released at the end of Nixon’s 1972 trip to China. I used it to understand the perspectives of the two countries at the time and how it was different from other diplomatic documents in the past.


This journal article was originally published anonymously and was the first to explore the idea of containment. The author, George Kennan, was a Foreign Service Officer who advocated for blocking Soviet influence, and his ideas became the base for U.S. foreign policy. I used this article to understand U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War.


This interview with Kissinger’s special assistant, Winston Lord, gives the perspectives of government officials on Nixon’s China initiative, the Vietnam War, and ping pong diplomacy. I used this source to show how the idea of reaching out to China wasn’t supported by everyone, even those closest to Nixon and Kissinger. This source also had valuable information on the U.S.’s China policy and efforts that were made to open relations with China.


This act was passed in 1947 under Truman’s administration to reorganize the military and intelligence organizations of the U.S. government, creating the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency. I used this source as evidence of the U.S.’s policy towards the Soviet Union.

This newspaper article was written after Nixon announced his trip to China that would happen the next year. I used this source to show how some people supported the Sino-US rapprochement because it would remove some international tensions.


This report is about the Louis Harris Poll, which surveyed 1,480 households throughout the nation between February 8th and 14th, 1972, to see if U.S. citizens favored Nixon’s trip to China. This poll provided concrete evidence that Nixon’s trip was seen as a positive improvement by Americans, too.


This newspaper article was written after Nixon’s trip and the release of the Shanghai Communique, explaining the perspective of the Taiwanese government. I used it as evidence to show the opposition to the One China Policy and how Taiwan believed that the nationalist Republic of China was the true China, not the communist PRC.


Nixon’s memoirs contained valuable details that I couldn’t find in other sources, like the president’s own reactions to the ping pong trip and his thoughts on China.
I used the information from this source to include the president's point of view and other details in my paper.


This article was written by a Canadian ping pong player who was with the American team while they were in Beijing, and I used it to find accurate information on what happened in Beijing from another person’s perspective. This source also led me to do more research on Sino-Soviet-American relations and their effect on the Sino-US rapprochement.


This newspaper article was written shortly after the American table tennis team’s trip to China. It explains the relationships between the Soviet Union, U.S. and China at the time. I used this source to back up my argument that worsening relations with the Soviet Union drove America and China to seek relations with each other.


This newspaper article was written the day that Nixon announced the end of the twenty-year-old embargo on China. In the article, it states that the congressional reaction was generally favorable, which supported my point that there were different views on rapprochement with China at the government level. This source helped me to explain the connection between ping pong diplomacy and the opening of relations between the U.S. and PRC.

This magazine article includes the events of the U.S. ping pong team’s visit. This was one of the first sources I used to figure out what exactly happened on the trip. Through this source, I learned about the lifting of the embargo and the Chinese civil war, both of which I did further research on afterwards. Many of the details and quotes I included in my paper come from this source.

Truman, Harry S. “Recommendations For Assistance To Greece And Turkey.” Transcript of speech delivered before Congress, March 12, 1947.

This speech was President Truman’s declaration that the U.S. was going to support countries resisting a communist takeover. It was specifically for Greece and Turkey, but it was expanded after Truman’s presidency to China. I used this source to show why the U.S. continued to support the nationalist Republic of China.


This act was signed by President Clinton almost 30 years after Nixon’s trip, and finally established normal trade relations with the PRC. This source helped me to understand U.S.-China relations after Nixon, and one of the long term aftereffects of ping pong diplomacy.
Secondary Sources


This journal article explains the U.S.’s foreign policy towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and how differing ideologies drove the two nations apart. I used this secondary source to provide historical context for ping pong diplomacy.


This website is a timeline of major events between the U.S. and China from 1949 to the present day. Through this source, I was able to further develop the background and consequences of my topic by researching the events around ping pong diplomacy. This source led me to discover the Sino-Soviet border conflict and the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000.


This article covers the details of relations between the PRC and Soviet Union’s top leaders, Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Kruschev. I used this source to explain some reasons for the Sino-Soviet split that led China to seek better relations with the U.S.


This article contains the perspective of the Chinese ping pong player, Zhuang Zedong, who was the one to greet Glenn Cowan. Through this source, I was able to understand why he decided to extend a hand to the American, and his point of view on U.S.-China relations.

This article detailed the events of the Sino-Soviet border conflict, and helped me to understand the origins of the border dispute as well as what led up to the Battle of Damansky (Zhenbao) Island. This source also led me to look for information on Krushchev and Chairman Mao, and how that led to the Sino-Soviet split.


This book covers the origins and history of ping pong being used as diplomacy, and it was one of the most useful sources I used for my paper. I used this source mainly for its information on U.S.-China ping pong diplomacy and Nixon’s trip.


This website explains the achievements of Nixon’s presidency, including his diplomatic opening to China and the nuclear arms limitation talks. I used this source to show that even though Nixon’s administration was cut short with his resignation, he still left a lasting impact on U.S.-China relations.


This journal article explains Sino-Soviet-American relations before ping pong diplomacy, and how the Sino-Soviet border clashes led to the opening of relations between Beijing and Washington D.C. This source helped me to better understand the historical context for my topic and the things that led to it happening. As Sino-Soviet relations became tense, the U.S. saw an opportunity to reach out to either country, and they opened up to China through ping pong.
National Museum of American Diplomacy. “Ping Pong Diplomacy: Artifacts from the Historic 1971 U.S. Table Tennis Trip to China.” Accessed February 24, 2022. https://diplomacy.state.gov/artifact-collection-highlights/ping-pong-diplomacy-historic-1971-u-s-table-tennis-trip-to-china/. This website has information on the surprise encounter and the trip that the U.S. table tennis team took to China, as well as photographs of the athletes and items from the visit. The photographs of Cowan and Zhuang Zedong, the team on the Great Wall, the Double Happiness Paddle and Premier Zhou greeting the Americans I included in appendices are from this source.

Overholt, William H. “President Nixon’s Trip to China and Its Consequences.” *Asian Survey* 13, no. 7 (July 1973): 707-721. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2642707. This source detailed the historical context, events, and consequences of Nixon’s 1972 trip to China. After reading this journal article, I was better equipped to explain the aftereffects of Nixon’s trip in my project. It also led me to research more about U.S.-Soviet relationships after Nixon’s trip, and the reactions of the Soviet Union, North and South Vietnam, and Taiwan.

Qin, Gang. “Remarks by Ambassador Qin Gang at the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of ‘Ping Pong Diplomacy.’ Transcript of speech delivered on November 23, 2021. http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/dshd/202111/t20211124_10452424.htm. This speech was delivered by the Chinese ambassador to the U.S. at a celebration of the 50th anniversary of ping pong diplomacy. The ambassador talks about the evolution of U.S.-China relations and the effect that ping pong diplomacy has had over the years. Through this source, I was able to see a broader picture of U.S.-China relations from another perspective.

Written by a professor of international relations, this article established the connection between the Sino-Soviet border conflict and the opening of U.S.-China relations. Through this source, I learned that the Soviet Union invited Nixon to visit Moscow shortly after his trip to China. The image in Appendix B that shows a map of Zhenbao (Damansky) Island is also from this source.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/04/10/ping-pong-diplomacy-50-years-ago

This article from the Washington Post was another source that I included to fact check the American ping pong team’s trip to China. I used this source to verify the details of the trip, and see if there were any important ones that I had missed.


Though the connection between Washington D.C. and Beijing is currently tense and not at its best, ping pong diplomacy left a long lasting legacy on relationships between America and the PRC. This source helped me to understand current U.S.-China relations and the effect of ping pong diplomacy today.


This source summarizes important events in U.S. foreign relations that happened in 1971, including ping pong diplomacy and President Nixon’s announcement of his trip. I used a quote from this source to express how the Americans found out that the Chinese weren’t that different after all.

This website gave me the general facts on the Chinese civil war and the battles between the nationalist and communist parties of China. Through this source, I learned how the United States continued to support the nationalists, and how the establishment of the People’s Republic of China led to a long period of hostility between mainland China and America. I also discovered the Taiwan question and how that was a major obstacle preventing the detente of the U.S. and China.

This website explained the general facts of the Vietnam War, and helped me to understand the end of the war for America. On January 27, a peace settlement allowed the U.S. to withdraw from Vietnam, but the two Vietnamese parties did not follow it, so the war still continued even after the U.S. left.

After I learned about Cold War foreign policy towards the Soviet Union, I discovered George Kennan’s “containment” policy, which became the base for U.S. foreign policy towards communist nations. This source led me to search for the original X-Article to understand the ideas during that time period.

This website had information on the National Security Act of 1947, which reorganized the military and intelligence organizations of the U.S. government. This was one of the most significant steps that the U.S. took to counter the Soviet
Union’s growing influence. This source also helped me to understand U.S. Cold War policy towards the Soviet Union.


This website from the National Archives has the U.S. military casualty count of the Vietnam War. I used this source as evidence of how costly the Vietnam War was for the U.S. and why President Nixon made ending the war his priority task.


This article covers the Moscow Summit in May of 1972, where Nixon signed several nuclear arms limitation treaties and held talks with Soviet leaders. The Soviet Union decided to invite Nixon after they heard about his China trip, which helped the U.S. to ease relations with the Soviet Union after reopening relations with China.


This article explains China’s use of sports diplomacy and the concept of “friendship first, competition second” that helped the PRC to establish connections with the U.S. During the U.S. ping pong team’s trip to China, the Chinese often purposely lost matches or made the scores really close so their opponents wouldn’t feel humiliated. This was an effective way to make political statements through sports, which the Chinese did throughout the Cold War.