

**Profiles in Influence: Shaping American Perceptions, Attitudes, and Policy Towards  
China**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Pearl Buck, Henry Luce, Edgar Snow, and Richard Nixon have profoundly influenced Sino-American relations throughout the 20th century. Their impact on American perceptions, attitudes, and foreign policy has played a pivotal role in shaping the current state of relations between the United States government and the People's Republic of China. Pivotal historical events such as WWI & WWII, the Sino-Japanese War, China's Civil War, and the Soviet-Sino conflict—among other events—have also significantly influenced the dynamics of Sino-American relations. Despite their importance, there is a notable absence of studies that comprehensively explore the collective impact of these individuals and events. Understanding this complex yet vital relationship requires a holistic examination that integrates their contributions and historical contexts.

*Keywords: Pearl Buck, Henry Luce, Edgar Snow, Richard Nixon, Sino-American relations, United States, China*

## **Dedication/Acknowledgement**

This study is dedicated to my family, who have supported me throughout this extensive undertaking. I am extremely thankful for their unending love, support, patience and motivation.

This study is also dedicated to the Disney College Program. Through this program, I was able to work side by side with international students from China, further inspiring my interest in the Chinese people and country. I am forever thankful for their kindness and friendship.

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## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

The unique relationship between the United States and China is characterized by profound differences and an intriguing juxtaposition. America is a relatively young nation, having achieved independence from Great Britain just 248 years ago. Its foundation is built on the principles of freedom and liberty, with a rich history of immigrants contributing to its diverse identity. In stark contrast, China possesses one of the world's oldest and most enduring civilizations, with a history stretching back over 3,500 years. Its cultural heritage is deeply rooted, spanning millennia. Despite these contrasting origins and fundamental attributes, a subtle yet undeniable attraction exists between these two nations, forming a complex and evolving dynamic that has shaped the course of international relations.

Today, the United States and China occupy prominent positions on the global stage. They stand as the world's two largest economies. The driving forces of their economies are deeply entwined, neither able to prosper independently without the other's involvement. However, despite the significant economic interdependence characterizing their relationship, the overall state of their bilateral relations has seen better days. This is not an uncommon occurrence from a historical vantage point, as the bilateral relationship between the United States and China has endured more formidable challenges in previous eras. Nevertheless, the dynamic between these two global giants continues to be a critical focal point in contemporary international affairs, shaping the course of global politics and economics.

The foundation of the U.S.-China relationship can be traced back to the distinctive differences that set America apart from European imperial powers. In its formative years, the United States emerged as an incipient, comparatively obscure, inexperienced, financially challenged, and vulnerable nation. Back then, young America sought to establish friendly ties with the older and more established China. While today, the United States holds the status of a global superpower, this current position stands in stark contrast to its historical beginnings. In contrast, during that historical period, China occupied a position of superpower prominence, embodying many of the attributes that the United States currently possesses.

Over time, as the global landscape evolved, a shift in roles unfolded between America and China. The United States experienced a momentous era of growth and progress, characterized by rapid advancements in industry, technology, and military strength. Leveraging robust trade networks and extensive exploration, America realized its vast potential, eventually rising to a position of considerable influence worldwide. Meanwhile, China's vulnerabilities and obsolete military became apparent with the rise of the European imperial powers. Persistent complacency, stagnation, and a lack of development took their toll, rendering China unable to protect itself from external threats. China also contended with a multitude of internal and external challenges that collectively played a role in its decline. Millennia of dynastic governance, coupled with bureaucratic corruption, inefficiencies, and societal unrest, depleted the nation's resources and impeded its forward trajectory.

Throughout the history of Sino-American relations, the trajectories of the United States and China have evolved, with moments of convergence and divergence sculpting a



narrative that inexorably binds these two nations. Their mutual attraction and shared history have woven a compelling narrative of deep connection filled with adventure, tragedy, curiosity, greed, pride, animosity, admiration, jealousy, passion, and suffering. The enduring bond between Americans and Chinese, forged by a long history of mutual attraction, has profoundly shaped the course of their relationship. Undeniably, American perceptions and policy vis-à-vis China have been shaped by a diverse cohort of 20th century American figures.

This research will embark on a compelling journey through the intricacies of 20th century Sino-American relations, where the passage of time assumes pivotal importance in unraveling the intricate details of this enduring relationship and determining its future direction. It will also detail the contributions of prominent Americans who exerted a considerable influence on this dynamic. The aspiration for this study is to offer valuable insights into the critical components that continue shaping the state of Sino-American relations. This study represents a unique endeavor, aiming to fill a gap as there seems to be no collective study of a similar scope that examines notable American figures who, in the 20th century, influenced Sino-American relations either directly or indirectly.

Among these influential figures, we encounter the captivating presence of Pearl Buck, a renowned author who later became an activist advocating for a wide range of social issues on behalf of marginalized groups including women, children, and people of color. Her writings, which captivated the hearts and minds of millions of Americans with their vivid and intimate portrayal of the Chinese people, served as a source of inspiration that encouraged Americans to forge connections with a nation they might otherwise have never engaged with.

Henry Luce, the visionary founder of the Time Incorporated empire, emerges as arguably one of the most influential American citizens of the 20th century. As the publisher of *Time*, *Fortune*, and *Life* magazines, which were widely distributed across the United States, Luce wielded an unparalleled position of influence. China occupied a special place in Henry Luce's heart. Growing up in China had a transformative impact on his psyche. His emotional attachment to the country went beyond geographical boundaries, as he conveyed his deep bond through the pages of his magazines, illuminating numerous American households to and cultivating a substantial appreciation for the complexities of China.

In the pantheon of American journalists, Edgar Snow holds a unique position, particularly within the realm of Sino-American relations. Hailing from the heartland of Kansas City, Missouri, Snow found his way to China, where he developed an unwavering commitment and love for the nation. Through his unique experiences living and traveling in China and venturing to its remote regions—rarely if ever visited by foreign journalists—Edgar Snow gained valuable insight into the daily struggles faced by rural Chinese. Furthermore, his direct interactions with figures like Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) afforded him an unparalleled transparency, allowing him to comprehend the events unfolding during a particularly tumultuous era.

Remarkably, it is the transformative presidency of Richard Nixon that stands as a watershed moment in Sino-American relations. Assuming office during a turbulent period in America, with the Vietnam War casting a long shadow over the international landscape, Nixon faced the daunting challenge of addressing both domestic and foreign

issues. Through his visionary initiatives and steadfast commitment to rebuilding trust, Nixon successfully initiated dialogue with Mao Zedong, opening a previously closed door and marking the beginning of a major transformation in this vital bilateral relationship.

Venturing further along the corridors of history, we encounter the most recent presidencies of Donald Trump and Joseph Biden. President Trump, characterized as one of the most controversial leaders in American history, propelled China back to the forefront of the American consciousness, albeit through a lens colored by negative perceptions. This outlook considerably shaped the views of millions of Americans, catalyzing confrontations with the formidable and influential nation of China. Meanwhile, President Biden, having assumed the mantle of leadership since being elected, has charted a course that largely maintains the status quo in Sino-American relations. The nuances of his approach, while softer and less confrontational, are not very different from those of President Trump. Discernible changes or shifts in this complex bilateral dynamic have been relatively limited, underscoring the continuity that persists in the relationship between the United States and China. While this study does not provide an in-depth analysis of Presidents Trump and Biden, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of their administrations within the context of current Sino-American relations.

Excluding Presidents Donald Trump and Joseph Biden, this study will conduct a thorough examination of each aforementioned notable American, dedicating a chapter to each 20th century individual. Each subject's early life and specific impacts on Sino-American relations will be thoroughly explored. Analysis will also be provided, delving

into the far-reaching contributions made by these figures. It is important to note that this study does not seek to criticize or question the impact or decisions of the Americans under discussion. Recognizing that each impacted the China-United States dynamic uniquely, the research aims to present their roles within the context of the times.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the individuals highlighted previously and within this study, although significant, do not represent the entirety of Americans who have left an indelible mark on Sino-American relations in the 20th century. Many others have also contributed to shaping this complex relationship, and their collective impact should not be overlooked. Among the noteworthy groups are the American missionaries in China, whose presence and efforts to spread Christianity had far-reaching implications on cultural exchange and the understanding between the two nations. Their interactions and engagement with the Chinese people played a role in fostering connections and shaping perceptions.

Furthermore, the Chinese diaspora living in America has played a pivotal role in shaping Sino-American relations. Chinese immigrants and their descendants have made important contributions across various facets of American society, including academia, business, arts, and politics. Like numerous other immigrant communities, the Chinese have become integral to the fabric of America. Their presence and achievements have been instrumental in the nation's success and exemplify the essence of the American dream cherished by many aspiring citizens. Through their diverse experiences, unique perspectives, and invaluable contributions, Chinese Americans have further enriched the bilateral relationship and fostered cross-cultural understanding. Many Chinese Americans

also hold prominent positions within the U.S. government and American businesses, reinforcing their noteworthy impact on the nation's affairs.

Lastly, it is vital to recognize the numerous pivotal events of the 20th century that propelled the United States onto the global stage and drastically influenced Sino-American relations. World War I and World War II, the Sino-Japanese War, China's Civil War, the Cold War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the conflicts in Indochina all played instrumental roles in shaping United States foreign policy, with varying degrees of impact on its relationship with China. Each of these events unfolded within a complex international landscape, with the United States becoming involved at different points, leading to significant consequences for Sino-American relations. In addition, the Soviet Union's role in Sino-American relations and the ascent of the Chinese Communist Party cannot be disregarded. The decisions made by the United States during that time were often influenced by the broader context of the Cold War and the pursuit of countering the Soviet Union's influence. This geopolitical backdrop played a critical part in shaping the interactions and dynamics between the United States and China.

Retrospective analysis of Sino-American relations poses considerable challenges due to the extensive body of research dedicated to this subject and the diverse range of opinions surrounding it. Numerous scholars and experts have devoted their lives to studying and writing about the Sino-American relationship, providing a wealth of information that guides in comprehending this multifaceted dynamic. Their contributions have not only expanded our knowledge but have also inspired many to pursue the study of America and China. Universities have established dedicated departments for Chinese

or Asian studies, fostering collaborations between American and Chinese educational institutions. The examination of Sino-American relations remains not only relevant but imperative, given its practical applications in the public sector, especially in the context of China being perceived as the United States' primary and most formidable geopolitical rival. Thus, delving into the historical aspects of Sino-American relations becomes crucial for gaining insights into the path ahead.

China has emerged as a formidable political opponent of the United States, yet it remains America's largest trading partner. The trade relationship between the two nations is of particular concern, highlighted by America's substantial trade deficit with China. This trade imbalance underscores America's reliance on Chinese goods, with China being the largest importer of American goods. However, this dependency is reciprocal, as the United States is also China's largest trading partner. This interdependence between the two nations creates a unique dynamic in the relationship, as both countries rely heavily on each other economically. This implication is noteworthy, reflecting the monumental strides made in Sino-American relations during the late 20th century.

While economic interdependence remains significant, the current state of Sino-American relations suggests that the future will likely be more contentious than collaborative, as evidenced by the tit-for-tat decision-making by both governments. More concerning is that under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China has not only asserted its power on the global stage but also tightened its control over human rights, a move reminiscent of the Mao Zedong era. The United States' adherence to the "One China" policy, which acknowledges the existence of only one Chinese government, is further complicated by its ongoing support for Taiwan. This support consistently provokes strong

reactions from officials of the Chinese Communist Party, leading to concerns that China may eventually resort to military action against Taiwan. Overall, this complex relationship is marked by a blend of economic ties and escalating geopolitical tensions.

The American-Chinese partnership is undeniably exceptional, characterized by mutual mistrust, with both nations engaging in espionage and monitoring each other. Therefore, comprehending and navigating the intricacies of their relationship is of paramount importance for policymakers and stakeholders in both countries. The intricate web of economic interdependence and geopolitical rivalry intertwining the United States and China considerably shapes the future trajectory this vital bilateral relationship, ultimately influencing not only the two nations but the entire global community. With only 24 years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is crucial to acknowledge that this period has played a relatively minor role in shaping Sino-American relations compared to the profound and lasting impacts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Given that the present dynamics of these relations are rooted in the developments of the 20th century, comprehending the influence of key individuals who shaped Sino-American interactions is critically important. This understanding is not just a matter of historical interest; it has the potential to greatly impact future relations between these two nations. The focus of the following chapters is to highlight pivotal moments in the early lives of various profiles, offering a concise yet comprehensive overview of the impact made by some of the most influential figures in shaping Sino-American relations and Americans' perceptions towards China.

## **CHAPTER 2. THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA: HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

This chapter introduces the early interactions between the United States and China, laying a contextual foundation for understanding the development of Sino-American relations throughout the 20th century. By doing so, it establishes a framework through which the contributions and impacts of figures such as Pearl Buck, Henry Luce, Edgar Snow, and Richard Nixon can be more thoroughly understood and appreciated. This exploration of Sino-American relations paints a detailed portrait, enriched substantially by insights from Richard Baum's lectures on the *Fall and Rise of China*, which offer comprehensive details on China's historical trajectory and its interactions with the United States.

### **The Dawn of Sino-American Trade Relations**

In 1784, the American ship *Empress of China*, laden with ginseng from the Appalachian forests and other commodities, including silver coins, set sail from New York Harbor bound for the Chinese trading port of Guangzhou, known today as Canton (Pomfret, 2017). The ship's captain received specific diplomatic instructions: "It is earnestly recommended to you, both on board and ashore, to cultivate the goodwill and friendship of all those with whom you may have dealings or connections. You will probably be the first to display the American Flag in those distant regions" (U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China, n.d.). This directive underscored the pioneering nature of the venture into uncharted international waters.

After navigating an 18,000-mile journey, the *Empress of China* set sail to return to the United States (U.S), a country the Chinese referred to as 'Hwa-Ke'—meaning



“Flowery Flag”—because the stars on the American flag looked like a familiar Chinese flower. The ship arrived back in the U.S. on May 11, 1785, its hold filled with valuable cargoes of Chinese tea, cloth, porcelain, and gunpowder. This journey not only marked the initiation of formal trading relations between the U.S. and China but also set the stage for what would become one of the largest economic exchanges in the world. It also represented an early step towards cultural interaction, laying the groundwork for future Sino-American acculturation.

In the 18th century, China had established itself as a global economic powerhouse, commanding over thirty percent of the world’s goods production (Pomfret, 2017). With its robust manufacturing capabilities, China enjoyed a strong position internationally. In stark contrast, America, during the same period, lacked a definitive global standing. The loss of British protection and the subsequent inability to trade with the British West Indies had a catastrophic impact on America’s economy. Devastated and burdened with considerable debt from the war, America’s survival depended on finding profitable trade routes beyond the confines of British control (Chang, 2015).

The marked dissimilarities between America and China were starkly highlighted in numerous aspects at the time. One of the most obvious differences was in age: China stands as the world’s oldest continuously existing civilization. In addition, the population disparities were striking. The first official U.S. census in 1790 recorded a population of less than four million people within the country’s borders, in sharp contrast to China, which boasted a population of approximately 400 million at that same time (Chang, 2015).

## **Trade and Transformation: Sino-American Relations in the 19th Century**

The robust trade that developed between America and China in the 19th century dramatically impacted America's growth, reinforcing the significance of this burgeoning relationship. Serving as a catalyst for the industrial revolution, it propelled the expansion and development of various industries such as factories, railroads, textile mills, banks, and insurance companies. This surge in private industry success led to increased profits, further bolstered by taxation on these transactions, contributing to America's economic prosperity. Even before the historic voyage of the *Empress of China*, the allure of Chinese goods—such as “china” (porcelain) and silk—had already captivated the imagination of pre-revolutionary America, leaving an indelible impression on American tastes and consumer preferences for generations to come. The enduring influence of this trade relationship resonated throughout American society, shaping its economic trajectory and cultural preferences.

As America surged forward, emerging as a global leader across diverse industries, China was experiencing a divergent trajectory marked by a gradual decline and a shift towards relative powerlessness (Baum, 2010). These contrasting dynamics subtly advanced America and other imperial powers, often at the expense of China, leaving a substantial impact on millions of Chinese citizens. The developments and challenges in America's relationship with China during this era significantly shaped the global standing of both nations.

## **Turmoil and Transformation: Key Events Shaping Sino-American Relations in the 19th Century**

The 19th century saw many events that would shape the Sino-American relationship (Baum, 2010). These include the:

- Opium Trade, Epidemic, and Wars
- Treaty of Nanking & Beijing
- Wangxia Treaty of Peace
- California Gold Rush
- Rural Misery & Taiping Rebellion
- Treaties of Tianjin
- Missionary Movement in China
- American Burlingame Treaty
- America's Chinese Exclusions Acts
- China's Self-Strengthening
- China modernization attempts
- Boxer Rebellion

These diverse events collectively shaped the intricate dynamics between America and China during the 19th century, leaving lasting imprints on the course of history for both nations and influencing their positions in the global arena. Additionally, the relentless abuse and infringement on Chinese sovereignty by European powers and the West during the 19th century had severe and devastating consequences for Sino-American relations. The once-existing admiration and respect that the Chinese people had for the West was replaced by deep-seated hatred and resentment (Fairbank, 1978). The imposition of unfair treaties, territorial losses, and the unequal treatment of China in diplomatic relations created a sense of injustice and betrayal. These experiences shaped the Chinese perception of the West and became a driving force for future events, including rebellions against foreigners. Revolutionary figures like Mao Zedong would later exploit this ingrained anti-Western sentiment as a rallying point for their revolution.

### **America's Rise to Global Power and the Shift in Sino-American Dynamics at the Century's Turn**

By the turn of the century, the U.S. had undergone a remarkable transformation compared to the nation that had engaged in trade with China over a century earlier.

Ascending to the status of a global power, America was now regarded as the “envy of the world” (Daniel, 2000). It had become the preeminent agricultural producer globally, responsible for a staggering quarter of the world’s goods, while China’s contribution had dwindled to a mere six percent (Pomfret, 2017). With an extensive railway network covering over 193,000 miles and unrivaled dominance in petroleum and steel production, America exemplified the pinnacle of technological advancement and industrial might. These advancements had also transformed numerous sectors, notably transportation and communication (Daniel, 2000).

During this era, the U.S. chose a stance of neutrality that served its own interests while engaging with China. As a global power without territorial ambitions in China, the U.S. pursued a foreign policy focused on restricting imperialist expansion in China, thus safeguarding its long-term national interests in the region (Pomfret, 2017). This policy became known as the Open-Door Policy, urging all foreign powers to refrain from seeking exclusive benefits, concessions, or territories within China. The objective was to establish an agreement among major foreign powers to share in the wealth and resources of China.

As China’s global standing and internal stability continued to deteriorate, the nation, once a trailblazer in manufacturing, struggled to maintain its sovereignty. The once-powerful Manchu dynasty had experienced a marked decline in its influence, approaching a state of powerlessness (Baum, 2010). The dynasty’s decline was due to a variety of factors, with the cumulative impact of its decisions and actions during its reign taking a considerable toll. Proven unable to defend itself against imperial powers, China became an enticing prospect for external actors looking to capitalize on its markets.

American enterprises, alongside those from other imperial powers, showed a keen interest in exploiting China. In the wake of Manchu decline, the stage was set for the emergence of a new leader.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen, a prominent revolutionary leader, poignantly referred to his homeland as a “sub colony,” emphasizing the substantial loss of sovereignty experienced by China (Huang, 1990). Born in 1866 in Canton, China, Sun Yat-sen emerged as a unifying figure against both foreign powers and the Manchu dynasty (Baum, 2010). Educated abroad, he was deeply influenced by Western ideas and the importance of individual potential. Distressed by the Manchu dynasty’s corruption and China’s vulnerability, he advocated for individual talent, free trade, and commercialization as key paths to national success.

Despite these diplomatic efforts, the fall of the Manchu dynasty saw a shift in power dynamics within China. General Yuan Shikai, who controlled the military, ultimately seized power. Although Sun Yat-sen was elected as the Provisional President of the new Nationalist Republic of China on December 29, 1911, and inaugurated on January 1, 1912, his authority was overshadowed by Yuan Shikai’s dominance over the country’s military forces. This imbalance led to Sun Yat-sen’s resignation, his subsequent exile, and ultimately, Yuan Shikai’s ascendancy to the presidency.

### **War, Upheaval, and National Awakening: China’s Turbulent Early 20th Century**

The outbreak of World War I and Japan’s incursion into China would, however, mark the downfall of Yuan Shikai’s reign (Baum, 2010). Facing provincial uprisings and disgrace, Yuan Shikai lost all authority and died on June 6, 1916. China descended into chaos, with warlords asserting control over different provinces during the tumultuous Warlord Era from 1916 to 1926. The Warlord Era stands as a somber chapter in modern

Chinese history, one marked by rampant strife among warlords and the displacement of numerous Chinese citizens that triggered a mass exodus across the nation. It is estimated that during this era, approximately two million lives were lost.

Concurrently, World War I raged on, prompting the allied powers to seek increased influence in China by enlisting the support of Chinese warlords to eliminate German-held territories within the country (Baum, 2010). In August 1917, China formally declared war on Germany, fueled by the aspiration of fostering a strengthened alliance with Western powers. The warlords embarked on campaigns to seize control of German-controlled regions in China, and in return, China was granted a respite of five years from payments stipulated by the Boxer Protocol's indemnity obligations.

The Boxer Rebellion emerged as a violent campaign against Western and foreign influence (Spence, 1999). Christians and foreigners living in China became targets of their attacks, and foreign legations in Beijing were besieged. In response to the aggression, an international coalition, including American troops for the first time in history, descended upon Beijing to suppress the rebellion and protect the foreign legations. The foreign victory led to the imposition of severe reparations through the Boxer Protocol, a treaty signed by China and the Western powers involved in the coalition. The protocol included the execution of high court officials, the establishment of permanent foreign government presence in Beijing, and substantial financial compensation to foreign nations.

After World War I ended, China was disillusioned to learn that territories it had claimed during the conflict were promised to Japan as a reward for their participation in the war (Baum, 2010). At the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, Chinese delegates

vehemently demanded the abolition of all foreign holdings in China and the rejection of Japan's 21 demands, referencing President Woodrow Wilson's "14 points," which advocated for territorial integrity. Despite their earnest pleas, the demands of the Chinese representatives were disregarded, leading to widespread indignation and intensifying anti-foreign sentiments within China.

On May 4, 1919, thousands of students protested at Beijing's Tiananmen Square against Western powers and Japan (Baum, 2010), marking a historic moment that sparked modern Chinese nationalism, uniting the nation and inspiring collective action. The May Fourth Movement triggered the New Culture Movement, with Chinese intellectuals embracing new ideas to confront national challenges. A key innovation from this era was the adoption of Dr. Hu Shi's revolutionary vernacular language as the new standard for education across China. This transformation made education more accessible and inclusive, especially for girls, and paved the way for prominent Chinese writers such as Lu Xun, Lao She, Mao Dun, and Hu Shi himself. These literary figures deeply shaped modern Chinese literature and fostered a growth in revolutionary thought. The enduring effects of the May Fourth Movement had a lasting impact on China's future and critically influenced the development of the Chinese Communist Party.

The May Fourth Movement profoundly influenced Chinese education and heightened nationalist sentiments by rejecting the historical injustices imposed by Western powers (Baum, 2010). Inspired by the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, young Chinese intellectuals delved into the translated works of visionaries like Vladimir Lenin and Karl Marx. Peking University emerged as a vibrant intellectual hub during this period, largely due to Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu, who established the university's first

Marxist study groups. It was here, under the mentorship of Li Dazhao, a respected history professor and head librarian, that Mao Zedong, then a young and ambitious student from Hunan province, began his transformative journey in 1918 as an assistant librarian. This environment decisively shaped Mao's worldview, exposing him to radical ideas and revolutionary zeal. Influential intellectuals like Li Dazhao fostered a passionate belief in the need for a revolution to liberate China from Western domination and reclaim its sovereignty.

### **Chinese Nationalism and Politics: Strategic Alliances in the 1920s**

China was a fragmented nation dealing with decentralization and chaos since the fall of the Manchu dynasty (Baum, 2010). Two distinct and growing factions emerged amidst this landscape: the nascent communist movement led by Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu, and the resurgent Republican Movement led by the charismatic Sun Yat-sen. After seeking refuge in Japan, Sun leveraged the chaos in China following Yuan Shikai's demise to rebuild support for his previously unsuccessful republican movement and facilitate the Nationalist return to power.

Sun Yat-sen's lack of support from America prompted him to form an alliance with Soviet Union leader Vladimir Lenin and the Third Communist International, which provided the critical financial and military assistance he desperately needed (Baum, 2010). In 1923, under Sun's leadership, the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party agreed to collaborate, leading to the integration of CCP members into the Guomindang (GMD) and forming the United Front. In preparation for a military campaign, Sun relocated to Canton in 1925, where he established peasant training institutes and modern military institutions with Soviet support. It was here that future leaders Chiang Kai-shek, Zhou Enlai, and Mao Zedong began their military careers.



Chiang Kai-shek took charge of the Whampoa Military Academy, with Zhou Enlai as his deputy. Mao Zedong, lesser-known at the time, served as a lieutenant at a peasant training institute. These three individuals would later rise to become the most influential and powerful leaders in China.

Tragically, Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary aspirations to reunify China under the Nationalist banner were cut short by his diagnosis of liver cancer, leading to declining health (Baum, 2010). He sought treatment at the American financed Beijing Union Medical College. On March 12, 1925, while still receiving care, Sun passed away due to complications from cancer. Ironically, before his death, he emphasized the importance of aligning with nations that treated China as equals, praising the Soviet Union instead of the Western powers he once admired. Sun's advice to China, to "ally with all nations who treat us on equal footing," carried great weight, and the West's failure, particularly the U.S., to align with him and the Guomindang had far-reaching consequences that still resonate today.

### **Power Struggles and Strategic Shifts: Nationalist and Communist Conflict Amidst Japanese Aggression**

After Sun Yat-sen's death, a fierce struggle for power erupted within the Nationalist government and the Guomindang (GMD), with Chiang Kai-shek's right-wing faction ultimately prevailing (Baum, 2010). From then on, Chiang's Nationalists and the Chinese Communist Party found themselves on opposing sides, each vying for power. The CCP's focus on peasants and rural populations distinguished it from Chiang's Nationalists, who had strayed from Sun Yat-sen's original vision. From 1931 to 1934, the Red Army had recruited over 100,000 members and controlled a territory spanning 12,000 square miles, home to nearly three million people. In contrast, the Nationalists

were perceived as an elitist regime that tolerated corruption within its ranks and struggled to address major national issues, including escalating tensions with Japan.

Facing threats from both the communist Red Army and Japanese forces in Manchuria, Chiang Kai-shek prioritized combating the communists from 1931 to 1934, which led to a prolonged military conflict (Baum, 2010). In response, the communists embarked on the “Long March” in 1934, a grueling escape plan involving over 85,000 troops attempting to evade Chiang’s forces. The journey proved to be exceptionally harsh, with fewer than ten percent of the participants surviving. The “Long March” is considered a seminal and formative event in the history of the Chinese Communist Party. During this period, Mao Zedong emerged as the CCP’s definitive leader. The surviving members of the Red Army eventually settled in Yan’an province in October 1935. Chiang’s strategic choice to prioritize combatting the communists over confronting the Japanese had far-reaching and lasting consequences, shaping both his personal legacy and the broader course of China’s history.

Chiang Kai-shek’s decision to prioritize combating the Chinese Communists over addressing the Japanese invasion provoked dissatisfaction among several members of the Nationalist military who faced the formidable challenge of confronting both adversaries (Baum, 2010). In response to the escalating Japanese threat, a new United Front was established between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party in December 1936. However, it is imperative to recognize that this coalition was merely a superficial alliance, as each party ultimately aimed to undermine the other.

The Japanese invasion of China constituted a pivotal and devastating juncture in Chinese history, culminating in the collapse of Chiang Kai-shek’s leadership and

resulting in widespread suffering, with millions of lives lost (Baum, 2010). Crucially, this invasion unintentionally fostered unity among the rural populace in North China under the Chinese Communist Party, consequently shifting the momentum from the nationalists to the CCP. Concurrently, a sharp increase in corruption and internal conflicts within Chiang's Nationalist regime further contributed to the erosion of its legitimacy. In contrast, the communists, reorganized as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) under the leadership of Mao Zedong, seized the opportunity to regroup and prepare for a more active role against the Japanese. By 1941, the United Front, initially formed to combat Japanese aggression, had severely fractured, leading to clashes and confrontations between Chiang's Nationalist and Mao's PLA forces.

### **The Turning Tide: U.S. Involvement and Internal Dynamics in China During World War II**

The trajectory of the war against Japan took a dramatic turn on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese launched a devastating attack on the U.S. Naval Station Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, Hawaii. Prior to this pivotal event, foreign aid extended to China had been rather limited in scope (Baum, 2010). The signing of the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact in 1939 had effectively halted Soviet support to China and while the U.S. had offered some economic assistance, it remained cautious in its commitment. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, though providing loans amounting to \$40 million dollars and supplying devalued Chinese Yuan, as well as one hundred U.S. Air Force fighter planes with American volunteer pilots to bolster Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces, maintained a posture of neutrality in the Sino-Japanese conflict.

The audacious attack on Pearl Harbor irrevocably transformed the geopolitical landscape, positioning Japan as a formidable enemy (Baum, 2010). As a result, defeating

Japanese aggression in China swiftly escalated to a top priority for American national security. In response, the U.S. initiated a considerable strategic shift, providing substantial financial and military aid to China. In 1942 alone, President Roosevelt's administration delivered over a billion dollars in supplies and loans to China. Additionally, Commander Joseph Stilwell was appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of U.S. forces in China, underscoring the increased American commitment to supporting the Chinese effort against Japan.

During this period, the Chinese Communist Party actively sought support from the U.S. (Baum, 2010). In July 1944, they invited a U.S. military advisory group, known as the Dixie Mission, to their headquarters in Yan'an. Understanding the importance of presenting a moderate, progressive, and democratic image, the communists aimed to cultivate a favorable perception among the Americans. Meanwhile, U.S. Ambassador Patrick Hurley, while engaging in discussions with the CCP, worked to suppress positive opinions about the communist movement and prevent negative views on Chiang Kai-shek from influencing public opinion in America. However, the findings of the Dixie Mission often contradicted Hurley's assessments, reflecting a widely recognized view within China, including among communist circles, that Chiang and the GMD were deeply corrupt and out of touch with the aspirations of the common people.

The communists, on the other hand, projected an image of organization and integrity, thus resonating with the populace (Baum, 2010). John Stewart Service, a U.S. State Department official attached to the Dixie Mission, underscored in a memorandum that if Chiang Kai-shek and the nationalist forces persisted with their trajectory of authoritarianism, economic mismanagement, and unpopularity among the Chinese

population, it was inevitable that China would eventually fall under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. However, Ambassador Hurley intercepted the memo, preventing its transmission to Washington and suppressing the unfavorable assessment.

The culmination of World War II and the Sino-Japanese War arrived in August 1945 with the fateful deployment of atomic bombs by the U.S., devastating the Japanese cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. While the U.S. provided overwhelming aid to Chiang Kai-shek and the GMD, the Chinese contribution to the defeat of Japan remained relatively limited (Baum, 2010). General Stilwell, in particular, believed that Chiang prioritized the preservation of his troops for the impending conflict against the Chinese Communist Party, rather than actively engaging the Japanese forces. Consequently, as the war drew to a close, Chiang found himself increasingly unpopular among the Chinese population, yet still retained the support of the United States. Conversely, Mao Zedong capitalized on how the Japanese occupation inadvertently fueled their revolution, using the years of war to regain strength and rebuild the foundation of the Communist movement. Notably, its membership swelled from a modest 50,000 in 1937 to over 1 million by 1945, while its People's Liberation Army grew from 80,000 to an impressive 900,000 soldiers. Equally notable, the CCP expanded its governance over a civilian population that grew from 1 million to a staggering 95 million. With such momentum propelling them forward, the communists were poised to seize a position of influence and power.

### **From War to Revolution: The Establishment of the People's Republic of China and Its Global Implications**

The conclusion of World War II brought a temporary respite to China, albeit with renewed international interest and involvement in Chinese affairs, particularly from the

U.S. (Baum, 2010). As Japan retreated, the primary U.S. objective in China was to safeguard Chiang Kai-shek's regime and prevent an armed conflict between his Nationalist forces and Mao Zedong's People's Liberation Army. Despite the initial objective to prevent conflict, American Ambassador Hurley resigned in November 1945, unable to achieve his mission of averting civil war. President Truman subsequently appointed General George Marshall as a special representative to China, charged with the task of preventing a full-blown internal conflict. Despite his efforts, Marshall's tenure lasted for only 13 months, ending in failure. China's civil war had commenced.

With supply lines severed and Nationalist troops overstretched in Manchuria, the PLA gradually unleashed its strategic "people's war" against Chiang Kai-shek's forces (Baum, 2010). Overwhelmed and plagued by corruption, the Nationalist troops succumbed to the PLA's advance, with entire armies defecting to the communist side. City after city fell to the PLA, with Chiang's capital city of Nanjing being approached without substantial resistance. Finally, in January 1949, Chiang retreated to Taiwan, marking the end of Sun Yat-sen's vision.

On October 1, 1949, a pivotal moment in history unfolded with the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), heralding a new era under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and Mao Zedong. This historic event was the culmination of the CCP's relentless struggle against formidable challenges. The rise of the CCP and the birth of the PRC were influenced by a complex series of historical catalysts. These included the neglect by former dynasties, the exploitative impact of Western imperialism, pervasive corruption within Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, the brutalities of the Sino-Japanese War, and the transformative effects of World War II. The role of the

U.S. during this critical period is pivotal, as its failure to provide meaningful guidance and support to China represents one of its most notable foreign policy missteps.

While the fighting had ceased and the birth of the People's Republic of China signaled a new beginning, true peace remained elusive in China (Baum, 2010). China had endured immense hardships throughout the tumultuous first half of the 20th century, leaving its economy in shambles and its people devastated. With the Chinese Communist Party at the helm, the monumental task of healing the wounds of neglect and transforming China into a modern and prosperous nation lay ahead. As Mao Zedong acknowledged in a speech delivered in June 1949, "the road ahead would be treacherous and demanding," an understatement that captured the enormity of the challenges that lay ahead.

In search of guidance, Mao Zedong turned to the Soviet Union, continuing China's long-standing pattern of looking north for inspiration rather than to the West—a pattern reinforced by America's decision to support Chiang Kai-shek instead of the Chinese Communist Party (Bernstein, 2014). This choice by the American government to back Chiang had long-lasting implications for both nations. Although there were discussions during President Truman's administration about supporting Chinese Communist independence from Moscow, these never materialized.

The People's Republic of China's constitution was drafted, establishing a government referred to as the People's Democratic Dictatorship (Baum, 2010). At its core, this system granted full rights to the laboring classes, the "people." However, those perceived as enemies of the state were stripped of their rights and subjected to disciplinary measures, including imprisonment, torture, and even execution. Throughout

the 1950s, campaigns were aimed at eradicating threats to the Chinese Communist Party, both internally and externally. In parallel, the CCP initiated a series of land reforms aimed at stimulating the economy and fostering social equity.

Mao Zedong's decision to turn to the Soviet Union had profound implications for China's relationship with America and the Western world (Baum, 2010). President Harry Truman, in his efforts to counter Soviet influence, implemented policies such as the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, which aimed to contain Soviet expansionism. George F. Kennan, Truman's Director of Policy Planning, played a key role in shaping U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union, ultimately leading to the policy of containment during the Cold War.

In 1949, under President Truman's leadership, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established as a collective defense alliance. Meanwhile, Mao Zedong's partnership with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin resulted in the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship in 1950. This treaty involved substantial Soviet economic assistance, including a \$300 million dollar credit line for China. However, the terms of the treaty heavily favored the Soviet Union, and it did little to address China's immediate needs as Mao had hoped.

The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship further aligned China against America and the Western world, exacerbating the growing divide between the two nations during the Cold War. China's close relationship with the Soviet Union solidified its position as part of the communist bloc and strained its ties with the U.S. and other Western powers. The dynamics of this international rivalry would continue to shape China's foreign policy and its position on the global stage in the following decades.



## **Conflict and Consequences: The Korean War and Its Impact on Sino-American Relations**

The first major conflict between America and China swiftly unfolded on the Korean Peninsula (Baum, 2010). The Korean War, lasting three years, resulted in heavy casualties on both sides. Following Joseph Stalin's death in March 1953, a ceasefire was negotiated, reinstating the 38th parallel as the formal boundary between North and South Korea. Despite the limited territorial changes, the war marked a crucial military confrontation between the U.S. and China. This conflict reinforced the U.S. commitment to Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist regime in Taiwan, subsequently making Taiwan a strategic focal point in America's ongoing struggle against communism and its efforts to contain the influence of the People's Republic of China.

In December 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower's decision to sign a treaty of mutual defense with the Taiwanese government sent a clear and strong message to the Chinese Communist government. The treaty further protected Taiwan and curtailed China's power in the region (Baum, 2010). In addition, the U.S. took proactive measures by establishing the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization and the ANZUS pact with Australia and New Zealand, aimed at safeguarding the Pacific region from Chinese influence.

Mao Zedong's actions in the Korean War also had major implications for the Republic of China's representation in the United Nations, as it effectively prevented them from gaining admission until 1971 (Baum, 2010). Nevertheless, China's involvement in the Korean War led to notable improvements in its military standing globally, with the acquisition of Soviet military equipment and a fleet of over three thousand warplanes. Despite the immense human toll and loss of lives during the conflict, The Korean War

ultimately strengthened China's global position and enhanced its reputation on the international stage.

In the early 1960s, China experienced growing unrest within the Chinese Communist Party leadership, with key figures like Liu Shao-chi and Deng Xiaoping openly criticizing Mao Zedong's policies, particularly the disastrous outcomes of the Great Leap Forward (Baum, 2010). In an effort to defend his ideological stance and strengthen his hold on power, Mao enlisted the support of his defense minister, Lin Biao. Under Lin's direction, a campaign was initiated to enhance Mao's cult of personality, solidifying the status of his teachings as sacrosanct. This move was aimed not only at reinforcing Mao's authority but also at quelling dissent within the party leadership.

The consolidation of Mao Zedong's power and the subsequent cult of personality campaign laid the groundwork for an even more tumultuous period known as the Cultural Revolution (Baum, 2010). The Cultural Revolution aimed to eliminate, by any means necessary, perceived threats to Mao's authority and the future of communist China. Mao called upon students to challenge authority figures and engage in rebellion, proclaiming slogans such as "to rebel is justified." This appeal to the younger generation sparked a mass movement, with students forming paramilitary groups known as the Red Guards. These Red Guards were characterized by their radical commitment, ideological fervency, and unwavering loyalty to Mao.

### **From Revolution to Reconciliation: The Cultural Revolution's Aftermath and the Thaw in Sino-American Relations**

The tumultuous period of the Cultural Revolution persisted until Mao Zedong ordered military intervention in August 1968 to quell the escalating violence and restore order (Baum, 2010). The Cultural Revolution's significance lies not only in the violence

and upheaval it unleashed but also in its enduring effects on China's political, social, and cultural landscape. It created a climate of fear, ideological conformity, and political repression, severely impacting intellectual discourse and stifling critical thinking. The scars left by the Cultural Revolution remain embedded in the collective memory of the Chinese people and continue to shape the nation's contemporary political and social dynamics.

During the 1960s, Mao Zedong became disillusioned with Soviet Union leader Nikita Khrushchev's decisions to abandon Stalin's legacy and pursue closer relations with the United States. This shift led to escalating tensions between China and the Soviet Union, culminating in armed clashes along the Sino-Soviet border (Pomfret, 2017). The situation reached a critical point, with the looming threat of a broader Sino-Soviet conflict. In this tense atmosphere, in August of 1969, the Soviet Union made an alarming overture to the U.S., seeking support for a potential strike on Chinese nuclear facilities. However, the U.S. opted against backing such a military action and openly condemned the proposal. This decision marked a pivotal moment in international relations, as it avoided a major escalation that could have drastically altered the global balance of power. The U.S. refusal to align with the Soviet Union against China not only influenced the course of the Cold War but also had profound implications for the future trajectory of China's development and attitude towards American reproachment. Amidst these tense developments, a dramatic shift in Sino-American relations was imminent.

Following a strategically staged photo-op between Mao Zedong and Edgar Snow, the initiation of Ping-Pong diplomacy, and a secret visit to China by Henry Kissinger, the groundwork was laid for a monumental American diplomatic initiative. President Richard

Nixon's visit to China in 1972 marked a historic turning point in Sino-American relations (Baum, 2010). Mao Zedong extended a formal invitation to Nixon, leading to a successful week-long visit that symbolized a momentous shift away from decades of mutual hostility and isolation. This visit opened new avenues for dialogue, trade, and cultural exchanges, laying the groundwork for the normalization of diplomatic relations and setting the stage for increased bilateral cooperation. The significance of Nixon's visit cannot be overstated; it reshaped the geopolitical landscape and ushered in a new era of engagement between the United States and China.

### **The Post-Mao Era: Transition and Transformation in the People's Republic of China**

Despite President Nixon's visit, it would still take several years for the formal reestablishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries (Baum, 2010). Meanwhile, in China, the end of an era was approaching as Mao Zedong's health deteriorated. Mao's towering presence in the country had elevated him to almost God-like status among the Chinese people. As the leader who had defeated Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists, ushered in the Communist Party's rule, and shaped the trajectory of the People's Republic of China, Mao's impending death marked a period of deep uncertainty for the nation.

When Mao Zedong passed away on September 9, 1976, China entered a phase of intense soul-searching (Baum, 2010). The loss of such a monumental figure was undoubtedly difficult for the Chinese people to accept. Amidst the grief and reflection, the country grappled with the question of its future direction. Following Mao Zedong's death, different factions within the Chinese Communist Party vied for power and influence. Eventually, Deng Xiaoping emerged as a key figure with widespread support

within the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army. Deng's pragmatic approach and emphasis on economic reform resonated with many party members and the Chinese population at large.

### **The Deng Xiaoping Era: Economic Reforms and Sino-American Diplomatic Normalization**

In December 1978, during the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Deng Xiaoping assumed the official role of paramount leader of the People's Republic of China, marking a fundamental turning point in the country's history (Baum, 2010). Deng implemented ambitious economic reforms aimed at modernizing China's economy and lifting millions from poverty. His pragmatic policies, exemplified by the introduction of the household responsibility system in agriculture and the encouragement of foreign investment, paved the way for China's remarkable economic transformation in the ensuing decades.

Under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, U.S.-China relations experienced a reestablishment phase (Baum, 2010). During Jimmy Carter's presidency, several factors on both sides contributed to creating an environment conducive to this reestablishment. A key motivation for both parties was countering the Soviet Union's influence. President Carter and his advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski sought to build a relationship with China as a means to counterbalance Soviet influence. On the other hand, China, led by Deng Xiaoping, was motivated to confront Vietnamese aggression in the region.

As a result of these mutual interests, a normalization agreement between the U.S. and China was announced on December 15, 1978 (Baum, 2010). According to the terms of the agreement, the U.S. would sever its diplomatic ties with Taiwan on January 1, 1979, and officially recognize the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate

government of China. This move played a critical role in reestablishing relations between the two nations.

Following a joint U.S.-China communique released on December 15, 1978, during President Jimmy Carter's administration, and the reaffirming of the Shanghai communique and establishment of official diplomatic relations on January 1, 1979, Deng Xiaoping undertook a historic visit to the U.S. in January 1979 (Baum, 2010). The visual of Deng Xiaoping wearing a cowboy hat at a Texas indoor rodeo made two impactful statements that resonated globally: the first signaled the commencement of a new era for Sino-American relations, and the second emphasized his departure from the policies of Mao Zedong (Schell & Delury, 2013). Subsequent U.S. presidents maintained the trajectory of improving relations between the two countries (Kissinger, 2011). President Ronald Reagan's administration issued a third joint communique that, despite its vague nature and contradictions with the Six Assurances memo issued to Taiwan, underscored a continued commitment to the One China policy and the enhancement of bilateral relations.

While Mao Zedong initially opened the door to Sino-American relations, it was Deng Xiaoping who ultimately removed the door completely, ushering in a new era of openness and cooperation. Dedicated to moving China beyond the repercussions of Mao's era, Deng championed modernization across various sectors, especially economically (Baum, 2010). As a champion of both personal and national preservation, Deng aimed to elevate China to the ranks of world powers. He encouraged the Chinese people to "emancipate their minds" and urged them to "advance courageously to change the backward condition of our country and turn it into a modern and powerful socialist

state.” Resolute in his vision, Deng successfully transformed China into a “socialist market economy,” propelling it into the 20th century.

Through sweeping reforms, the Chinese economy experienced rapid and widespread growth under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, who leveraged the support of influential figures like Zhao Ziyang and Xi Zhongxun (father of the current President, Xi Jinping) (Schell & Delury, 2013). Deng’s transformative policies, which combined increased foreign investment with progressive reforms, significantly improved the quality of life for millions of Chinese citizens. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that, despite these advancements, there was still substantial room for improvement. While Deng set China on a trajectory towards prosperity and permitted unprecedented criticism of the Chinese Communist Party, true freedom of expression remained risky, often carrying the threat of penalties.

### **End of an Era: From Tiananmen to Global Ascendancy as the 20th Century Closes**

The underlying tension within Chinese society came to the forefront after the death of Hu Yaobang—a popular Communist Party official and supporter of Deng Xiaoping’s reformist policies—in 1989 (Baum, 2010). His death triggered widespread protests fueled by social and political discontent. As demonstrations grew and hunger strikes commenced in Tiananmen Square, they became unmanageable. Faced with escalating protests on the eve of China’s first visit from Mikhail Gorbachev, and amidst growing international attention, Deng ordered the People’s Liberation Army to intervene. The resulting crackdown in June 1989 led to hundreds, possibly thousands, of deaths and many more injuries, events that were broadcast worldwide by the foreign press. The tragic outcome of the Tiananmen Square massacre starkly underscored that, despite

Deng's transformative efforts, China remained a restrictive state. This episode revealed the lengths to which its leaders were willing to go to preserve their power.

After the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4, 1989, Deng Xiaoping's legitimacy, credibility, and previously lauded charismatic leadership quickly eroded (Schell & Delury, 2013). The global community, shocked by the events, responded with condemnation and imposed Western sanctions. Despite these formidable challenges, Deng's determination to propel China forward remained steadfast. The economic boom that ensued during and after his leadership, persisting into the present day, is truly remarkable. Deng emerging in stark contrast to Mao Zedong, whose leadership nearly brought China to ruin, successfully rescued the nation and set it on a path of unprecedented growth and transformation.

As the 20th century drew to a close, so did Deng Xiaoping's era. His successors, including Jiang Zemin, Zhu Rongji, and Hu Jintao, continued to build upon the robust foundation he had laid (Baum, 2010). Under their leadership, and beginning with Deng, China underwent a remarkable transformation—from a nation isolated from the world stage to a global leader. The Sino-American relationship, once strained, was mended, making it customary for American presidents to engage with and visit China. The end of the 20th century marked a pivotal turning point; it saw the cessation of China's dynastic rule and a nation initially in turmoil. However, by the end of this era, China had re-emerged as a formidable global power.



### CHAPTER 3. PEARL BUCK

Pearl Sydenstricker Buck emerged as a transformative figure, reshaping American perceptions regarding China and championing the cause of social change. Her formative experiences in China not only shaped her as an individual but also propelled her to the forefront of American cultural consciousness, where she left a lasting legacy through her powerful and evocative novels that vividly depicted the Chinese peasant experience. These works garnered widespread praise and significantly influenced the American view of China in the early 20th century. In recognition of her pivotal contributions to literature, Buck received the Pulitzer Prize in 1932 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938 for her magnum opus, *The Good Earth*. This historical novel, characterized by its portrayal of Chinese rural existence, achieved immense popularity. It was translated into multiple languages, sold millions of copies, and exerted a lasting influence on Americans' curiosity and interest in the Chinese people and culture.

Beyond her literary achievements, Pearl Buck utilized her prominence and platform to champion various causes, notably advocating for human rights. Fearlessly challenging prevailing norms and public opinion, she played a pivotal role in shaping American attitudes towards China and challenging prevailing narratives on issues ranging from China's socio-political landscape to racial equality. Buck's remarkable ability to influence public opinion in an era marked by limited knowledge of East Asia underscores her enduring significance as an author, cultural mediator, and political commentator from the 1930s forward (Leong, 2005).

However, despite her substantial impact on American society, Pearl Buck's legacy has unfortunately faded over time. While her name and *The Good Earth* may still resonate with scholars and historians, the wider American public and academic circles have mostly forgotten her. Fortunately, the intellectual and cultural foundations she laid through her early efforts to generate interest in China persist, permeating contemporary American minds and academic discourse. The lasting influence of Buck endures and is a true testament to her invaluable role in shaping American perceptions of China and Chinese culture.

### **Early Life and Formative Years**

The experiences of Pearl Buck's early life were both extensive and meaningful. As is the case with many other influential figures, her childhood played a crucial role in shaping her into the cultural icon Americans came to recognize. While this study aims to offer a concise summary of her early years, it acknowledges the inherent challenge of fully capturing the extensive and rich importance of her upbringing. Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker, born on June 26, 1892, in West Virginia, was the fifth of seven children in a devout Presbyterian missionary family (Buck, 1936). Her father, Absalom (Andrew) Sydenstricker, had a formative background deeply rooted in religion and the tumultuous times of the American Civil War. He chose to embark on a missionary journey to China, a decision that would not only define his own life but also deeply influence the life and perspective of his daughter. This choice led Pearl Buck to spend much of her early life in China, an experience that extensively shaped her worldview and later her influential literary works.

Absalom Sydenstricker, upon completing his education and leaving home, married Caroline "Carrie" Stulting in the summer of 1880 (Buck, 1936). Not long after

their marriage, the pair set sail for China, committed to their missionary vocation.

Caroline Stulting, of Dutch and French descent, was born into a family that had sought religious freedom in Virginia, and later West Virginia following the American Civil War. The experiences of the American Civil War left an indelible mark on Stulting, shaping her character and instilling in her a deep appreciation for resilience and compassion. The struggles and challenges she witnessed during that tumultuous period served as a constant reminder of the importance of empathy and understanding in the face of adversity. Carrie's strength and capacity to love would prove invaluable in her own life and in raising her daughter, Pearl Buck, who would go on to become a renowned author and advocate for social justice.

For Absalom Sydenstricker, China represented a dedicated mission field for the spread of Christianity (Spurling, 2010). For Caroline Sydenstricker, it marked the start of a new life and the birth of her family. Their early years in China, however, were overshadowed by the sorrowful losses of their first three children—Maude, Arthur, and Edith. After these tragedies, the Sydenstrickers briefly returned to the United States, where Caroline gave birth to Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker. When Pearl Sydenstricker was only a few months old, her parents returned to China to continue their missionary endeavors. Pearl Buck's formative years were deeply rooted in Chinese culture; she learned Mandarin as her first language and fostered a profound connection with the country that would later inspire and inform her literature.

The Sydenstrickers, unlike many of their missionary counterparts, chose to live within the Chinese communities where they served. This decision played a pivotal role in shaping the upbringing of their daughter, Pearl Buck, as she grew up surrounded by

Chinese (Doyle, 1980). Assisted by a devoted Chinese maid and nanny named Wang Amah, Buck's mother formed nurturing bonds with her during her childhood (Spurling, 2010). With the loving guidance of her mother and nanny, Buck not only became fluent in the Chinese language but also learned Chinese history, culture and traditions, fostering her lifelong affinity and understanding of the Chinese people. Buck's childhood, however, was not without its challenges. Her family moved frequently and often lived in modest homes with earthen floors that became muddy during the rain. By the age of ten, Buck was attending mission meetings in Zhenjiang, gaining early exposure to the complex dynamics of her father's missionary work. To complement her unique environment, Buck's education was further enriched by a Chinese tutor, Mr. Kung. He educated her in Chinese history, Confucian philosophy, classical texts, calligraphy, and the Mandarin language.

### **Cultural Integration and Educational Endeavors**

After the death of Mr. Kung in 1905, when Pearl Buck was thirteen, she was enrolled in a Methodist school for Chinese girls, an institution established by missionaries (Spurling, 2010). Unique in her status as the only non-Chinese student, she seamlessly blended into the academic environment and excelled as a scholar. Alongside her studies, Buck utilized her English proficiency by teaching part-time, further connecting with her peers and deepening her appreciation for Chinese culture. This rich, cross-cultural experience continued to shape her as she later joined Miss Jewell's School in Shanghai at the age of 17 as a boarder. Given that Buck's educational background was deeply rooted in Chinese culture, her new school's Western-centric approach and strict rule left her feeling out of place for the first time.

After attending the school for about a year, Pearl Buck struggled to adapt to the intensity of the religious fervor and charitable obligations that were required of her (Doyle, 1980). While the revivalist meetings exposed her to a different version of Christianity, it was the social work that truly left a lasting impression. As one of the few white women who spoke Chinese, she was confronted with the harsh realities faced by many Chinese women, including forced prostitution, slavery, and labor exploitation. Witnessing their unimaginable suffering deeply affected the 17-year-old Buck. She listened to their stories and taught them skills such as knitting and sewing. Once Caroline Sydenstricker, her mother, learned of her daughter's experiences, she promptly removed Buck from the school. These early experiences would fuel Pearl Buck's desire to advocate at home and abroad for social change and human rights throughout her life.

### **Return to America and Higher Education**

The time had come for Pearl Buck to embark on her collegiate journey, prompting her parents to send her back to the United States. She enrolled at Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, where she immersed herself in American education and the social environment of her newfound homeland (Spurling, 2010). Here, she quickly became aware of the pronounced disparities in intellectual acumen, ambition, wealth, and sophistication among her diverse classmates. Although Randolph-Macon Woman's College was a relatively young institution, its rigorous standards and numerous regulations, including a strict curfew, challenged Buck's free-spirited nature. Nevertheless, her time at the college allowed her to integrate her dual heritage and forge a cohesive sense of self.

Buck experienced considerable social success during her college years. In her sophomore year, she assumed the role of class treasurer, and in her junior year, she

ascended to class president, demonstrating her leadership abilities and earning the admiration of her peers (Spurling, 2010). Her exceptional presence also landed her an invitation to join *Am Sam*, a secret women's society at the college—an honor bestowed upon only those who displayed exceptional character and intellect. Additionally, Buck showcased her literary talents by contributing frequently to the college magazine and expanding her social circle by joining a sorority.

Pearl Buck's time at Randolph-Macon Woman's College provided her with invaluable insights and experiences. Accustomed to being a minority in China, Buck was now part of the white majority in America (Leong, 2005). However, she most likely felt quite the opposite, as American culture was very foreign to Buck. She also confronted the harsh reality of racial prejudices among her American peers, a disheartening revelation that deepened her commitment to bridging cultural divides and promoting understanding (Spurling, 2010). Her affinity for China and her disappointment at the lack of interest and compassion from her friends and peers regarding her Chinese heritage fundamentally influenced her worldview. In June of 1914, Buck proudly graduated from college, armed with a broad range of knowledge and a reinforced sense of purpose. Later in her life, she would receive a master's degree from Cornell University in English literature (Davis & Trani, 2009).

### **Marriage, Motherhood, and Early Literary Career**

By the end of 1914, Buck returned to China to care for her mother. A few years later, she married missionary John Lossing Buck, a recent Cornell University graduate and agriculture expert. Settling in China in the rural northern Anhwei province and later Nanking, Buck was following in the same footsteps as her mother, as a missionary's wife

(Leong, 2005). This time period for Buck became a pivotal phase of her life, filled with happiness and sorrow, and it set the stage for her becoming more than only what was expected of her. Exposed to different worlds, different people, and different cultures, Buck became evermore aware of the striking differences between the United States and China. Buck was upset by the reality of the barbarity that pervaded the Chinese and especially the women in China. During this time, she began to formulate her opinions and write for various publications, including *Nation*, *Asia*, *The Chinese Recorder*, and *Atlantic Monthly*. It was a time of personal exploration and growth for Buck.

In 1921, Pearl Buck gave birth to her first and only biological child, Carol, who unfortunately was born with Phenylketonuria (PKU), a developmental disorder (Spurling, 2010). In 1925, the Bucks adopted their second child, Janice. Ironically, despite the personal milestones of marriage, motherhood, and a burgeoning writing career, Buck faced immense challenges during this period. She confronted the harsh realities of the civil war brewing in China, and her marriage to John Lossing Buck deteriorated rapidly (Spurling, 2010). Additionally, the difficulties of caring for her daughter Carol, who had developmental disabilities, weighed heavily on Buck. The strain led to her separation and eventual divorce from John Lossing Buck. Subsequently, she placed her daughter, Carol Buck, at the Vineland Training School in New Jersey, which specializes in caring for individuals with developmental needs. Despite it all, her first book, *East Wind, West Wind*, was finally set to be published by the John Day Company.

### **Literary Impact of *The Good Earth***

*The Good Earth*, first published in March 1931 when Pearl Buck was 39, made an indelible impact on American literature and captivated readers worldwide. Through this groundbreaking work, Buck shifted American attitudes toward China, evoking sympathy

and understanding. Its influence was palpable, evident through its consistent presence in newspapers and bestseller lists across the United States and beyond. The journey of *The Good Earth* from its origins as a short story to its eventual publication and immense success is a testament to Buck's resilience and the captivating power of her work.

Originally titled *A Chinese Woman Speaks*, the story struggled to find a publishing house before eventually being published by the John Day Company ("Mrs. Buck Tells," 1933). However, once released, the novel achieved extraordinary success, selling millions of copies worldwide and captivating readers on a grand scale (Spurling, 2010).

The profound impact of *The Good Earth* was recognized through prestigious accolades and honors bestowed upon Pearl Buck. In 1932, she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, a testament to the novel's literary merit and its pervasive resonance with readers (Spurling, 2010). The American Academy of Arts also honored her with the esteemed Howells Medal in 1935. Perhaps the most symbolic recognition came in 1938 when Buck became the first American woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, joining an exclusive group of only three other American women at the time who had ever received this prestigious award.

Pearl Buck's writings were deeply rooted in her own life experiences and the myriad emotions they evoked. She channeled her anger on behalf of the peasants and common folk of China into her work, infusing it with an energy that resonated with readers (Spurling, 2010). Buck believed that Chinese writers had failed to capture the authentic lives of the rural proletariat, and she drew inspiration from her own proximity to the Chinese people and their stories, which she intimately understood. The seeds of *The Good Earth* can be traced back to articles and stories published in the *Chinese*



*Recorder*, a missionary journal that contained contributions from the missionary community in China. These writings served as the foundation for Buck's exploration of Chinese peasant life and laid the groundwork for the themes and characters that would later emerge in her novel.

Pearl Buck's path to success was not without its challenges. Starting in 1927, she faced rejection from magazines and publishers who claimed there was no interest in Chinese material in America, making it difficult for her early writings to gain traction (Spurling, 2010). It was only through the support of David Lloyd from the Paget Agency, who agreed to work with her in finding a publisher, that Buck began to make progress. Her first novel, initially titled *Winds of Heaven* and later changed to *East Wind, West Wind*, faced over two dozen rejections before finally being published by the John Day Company in April 1930. This small and relatively new publishing company, led by its president Richard Walsh, played a pivotal role in Buck's career. Walsh's unwavering belief in her talent and the potential of her work led to the decision to publish *Winds of Heaven*, which proved to be a monumental turning point for Buck. The success of her first novel provided financial stability for herself and her family.

Having gained traction through this initial success, Pearl Buck began to seek out a title for *Wang Lung*, the manuscript that would become *The Good Earth*, later that same year. Thanks to the support and vision of Richard Walsh, John Day published *The Good Earth* in March 1931, launching Buck and her novels into popular and political culture in America (Spurling, 2010). This author-publisher relationship evolved from a professional partnership to a personal one, as evidenced by Buck's marriage to Walsh shortly after her divorce from her first husband, John Lossing Buck, in 1935. The story behind the

publication of *The Good Earth* showcases the determination, faith, and foresight of both Buck and Walsh. Their collaboration and belief in the novel's potential paved the way for its immense success, establishing Buck as a prominent figure in American literature and ensuring her name would be respected for generations to come.

Since its publication in 1931, *The Good Earth* not only gained increasing popularity and influence, but it also profoundly transformed Pearl Buck's life. While she continued to write and publish novels throughout her career, the success of *The Good Earth*, both as a novel and later as a movie, provided Buck with a platform to advocate for social causes. Her newfound position of influence garnered international recognition and encouraged people to sympathize even more with China and the causes she championed (Davis, 2009).

### **Civil Rights Advocacy and Cultural Diplomacy**

In a position of influence, Pearl Buck confronted, among many other issues, race relations within the United States from an international perspective (Leong, 2005). Buck believed that her experience in China as a minority white child among the Chinese people allowed her to relate to African Americans within the United States. She frequently spoke to African American organizations and audiences to share her experience and advocate for equal rights for Black Americans (Cole, 2018). Buck became associated with the National Urban League and contributed to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) magazine *Opportunity*. In 1943, she was named "Woman of the Year" by the African American newspaper *The Louisville Defender* for "meritorious service to the Negro by a member of the white race" (Leong, 2005).

She regularly contributed opinion articles to newspapers like *The New York Times*, a practice she continued until her death in 1973. Additionally, Buck translated

historic Chinese writings into English, further showcasing her deep connection to and expertise in Chinese culture (Lewis, 2017). Buck's activism also extended to her efforts in helping the region she held dear, southeast Asia. She founded an adoption agency called The Welcome House, which aimed to find homes for Asian children born out of war, particularly those fathered by American servicemen. Her dedication to humanitarian work and her unwavering commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of others exemplified her remarkable transition from a missionary wife and mother to a multifaceted writer, advocate, scholar, and philanthropist.

During Pearl Buck's time, China largely remained a mystery to the American people (Spurling, 2010). While missionaries in China initially played a key role in shaping early perceptions of the country, laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 significantly altered these views, fostering stereotypes and distorted images. Buck's novel shattered these limited perspectives, opening a door to greater understanding and empathy. In addition to her literary contributions, Buck, along with her husband Richard J. Walsh, addressed this reality head-on by founding the East West Association (Leong, 2005). This organization facilitated the cultural exchange of information between America and Asia, aiming to educate Americans about the realities of Asia.

Pearl Buck's achievements went beyond merely opening doors and changing perceptions. She humanized the Chinese people in the eyes of readers, eroding the foundations of ignorance and prejudice (Spurling, 2010). For Buck, China was not just a subject of fascination; it was her home. Her experiences in both China and America endowed her with a unique perspective, allowing her to be mentally bifocal—able to see issues through the lens of each country (Davis & Trani, 2009). She used her newfound

platform and influence to defend, educate, and advocate for what she felt was right on issues surrounding China until her last breath. Buck consistently pushed for a more engaged and committed stance from the United States government towards China, urging the country to take a more proactive role (Buck, 1932). Her lifelong goal was to foster positive change in the United States' relationship with China and to promote understanding and empathy between the two nations.

Pearl Buck emerged as a leading authority on China in the 1930s. The publication of *The Good Earth* in 1931, during the Great Depression, coincided with a period of political instability in China following the death of President Yuan Shikai in 1916 (Roberts, 1999). This era saw the birth of the Chinese Communist Party and the restructuring of the Guomindang, the Nationalist Party. From 1928 to 1937, a period known as the Nanjing decade, the Nationalist Party and the CCP engaged in a power struggle for dominance. With the onset of World War II, Buck's commentary became increasingly relevant and important. Her book *American Unity and Asia* was recommended and circulated by the United States Office of War Information's Book Division (Leong, 2005). The war provided Buck with an even larger platform from which to voice her opinions on U.S.-China relations and the American-supported Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek.

While hopeful for China's future, Pearl Buck remained skeptical of Chiang Kai-shek and the nationalist government, believing them to be corrupt and incapable of earning the support of China's rural population (Hunt, 1977). Despite this skepticism, many believed that the Nationalists would modernize China, evidenced by its efforts to improve quality of life through education and sanitation, even while combating the

Chinese Communist Party and Japanese aggression (“Soong, Here, Denies”, 1933).

During this time, the Chinese Nationalist government sought American support. Their call for help was publicly supported by Pearl Buck, Dr. T.V. Soong, the Finance Minister of the Chinese Nationalist Government, and Henry Luce, the founder of Time Inc. In 1938, before the United States acknowledged China’s war with Japan, Buck helped create the China Emergency Relief Committee, which raised funds for China (Leong, 2005). This committee eventually merged with several other major China relief agencies to form the organization United China Relief Incorporated (UCR). Despite her optimism, Buck remained fully aware of the major challenges China faced both internally and externally and continued to support where she could.

Buck also held a distinct perspective on the potential success of communism in China compared to Russia. In a broadcast, she expressed her belief that the causes of communism in China were primarily economic, followed by political factors. She doubted the extent of the movement’s growth once these underlying causes were removed, stating, “I do not believe that the Communist movement in China is similar to the Communist movement in Russia” (“Mrs. Buck doubts,” 1932). Consequently, during the early 1930s, she advocated for improved relations between the United States and the Chinese Nationalists. Buck argued that China had the potential to become a global power, and she urged America to share its knowledge with the Chinese, fostering friendship and peace (Buck, 1933). History would ultimately prove her right.

### **Legacy and Lasting Influence**

Despite Pearl Buck’s tireless efforts to garner greater American support for China, the unfolding political realities of the 1930s presented significant challenges. The brewing conflict between Japan and China could not be averted by Buck’s advocacy

alone. In 1937, the Nationalist government and the Chinese Communist Party formed a united front to confront Japanese aggression, resulting in the outbreak of full-scale war on July 7 of that year (Roberts, 1997). Despite the ongoing conflict, Buck remained steadfast in her commitment to her cause. She spoke out against the CCP and advocated for increased involvement from the United States. Through speeches, public forums, magazines like *Asia*, and her own novels, Buck sought to influence Sino-American relations in the direction she believed best.

In addition to her public advocacy, Pearl Buck corresponded with powerful leaders around the world to champion China and her causes. Notable among these Americans were President Franklin D. Roosevelt, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and President Harry Truman, among many others (Hunt, 1977). She shared a particularly close bond with Eleanor Roosevelt, collaborating on shared causes such as civil rights. Throughout her life, Buck emerged as a campaigner for positive change, leaving a lasting mark on American perceptions of China throughout the 20th century. Her unwavering dedication to fostering cultural understanding and heartfelt advocacy for China's welfare remain enduring elements of her legacy. While her influence may not have received the scholarly recognition it deserves, the curiosity and fascination she sparked in the American public towards China continue to resonate worldwide.

## CHAPTER 4. HENRY LUCE

Henry Luce, the founder of Time Incorporated, played a pivotal role in transforming the news industry and shaping the minds of millions of Americans during the 20th century. Through his publications—*Time*, *Fortune*, and *Life*—and multimedia programs like *The March of Time*, Luce reached an audience of unprecedented proportions (Brinkley, 2010). Before the television era, the Time Inc. empire and its national magazines dominated the news media landscape (Neils, 1990). In 1944, *Time* maintained a weekly circulation of 1,160,000, with special editions for school classrooms and foreign countries, printed around the world in Canada, Europe, Asia, Mexico, South America, Sweden, Australia, and Germany among other locations. *Life* surpassed *Time*'s circulation, distributing over 4,000,000 copies weekly, plus an additional 317,000 internationally. Although *Fortune* had the smallest circulation, it still distributed 170,000 copies monthly. *The March of Time*, originally a radio program, was featured in 10,000 cinemas across America and internationally.

Time Inc.'s diverse platforms wielded considerable power and influence over public opinion, not only informing but also molding individual perceptions and guiding public sentiment in the United States (Brinkley, 2010). Luce's impact on American society was immense and his legacy continues to resonate in today's media landscape. His innovative approach to news formatting set a standard that many others have since emulated. By delivering news to a mass audience in a concise and accessible manner, Luce made information more digestible and engaging for the general public. His strategy

resonated broadly, reaching a quarter of America's population monthly through the *March of Time* alone.

The success of Henry Luce's endeavors has solidified his position as one of the most influential figures in America during the 20th century. While his name may not be widely recognized, his publications are world-renowned, and his impact is everlasting. A patriotic American, Luce harbored a deep affection for China, perhaps as intense as his love for the United States. He saw it as his duty to contribute to America's progress and to promote its role as a champion of freedom and justice worldwide. Throughout his life, he aspired to help China achieve a prosperous future and to foster closer ties between China and the United States as allies. Although the Sino-American relationship today is strained, since the inception of Luce's Time Inc., the two nations have become seemingly inseparable. Today, interconnected in numerous ways, they are indispensable to each other. Thus, while relations could be friendlier, Luce's vision of a closer Sino-American relationship has, in many ways, been realized.

Though Henry Luce has since passed away, his legacy continues through entities such as Time Warner, Fortune, and Sports Illustrated, which uphold his tradition of informing and educating a global audience. Numerous authors have explored Luce's life and impact in their biographies, offering diverse perspectives on his influence, motives, and beliefs. Indisputably, Luce was a revolutionary figure in the news industry. He held strong values and was committed to making the world a better place, believing it was both his and America's responsibility to do so. This study aims to provide a balanced and commonsensical overview of Luce's life and impact.



## **Early Influences: A Missionary Childhood in China**

Henry Robinson Luce, commonly known as Harry Luce, was born on April 3, 1898, in Tengchow (Tengzhou), China, to missionary parents Henry Winters Luce and Elizabeth Middleton Root (Herzstein, 1994). Their Presbyterian faith, deeply intertwined with social activism, motivated them to embark on their mission to modernize China and spread Christianity. The Luces believed in the transformative power of their work, considering it not merely a religious duty but a comprehensive way of life. Living within a segregated compound for Westerners, Henry Luce enjoyed a privileged upbringing, shielded from the realities of life in China beyond its walls. The Luces employed local servants and engaged a Chinese nurse to assist in caring for young Luce. Despite their busy schedules, the Luces maintained a close connection with their son.

Unfortunately, the Luces' arrival in China coincided with the turbulent period of the Boxer Rebellion, which erupted in 1899. This violent uprising was directed against foreign presence and influence in China (Brinkley, 2010). The rebellion posed a grave threat to the Luces and the broader missionary community. However, with the help of their Chinese nurse, the Luces managed to escape the violence, embarking on a treacherous journey that ultimately led them to seek refuge in Korea.

The resolution of the Boxer Rebellion, facilitated by international military intervention, prompted the Luces to return to China and resume their missionary work (Herzstein, 1994). Young Henry Luce thrived within the missionary community, and a pivotal moment in his young life occurred when he attended a missionary conference in Japan at the age of nine. This conference, which was attended by numerous missionaries including his father, instilled in Luce a profound sense of responsibility as an American

missionary. Charged with the duty of making a positive difference in the world, he embraced this mission wholeheartedly, and it would drive him for the entirety of his life.

Henry Luce's early years were characterized by exceptional intellect and a deep sense of responsibility, instilled through his upbringing (Herzstein, 1994). From a young age, he exhibited a remarkable aptitude for learning, starting his education at the tender age of three and mastering writing by five. His written correspondence with his father, whose missionary work often required long absences, became a memorable aspect of their relationship, helping to forge a bond that lasted a lifetime (Brinkley, 2010).

Religion and a sincere love for America were central pillars of the Luce household, significantly shaping young Henry Luce's worldview (Herzstein, 1994). His childhood heroes included his father, as well as the clergy in the broader missionary community. He especially looked up to the ideals embodied by the United States. Luce watched his father's sermons with great admiration, aspiring to emulate their teachings and integrate them into his life. This deep sense of faith and patriotism profoundly influenced his character, instilling in him a genuine love for both God and country.

From a young age, Henry Luce demonstrated a strong belief in the power of words and a sense of duty to make a positive impact (Herzstein, 1994). He developed a passion for writing, recognizing its potential as a tool for effecting change. With his newfound ability, he created homemade newspapers, showcasing his budding talent and his desire to use words to influence the world. This early inclination towards writing and communication would later inspire his future endeavors.

### **Education and the Development of a Visionary**

At the age of ten, Henry Luce was enrolled by his parents in the British China Inland Mission School in Chefoo (Brinkley, 2010). This institution, known for its

Victorian-style English teachings, emphasized stern discipline and a rigorous curriculum. As a proud American among primarily British instructors and students, Luce felt utterly out of place. His two-year tenure at the school was marked by intense emotional turmoil and unhappiness. The cultural and social differences he encountered presented a stark contrast to his familiar environment, making it difficult for him to acclimate to his new surroundings. Separated from the comforts of home and his beloved family, Luce found himself in a daunting and unfamiliar setting. This experience was overwhelming for young Luce, representing a striking departure from the comfort and familiarity of his earlier life. For Luce, the school quickly became a version of torment, marking the first time he faced a life situation that he deeply abhorred.

Facing a sense of exclusion and otherness as an American among primarily British peers, Henry Luce experienced firsthand what it meant to be ostracized because of his nationality (Herzstein, 1994). This experience of nationality-based exclusion not only heightened his awareness but also fueled his determination to effect change and advocate for a more equitable society. Despite the challenges of his time at the British Mission School, the experience enormously impacted Luce's psyche, deepening his understanding of global realities and solidifying his desire to make a difference. The hardships he endured during these formative years would ultimately shape his worldview and influence his future endeavors as a writer and advocate for change.

After leaving the Chefoo British Mission School, Henry Luce's educational journey led him to Europe and eventually to the prestigious Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, Connecticut (Herzstein, 1994). At Hotchkiss, Luce once again felt a distinct sense of difference from his classmates in both appearance and background. However, he

offset these differences with his intellectual pursuits and a strong sense of purpose. Despite his distinctive appearance, dressed in a suit altered by a Chinese tailor and wearing unconventional shoes, Luce distinguished himself intellectually among his peers. His upbringing in the missionary community and education at British boarding schools had endowed him with a maturity and determination well beyond his years. While his peers might have been preoccupied with leisure, Luce remained firmly dedicated to his mission.

At Hotchkiss, Henry Luce seized various opportunities for personal growth and development (Herzstein, 1994). He continued to cultivate his affinity for sermons and also participated in sports such as tennis and golf. In addition, he studied Greek, and through this endeavor formed a lasting friendship with Briton Hadden, who would later become his business partner. The two complemented each other's strengths well, with their shared passion for journalism serving as the driving force behind their future collaboration.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 further solidified Henry Luce's belief in the need for healing and reinforced his sense of purpose to contribute positively to the world (Herzstein, 1994). In his eyes, life encompassed more than just enjoyment; it carried a necessary responsibility. Luce viewed journalism as a means to preach and educate, allowing him to serve others and connect with the essence of humanity.

After graduating from Hotchkiss, Henry Luce followed in his father's footsteps and attended Yale College (Herzstein, 1994). At Yale, he and Briton Hadden continued their involvement with the school's periodicals, further honing their journalistic skills. As the United States debated its entry into World War I, Luce firmly supported American

intervention, viewing it as a just cause that aligned with his beliefs in America and freedom.

Driven by patriotism and a commitment to service, Henry Luce volunteered for the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Yale (Herzstein, 1994). Although he excelled in his military training, the armistice of November 1918 prevented him from participating in World War I. Instead, Luce and Hadden returned to Yale and graduated with distinction. Luce was recognized as “most brilliant” and Hadden as “most likely to succeed.” Additionally, both were selected to join the prestigious secret society, Skull & Bones, which provided its members with support and privileged resources throughout their lives.

The experiences and opportunities at Hotchkiss and Yale College were crucial in shaping Henry Luce’s intellectual and personal development, as well as his unwavering sense of purpose and commitment to service. These formative years laid the groundwork for his future achievements and influence in journalism and beyond. Briton Hadden also played a meaningful role in the trajectory of Luce’s career and his broader impact on the world.

After graduating, Briton Hadden and Henry Luce temporarily pursued separate paths. Hadden traveled to South America, while Luce attended the Republican National Convention, explored Europe, and studied at Oxford for two semesters (Herzstein, 1994). This period offered Luce time to reflect on his aspirations. At the convention, he actively participated in political debates with fellow Republicans. In Europe, he immersed himself in historical sites, deepening his appreciation for the histories of the places he visited. His time at Oxford was spent studying history, engaging in academic discussions, and hunting. Luce was captivated by intellectual pursuits and enjoyed the company of the

intellectual elite. Despite cherishing these experiences, his love for America remained paramount. The stories told by his parents and other missionaries deeply influenced him, shaping his perception of what America represented.

For Henry Luce, America was an ideal to be cherished. Growing up in China, he lacked a firsthand perspective on what it was like to live and grow up in America (Herzstein, 1994). Despite the discrepancies between his ideals and the reality, America remained his beloved home. This realization fueled his determination to make America a better nation. Throughout his life, Luce remained unwavering in his dedication to improving the lives of American citizens. He envisioned America as a global power defending humanity worldwide. Believing there was no limit to what America could achieve, Luce felt a deep responsibility to persuade others to share his beliefs. His dream of creating a national journal was about to become a reality.

### **Forming Time Inc.: The Beginning of a Media Empire**

After working for various newspapers and saving money, Henry Luce and Briton Hadden began developing their own magazine, which they named *Time*. This twenty-four-page publication covered a wide range of topics, including national and foreign affairs (Herzstein, 1994). *Time* also highlighted various professions and influential figures worldwide, summarizing perspectives from leading columnists around the globe for an American audience. Targeting educated individuals who sought to stay informed, *Time* aimed to provide comprehensive coverage of current events in a concise manner. It aspired to be the sole magazine readers needed to stay well-informed, recognizing the value of their time. This innovative national magazine revolutionized the news landscape. Led by two progressive thinkers, Luce and Hadden, *Time* would become America's leading national magazine. Despite their lack of experience as recent college graduates,

they believed deeply in progress, education, and traditional values. *Time*'s success stemmed from their shared vision. Pairing Hadden's desire to create an appealing magazine with Luce's passion for education and uplifting others, the two pioneered a publication that eventually reached millions worldwide. The first issue of *Time* was released on March 3, 1923.

While the publication initially took time to gain popularity and expand its reach, it quickly caught the attention of influential figures. In August 1923, a letter from the soon-to-be President Franklin Delano Roosevelt expressed concern about *Time*'s editorial practices, marking the beginning of a sometimes-contentious relationship that persisted throughout FDR's presidency, with both sides strategically leveraging the other as needed (Herzstein, 1994). Henry Luce was considered a powerful and influential individual not only by American presidents from Roosevelt to Lyndon B. Johnson but also by leaders such as Chiang Kai-shek, Winston Churchill, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Josip Broz Tito (Neils, 1990). As Time Inc.'s global reach increased, so did Luce's perceived power. However, for Luce, it was not about the power he held; although recognized as a figure of considerable influence, his focus remained steadfast on elevating Americans' ethical consciousness and shaping their perceptions and knowledge (Kobler, 1968).

Henry Luce's success led to the expansion of Time Incorporated, with the debut issue of *Fortune* being announced in *Time*'s October 21, 1929, issue (Herzstein, 1994). Targeting the financial world, *Fortune* aimed to educate and enlighten its readers about business matters. Printed on high-quality paper, the magazine sought to attract the business elite and advertisers. Despite launching during the Great Depression and the stock market crash of 1929, *Fortune* quickly gained traction. At a time when America

was grappling with severe economic challenges, *Fortune* offered critical analysis and critique of capitalist-run businesses, delved into industrial matters, examined labor disputes, and advocated for improved business practices across the country. *Fortune* played a vital role in guiding America towards recovery during this challenging period.

### **Expanding Media Frontiers: From Print to Radio**

Henry Luce's ambitions did not stop with print media. In March 1931, the first episode of *Time*'s radio program, "The March of Time," aired (Herzstein, 1994). This program utilized dramatic reenactments to bring news stories to life and captivate listeners. By the mid-1930s, *Time* magazine's circulation exceeded half a million subscribers, while *Fortune* approached one hundred thousand readers. Time Inc. had become a major news agency in America, setting the stage for the introduction of *Life* magazine, which focused on popular culture and covered topics such as cinema, theater, and art. Through the magazines of Time Inc., Luce wielded unprecedented influence, shaping public opinion on a massive scale. His publications reached millions, who in turn influenced others. Regardless of his intentions, Luce's impact on public perception was undeniable.

Henry Luce's values and beliefs shaped his decisions and actions throughout his life. As a devout Christian, he was committed to doing what was right and advocating for those in need, irrespective of their race or ethnicity. Luce held a special place in his heart for China, a connection forged during his childhood as the son of missionaries. When he revisited China in 1932, Luce met with several prominent figures (Herzstein, 1994). Among them was T.V. Soong, Chiang Kai-shek's brother-in-law, who traveled to Shanghai specifically to meet Luce. Soong, a notable Chinese businessman, understood the significance of making a favorable impression on Luce, and he praised *Time* and



*Fortune* while promoting Chiang. During this trip, Luce also met with Pearl Buck and revisited the mission building and the China Inland Mission School in Chefoo, places that had considerably impacted his life.

### **An Advocate for China: Fostering U.S.-China Relations**

Henry Luce's 1932 visit to China reinforced his commitment to the Chinese people. He believed that, despite China's turbulent and violent history, the current conditions and government under Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang offered the best chance for a democratized nation, superior to the Chinese Communist Party (Herzstein, 1994). While early issues of *Time* consistently covered a range of topics, including the Sino-Japanese conflict, the opium crisis, internal bandit conflicts, the Western obsession with mah-jongg, and the Chinese government's struggle for stability, the magazine's focus on and portrayal of Chiang evolved substantially over time. The April 4, 1927, issue featured Chiang on the cover, describing him as a "conqueror" and "dangerous to the great powers." However, following Luce's 1932 visit, *Time*'s narrative shifted, now commending Chiang for his fight against the communists and his efforts to unify the country against Japan. The January 1, 1938, issue, titled "Man & Wife of the Year," showcased Mr. and Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek, emphasizing the "phenomenal" progress achieved in Chiang's China.

Following Franklin Delano Roosevelt's inauguration as President of the United States in 1933, Henry Luce played an increasingly active role in cultivating relationships with the White House and the president (Herzstein, 1994). Throughout Roosevelt's three terms, FDR and Luce met frequently to discuss national and foreign policy matters, establishing a relationship that, while at times utilized for quid pro quo, proved mutually beneficial. Leveraging his position and influence, Luce frequently advocated for China

and other issues he deemed important for the greater good of humanity during his conversations with FDR.

*Life* magazine also played a pivotal role in introducing Americans to China. One notable issue featured a biography of T.V. Soong and his family (Herzstein, 1994). The article highlighted their emigration to America to pursue an education, presenting it as a success story that reflected China's journey towards modernization. Madam Chiang Kai-shek, formerly Mei-ling Soong, frequently appeared as a regular heroine in *Life's* publications, further emphasizing the magazine's focus on influential Chinese figures.

From 1936 to 1941, *Time* and *Life* magazines consistently portrayed China in a positive light, fully supporting Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists (Neils, 1990). During this pivotal time, as China struggled against the Japanese, Henry Luce not only focused on the Nationalists and their leader but also displayed a keen interest in Edgar Snow and his interactions with the communists. Before the publication of Snow's *Red Star Over China*, Time Incorporated paid top dollar for Snow's photographs and firsthand accounts of the Chinese communists. Recognizing the importance of a united front against Japan, Time Inc. decided to present a more nuanced view of the Chinese Communist Party to its audience, emphasizing that collaboration was essential for China to have any chance of victory. The Japanese attack on China in 1937 further solidified Luce's support for Chiang and intensified Time Inc.'s focus on the region (Herzstein, 1994). Given Japan's superior military power, it seemed unlikely that Chiang's armies could prevail without such unity.

In spring 1938, Henry Luce launched a campaign against Japan in his publications (Herzstein, 1994). A poignant photograph from a *Life* issue, showing a child crying after

Japan bombed Shanghai, was widely reproduced in newspapers, magazines, and cinemas, reaching an estimated 136 million Americans. This campaign sharply criticized the Japanese, depicting their soldiers as sadistic and comparing them to cockroaches, while portraying China as unbeatable. However, Luce's efforts to present China in the best possible light had its shortcomings. Time Inc. failed to report on the abuses carried out by Chiang Kai-shek and his armies, highlighting a notable gap in their coverage.

### **The Impact of War and Final Years**

Despite the rise of Nazi Germany and other global events that commanded attention, Henry Luce and Time Inc. never lost sight of China (Herzstein, 1994). Luce consistently reminded people, both publicly and privately, of the suffering endured by the Chinese under Japanese aggression. Unable to convince the American government to provide the necessary military support for Chiang Kai-shek, Luce shifted his focus towards humanitarian aid. With the backing of Pearl Buck and Eleanor Roosevelt, he spearheaded the consolidation of major China relief organizations into the "United China Appeal," led by prominent American figures. These organizations played a crucial role in delivering medical supplies, medicines, trained physicians, and support to the Chinese people during their time of need.

Throughout Chiang Kai-shek's rule in China, Henry Luce and Time Inc.'s magazines portrayed the Generalissimo, a title Chiang gave himself, as a heroic figure (Herzstein, 1994). They depicted him as a leader striving to unite, democratize, and modernize China. In May 1941, Henry Luce and his then-wife Clare Luce traveled to China, where they met directly with Mr. and Mrs. Chiang Kai-shek. For Luce, Chiang was a clear hero, representing the possibility of a democratic and modernized China

within his lifetime. This visit would permanently cement Luce's unwavering support for Chiang.

Throughout the 1940s, Time Inc. consistently promoted Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, despite the increasingly complicated conditions in China (Herzstein, 1994). However, American public perception began to shift following the attack on Pearl Harbor. As America entered the war against Japan alongside Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong, U.S. military leaders and the presidency started to reassess Chiang's leadership. General Stilwell and others attributed many of China's problems directly to him. This shift in perception created questions around Time Inc.'s reputation and prestige, particularly among Americans serving in China who witnessed the realities firsthand. Despite these revelations, Henry Luce's loyalty to a man he believed to be the best for China, Chiang, remained unwavering.

The defeat of Chiang Kai-shek's regime and the rise of the Chinese Communist Party in China marked one of Henry Luce's greatest disappointments (Brinkley, 2010). His renowned concept of "The American Century" extended beyond America's borders, incorporating China's fate as well. Luce believed that a communist China would destabilize not only Asia but also the global order, viewing communism as a monstrous threat to humanity. From that point onward, Luce dedicated himself to denouncing communism wherever it appeared. He never relinquished his fight for what he envisioned for China.

Henry Luce's profound impact on the perceptions of millions of Americans firmly establishes him as one of the most influential figures in Sino-American relations. Unlike others who openly advocated for China, Luce subtly used his widely-trusted publications

to shape a narrative about China, and particularly about Chiang Kai-shek—a narrative he believed was in China’s best interest. The American readership of his publications, much like many Americans today, tended to accept what they read as true, illustrating the unparalleled extent of his influence over China and numerous other topics at the time.

Henry Luce was deeply committed to making a difference in the world, believing it was his responsibility to guide it, especially China, towards what he saw as the best path for the country. In a speech to Time Incorporated executives, he reflected on his idealistic views of America, stating, “I probably gained a too romantic, too idealistic view of America” and “I was never disillusioned with or by America, but I was, from my earliest manhood, dissatisfied with America. America was not being as great and as good as I knew she could be, as I believe she was intended to be” (Neils, 1990).

Despite the evident flaws in Chiang Kai-shek’s regime, Henry Luce used his influence to ensure that Time Inc.’s publications portrayed Chiang positively, while depicting Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party negatively. However, Luce failed to recognize a crucial reality: the future of China was not his to determine. As time progressed, it became clear that the Chinese people would make their own choice, ultimately lending their support to Mao and the CCP. China, a country deeply intertwined with his childhood, held a special place in Luce’s heart, instilling in him an impenetrable sense of duty. Luce passed away on February 28, 1967, but his impact and legacy have transcended generations and continue to endure.

## CHAPTER 5. EDGAR SNOW

Edgar Snow stands as a seminal figure among American journalists who covered Chinese affairs in the 20th century. His landmark book, *Red Star Over China*, published in 1937, offers an unprecedented insider perspective on the Chinese Communist Party and its leaders, including Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. Snow's exclusive interviews and firsthand experiences provided global readers with invaluable insights into the CCP's ideology, strategies, and vision for China's future.

This chapter aims to detail both concisely and comprehensively the early life of Edgar Snow and his profound influence on American perceptions of China and Sino-American relations. Despite his pivotal role in these relations, research focusing on his impact remains surprisingly scarce. This scarcity underscores the importance of John Maxwell Hamilton's biography of Edgar Snow (1988), which serves as the backbone of this analysis. Praised by John King Fairbank, a distinguished scholar in Sino-American studies, as "well-written and comprehensive, with several special merits," Hamilton's work provides an essential perspective on Snow's contributions (Fairbank, 1989). The depth and breadth of this biography are vital for understanding Snow's nuanced impact in shaping the narrative of Sino-American interactions.

*Red Star Over China* was instrumental in introducing the Chinese Communist Party to America and the wider world. Edgar Snow became an unofficial interpreter for the CCP and Mao Zedong, offering insights that shaped public opinion during a tumultuous period both within China and globally (Fairbank, 1967). His in-depth

reporting and firsthand accounts presented a unique and intimate view of the Chinese Communist movement, revealing aspects previously unknown to the outside world.

Edgar Snow's relationships with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai played a crucial role in the normalization of relations between the United States and China. Renowned as the first and last American journalist to interview Mao Zedong, Snow provided the world with a deeper understanding of the reclusive leader who trusted very few people. Throughout his life, Snow provided America and the world unparalleled information on the happenings within China (Service, 1972). His journalistic approach—emphasizing a firsthand portrayal of the people and events he encountered—demonstrated empathy and sensitivity toward individual struggles.

What distinguished Edgar Snow was his unprecedented access to historical leaders and events in Asia. His empathetic and observant nature enabled him to establish connections and develop trust with key figures, allowing him to deliver a unique and authentic account of lives and events in regions where much remained enigmatic. Snow's extensive coverage of Chinese affairs have established him as a distinguished figure in his field. His work continues to be highly valued for its considerable impact on our understanding of China, its leaders, and the complexities of the Chinese Communist Party during a crucial period in history.

### **The Making of a Journalist: Early Years**

Edgar Parks Snow was born on July 19, 1905, in Kansas City, Missouri, to parents James Edgar Snow and Anna Catherine Edelman (Hamilton, 1988). James Snow hailed from a long-established American family with a farming background, while Anna Edelman's family had migrated from Europe in the 1800s, making her first generation

American. The couple married in June 1899 and went on to have three children: Mildred, John Howard, and Edgar.

Growing up in Kansas City, Edgar Snow experienced a relatively typical childhood (Hamilton, 1988). The family resided in middle-class homes, and Snow often assisted his father in his commercial printing shop, where he gained valuable insights into the world of publishing. Meanwhile, Mrs. Snow managed the household and cared for the family. At the age of 13, Snow joined the Boy Scouts and quickly excelled, earning numerous merit badges. He became a member of the first-ever Eagle Scout troop in his city. In school, Snow was an active student, participating in sports such as football and track. He also engaged in various extracurricular activities, including the Sophomore Business Committee and Round Table Club. Snow's involvement extended to joining the Delta Omicron Omicron fraternity, showcasing his social connections and desire for camaraderie.

After graduating from high school, Edgar Snow initially attended junior college, followed by studies in journalism at the University of Missouri, and later at Columbia University (Hamilton, 1988). Throughout his academic career, journalism remained a steadfast passion for Snow, likely influenced by his father's profession and the time he spent in his father's print shop. Inspired by the adventurous and worldly tales of Mark Twain, Snow harbored dreams of global exploration.

### **Journey to the East: Asia Bound**

Leaving his academic pursuits behind, Edgar Snow moved to New York City with his brother Howard Snow (Hamilton, 1988). He secured employment at Scovil Brothers & Company, an advertising agency, where he worked for a year and a half. While Snow enjoyed the vibrant New York atmosphere, he found the daily routine of advertising work



unfulfilling. By the end of 1927, Snow found himself at a crossroads, contemplating his future direction. While he considered options like acting and law school, that year he ultimately made a life-altering decision: to embark on a journey to Asia. Shortly before his departure, Snow penned a heartfelt letter to his parents, expressing his deepest sentiments about his current life and his intense longing for adventure. Though his parents would only receive the letter after he had set sail, it served as both an apology and a declaration of his irrepressible desire for exploration and new experiences.

I have been somewhat depressed by the monotony of existence and the thought that I labored, a cog in a gargantuan machine, while youth, life, was slipping by. Brooding over my stereotype style of living had to have a culmination. I determined it should be a happy one. And to me, found ones, happiness at the moment meant but one thing. And that was travel!! Adventure! Experience! I wanted to overcome difficulties-physical hardships-and enjoy the tokens of triumph! I wished to know peril and danger! I wanted to fill my youth with something more than the pious, pitiful platitudes which I felt surrounded me. And the consistent drabness of the days through which I have been wearily dragging myself, aggravated my nerves and put me to dreaming of fabled, far-off places.

(Hamilton, 1988)

Edgar Snow eventually made his way to Japan by stowing away on the *Shinyo Maru*, a Japanese ship that was transporting the Japanese ambassador and his daughter back to Japan (Hamilton, 1988). After arriving in Japan, he journeyed through the country until he reached Shanghai, China, on July 6, 1928. It was in Shanghai where Snow had the opportunity to meet J.B. Powell, the owner and editor of *The China Weekly*

*Review*, an American-run weekly periodical that covered events in China. Armed with a letter of introduction from a mutual friend, Snow began working for Powell, thereby taking his first steps into the world of journalism in China.

### **First Encounters with China - Deepening Ties and Growing Influence**

After securing a position with *The China Weekly Review*, Edgar Snow embarked on his work to regain advertisers who had left the periodical (Hamilton, 1988). His efforts were fruitful, and he was offered a promotion to Assistant Advertising Manager while continuing to write about his experiences. In mid-October, Snow was sent by Powell to Nanking, the Nationalist capital, to secure advertising contracts. Once again, he achieved success and secured a 12-month contract with the Nanking Registration Bureau. During his time in Nanking, Snow had the opportunity to meet and shake hands with influential figures such as Chiang Kai-shek and interview prominent Chinese leaders like T.V. Soong.

Edgar Snow's encounter with Chiang Kai-shek was an awe-inspiring and humbling experience for Snow as a young American new to China, (Hamilton, 1988). In those early years, Snow held optimistic beliefs that China was on a path of positive change, with Chiang as the leader spearheading this transformation. At the invitation of Sun Fo, the minister for Chiang, Snow traveled to Shantung in North China to witness firsthand the impact of Japanese imperialism. There, he confronted the harsh realities of continued Japanese aggression in China.

Edgar Snow continued to undertake travel assignments from Powell, allowing him the ability to explore China more extensively than any other American journalist of his time (Hamilton, 1988). He spent four months traveling by train across China's countryside, visiting cities such as Hangchow, Ningpo, Nanking, Tientsin, and

journeying into Manchuria, Korea, Peking, and Suiyan. These firsthand encounters with China and its people deeply impacted Snow, reshaping his perspective as both a person and a journalist. The poverty, disease, hunger, and suffering he witnessed during his travels challenged him emotionally and compelled him to advocate for the plight of the Chinese people. The images of individuals ravaged by disease and famine, as well as the sight of children clinging to life with little hope, left an indelible mark on his mind.

Originally, Edgar Snow's trip to Asia included only six weeks in China (Service, 1972). However, what was intended as a brief adventure turned into a lifelong passion. After just two years, Snow's experiences in China surpassed those of any other American journalist (Hamilton, 1988). He found considerable success in his advertising role and as a freelance writer for American editorials. While Snow's initial optimism for Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist government remained, he began to develop a keen awareness of the overwhelming challenges facing the country. In a letter written home in 1929, Snow referred to Chiang as a "dictator" with "mediocre abilities." In his eyes, China needed a visionary leader, a practical idealist who could lead the nation out of its current state of corruption, greed, and ignorance.

The longer Edgar Snow traveled throughout China, the more critical he became of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists, whom he saw as exploiting Sun Yat-sen's legacy for personal gain rather than advancing Sun's democratic and nationalistic ideals. Snow's experiences in China, particularly his first-hand accounts of widespread famine, poverty, and class struggle among the rural population, overwhelmingly shaped his identity and perspective as a journalist. These observations led to a gradual erosion of his faith in Chiang and an increasing curiosity about the Chinese Communist Party (Hamilton,

1988). Like many Americans in China at the time, Snow viewed the country through an American lens, harboring hopes that it would one day embody the democratic ideals of the United States. He yearned for authentic leadership and democracy in China.

The escalating tensions between China and Japan resulted in Japanese military action within Shanghai (Hamilton, 1988). Snow covered the Japanese aggression against Chinese civilians and the military over the following five weeks. Chiang Kai-shek's decision to retreat from the fight and accede to Japanese demands marked the end of the conflict but led to increased anti-Guomindang sentiment. Influential figures in China, including former members of the Guomindang party, began to voice their dissent against Chiang. One such influential figure was Madam Sun Yat-sen.

Snow's relationship with Madam Sun Yat-sen, whose maiden name was Soong Ch'ing-ling, began when she agreed to meet him in a chocolate shop in Shanghai (Hamilton, 1988). From that moment, their relationship flourished. They continued to correspond, and Snow's exclusive interview material with Madam Sun Yat-sen was featured in an article in *The New York Sun* in October 1932. A year later, he authored a more comprehensive profile of her in the *New York Herald Tribune* Sunday magazine.

As a prominent figure in China, Madam Sun Yat-sen became a vocal critic of Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang. She confided in Snow, expressing her belief that the Chinese Communist Party was the only revolutionary movement capable of effecting change in China (Hamilton, 1988). Snow developed a deep admiration for Madam Sun Yat-sen, stating that he had never met anyone who inspired such immediate trust and affection. A strong bond developed between Snow and Madam Sun Yat-sen, as she provided him with valuable insights into Chinese history and granted him access to

influential circles in China. Alongside other notable American journalists like Agnes Smedley and Randall Gould, Snow became a regular visitor to Madam Sun Yat-sen's residence. Within China, she was often referred to as "China's Mrs. George Washington."

Edgar Snow's growing influence, fame, experience, and connections as a foreign correspondent in China made him one of the most capable journalists in the world to cover Chinese affairs (Hamilton, 1988). He became increasingly vocal in his criticism of Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang, as well as the escalating aggression of Japan in China. In his book *The Far Eastern Front*, published in October 1933, Snow provided readers with firsthand insights into his personal experiences in China while sharing his perspective on the crisis facing the nation. He advocated for American idealism and the abandonment of American imperialism in China and the Philippines. Snow's sympathies resonated with many Americans who read his book, and the escalating Japanese aggression in China further increased sympathy for the Chinese cause. He also began to express concerns that Japan was heading towards a path of war with the world.

As Edgar Snow's criticism of Chiang Kai-shek grew and his interest in the Chinese Communist Party deepened, his reputation began to face repercussions (Hamilton, 1988). Some viewed him as a communist, which concerned Snow regarding its impact on his credibility in America. However, it also brought him closer to fellow dissidents who could provide him with access to the highly secretive CCP. Snow's coverage of the December 9 Movement in China in 1935, along with his support for students and fellow writers, brought him one step closer to a meeting with the CCP.

## **Inside the Chinese Communist Party – Meeting Mao Zedong**

In 1935, reliable information about China's communist movement was scarce (Hamilton, 1988). With the assistance of Pastor Wang, a Communist emissary, Edgar Snow traveled secretly and arrived in front of Teng Fa, the chief of the Red Army's Security Police, in July 1936. With their help and after traveling for several days, Snow finally reached the village of Paikiaping. It was there that he made his first contact with Chinese Communist Party leader Zhou Enlai, whom he interviewed over the course of two days. Snow then embarked on a three-day trek to Yan'an, where he would meet Mao Zedong.

Edgar Snow's arrival in Yan'an was met with great warmth and reception (Hamilton, 1988). He was greeted by a government committee and a crowd of city residents. That evening, Mao Zedong personally shook Snow's hand, and within the week, had invited Snow to visit his home. This encounter marked a pivotal moment in history, as Snow became the first foreign journalist to interview Mao. These interviews held great importance for Mao, as they provided an opportunity to share his and the Chinese Communist Party's story with the world.

During the interviews, Edgar Snow submitted questions to Mao Zedong, who carefully provided answers using his notes and a translator (Hamilton, 1988). The recurring themes centered around the struggle against Japanese imperialism in China, the liberation of oppressed peasants, and the rise of the Chinese Communist Party, firmly rooted in the ideals of Marxist-Leninism. While the initial twelve days of Snow's interview with Mao focused on CCP policies, subsequent days delved into Mao's personal history—a topic rarely discussed by the communist leader. It is even said that Mao's wife was present nearby, listening intently to learn things about her husband that

she had never known before. Edgar Snow opened the CCP to the world and paved the way for future journalists to access CCP leaders (Borg & Heinrichs, 1980).

Edgar Snow went on to interview many other communist leaders, Red Army soldiers, and peasants who had joined the movement (Hamilton, 1988). He experienced a sense of pride in the communist movement they supported, as they believed that the communists cared for them and their plight. The problems plaguing China under Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist government, such as child labor, excessive taxation, and low wages, were challenges that the communists sought to address and rectify. Snow believed the Communist Party provided the people of China with hope above all else. Snow's desire to meet the Communists stemmed from the same hope he had once held for the Nationalists—a government that could alleviate the suffering of the Chinese people and guide the nation towards an American-like future, among the great nations of the world.

After spending four months with Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists, Edgar Snow returned to his home in Peking on October 12, 1936, having developed a deep admiration for the Chinese Communist Party cause (Hamilton, 1988). Upon his return, Snow convened with a small Sino-foreign group that included Owen Latimore, a writer, and John S. Service, an American diplomat, among others who regularly gathered to discuss China and world affairs (Service, 1972). In this meeting, Snow shared unprecedented details about the CCP, revealing information that had never before been heard. Needless to say, this was a meeting to remember.

Edgar Snow's interviews with the Chinese Communists became a major news story in China and throughout the world (Hamilton, 1988). *The China Weekly Review*, Snow's former employer, published the interviews with Mao Zedong. The *London Daily*

*Herald* featured his story on the front page, and *Life* magazine purchased his photographs for \$1,000, showcasing them in two issues. Articles by and about Snow appeared in publications such as *Asia*, *New Republic*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. His interviews gained worldwide popularity, shedding light on the Chinese Communist Party and its cause.

### **Red Star Over China: A Groundbreaking Publication**

Edgar Snow's book, *Red Star Over China*, was first published in Britain in October 1937, and then released in the United States on January 15, 1938 (Service, 1972). The book was translated into various languages, and hundreds of thousands of copies were sold within weeks of its publication. It came after the release of Pearl Buck's book, *The Good Earth*, and its 1937 movie adaptation (Hamilton, 1988). The combination of Pearl Buck's book, Henry Luce's stories in *Time* and *Life* magazines, and the increasing news coverage of Japanese aggression in China by journalists all contributed to shifting American sentiments towards China. Many Americans sympathized with the challenges faced by the Chinese people. During that time, however, Americans were also preoccupied with their own problems. The aftermath of World War I had influenced their attitudes towards foreign intervention, and the Great Depression had left them wary and concerned about the state of their own country. Additionally, the rise of Hitler and Mussolini posed a threat to Europe and diverted attention away from communism. Despite this, *Red Star Over China* achieved great success.

Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes read the book overnight and shared it with President Roosevelt (Hamilton, 1988). The book intrigued educators, academics, and people across the country, as it presented the Chinese Communists as potential allies against fascism. In comparison to Pearl Buck's work, Edgar Snow's book provided an



opportunity for readers to experience his firsthand encounters with the Chinese Communists. For many, it was an adventure into China, filled with danger, risk, and reward. Snow wrote *Red Star Over China* based on his own experiences, offering a subjective view and romanticized portrayal of the Chinese Communist movement. Like anyone who cares deeply about a subject or group of people, Snow aimed to influence his fellow Americans to share his admiration and hope for the Chinese Communists as a solution for China. However, Snow also described them as revolutionaries, subtly hinting at complexities and potential dangers that even he, along with many others, may not have fully appreciated.

Edgar Snow also hoped that his interviews would contribute to building a united front between the Nationalists and the Communists against Japanese aggression (Hamilton, 1988). Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists saw an opportunity to use Snow as a reputable American journalist to promote their cause globally and gain more support within China. Snow played a crucial role in generating sympathy for the Chinese Communist movement, both inside and outside of China.

*Red Star Over China* remains a unique book in its genre. Its impact in China and around the world is immeasurable. Edgar Snow's interviews with the Chinese Communists inspired many in China to join their cause and influenced people worldwide to believe that they held the key to solving China's problems. The book provoked the minds of millions and provided additional support and momentum needed for Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists to eventually overthrow Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists.

## **Legacy and Lasting Impact**

Edgar Snow, having spent years in China supporting the United Front that he believed he had contributed to inspiring, faced a daunting task upon his return home (Hamilton, 1988). In 1941, as the United States teetered on the edge of entering the war, the prevailing sentiment among Americans was to remain uninvolved in global conflicts, including China's struggles. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who faced an upcoming election, had no intention of defying public opinion on this matter.

At home, Edgar Snow constantly faced inquiries about his book, *Red Star Over China*, and his affiliation with the Chinese Communist Party (Hamilton, 1988). While Snow sympathized with Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists, he never considered himself a communist. This left him feeling alienated, as conservatives branded him a communist while the American Communist Party viewed him as a threat to their mission. Snow's reporting on China and the CCP aimed to inform the American public and garner support for greater American involvement in China. Unfortunately, his message was not always interpreted as intended.

Throughout the years, Edgar Snow had foreseen America's eventual conflict with Japan. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the media and government sought out Snow for his expertise (Hamilton, 1988). His popularity and proficiency in foreign affairs led him to accept a position with *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1941, which provided financial stability and a platform to reach millions of Americans. Snow's first assignment for *The Post* was to India, with a brief visit to China during his time there, followed by a trip to Russia. Upon returning from China, he shared with *Post* readers his belief that a day would inevitably come when China's issues needed resolution.

Edgar Snow's expertise in Asia and his understanding of the Chinese Communist Party gave him a significant advantage over other journalists covering the Soviet Union and World War II (Hamilton, 1988). During the war, he wrote two successful books: *People on Our Side*, which chronicled his experiences and reflections in India, China, and the Soviet Union, and *The Pattern of Soviet Power*, dedicated exclusively to the Soviet Union. President Roosevelt claimed to have stayed up half the night reading *People on Our Side*, highlighting Snow's esteem and the demand for his insights. In January 1944, *The Post* recognized his contributions by appointing Snow as Associate Editor.

Following the conclusion of World War II and the United States' deployment of atomic bombs in Japan in August 1945, Edgar Snow joined the American delegation on a trip to Saudi Arabia in September (Hamilton, 1988). During his visit, King Ibn Saud held a private conversation with Snow, gripping his hand tightly, discussing Middle Eastern independence and the issue of Palestine. This private audience with King Ibn Saud further underscored how influential foreign leaders regarded Snow. His popularity and the persuasive power of his writings, which had the ability to shape opinions in America and around the world, preceded him wherever he went. Like Mao Zedong and others, King Ibn Saud understood the significance of engaging with one of the most influential foreign journalists of the time. Despite his closeness to leaders whose trust he earned, Snow arguably never compromised his journalistic integrity (Service, 1972). His reputation as a trustworthy journalist proved to be his greatest asset, one that would eventually help reengage Sino-American relations. Unfortunately, Snow's popularity began to decline.

The conclusion of World War II signaled the end of his acclaim and the dawn of the Cold War, accompanied by a vehement assault on communism within America (Hamilton, 1988). Edgar Snow and anyone associated with him became targets in a newly paranoid and hate-filled America. Communism swiftly became public enemy number one, and Snow's name and face became synonymous with the perceived evil of communism in the eyes of Americans. At home, an ideology that became known as McCarthyism was about to declare war against anything and anyone that resembled communism in America. McCarthyism would begin to alienate Snow's views and further strengthen America's support of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists in China. Despite Snow's efforts to persuade Americans and even President Truman that the United States should accommodate communism and embrace different views and governments beyond capitalism, his arguments fell on deaf ears.

In a series of articles written by Edgar Snow, titled "Stalin Must Have Peace," published in *The Saturday Evening Post* and later as a Random House book, Snow argued for a new American foreign policy that "recognizes, as the significance of isolationism abandoned, the explicit lesson that external peace and the prosperity of other nations are inseparably linked with our own domestic peace and internal prosperity" (Hamilton, 1988). His view was that America should find ways to work with other nations despite their differences, instead of opting for hard stances and the threat of war. While his articles received widespread recognition, they would not change the attitude or alter any future actions by President Harry Truman and his administration. While any affiliation with communism continued to be attacked and destroyed in America, the Chinese Communist Party grew more powerful in China.

Although not a communist, Edgar Snow's actions, movements, and communications were closely monitored by the FBI, initially under the directive of President Franklin D. Roosevelt (Hamilton, 1988). Anyone associated with Snow was a potential target for the American government. Many of Snow's friends were harassed and interrogated about their connections to him and to the Communist Party. Diplomats abroad were reportedly instructed to burn his books. During these exhausting years, Snow was constantly on the defensive, combating negative press and allegations against him. His writing output diminished in the 1950s; however, he was hired by John Fairbank at Harvard as a research associate, where Snow's notes on China were eventually published by the university for scholarly use.

After the Chinese Communist takeover from the Nationalists in 1949, Edgar Snow signed a contract with Random House to write a biography of Mao Zedong (Hamilton, 1988). Unable to travel to China, he began working on an autobiography instead. The book, completed in 1958, was titled *Journey to the Beginning: A Personal View of Contemporary History*. The book received mostly positive but muted reviews, showcasing the extent of the non-existent and often hostile relationship the United States had with China. It largely focused on events before 1949, once again highlighting the misalignment between Snow's perspective and America's foreign policy. For Snow, he stated:

American Policy has offered little to countries whose primary pre-occupation or problem is not military defense against hypothetical Communist aggression from without but internal defense against the political consequences of profound

poverty, industrial and scientific backwardness, and lack of capital and technique.  
(Hamilton, 1988)

Snow advocated for the world and believed himself, more than anything else, to be a citizen of the world. Many who thought of Snow as a traitor to America did not understand that Snow believed in shared human interests across borders, versus national interests between borders. For Snow, human values were always more important than corporate values.

By 1960, the American perception of China had changed significantly (Hamilton, 1988). The Truman administration had made no efforts to engage with the Chinese Communists, and the Korean War had further strained relations between the two countries. The Eisenhower administration continued to support Taiwan and oppose Red China. When Edgar Snow returned to China in 1960, he faced a very different American audience compared to when he first arrived in 1936. Americans had transformed from being curious and interested in China to harboring strong animosity towards what they perceived as a country where evil communism prevailed.

After receiving sponsorship from *Look* magazine, Edgar Snow successfully obtained an invitation from China and approval from the State Department to travel there (Hamilton, 1988). On June 28, 1960, Snow returned to China for an extended stay, marking almost 20 years since his last visit. In Snow's eyes, China had undergone a profound transformation, particularly in relation to the vulnerable peasant population. The long-standing history of the wealthy and powerful exploiting others seemed to have come to an end in China.

This trip held great significance for Edgar Snow's career. Upon arrival, he meticulously scheduled his time to maximize his learning opportunities (Hamilton, 1988). He investigated various aspects of Chinese society, including arts, healthcare, government, education, living conditions, agriculture, economy, recreation, and religion. He planned to meet and interview top communist leaders, including Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. Snow's initial meeting was with Zhou Enlai, who expressed openness to negotiations with the United States. This marked the first of many indications that China was willing to reestablish dialogue with America.

It took four months for Snow to finally meet with Mao Zedong, a momentous encounter that took place on the terrace overlooking Tiananmen Square (Hamilton, 1988). Occurring on the 11th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Snow became a symbol of his longstanding role as a bridge between the Chinese Communists and America. Over the following weeks, Snow would have two meetings with Mao, totaling nearly ten hours.

During this challenging time for China, Edgar Snow's conversations with Mao Zedong unveiled much that was unknown to the rest of the world (Hamilton, 1988). Mao acknowledged that China had much to learn and was far from achieving modernization. China remained a poor country, grappling with the need for advancement. Mao also expressed a desire to maintain world peace and avoid war. Snow's interview with Mao was the first conducted by an American since 1949. Afterward, Snow received permission to view, photograph, and videotape the People's Republic of China's military installations, becoming the first Westerner allowed to do so. Upon returning home to

America, Snow promptly began working on his next book, *The Other Side of the River: Red China Today*.

In this book, Edgar Snow focused on reporting what he had actually observed in China (Hamilton, 1988). He took great care in crafting his statements, providing qualifications and warnings to acknowledge that his knowledge was limited to his five months there. Snow used the book to critique the People's Republic of China's stance on foreign correspondents and questioned the outcomes of the Hundred Flowers Movement and the restrictions on free thinking in the country. He also recognized that the Communist Party in China had become authoritarian, albeit in a different manner than the Nationalists. While the Nationalists acted in their own self-interest, the Communist authoritarianism aimed to bring about social, political, and economic reform for the peasant and rural classes within China. Snow argued that this authoritarianism was necessary to transition China into a socialist state and address the individual needs of the Chinese people.

Undoubtedly, China had undergone major changes. Mao Zedong had assumed leadership, and a cult of personality had emerged around him (Hamilton, 1988). It was clear that this was Mao's China. Edgar Snow acknowledged this fact and questioned whether it was ultimately beneficial or detrimental for China. Mao himself confirmed that certain challenges from the past persisted in China. For instance, food shortages, which had occurred in some areas before, remained a problem for the country's large population. Being the first journalist to delve deeply into the post-establishment era of the People's Republic of China, Snow faced challenges in accurately portraying the full extent of what had happened.



Controversy surrounds the objectivity and accuracy of Edgar Snow's reporting. Indeed, an element of subjectivity is inherent in any journalist's work. Snow first arrived in China at the age of 22 with no prior knowledge of the country or its history, intending to stay for only six weeks. Yet, his visit extended to 13 years, during which he traveled extensively across China to places no other American journalist had explored before. Over time, he developed a deep affection for China and its people. True, effective, and successful foreign policy and journalism depend on a deep, comprehensive understanding of a nation's dynamics, including its culture, people, food, religion, and other characteristics that define its society (Service, 1972). Moreover, a genuine emotional capacity for empathy—placing oneself in another's shoes—is essential for truly understanding the challenges faced by a foreign populace. A closed mind yields no benefits. According to American diplomat and friend to Snow, John S. Service, "it was these qualities, as well as his reputation for honest, factual reporting, that commended Ed Snow to the Chinese leaders, that led to their confidence and friendship, and that opened doors never opened to anyone" (Service, 1972).

Edgar Snow's emotional attachment to China, along with his belief in Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party, meant his reportage was sometimes viewed as bordering on the fine line between journalistic objectivity and propaganda (Mathews, 1989). However, his desire for positive outcomes in a country he knew better than most led him to recognize that he could not evaluate China's progress through the same lens as the United States or any other country. Given the extreme suffering and death Snow witnessed upon his arrival during Chiang Kai-shek's rule, his perspective on positive changes was understandably different from those who had not seen such conditions

firsthand. After spending 13 years in China, Snow deeply understood the inherent differences between nations, recognizing that China's path would be distinctively its own.

When Edgar Snow returned to China on June 28, 1960, he was asked by a Chinese Communist Party official about his impressions of the country compared to 32 years earlier. Snow responded, "China is no longer a backward country." The official countered:

You are mistaken. China is still a backward country. It is true that China is in better condition than it was under Chiang Kai-shek, but that is not saying much. The old China could hardly have been worse; some improvement was inevitable. The big change is in the people. I believe they have changed fundamentally for the better. However, if we discuss economic progress, we can only say that China has laid the foundations for fundamental change. We have enormous difficulties to overcome before we can consider ourselves a forward nation. (Snow, 1962)

This conversation underscores that Edgar Snow was well aware of the real conditions in China, yet he chose to remain optimistic about the country's direction. He believed in the transformative process underway, convinced that China was on the path to improvement. However, in all fairness, the true effects of the Great Leap Forward, for example, would only become fully understood years later.

During Edgar Snow's visit to China, John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States (Hamilton, 1988). Upon returning to the United States, Snow's first article for *Look* magazine, covering his interview with Zhou Enlai, was published in January 1961. His book, *The Other Side of the River: Red China Today*, published just

before Christmas in November 1962, was his longest book to date, totaling over 13,000 pages. With limited information coming out of China, the book became a popular choice for those seeking the most up-to-date information on a country closed off to foreigners. By 1965, Americans had purchased over 21,000 copies.

The following years remained challenging for Edgar Snow. While there was interest in his reporting, it did not translate into much more than that (Hamilton, 1988). President Kennedy had no interest in changing American foreign policy towards China, and the American people were content with the existing conditions. This period in America was marked by a pronounced lack of interest in global affairs. Surveys revealed an increase in American ignorance regarding events in China, with nearly 30% of Americans unaware that China had a communist government. The once strong attraction and keen interest in China among many Americans had waned, giving way to disinterest. President Lyndon B. Johnson continued with the status quo after President Kennedy's assassination.

During the years after returning from China and finishing his book, Edgar Snow and his wife Lois Wheeler Snow would enjoy much of the 1960s in Switzerland with their children. In 1968, they would purchase a Swiss farm there. While they considered returning to the United States one day, their house in Switzerland would be the last home for Snow. Living in Switzerland was cheaper than the United States and it allowed Snow to escape the constant attacks he found himself subject to in America. For Snow, being unable to bridge the two countries he loved so much became an agonizing reminder for him. He began to take his position and influence delicately, as he knew it could be used to make the relations between the two countries worse.

In 1964, Edgar Snow made a return trip to China. Sponsored by French, German, and Italian publications, the purpose was to witness the progress made by Communist China since his last visit (Hamilton, 1988). During this trip, Snow once again interviewed both Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong. Both leaders hinted at their interest in opening negotiations with America. However, with America deeply involved in the Vietnam War, concerns arose about China's potential involvement. Mao assured Snow that China would not send Chinese troops to intervene in the Vietnam War.

Returning to Switzerland, Edgar Snow devoted himself to sharing what he had learned (Hamilton, 1988). He worked on a book, *China Since the Bomb*, and undertook a documentary project. The documentary, *One Fourth of Humanity*, was completed towards the end of 1966, shortly after the Cultural Revolution that shook China in the summer of that year. Snow was deeply troubled by the fact that he could not fully grasp what was truly happening in China. Saddened by the ongoing struggles in China and the Vietnam War, Snow kept himself busy. He continued writing for foreign markets based on any available information and updated *Red China Today* for European audiences.

In 1968, Richard Nixon was elected as the 37th President of the United States (Hamilton, 1988). In July 1969, Edgar Snow wrote directly to Chairman Mao Zedong, requesting permission to visit China. In June 1970, Snow and his wife received an invitation, and they departed in July, arriving in August. Unfortunately, this would be Snow's final trip to China. He was the last journalist to visit China before the Cultural Revolution, and now he was the first to return after it.

Upon his arrival, Edgar Snow met with Zhou Enlai, who once again discussed the need to improve Sino-American relations (Hamilton, 1988). Snow stayed in China, and in

October, he witnessed the 21st anniversary celebration of the People's Republic of China, as he had done before. During this visit, Snow had another face-to-face meeting with Chairman Mao Zedong. They discussed Snow's letter and the potential for opening talks with the United States. This moment was captured in a photograph that became one of the most iconic images of Snow and Mao. The photo was published on the front cover of China's *People's Daily*, referring to Snow as a "friendly" American.

On December 18, Edgar Snow met again with Mao Zedong. During their discussion, they covered a range of topics including the possibility of President Nixon visiting China, the progress made by the Chinese Communist Party and its ongoing challenges, and the Cultural Revolution—a topic on which Mao expressed dissatisfaction. Although Snow sought to delve deeper into the details of the Cultural Revolution, he felt that he was not receiving the full truth. Nevertheless, it was clear that Snow's visit and his candid conversation with Mao marked a meaningful step toward the reestablishment of Sino-American relations.

In April 1971, China extended an invitation to the American Table Tennis team, who were participating in a tournament in Japan, to visit China (Hamilton, 1988). Edgar Snow saw this as the perfect opportunity to publish his interview with Mao Zedong, which included a direct invitation for President Nixon to visit China. He approached *Life* magazine, which purchased and published Snow's interviews, along with 21 pages of pictures of the American Table Tennis team in China. Following a secret visit by Henry Kissinger to China, President Nixon announced on July 16, 1971, that he would accept the invitation "with pleasure." Snow's phone began ringing with requests for comments, and news outlets such as the Associated Press, *Chicago Tribune*, *Life*, *Time*, and *The New*

*York Times* ran stories featuring Snow's remarks. In the following two months, his new paperback edition of *Red Star Over China* sold over 11,000 copies. Snow's long-held dream of bringing together the Chinese Communist Party and America was finally becoming a reality. Snow was eager to cover President Nixon's trip, and *Life* wanted him to cover the trip for them, telling Snow to name his price.

Unfortunately, Edgar Snow would not be able to fulfill this opportunity. After experiencing acute fatigue following a trip to Italy, Snow learned that he had pancreatic cancer (Hamilton, 1988). He spent his remaining days at home, surrounded by his family. Messages of support came from American and Chinese leaders, including President Nixon. On January 24, 1972, China took an extraordinary action by sending a medical team consisting of four doctors, an anesthesiologist, and nurses to Switzerland to bring Snow back to China for treatment. Upon their arrival, however, the medical team realized that Snow was too ill to travel. They stayed with him in Switzerland, providing care until his final moments. Thanks to the Chinese medical team, Snow was able to spend his last days surrounded by loved ones and friends. On February 15, 1972, just three days before President Nixon's trip to China, Edgar Snow passed away.

The People's Republic of China honored Edgar Snow's life and dedication to China by memorializing him in the Great Hall of the People, making him the first foreigner to receive such recognition (Hamilton, 1988). News agencies worldwide paid tribute to Snow and acknowledged his commitment as a foreign journalist. As President Nixon arrived in China, Snow's presence was deeply felt by every journalist accompanying the president. Snow's books served as valuable resources for President Nixon, his administration, and journalists in preparation for the trip and the reopening of

Sino-American relations. Edgar Snow's ashes were divided and placed in both the United States and China, the two places he considered home. In China, this half was interred at Peking University, with a white marble marker bearing words written by Zhou Enlai: "In Memory of Edgar Snow, an American friend of the Chinese people."

Edgar Snow's life was marked by immense significance and purpose. His impact on Sino-American relations and historical understanding remains unparalleled by any other foreign correspondent or journalist. Snow serves as a lasting reminder of how a single individual can profoundly influence the relationship between two nations. His books and writings continue to be valued resources for students and scholars worldwide. Reflecting on his legacy, we finally turn to China itself. A condolence letter written by Premier Zhou Enlai strongly concludes the importance of what Edgar Snow meant to China:

Mr. Snow's life was a testimony to the sincere friendship between the Chinese and American peoples. Back in the period of the Chinese people's national-democratic revolution, he already entered into friendship with China's revolutionary forces. Breaking through the numerous obstacles of that time, he enthusiastically introduced to the American and other peoples the Chinese revolutionary struggles and the 25 thousand li Long March of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, which were undertaken under the leadership of Chairman Mao Tsetung. After the liberation of our country, he came again on several visits and reported the progress of the people's revolutionary cause of New China led by Chairman Mao. His writings were widely appreciated both in China and abroad. Even during his serious illness, he never ceased turning his

mind to working for better understanding and friendship between the Chinese and American peoples. The Chinese people will not forget such an old friend of theirs. Mr. Snow has left us, but we believe that the friendship between the Chinese and American peoples, for which he worked all his life, will certainly grow daily.

(Service, 1972)

This recognition of Snow's importance to the Chinese people by Premier Zhou Enlai stands as a powerful testament to Snow's life's mission of fostering closer relations between the United States and China.



## **CHAPTER 6. RICHARD NIXON**

President Nixon, the 37th president of the United States, played a pivotal role in establishing the first official relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China. His efforts to engage with China and initiate diplomatic dialogue laid the groundwork for the normalization of relations between the two countries. This historic development, often referred to as "Nixon's China initiative," marked a significant shift in U.S. foreign policy and opened the door to increased cooperation and engagement between the two nations.

Richard Nixon's career and achievements are notably extensive. To ensure a focused examination of his ascent to the presidency and his immeasurable impact on Sino-American relations, this discussion intentionally omits topics less relevant to these themes. By concentrating on Nixon's journey to the White House and his strategic engagement with China, we gain deeper insights into the substantial contributions he made to Sino-American relations. His initiatives toward rapprochement with China dramatically altered the dynamics of global geopolitics and power structures. Much of the current geopolitical landscape, particularly China's ascent as a global power, can be traced back to Nixon's historic 1972 visit. While his presidency is often overshadowed by scandal, it undeniably marked a turning point in the 20th century and set a new course for Sino-American relations that continues to evolve today.

### **Early Life and Formative Years**

Richard Milhous Nixon was born on January 9, 1913, on his family's citrus farm in Yorba Linda, California (Aitken, 1993). Named after the legendary King Richard the

Lionheart of England, he had a formidable namesake to live up to. His father, Francis (Frank) Anthony Nixon, a hardworking man from Ohio, and his mother, Hannah Milhous, a Quaker from southern Indiana, first met on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1908. They married just four months later, on June 25, 1908.

After marrying, the Nixons settled in Yorba Linda with a dream of owning a citrus farm. They purchased 12 acres of land using money borrowed from the Milhous family (Aitken, 1993). Frank Nixon constructed their home using an \$800 do-it-yourself house-building kit from Sears department store, completing the small house where the family would live until 1922. The simple farmhouse featured two bedrooms—one upstairs for the children and one downstairs for the parents—a small kitchen, and an outdoor bathroom. The family relied on oil lamps for lighting and a wood-burning stove for cooking, embodying the simplicity of rural farm living. While the home lacked modern conveniences like refrigeration, a telephone, electricity, and running water, Nixon fondly remembered it as a place filled with happy memories. The one indulgence was the brick fireplace that Frank Nixon took great pride in building. Richard Nixon reminisced about the “marvelous fireplace” where the family would gather:

We'd come down and sit around that fireplace. There was no television then, no radio, but we did talk evening after evening. And that's one of the reasons I think I got an interest in politics very, very early. I can even remember my father berating my mother for having voted for Woodrow Wilson in 1916. (Aitken, 1993)

Richard Nixon's upbringing in a vastly different America, characterized by modesty and minimal conveniences, laid the foundation for his remarkable journey to the

presidency (Aitken, 1993). Despite facing adversity in his childhood, Nixon ascended to the highest office in the land, embodying the essence of the American dream. His formative years, shaped by the challenges he confronted, instilled in him resilience and determination. Frank and Hannah Nixon raised five sons, in order of birth: Harold Samuel, Richard, Francis Donald, Arthur Burdick, and Edward Calvert.

### **Educational Pursuits and Early Influences**

Richard Nixon's parents prioritized education, ensuring he had access to the best opportunities they could afford. His mother, a pivotal influence in his upbringing, played a central role in shaping his intellectual growth (Aitken, 1993). She instilled in him a love for learning by teaching him to read before he even entered school and exposing him to a broad range of literature, including classic novels and subjects such as history and languages. By the age of five, Nixon was reading children's encyclopedias, and he soon progressed to newspapers and magazines like *National Geographic*, fueling his curiosity and fostering a desire for adventure in the distant places he read about. His mother's fluency in multiple languages, including German, Greek, Latin, and French, fostered Nixon's curiosity about the wider world, greatly shaping his global perspective. This early exposure to different cultures laid the groundwork for Nixon's enduring interest in international affairs, a passion that defined his presidency. Renowned for his sharp intellect and exceptional memory from a young age, Nixon's upbringing prepared him with the cognitive tools and knowledge necessary to navigate complex diplomatic challenges he would face throughout his political career.

Richard Nixon was raised with a blend of Quaker virtues, including idealism, pacifism, informality, and emotionalism (Mazlish, 2017). These religious principles, coupled with his father's more fundamentalist beliefs, profoundly influenced Nixon

during his formative years. However, as he matured, Nixon's religious involvement waned. Despite his Quaker upbringing, he was not actively engaged in his religion before assuming the presidency, and church attendance was infrequent. Even during his time in office, religious undertones were seldom present in social settings at the White House. Reflecting on his religious background, Nixon remarked, "I suppose the Quakerism just strengthened my own temperament here. I'm an introvert in an extrovert profession."

### **Adversity and Personal Growth**

In addition to financial challenges, the Nixon family faced substantial personal hardships. Arthur, Richard Nixon's younger brother, tragically succumbed to tubercular meningitis when Nixon was just 12 years old (Aitken, 1993). A few years later, when Nixon was about 19, his oldest brother, Harold, also fell victim to tuberculosis and passed away. Understandably, these losses deeply affected Nixon both at the time and throughout his life. He often found it difficult to discuss how these tragedies impacted him, even during his adult years.

Richard Nixon's formative years were marked by considerable challenges, including his brothers' health struggles and his father's financial difficulties. These hardships provided Nixon with a powerful impetus to transcend the limitations of his past. He used these experiences as motivation to forge a better future for himself, drawing strength from his parents' belief that he was the master of his own destiny. Throughout his life, Nixon remained committed to the ideals of the American dream, a theme he famously echoed in his acceptance speech at the 1968 Republican National Convention when he received the Republican nomination for President.

Throughout his schooling, Richard Nixon demonstrated exceptional academic dedication, often studying late into the night, sleeping only a few hours, and rising at four

a.m. (Aitken, 1993). This rigorous routine became a hallmark of Nixon's work ethic, persisting throughout his life and contributing significantly to his future success academically and politically. Although socially challenged by his shyness and introverted nature, he compensated through intellectual pursuits. His commitment to academic excellence earned him awards and tuition scholarships to prestigious universities such as Harvard and Yale. However, familial obligations and his brother Harold's health issues compelled Nixon to remain close to home during this critical period. Despite these constraints, Nixon's determination to pursue his dreams remained unwavering, regardless of the college or university he attended.

From childhood, Richard Nixon harbored a passion for sports. While enrolled at Whittier College, where he immersed himself in a wide range of activities on and off campus, he persistently tried to make the football team, spending most weekdays from four to seven p.m. practicing with the team (Aitken, 1993). Despite never getting the chance to play in actual games, Nixon regarded his time under the guidance of Coach "Chief" Wallace Newman as one of the most rewarding experiences of his life. He credited Coach Wallace with reinforcing his belief that with hard work, even the greatest of victories are attainable. Nixon's unwavering commitment, despite drawbacks or rejections, set him apart throughout his life. Where many would have quit, Nixon did not. This level of commitment was consistently displayed in every challenging situation he faced, from law school to the Watergate incident.

After graduating from Whittier College, Nixon earned a scholarship to attend Duke University Law School (Aitken, 1993). Although his tuition was covered, he still had to pay for his own living expenses, which led him to secretly reside in an abandoned

tool shed just outside the campus. This arrangement further tested his perseverance. For the first time, Nixon was placed in a highly rigorous academic environment where he encountered fierce competition from his classmates. Despite always being a diligent student, he began to question whether his efforts could meet the high standards set before him. Ultimately, Nixon's routine of countless hours spent studying and preparing paid off. While he may have harbored doubts about himself, those who knew him did not. His achievements were a crucial affirmation that he was indeed among the best and brightest. In 1937, he graduated as President of the law school student body and ranked third in his class.

After completing law school, Richard Nixon returned to Whittier, California and began working for local law firms, eventually becoming a partner at Bewley, Knoop & Nixon. During this time, he was also involved with a local theater group, the Whittier Community Players, where he met his future wife, Catherine Patricia Thelma Ryan (Pat), in 1938. They married on June 21, 1940, at the Mission Inn in Riverside, California, and later had two daughters, Patricia (Tricia) and Julie. Throughout Nixon's political career, Pat Nixon was credited with providing him crucial support during his most challenging times.

### **Stepping into Public Life**

After returning from his military service, Richard Nixon ran for and won the 12th Congressional District seat of California in the United States House of Representatives, being sworn in on January 2, 1947 (Aitken, 1993). Upon recommendation, Nixon was appointed to three high-profile committees within his first seven months in Congress. These committees were Education and Labor, the Herter Committee, and the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). Each played a pivotal role in elevating

Nixon's political stature. While serving on the Education and Labor Committee, the 34-year-old Richard M. Nixon worked closely with the 29-year-old future 35th President of the United States, John F. Kennedy (Aitken, 1993).

The Herter Committee dealt with foreign policy and aid in the wake of World War II (Aitken, 1993). Richard Nixon's involvement on this committee led to him being selected as part of a bipartisan committee tasked with touring Europe for six weeks to evaluate the merits of Secretary of State George C. Marshall's extensive aid plan. The Herter Committee was responsible for presenting a report to the House on its findings and advise whether to support what would become known as the Marshall Plan. This report would have enormous implications and impact the future of the world.

During this trip, the mass destruction and devastation Richard Nixon witnessed across Europe, both to structures and to people, was horrific and unforgettable (Aitken, 1993). Moreover, Nixon encountered firsthand the threat of communism in the vulnerable, war-torn regions. He recognized that if the United States did not assist European countries in rebuilding, communists would likely gain a foothold. Thus, Nixon understood that supporting European reconstruction was crucial not only for maintaining freedom and democracy worldwide but also for the strategic interests of the United States.

In his book, *Six Crises*, Richard Nixon writes, "A man who has never lost himself in a cause bigger than himself has missed one of life's mountaintop experiences. Only in losing himself does he find himself." Nixon's initial experience abroad in Europe, where he witnessed the horrific destruction caused by Nazi Germany, ignited his desire and belief in America's role as a global leader for peace (Aitken, 1993). The future President

Nixon would become renowned for his passion for foreign affairs. When exploring the reasons or principles that guided Nixon to seek the reestablishment of Sino-American relations, it becomes clear that his firsthand experiences with a devastated Europe deeply influenced his lifelong mission to improve the world. He recognized the critical role that China would play in achieving this goal in Asia.

The Cold War and rising communist fears propelled HUAC into the spotlight of American politics (Aitken, 1993). Originally established in 1938 to eliminate Nazi infiltration and prevent foreign subversion, HUAC had, by Richard Nixon's time, turned into a platform for members to make headlines (Aitken, 1993). However, after some thought, Nixon viewed it as a crucial committee considering the imminent approach of the Cold War. He was right, as HUAC would provide Nixon a platform from which he rose to national prominence.

The Hiss case was pivotal in elevating Richard Nixon to national prominence, eventually paving the way for his election as Senator, and later, Vice President and President of the United States (Aitken, 1993). The case, which unfolded like a script from a Hollywood thriller and has since been extensively detailed in literature, involved intense drama and suspense. It centered on a former communist Soviet spy and an accused active communist Soviet spy. Nixon's political future arguably hung in the balance; despite the easier path of dropping the case, he felt a deep obligation to his country to uncover the truth. That year, Nixon emerged as the highest-profile member of Congress in the United States. Through the Hiss case, he garnered noteworthy support and forged important relationships across America.



The Hiss case and its subsequent conviction had severe implications for both the U.S. government and American society, amplifying fears that communists had infiltrated the government and highlighting the urgent need for a comprehensive investigation and removal of such influences (Aitken, 1993). This climate of suspicion fueled U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy's infamous crusade, often described as a witch hunt, which came to dominate American politics in the 1950s. Arguably, this pervasive fear and the anti-communism crusade ingrained in the American consciousness prevented an early rapprochement with the People's Republic of China prior to the Nixon presidency. However, successful diplomacy between the two nations required both to be adequately prepared for engagement, and at that time, it is likely that China was not yet ready for such developments.

In 1950, riding the wave of his popularity as an anti-communist crusader and a member of HUAC, Richard Nixon defeated Helen Gahagan Douglas to secure a U.S. Senate seat in California, further cementing his status as a rising star within the Republican Party (Aitken, 1993). His reputation caught the attention of Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican nominee for President in 1952. That year, Nixon was selected by Eisenhower as his Vice-Presidential running mate. On November 4, 1952, the Eisenhower-Nixon ticket won the election.

### **Rising through the Ranks**

The vice presidency of Richard Nixon, beginning with his swearing-in on January 20, 1953, was extraordinary in that he transformed a historically insignificant role into one of significant influence (Aitken, 1993). President Eisenhower tasked Nixon with a crucial diplomatic mission to the Far East, marking a pivotal moment in his career. This assignment required Nixon to reexamine and redefine America's objectives and approach

in the region—an experience that served as his introduction to American foreign policy and laid the groundwork for his future diplomatic endeavors.

During his tour as Vice President, Richard Nixon met with Malcolm MacDonald, Britain's Commissioner General for Southeast Asia (Aitken, 1993). A British dispatch from this meeting illuminates Nixon's early perspectives towards China. The report highlights Nixon's recognition of Chiang Kai-shek's waning influence and his speculation about the possibility of distancing China from Russia. Nearly two decades before his groundbreaking 1972 visit to China, Nixon was already considering strategies that would only come to fruition years later. He discussed potential milestones such as China's entry into the United Nations and the enhancement of trade relations. These discussions were the first signs of Nixon's openness towards China and the Chinese Communist Party. As Vice President, Nixon gained invaluable executive experience by attending Presidential National Security Council meetings and undertaking numerous diplomatic trips across Asia, South America, Africa, and Europe. One of his most memorable visits was to the Soviet Union, where he engaged in the famed "Kitchen Debate" with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.

After serving two terms as Vice President, Nixon sought the Republican nomination for President in 1960 but narrowly lost the election to John F. Kennedy (Aitken, 1993). Disappointed but undeterred, he ran for Governor of California in 1962, only to face another defeat. These setbacks led to a period of exploration and uncertainty for Nixon. He returned to practicing law, assuming the role of senior partner at a prominent law firm, authored *Six Crises*, and traveled extensively across Europe and Asia. These experiences broadened his perspective and sharpened his political acumen. In

1968, Nixon once again secured the Republican nomination for President. This time, he successfully defeated Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, the Democratic nominee, and third-party candidate George Wallace, ultimately being elected the 37th President of the United States.

Richard Nixon assumed the presidency during one of the most tumultuous and tragic periods in both American and world history. The 1960s in the United States were marked by intense social upheaval. The civil rights movement was at a highpoint, sparking protests and violence across the nation. The assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, his brother Robert F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. inflicted deep wounds on American society. Additionally, the Vietnam War, the counterculture movement, the women's rights movement, and ongoing Cold War tensions posed significant challenges as Nixon took office in 1969. With the country deeply divided, Nixon aimed to foster healing and stability.

From a young age, Richard Nixon was drawn to the world beyond the United States, a fascination inspired by his mother's appreciation for different cultures and nations (Aitken, 1993). As he matured, so did his interest in geopolitics, leading him to view America's role in the world distinctively compared to his predecessors. Nearly two years before his presidency, in a persuasive speech to the Bohemian Club in 1967, Nixon detailed his views on the state of global affairs and outlined what he believed should be America's role on the international stage.

In his influential 1967 speech, Richard Nixon articulated his belief in America's responsibility to preserve "peace and freedom in the world." He outlined a rapidly changing global landscape:

We live in a new world. Never in human history have more changes taken place in the world in one generation. It is a world of new leaders. True, De Gaulle, Mao Tse-tung and Chiang Kai-shek are still with us; but Churchill, Adenauer, Stalin, Khrushchev, Nehru, Sukarno—the other giants of the post-war period have all left the world stage. It is a world of new ideas. Communism, Marxism, Socialism, anti-colonialism—the great ideas which stirred men to revolution after World War II have lost their pulling power. (Nixon, 1967)

Nixon acknowledged a decline in America's international prestige, noting,

Twenty years ago, after our great World War II victory, we were respected throughout the world. Today, hardly a day goes by when our flag is not spit upon, a library burned, an embassy stoned some place in the world. In fact, you don't have to leave the United States to find examples. Communism is losing the ideological battle with freedom in Asia, Africa, Latin America as well as in Europe. (Nixon, 1967)

He also addressed the adaptability of American governance models, stating, "It is time for us to recognize that much as we like our own political system, American style democracy is not necessarily the best form of government for people in Asia, Africa and Latin America with entirely different backgrounds" (Nixon, 1967). Concluding his speech, Nixon emphasized the crucial role of the United States:

As we enter this last third of the twentieth century the hopes of the world rest with America. Whether peace and freedom survive in the world depends on American leadership. Never has a nation had more advantages to lead. Our economic superiority is enormous; our military superiority can be whatever we choose to

make it. Most important, it happens that we are on the right side—the side of freedom and peace and progress against the forces of totalitarianism, reaction and war. There is only one area where there is any question—that is whether America has the national character and moral stamina to see us through this long and difficult struggle. (Nixon, 1967)

This speech showcased Nixon as one of the greatest strategic foreign policy thinkers of the 20th century, offering profound insights into the shifts and challenges facing the modern world.

### **Nixon's Geopolitical Vision and Presidential Aspirations**

Richard Nixon was now in a position to shape global relations according to his vision of America's role. He once reflected, "I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life has been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial" (Aitken, 1993). In an interview with *The New York Times* five weeks before the election, Nixon detailed his foreign policy plans. He intended to travel to Western Europe to reinforce the Atlantic alliance, end the war in Vietnam, and initiate relations with China. Nixon held a strong belief that China was pivotal to global security, considering its potential influence in negotiations with Russia. Upon assuming the presidency, Nixon appointed Henry Kissinger as his National Security Advisor and William P. Rogers as his Secretary of State. Both Kissinger and Rogers also advocated for a rapprochement with the People's Republic of China, aligning with Nixon's aspirations. Nixon swiftly consolidated power over foreign policy within the White House, diminishing the influence of the State Department. His distrust of the department led him to rely on Kissinger to formulate the exact foreign policy he desired. While the State Department traditionally provided

recommendations they deemed best, Nixon and Kissinger took charge, directing the trajectory of American foreign policy.

### **Opening Doors: The China Initiative**

Regarding Sino-American relations, the topic had been largely avoided since the end of the Korean war (Harper, 2022). This trend was also influenced by the prevailing fear and paranoia of communism during the Cold War era (Tudda, 2012). Public opinion generally viewed anything related to the Chinese communist government unfavorably. Richard Nixon's perception of China changed significantly after his 1953 World Tour as Vice President. During his travels and discussions with foreign officials, he began contemplating the possibility of normalizing relations with China. However, he foresaw that such normalization could only occur after the U.S. withdrew from the Vietnam War.

In his article titled "Asia after Vietnam," published in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, Richard Nixon acknowledged the potential threat Asia posed to global stability (Tudda, 2012). He emphasized the need for the United States to approach the region as partners rather than conquerors, adopting a pragmatic view of America's role and responsibility in shaping Asia's future. Nixon's approach to Sino-American relations was informed by his understanding of the geopolitical landscape, his experiences in international diplomacy, and his vision for promoting stability and cooperation. By pursuing rapprochement with China, Nixon aimed to address the challenges posed by communism and forge a more positive future for both Asia and the United States.

Gaining access to China posed substantial challenges for President Nixon's administration (Tudda, 2012). Staff employed diplomatic channels and consulted with other nations to convey messages to the People's Republic of China. The State Department utilized diplomats to send messages, while President Nixon, during his first

overseas trip, discussed America's aim for rapprochement with the PRC with French President Charles de Gaulle. Finding support and encouragement from de Gaulle, who already had a working relationship with China, Nixon returned home with increased determination to bring China to the negotiating table.

Internally, the People's Republic of China faced its own challenges. Communist China was still grappling with internal struggles to establish stability (Tudda, 2012). Mao Zedong had to make a difficult decision on whether to engage in talks with the United States. Relations between China and the Soviet Union, which had deteriorated over the years, had escalated into military confrontations along their shared borders. Despite these challenges, Mao eventually decided to pursue rapprochement with the United States. A clear message from Mao came on October 1, 1970, when he and Edgar Snow posed together for a photograph atop Tiananmen Square on China's National Day. The accompanying statement by Mao, printed below the photo, conveyed that "people from all over the world, including the people from the U.S., are our friends." Clearly, Mao was sending a deliberate message to the Nixon administration.

President Nixon expressed his desire to establish connections with China during an interview with *Time* magazine (Tudda, 2012). He even stated, "If there is anything I want to do before I die, it is to go to China." On the other hand, Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong continued to employ Edgar Snow to convey messages to President Nixon and the American people. Mao expressed warmth and praise for Nixon in an interview with Snow, remarking that, "only Nixon, not the leftists or the centrists, can solve the problems we are now facing" and that, "we also have to criticize ourselves, that is to say, reflect on our mistakes, faults, and weaknesses."

The Nixon administration published a second foreign policy report advocating for rapprochement with China, addressing the realities of the situation (Tudda, 2012). Notably, it marked the first time the United States government officially recognized the People's Republic of China in an official document. This public statement did not go unnoticed by the government of the Republic of China in Taiwan (GRC), which expressed concerns about its future and security in light of an improved U.S.-China relationship. The Taiwan issue continues to cast a shadow over U.S.-China relations to this day.

After a series of strategic exchanges, both indirect and direct, Beijing made a major international move (Tudda, 2012). Following an order from Chairman Mao Zedong, the U.S. Table Tennis Team, then participating in the World Championship in Japan, received an unexpected invitation to visit the People's Republic of China. This public invitation was extended on April 8, and with the approval of the State Department, the team arrived in Beijing shortly thereafter. The visit created a global sensation and seemed almost too fortuitous. Premier Zhou Enlai personally oversaw the visit and famously remarked, "Your visit has just opened the door to friendly Sino-American relations." This landmark event, initiated by the PRC and embraced by the U.S., became famously known as ping pong diplomacy.

On April 14, the United States removed all travel, currency, and trade restrictions with China, including lifting bans on non-strategic exports (Tudda, 2012). As a next step, Nixon decided to send a secret emissary to Beijing, choosing Henry Kissinger for this critical role. Kissinger's mission was to prepare for a summit that Nixon would attend personally. In July 1971, Kissinger led the first American delegation to visit China in 22



years. During their discussions with Premier Zhou Enlai, they covered a wide range of topics including the official recognition of the People's Republic of China, the "One China" policy, and relations with the Soviet Union, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, East Asia, and Indochina. The meetings concluded successfully, resulting in an agreement on how to announce their discussions publicly. This culminated in a formal invitation for President Nixon to visit the People's Republic of China. The revelation of reopened official relations with China and Nixon's acceptance of the invitation, announced by Nixon himself via live television and radio on July 15, 1971, stunned audiences worldwide.

The announcement elicited strong reactions both in America and globally (Tudda, 2012). The former Mayor of Florence, Italy, described it as "a rainbow above the world." In contrast, American reactions were mixed, with a poll indicating that 67% of Americans viewed the visit positively, while 20% were opposed (Bostdorff, 2002). Nixon reassured all parties, including international allies, that the summit was exclusively a U.S.-China affair and not intended to affect other countries. Nonetheless, the repercussions were noticeable. The Soviet Union voiced concerns about the burgeoning U.S.-China ties. Taiwan's response was particularly sharp; Ambassador James Shen, informed just minutes before the public announcement, expressed shock and disbelief. He regarded President Nixon's actions as "an unfriendly act with serious consequences." In Tokyo, Prime Minister Sato felt the foundation of "close collaboration with the United States on foreign policy, particularly regarding China," had been compromised, reflecting a sense of betrayal among America's allies, especially Taiwan and Japan.

Setting personal feelings aside and acting as a staunch ally of the United States, Prime Minister Sato publicly supported President Nixon's rapprochement with China

(Tudda, 2012). In a personal communication, Nixon thanked Sato and expressed regret over the lack of prior consultation with Japan, promising to keep him informed about future developments in U.S.-China relations. Over the following months, the durability of the alliances the United States had formed post-World War II would face significant tests, as global dynamics began to shift.

### **Legacy and Impact**

The issue of China's representation in the United Nations came to the forefront with the upcoming vote on Resolution 2758, also known as the Albanian Resolution. Faced with a decision, President Nixon had to choose whether to support the People's Republic of China as the legitimate representative of China at the UN or to continue backing Taiwan (Tudda, 2012). On October 25, the United Nations passed the Albanian Resolution without U.S. support or a veto. This resolution recognized the PRC as the sole representative of China in the UN and awarded them a permanent seat on the Security Council. Consequently, the General Republic of China (GRC) was excluded from the United Nations.

Kissinger made a second trip to Beijing on October 20 to finalize preparations for President Nixon's visit (Tudda, 2012). Prior to this, the Nixon administration upgraded the People's Republic of China's status on the Commodity Control List to "Y," aligning it with European countries and permitting similar commodity purchases. Additionally, Nixon consulted with French author Andre Malraux, who was familiar with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai through his book about the Long March, *Man's Fate*. Malraux's insights were seen as valuable for Nixon's preparations. Furthermore, Kissinger coached Nixon on effective communication strategies with Zhou and Mao.

This period marked a momentous time for the United States, capturing global attention. Recognizing the significance of the occasion, President Nixon renamed the presidential plane “Spirit of ‘76” in honor of the year 1776, when the United States Declaration of Independence was signed, and to commemorate this pivotal moment in Sino-American relations (Tudda, 2012). The country’s fascination with Chinese culture was rekindled; Chinese food, fashion, and goods surged in popularity. There was a significant increase in requests for visas to China from Americans. College students began enrolling in courses about China, and symposiums on U.S.-China relations were held nationwide. Films about China became highly sought after. The reopening of Sino-American relations brought about a monumental shift in American attitudes towards China.

On February 17, 1972, President Nixon embarked on a historic journey from the United States to Beijing, notably choosing not to bring any military aides to symbolize his intention for a peaceful summit (Tudda, 2012). Upon his arrival in Beijing at 11:30 a.m., he was warmly greeted by Premier Zhou Enlai, marking the start of a new era in Sino-American relations. The two leaders exchanged a monumental handshake, and during their limousine ride to the city, Zhou remarked, “Your handshake came over the vastest ocean in the world—twenty-five years of no communication.” This poignant statement highlighted the profound shift in diplomatic engagement between the two nations.

A few hours later, at 2:50 p.m., the first official meeting of the summit took place at Mao Zedong’s residence (Tudda, 2012). The attendees included President Nixon, his advisor Henry Kissinger, Mao himself, and Zhou Enlai. Kissinger observed that Mao’s

health had visibly deteriorated. During the meeting, Mao, with assistance from his aide, stood to shake hands with Nixon. The president later described this handshake, which lasted about a minute, as “the most moving moment” of the visit. The meeting, which continued for approximately an hour, allowed them to discuss regional issues, focusing on Japan and the Soviet Union.

In his subsequent meeting with Zhou Enlai, President Nixon reiterated the five principles previously conveyed by Henry Kissinger, central to which was the United States’ acknowledgment that “there is one China, and Taiwan is a part of China” (Tudda, 2012). The Taiwan issue was a primary concern for China throughout the summit. Nixon underscored his commitment to finding a mutually beneficial solution, revisiting the concerns previously discussed by Kissinger with Zhou. At a reception in Shanghai before returning to Washington, Nixon expressed his belief that “our two peoples hold the futures of the world in our hands.” While this statement might have seemed questionable at the time, the significant roles that both the United States and China play in global affairs today underscore the profound importance of their relationship.

President Nixon and his team returned to the United States on February 28, 1972, after what became known as the Beijing Summit—a pivotal moment in the history of Sino-American relations, though its future impacts were then unknown (Tudda, 2012). While there were concerns about the implications for Taiwan, 52 years later, Taiwan continues to be an independent, thriving nation and a friend to the United States. Overall, Nixon’s persistent efforts to pursue rapprochement with China rekindled American fascination with China and its rich cultural heritage.

Ironically, it was Richard Nixon, a man known associated with anti-communist sentiment, who re-opened diplomatic pathways between America and China, thereby reintroducing China to the world (Tudda, 2012). Nixon sought to dispel the “mystery” surrounding China, guided by the belief that “people fear what they do not know.” Echoing Franklin D. Roosevelt’s sentiment that “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” Nixon recognized and addressed the widespread fear of communism within American society. His efforts not only contributed to the end of the Vietnam War but also influenced the broader Cold War dynamics. The Soviet Union, viewing the burgeoning Sino-American relationship with concern, factored this new alignment into its strategic decisions (Harper, 2022). Clearly, Nixon’s initiative to improve relations with China profoundly impacted the course of the Cold War and global affairs.

Following the Beijing Summit and Nixon’s push for rapprochement, the subsequent years saw a steady movement towards formal diplomatic relations with China (Tudda, 2012). However, the People’s Republic of China faced a decade of significant uncertainty after Mao Zedong’s death. The ramifications of Mao’s rule, particularly the considerable damage caused by the Cultural Revolution, came to the forefront, influencing both government leaders and the Chinese populace. This period necessitated healing and introspection as the lingering impacts of these events had not been forgotten by those affected. The future of China’s leadership, including Mao’s succession, remained uncertain. It was only with Deng Xiaoping’s ascent to power that discussions between the United States and China resumed.

Unfortunately, President Nixon’s presidency was overshadowed by scandal rather than celebrated for his monumental impact on Sino-American relations. After winning a

second term in 1972, Nixon's administration was rocked by the Watergate scandal. Following the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters and the subsequent discovery of tapes implicating him in the cover-up, Nixon resigned from the presidency on August 9, 1974, making him the first U.S. president to do so. Nonetheless, it is recognized that President Nixon's administration paved the way for President Carter to establish official diplomatic relations with the People Republic of China in 1978. Post-presidency, Nixon initially kept a low profile, but he eventually traveled abroad and authored several books, continuing his passion for geopolitics (Bostdorff, 2002).

President Nixon's legacy is often debated, particularly regarding whether he was truly an effective president in the realm of foreign relations. While that debate is beyond the scope of this paper, what remains indisputable is his profound impact on the future of Sino-American relations. President Nixon's influence on Sino-American relations can be compared to two doors between adjoining hotel rooms, one representing the U.S. and the other representing China. For over 25 years, these doors had remained firmly locked, each side peering through its own keyhole but unable to pass through. In 1972, Nixon took the unprecedented step of unlocking both doors, not only from the American side but also persuading China to turn its own key. His determination and boldness to initiate relations with the Chinese Communist Party have had lasting implications, both positive and negative. The current dynamics of Sino-American relations can largely be traced back to this pivotal moment in 1972, when Nixon effectively opened the door to a new era of engagement between these two superpowers.

Richard Milhous Nixon passed away on April 22, 1994, at the age of 81. His journey from humble beginnings to the Oval Office is a testament to the possibilities

inherent in the American Dream. Nixon's story remains a powerful narrative that should be shared with every American child who dreams big. He epitomized the spirit of determination, proving that anyone with a dream and the resolve to pursue it can achieve great things. Nixon was a remarkably intelligent and complex individual who led a successful and impactful life. America, despite the challenges and controversies, should be proud to count him among its sons.

**CHAPTER 7.**  
**CONCLUSION: REFLECTING ON THE PAST TO NAVIGATE THE FUTURE  
OF SINO-AMERICAN RELATIONS**

The relationship between the United States and China holds paramount importance on the global stage. Despite its significance, the general American public's understanding of China is often superficial, shaped by a mixture of stereotypes about communism, cultural icons like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, and aspects of Americanized Chinese culture, such as Chinatowns and cuisine. Recent political rhetoric from figures like President Donald Trump and historical references such as Mao Zedong, President Nixon's diplomacy, and the Vietnam War also color perceptions but do not necessarily convey a comprehensive understanding of China as America's most critical trading partner and a major geopolitical challenger.

This presents a substantial problem. The American electorate, whose decisions shape the future of international relations, often votes without an accurate understanding of critical issues like Sino-American relations. As discussed throughout this thesis, influential figures of the 20th century, such as Pearl Buck, Henry Luce, Edgar Snow, and Richard Nixon have significantly shaped these relations and Americans' perceptions toward China.

Looking forward, as we navigate the 21st century, the historical details of our relationship with China become increasingly relevant. We have not yet reached the first quarter of this century, underscoring the still relative closeness to the previous, tumultuous, and ever-important 20th century. Understanding the intricacies of this relationship is akin to individuals learning about each other's backgrounds and values to



build a meaningful connection. Similarly, knowing China's long history, cultural evolution, and internal dynamics is essential for building a stronger relationship with our largest trading partner and friend in the East.

This thesis has argued that a thorough understanding of the history of Sino-American relations is crucial for anticipating future challenges and opportunities. By examining past interactions and trends, we can predict potential future scenarios. For instance, recognizing China's current policies and international behaviors are often reactions to historical Western imperialism and its quest for a stable identity post-Mao era, underpinned by the rapid economic transformation initiated by Deng Xiaoping.

Furthermore, the role of individuals in shaping these complex relations is critical yet often underestimated. Personal stories of Americans who engaged deeply with China and who made considerable contributions, such as Pearl Buck's evocative writings, Henry Luce's influential publications, Edgar Snow's intimate chronicles of Chinese leaders, and Nixon's pivotal diplomatic initiatives, demonstrate that individual efforts can and do have a substantial impact on bilateral relations. However, beyond the well-known figures profiled here, countless others have also played vital roles in shaping U.S.-China foreign policy. These include the missionary community and their families, who have historically bridged cultural divides; the thousands of Chinese-Americans who have integrated into American society, contributed to its development, and championed civil rights; and the myriad American students and scholars whose ongoing research enriches our understanding of Sino-American dynamics.

The profiles explored in this thesis represent just a fraction of the individuals who have meaningfully influenced Sino-American foreign policy. While the focus of this

research has been on those who had the most significant impact on shaping U.S.-China relations during the 20th century, they do not encompass all who have left their mark. Notable figures not individually covered include John King Fairbank, Henry Kissinger, Owen Lattimore, Joseph W. Stilwell, Anna Louise Strong, John Leighton Stuart, George Marshall, Patrick Hurley, Dean Acheson, Joseph Alsop, Winston Lord, Theodore White, and Barbara Tuchman, among others. Additionally, each American president has played a critical role in the evolution of Sino-American relations. Although President Nixon received a dedicated chapter for his pivotal reopening of dialogue with China, other presidencies have also substantially shaped these relations, each influencing the trajectory of U.S.-China dynamics in their unique ways, for better or for worse.

In conclusion, this thesis not only highlights the key figures who have shaped the course of Sino-American relations but also illustrates the enduring influence of personal and historical narratives in international policy. As we consider the future of these relations, it becomes clear that an informed, historically grounded understanding is indispensable. It is through studying our past interactions and their long-term impacts that we can best prepare for and shape a collaborative and mutually beneficial future.

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