Learning From the Past:

Nixon’s Visit to China and the Role of Nuanced Diplomacy to Build Global Peace and Stability

Ariana Thornton

Senior Division

Historical Paper

Paper Word Count: 2498

Process Paper Word Count: 467
The year 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of President Nixon’s historic visit to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), after both countries’ governments and peoples had been in a state of public hostility for more than two decades. Given the ongoing and increasing tensions between Washington DC and Beijing, I decided to investigate and illuminate the history of Sino-American relations and the consequences of Nixon’s high-impact diplomatic breakthrough. President Nixon’s week-long 1972 trip to China was the successful culmination of years of delicate debates and diplomatic gestures between Chinese and Americans. The impact of the visit was nuanced and transformative, particularly for China, leading to the burgeoning of new communities, economies, and strategic calculations.

I began my research by gathering a large range of secondary sources to grasp a broad understanding of the preparation and execution of Nixon’s visit. Newspaper articles, journal essays, and the web pages of research centers were very useful. The most comprehensive secondary source was Margaret MacMillan’s *Nixon and Mao: The Week That Changed the World*. Reading MacMillan’s book cover-to-cover provided me with crucial details for my outlook on this historic event. After researching these secondary sources, I consulted primary sources. As a Chinese language student, I was able to comb through not only online transcripts of English language interviews, but Chinese ones as well. I took great care to research and consider Chinese perspectives as much as American ones. For general information and detailed insights on the perspectives of US government officials, Nixon’s and Kissinger’s memoirs were undoubtedly useful. Through copious notes, I narrowed my focus to a key topic: The delicate diplomatic minuet that unfolded as the Sino-American détente, the cultural and economic
transformations in China that resulted from this rapprochement, and the new threat against the United States posed by a rising Chinese power.

I worked on my paper over several months, receiving constructive criticism from peers, teachers, and experts on my topic before it was finalized. My writing process has been extensive and tremendously rewarding, and I am grateful to present my historical argument. My topic is historically significant as it covers the formal start of Sino-American diplomatic relations that continue to influence global politics, economics, and commerce to the present time. This paper aims to appreciate how the official diplomatic relationship between the US and PRC began, elucidate the nature and history of tensions between Washington and Beijing, and advise how greater global political stability may be striven towards through analyzing the past. Since both Washington’s and Beijing’s decision-making at the time were heavily influenced by their respective relations with Moscow, one cannot help but recognize that the dynamics of the Sino-American rapprochement of the 1970s have an important relevance in the recalculation of global relations in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022.
The televised announcement was made on the night of July 15, 1971: President Nixon was going to China. “If Mr. Nixon had revealed he was going to the moon,” a Washington Post editorial read, “he could not have flabbergasted his world audience more.”⁴ Indeed, during the depths of the Cold War and rise in US anti-communist sentiment, the People’s Republic of China seemed to be as distant from the United States as Earth’s moon. Yet, behind this seemingly sudden détente between the US and PRC were years of nuanced diplomatic gestures and debates by Washington and Beijing. Their mutual interest in exploring rapprochement and sensitivity for the other’s political values allowed them to execute a delicate diplomatic minuet to move from a position of hostility to the beginning of cooperation. While this opening transformed the Cold War era, beginning the growth of cultural, diplomatic, and economic ties that have benefitted both countries’ strength and global standing, it has also shaped the recent rise of a formidable Chinese Communist Party. The lessons from Nixon’s historic opening to China has great relevance in navigating the US-China dynamics of today.

The Emergence of the PRC: US and Soviet Reactions

October 1, 1949, marked the establishment of the PRC by Mao Zedong and the end of the civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Kuomintang Party.² Mao’s victory fed the frenzy of the Second Red Scare³ in the US, where opposition to communism was deep-rooted. Similarly, as the United States continued supporting the exiled

---


³ The Red Scare refers to two periods of mass hysteria over the perceived threat of communists in the US—the first occurring after World War I and the second after World War II.
Nationalists in Taipei, Mao’s government spread vitriolic anti-American propaganda.4 These activities set the stage for several decades of US-China animosity, from use of nuclear weapons threats to armed conflicts in the Korean War.5

Unsurprisingly, the Soviet Union was the first nation to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC. Beginning from 1950, the two countries formed a treaty of alliance, through which the Soviet Union provided valuable technical assistance to China. Starting in the late 1950s, however, ideological rifts between the two nations widened, as the Chinese government became increasingly critical of the Soviets’ strategy of cooperation with the United States. In July 1960, the Soviet government abolished various agreements between the two countries, further deteriorating the Sino-Soviet relationship.6 This Sino-Soviet split marked a significant shift in the Cold War crucial to the development of US rapprochement with China, transforming the bipolar Cold War into a tripolar one.

_Nixon and the China Card_

Richard Nixon’s inauguration as President in 1969 fell within the 20th anniversary year of the founding of the PRC. It was a globally dangerous and volatile period, with the US engaged in


While the Soviet Union held that peaceful coexistence between capitalist and communist nations was crucial in the atomic era, the PRC supported an aggressive attitude towards capitalist nations.
a costly war with the communist North Vietnamese, who were supported and armed by their Chinese and Soviet allies. A year before his election, Nixon wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that “we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates, and threaten its neighbors.” Although Nixon made his career as a staunch anti-communist, he saw opportunities to ease Cold War tensions and pressure North Vietnam into stopping the war by boosting relations with the PRC and Soviet Union. Playing the “China card” was one strategy to achieve this objective. This China card involved establishing and leveraging diplomatic relations with the PRC to curb the Soviets’ geopolitical ambitions and pressure them into being more malleable on a variety of strategic issues. In the long term, Washington hoped to nudge the Chinese government towards a liberal democracy, as part of its goal to foster and strengthen democracy abroad. Meanwhile, as China realized that its Soviet rival held a more immediate threat than its historic American adversary, reaching out to the US took on strategic importance.

---


Ping-Pong Diplomacy

One major step towards improved Sino-American relations was surprisingly not a scheduled meeting between dignitaries, but an event that would later be dubbed “ping-pong diplomacy.” On April 4, 1971, American and Chinese athletes were nearing the end of the World Table Tennis Championship in Japan, when Chinese athlete Zhuang Zedong presented a silk brocade scarf to American athlete Glenn Cowan—despite the protests of Zhuang’s manager. Cowan returned the favor, gifting Zhuang a peace emblem shirt the next day. Once hearing this news from his nurse, Mao commented approvingly, “Zhuang Zedong not only plays good ping-pong but knows how to conduct diplomacy as well.”

He decided to invite the American team to China, making the ping-pong players the first US delegation admitted there since 1949.

In the words of Nixon’s National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, the widely publicized welcome event in China “reassured–more than any diplomatic communication through any channel–that the emissary who would now surely be invited would step on friendly soil.”

The US administration was deliberate in its response to the event. On April 14, 1971, Nixon ended most of the remaining restrictions on Sino-American trade. On April 27, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai took the next step, proposing that an envoy from Nixon—or Nixon

---

12 Macmillan, Nixon and Mao.


himself—could come to discuss political matters in Beijing.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, in Mao’s words, “the little ball moves the big ball”—the small ping-pong ball moved the large sphere of the Earth.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Operation Polo}

To arrange the details of Nixon’s visit to China, Kissinger was sent to Beijing in a secret trip codenamed “Operation Polo.”\textsuperscript{17} On July 8, 1971, three months after the US table tennis team’s visit to China, Kissinger met with Zhou and engaged in “easy conversation, as if there had never been a day’s interruption”\textsuperscript{18} in the contact between the two nations. As the two men discussed the main areas where the United States and China agreed and disagreed, neither attempted to confront the other’s political beliefs.\textsuperscript{19} Any such debate between two sides so estranged by ideology would have simply ended in failure, so the calculated selection of \textit{which} debates to launch enabled the development of a necessary level of trust to plan Nixon’s visit. While the commonly perceived danger of the Soviet Union pulled the United States and China together, it was the strategic diplomacy of Kissinger and Zhou that brought the breakthrough to fruition.

\textit{Nixon in China}

\textsuperscript{15} Macmillan, \textit{Nixon and Mao}.


\textsuperscript{17} Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}. The operation was named after the Italian explorer of China, Marco Polo.

\textsuperscript{18} Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}.

\textsuperscript{19} Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}.
“It is in this spirit that I will undertake what I deeply hope will become a journey for peace…not just for our generation but for future generations on this earth we share together,” Nixon stated in the official announcement of the trip on July 15, 1971. Notwithstanding the few objections from some liberals and conservatives, the announcement was met with approval and enthusiasm across the US. World leaders were more divided: Allies who either approved or disapproved of the change in American policy were frustrated at being told only so late in the process, and the Soviet leadership was worried and shocked.

Greeted by Zhou’s welcoming party upon landing in Beijing on February 21, 1972, the first diplomatic action Nixon made was a handshake. In 1954, Zhou was publicly snubbed by Eisenhower’s Secretary of State John Dulles, who brushed past Zhou’s proffered hand at a Geneva convention. Dulles later quipped that the only way he and Zhou would meet would be if their cars collided. As he descended the steps of Air Force One, Nixon knew that Zhou remained deeply insulted by this moment. Chinese protocol required that Zhou, as the host, extend his hand to the guest, but Nixon thrust out his hand first. This diplomatic gesture

20 Kissinger, *White House Years*.

21 Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao*.

22 Macmillan, *Nixon and Mao*. Zhou’s welcoming party was intentionally minimal, with none of the splendor that would usually accompany the arrival of a head of state. It sent the clear signal that although Sino-American relations were beginning to thaw, a single summit would not repair decades of hostility.

23 See Appendix A.


carried an especially deep significance: Not only did it rectify a past slight and express the goodwill of the United States, but it also recognized communist China—a historical adversary—as a world power alongside the capitalist United States. “When our hands met,” Nixon later wrote, “one era ended and another began.”

One of the most significant events of the visit was Nixon’s meeting with Mao later that first day. Despite the meeting being less substantive and more philosophical than Nixon and his colleagues had hoped, it was a resounding success, evidenced by the widely circulated photograph of Nixon and Mao’s handshake. The image dismantled both the US’s and communist China’s historical view of their nations as ideological beacons for the rest of the world. After decades of hostility, what was most remarkable in that diplomatic meeting was not the words exchanged but the occurrence of the conversation itself.

In contrast, drafting the joint communiqué to be presented at the end of the week involved substantial negotiations, especially on Taiwan. When the Chinese pushed for Kissinger’s acknowledgment that Taiwan was a province of the PRC, Kissinger sought to compromise with a vaguer wording. Every word in the paragraph describing the American view on Taiwan was the product of intense debate:

The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States


30 See Appendix B.

31 Kissinger, White House Years.
Government does not challenge that position. It reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves.32

With tactful word choice, Kissinger allayed both the Chinese and Taiwanese who believed in a “one China,”33 specifically choosing the word “acknowledges,” not “recognizes,” to avoid implying that the United States accepted China’s claims to sovereignty over Taiwan.34

The Shanghai Communiqué was the climax of the visit. When Nixon returned to Washington on February 28, 1972, he received a hero’s welcome from the fifteen thousand people who watched his plane land. One onlooker remarked, in a summation of the trip’s brilliance: “It’s sort of like seeing the astronauts coming back from the moon.”35

Consequences

Nixon’s week in China was the culmination of years of delicate developments that were closely guarded by both American and Chinese governments. As both sides’ governments and populations had been so deeply hostile to each other since 1949, each leader had to have confidence in the other and find areas of mutual agreement through tactful debate. Washington’s “China card,” although ineffective once US-Soviet relations worsened in 197336, had served a

32 “Joint Communique between the United States and China,” February 27, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Staff Member Office Files (SMOF), President’s Personal Files (PPF), Box 73. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121325.

33 “One China” refers to the position held by the PRC and the Kuomintang that there is only one sovereign nation under the name “China.”

34 Kissinger, White House Years.


36 Macmillan, Nixon and Mao. US-Soviet relations deteriorated during the Yom Kippur War of 1973, in which the Americans supported Israel and the Soviets its Arab opponents, bringing the US and USSR to the brink of direct conflict.
greater purpose, providing the driving force for the breakthrough meeting. Since then, the United States and China have brought to the other extensive benefits in the realms of diplomacy, culture, and commerce.

“Those dialogues and negotiations opened the door,” Chinese journalist Jianying Zha recalled of Nixon’s visit. “It was only a matter of time before the spring tide would overflow” and Deputy Premier Deng Xiaoping would initiate the Reform and Opening-Up of 1978, a decades-long process of economic reform. In 1979, US President Jimmy Carter officially normalized relations with the PRC, inspiring a “swelling flock of wide-eyed, gauche, eager” Chinese students to study on American campuses. Thus, 1980s China was a “passionate decade of learning, exploration and intellectual and artistic fermenting,” culminating in calls for political reform through the Tiananmen Square protests.

Heartened by these pro-democracy student movements, successive US administrations expanded the Nixon/Kissinger policies towards China in extensive efforts to promote democratic practices and institutions abroad. In the words of President George H.W. Bush, fostering this “growing community of democracies” would “[anchor] international peace and stability” and curb authoritarianism. The two-fold US strategy to implement this liberal international order involved “engagement” and “balance”: Deepening economic, diplomatic, and cultural ties between China and the West while simultaneously keeping a favorable balance of military power in the Indo-Pacific region.

---


38 Aaron Friedberg, Getting China Wrong (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2022).

39 Friedberg, Getting China Wrong.
Over decades, the United States has assisted China in strengthening its economy, and thus, the foundations of its long-term national power. Since the two countries signed a bilateral trade agreement in 1979, China’s economy has advanced exponentially—from an “impoverished” to the world’s second largest. Washington optimism culminated with the PRC’s accession into the World Trade Organization in 2001. Nevertheless, the subsequent two decades have been marked by darkening moods as economic, diplomatic, and military tensions between these global powers are increasing.

Beijing has expanded state-directed trade, technology promotion, and industrial policies instead of forging toward a greater reliance on free trade and open markets. The Chinese government routinely and persistently cracks down on its peoples: Stifling dissent; building a nationwide, high-tech surveillance system; and detaining millions of ethnic minorities in forced labor camps. The Chinese government employs millions of people to monitor and censor the nation’s media, with one of its most aggressive censorship campaigns following the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre. Twenty-five years from this Chinese troops’ killing of several thousand peaceful student demonstrators, about 75% of Chinese university students did not

---


42 Friedberg, Getting China Wrong.

recognize the iconic “Tank Man” photograph⁴⁴ that, for the rest of the world, is an immediately recognizable symbol of the historic protests.⁴⁵

The United States drastically underestimated the nature of China’s political regime: The ruthlessness and resourcefulness of the CCP, as well as its persistence to retain domestic political power. Ultimately, Washington’s efforts to initiate any change in the CCP’s hostility through broader engagement could be considered naïve. However, China and the United States’ opposing ambitions must be managed and resolved to avoid direct military conflict and better their peoples’ lives.

The history of the US’s rapprochement with China stands as a historically significant display of debates and symbolic gestures that defines the art of diplomacy. From a handshake between leaders to a gift exchange between ping-pong teams, successful international diplomacy requires not only precise language, but also the pursuit of considerate gestures and the seizing of chance opportunities. The cultural and economic prosperity following this historic event also stands in contrast to the current deterioration of Sino-American relations. Yet today’s mutual hostility is not dissimilar to that at the founding of the PRC, and fifty years ago, Nixon helped form a strategic connection that had not been conceivable for two decades. To improve relations at the present time, avoid military conflict, and influence a better outcome for the well-being of each nation’s peoples, today’s world leaders must strive for the same level of nuanced debate as Nixon and Kissinger in the 1972 détente.

⁴⁴ See Appendix C.

President Nixon’s handshake with Premier Zhou Enlai marked a powerful and meaningful beginning to the summit in Beijing.

The sheer occurrence of a handshake between Mao and Nixon—a mutual diplomatic act by longtime adversaries—was confirmation of the success of years of careful progress.

Jeff Widener’s photograph, capturing a grocery-holding man blocking a line of tanks, has become an iconic symbol of the Chinese government’s brutal crackdown on the Tiananmen Square protests. While Chinese authorities enforce a collective amnesia of this massacre, to the United States, Tiananmen represents the somber reality of the ruthless ambitions of the CCP.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources


Ranging from skeptical to enthusiastic, this article provides a sampling of editorial comment in American newspapers once Nixon began his trip to China. One writer described Nixon’s visit as “one of the greatest diplomatic and political coups of the century,” and another lauded it as “an auspicious beginning.” These clashing opinions represent the domestic debates Nixon avoided by keeping his operations secret until his announcement with Zhou Enlai.


This article, published the day after Nixon’s unexpected announcement to the world, was useful for my gauging of the announcement’s reception. In particular, I took note of the writer’s testimony to the secrecy of US-China operations and the shock of the reveal: “It had not been known that Mr. Kissinger was in China at all.”


This interview transcript, translated to English, provided me with an understanding of the valuable perspectives of Chinese diplomats who were involved in Nixon’s visit. One such perspective was that “the most important contents of the communiqué were the anti-hegemonic clauses and the statement on the Taiwan question.” Gathering a wide range of views was crucial for my research; in this article, I found quotes from involved Chinese besides Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong that were rare to find on American news sites.


This article, published the day of Nixon’s arrival in China, gave useful details on the intentionally small size of the welcoming party and the significance of Nixon’s handshake in the context of the 1954 Geneva Conference. I noticed a peculiar detail in the article where it labels the handshake as Zhou’s, yet in other print and video sources, Nixon is seen reaching his hand out first.
“Joint Communique between the United States and China,” February 27, 1972, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Staff Member Office Files (SMOF), President’s Personal Files (PPF), Box 73. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121325.

This site provides a full transcription of the Shanghai Communique as well as the original scan of the document. It was fascinating to observe that a major feature of the Shanghai Communique, unlike other joint communiques, was the US and China first expressing their differing positions before discussing areas of mutual agreement.


Select chapters in this book were very helpful in understanding Kissinger’s perspective on the history of “triangular diplomacy” and the road to rapprochement with China. His detailed and organized writing, dense with information, significantly contributed to my understanding of the historic event.


The chapters “First Steps Toward China,” “An Invitation to Peking,” “The Journey to Peking,” and “Nixon’s Trip to China” recounted the story of US rapprochement with China in an exciting, easily read narrative, combining factual details with his analyses of the significance of various events. Kissinger’s documentations and insights were one of the most valuable primary sources I read for this paper.


This film included audio recordings of Nixon and his colleagues and provided a captivating look into the highly publicized visuals of the event, such as Pat Nixon visiting a children’s hospital, a banquet in the Great Hall, and Nixon’s toasts. The colored video clips, compiled in chronological order, had the effect of a spirited documentary narrated by the people in the videos themselves.


Like Kissinger’s memoirs, Nixon’s descriptions of his trip to China hold a considerable amount of detail. When researching the interactions and events of the week for my broad understanding, it was highly useful to have Macmillan’s book, Nixon’s memoir, and Kissinger’s memoirs on hand to identify differences in narration. For example, while Nixon describes his interactions with Zhou as quite friendly, Macmillan reveals that Nixon had been agitated at Zhou at many points through the trip.

Nixon’s essay in *Foreign Affairs* contains a dense analysis and prediction of the United States’s and Asia’s future positions in the world. Towards the end of the article, there are a few paragraphs detailing his insights on the US’s relationship with China, and there I retrieved the quote “we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors.”


This essay, written a little over a year after Nixon’s visit to China, describes the mutual motivations for rapprochement (“fear of the Soviet Union”) and immediate consequences: Shock and fear of various nations, and the “mudd[ying]” of “diplomatic waters in the triangle between Taipei, Tokyo, and Peking.” It is a valuable source of an expert’s opinion on the trip shortly after it occurred.


Through this brief recording of Nixon’s official announcement of his trip, I observed what millions of Americans saw five decades ago.


This article consists of statements by seventeen individuals about the personal impact Nixon’s trip had on their lives. Interviewees ranged from four Chinese to an American table tennis player who visited China in the April 1971 event. It was fascinating and constructive to read these interviews in combination with other sources. For example, when I read American athlete Judy Hoarfrost’s statement that she won three of the four matches she played in Beijing, I recalled from a separate secondary source that Zhou Enlai had instructed Chinese players to deliberately let the Americans win. This diplomatic gesture was small, but meaningful.


This article, published after the signing of the US-China trade agreement, provided me with details on its significance and a useful quote from Secretary of Commerce Juanita Kreps.

This article, containing condensed information on the “China card,” “ping-pong diplomacy,” and the meeting with Mao, was a highly useful resource for my broad understanding of these important aspects of the trip.


This interview transcript provided valuable information specifically on the motivations for and consequences of Kissinger’s secret trip to Beijing.


Written by Yuwen Wu, a fifteen-year-old Chinese student in 1972, this article describes his perspective on Mao’s “strategic calculation” in inviting the Americans to China, as well as preparatory actions China took to “create a friendly and orderly atmosphere”: recruiting people to perform as fake tourists, cleaning neighborhoods, and filling shops with a variety of goods. It provides an insider’s look on the extents of China’s preparation.


This is a moving personal essay written by a Chinese journalist who was an 11-year-old student at the time of Nixon’s visit. Describing herself as part of the “Cultural Revolution Generation” and “the 1980s Generation,” she details her upbringing among strict Maoist propaganda and her later attraction towards western liberal ideals. I was able to pull many quotes from this essay regarding the cultural impacts of Nixon’s trip.

**Secondary Sources**


I used this article to better understand the significance of Nixon’s handshake with Zhou, as well as the various worries surrounding the optics of the event.

This article, containing mostly photographs, provided me with a useful explanation of how US Chinatowns transformed in the 1980s. This decade of educational and economic reform in China not only shaped Chinese communities, but American ones as well.


This article focuses on a series of surveys conducted by NPR’s Louisa Lim in 2014. Out of 100 students at prestigious Beijing universities that, in 1989, were central to the student protests, only 15 recognized the iconic “Tank Man” photograph as being from the Tiananmen Square Massacre. According to the Vox writer, China's success in enforcing a near-total amnesia of the massacre has “politically neutered” a generation. Reading this article helped me gain a better understanding of China’s pervasive surveillance system and crackdown on dissent.


This is political scientist Aaron Friedberg’s latest book, published very recently in March 2022. The freshness of the evidence and arguments in Friedberg’s book greatly aided my understanding of the connections between Nixon’s historic visit, the rocky reality of current Sino-American relations, and possible future realities. Friedberg’s analyses of the CCP join a growing chorus of scholars recognizing the uncertainties surrounding a rising China.


I read this article towards the beginning of my research, and it provided me with a broad understanding of Nixon as a politician and his policies and approach towards China.


This editorial provides an interesting outlook on Nixon’s trip: “one of the biggest—and best—flip-flops in American history.” The writer first marks Nixon as a devious president and a negative role model but acknowledges his bold measures in going against his own policies.


This Vox article provides an in-depth explanation of China’s so-called “reeducation centers,” in which the Chinese Communist Party has detained 1-3 million Uighur Muslims—the largest mass-internment of an ethnic-religious minority group since World
This article helped me better understand the human rights abuses committed by the Chinese government.


This is one of the first and most important sources that I read for this project and was instrumental in constructing my research. Macmillan ties many photos, interviews, transcripts, biographies, memoirs, and articles together to form a captivating and well-written story from start to finish. She seamlessly intertwines the events of the week-long trip with brief biographies of Nixon, Kissinger, Mao, and Zhou, and analyses of their characters. The book’s conclusion greatly helped me in devising my own statements regarding the many consequences of Nixon’s visit.


This was another site I read at the beginning of my research, which gave me a brief overview of the agenda and activities of Nixon’s trip.


This article discusses the consequences of Nixon’s trip as perceived by Americans in 1972 compared to Americans today. Plithides argues against claims that the summit’s significance was due to the communique and an “anti-Soviet front.” He expresses that the widely circulated visuals and resulting shift in American public opinion was what made the trip immediately important.


This article reads like a well-written short story, taking the reader through the relevant details of the journey to US-China rapprochement at a moderate pace. Renouard touches on all the major pieces of information that I’d planned on writing about: The historical background, Nixon’s perspective, a “trump card” in dealing with the USSR, “ping-pong diplomacy,” the Nixon-Zhou handshake, and the meeting with Mao. It is a relatively brief resource with high readability.


This article takes an approving view on the trip, emphasizing the brilliance of the Americans involved. It contains three photographs from the trip and three video sources.
from the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum. I pulled from this article a Washington Post quote that “If Mr. Nixon had revealed he was going to the moon, he could not have flabbergasted his world audience more.”


In a writing style similar to Macmillan’s, Shell combines quotes from a variety of American and Chinese sources to create an interesting narrative about the process of Sino-American rapprochement and present-day ramifications.


I used this resource for my research on the history of Sino-Soviet relations, especially the Sino-Soviet Split. The articles in Britannica are a brilliant and reliable source of information.


This in-depth article was especially helpful to me for understanding the history and current state of US-China trade relations. The article dives into both the benefits and issues of the relationship, the response of the United States to concerns, and statements from experts regarding the future of the trade relationship.


This article specifically discusses the event of “ping-pong diplomacy,” and it is this place where I pulled Mao’s quote about the little ball moving the big ball.


The Zhou Enlai Peace Institute is a site recognizing the contributions of Zhou Enlai to the world. Its “Stories” page describes Zhou’s involvement in the Nixon visit and touches on the significance of his handshake with Nixon.


This timeline was very helpful for factual details about US relations with the PRC at the start of its founding as well as after diplomatic relations were opened.
This book’s “Conclusion” chapter was a useful resource that provided many details on the geopolitical consequences of Nixon’s trip, specifically in Taiwan, Vietnam, and South Asia. The chapter contains the quote I used at the end of the “Nixon in China” section: “It’s sort of like seeing the astronauts coming back from the moon.”