

# The Evolution of Sino-American Exchanges: A View from the National Committee

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## Introduction

In April of 1971 the Chinese startled the world by inviting an American ping-pong team into “forbidden territory.” Within a week fifteen American table tennis players and officials were on their way to China from Nagoya, Japan, where the invitation had been extended during an international tournament. Ping-pong diplomacy was in full swing.

To everyone’s surprise, after more than twenty years of hostile relations between the two countries, exchanges quickly flourished. What began with ping-pong took on a momentum of its own so that by the mid- to late seventies there were more exchanges occurring between China and the United States—two countries that did not maintain diplomatic relations—than between China and any other country except Japan.

The Sino-American exchange relationship rapidly moved from ground zero (prior to 1971); to the ping-pong diplomacy period of high-profile events, during which the main purpose was to change hearts and minds (1971–73); to a brief hiatus in which exchanges were buffeted by political winds (1974–75); to a time when substance began to win out over form (1976–78); and finally, to the present era when the process has expanded and so matured that even an incident like the defection of the tennis player Hu Na slows down only the official program but does not affect the considerable activity in the private sector. Although no periodization is absolute, delineating these stages provides a useful starting point for looking at the evolution of Sino-American exchanges. The National Committee on U.S.-China Relations—a key player in the development of exchanges, an organization whose history reflects the evolution of Sino-American exchanges, and the organization with which the author is most familiar—is the focal point of this chapter.

## The Evolution of Sino-American Exchanges

### *The Early Structure: 1966–71*

The National Committee on U.S.-China Relations was formed in 1966 by a coalition of civic leaders (several with Quaker roots), businessmen, and academics who were concerned that U.S.-China relations were frozen in the mutual hostility of the 1960s and that the American political climate was

not conducive to a dispassionate discussion of the issues. The objective was to stimulate and legitimize nonpartisan public discussion of American China policy through conferences, seminars, publications, and educational outreach programs. Its board and membership, carefully selected to represent the gamut of the political spectrum, included people with sharply differing views on China. The Committee's activities in the late 1960s in promoting public discussion around the United States have been credited with helping to create a climate that enabled acceptance of President Nixon's initiatives toward China. But its original mission of public education was altered dramatically by the events of April 1971.

Those American table tennis players who unexpectedly became part of history wanted to reciprocate. However, the U.S. Table Tennis Association, a small, loosely knit organization of ping-pong enthusiasts, lacked the administrative and financial resources and the knowledge of China necessary for undertaking such a project. The National Committee learned of the association's predicament and offered to cosponsor the Chinese team's visit, raising funds, coordinating with both the Chinese and American governments, and providing administrative structure and China "expertise." The offer was accepted and the resulting tour was a great success. A few months later officials of the PRC Mission to the UN (the only Chinese government representatives then in the United States) asked the National Committee to sponsor the American tour of the Shenyang Acrobatic Troupe. Thus began the Committee's involvement in exchanges with China.

There were several reasons why the National Committee and its sister organization, the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC),<sup>1</sup> played such pivotal roles in the early days of exchanges. In the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries, private agencies provided the only channels available for such activity. The sudden Chinese initiative left no time to create new institutions, and the two committees were already functioning. They had offices, organizational structures, funding (albeit for other activities), and a desire (National Committee) and a mandate (CSCPRC) to move into the exchange process. The membership of both committees included leaders in civic affairs, business, academia, and science, as well as former government officials or advisors. Men such as W. Michael Blumenthal and Ambassador Charles W. Yost (NCUSCR), and Dr. Frank Press (CSCPRC) chaired the committees during the early 1970s.

Given the dominance of extreme ideologues in China during the Cultural Revolution period, one would have expected the Chinese to insist on dealing with more radical, less "establishment-oriented" organizations, and to a certain extent they did, working with the U.S.-China People's Friendship Association, an organization set up to promote sympathetic understanding and support of the PRC and its policies. The Friendship Association provided an important vehicle for the involvement of Americans at the grass-roots level in China-related activities, primarily by sending

Americans to China (no Chinese delegations were sent to the United States under the Association's auspices until the late 1970s). On the other hand, the Chinese were looking for legitimacy and apparently believed it could best be achieved by dealing with respected public leaders. The American government, in its turn, was comfortable entrusting an important aspect of a delicately evolving relationship to organizations whose membership was known and trusted. There may also have been a belief that the nonpartisan and diverse views represented by the members of both committees might help minimize any potential political backlash resulting from a rapprochement with China. Thus, it is probably *because* of the prestige and influence of the membership of the two committees that both the Chinese and American governments chose to work with them.

### *Form over Substance: 1971-74*

It has been argued elsewhere in this book that the early exchanges between China and the United States were primarily symbolic, that they represented "foreign policy initiatives and only secondarily a concern with the intrinsic value of the exchange itself" (Kallgren). Unquestionably, this was a period of form over substance as both sides sought to use exchanges to move the political relationship forward. While there was some concern over whether deeper, more nuanced, longer lasting contacts were developing between people and between organizations, it was primarily the image that counted.

The importance of the high-profile, spectacular exchanges, therefore, cannot be dismissed. It was essential to create a climate of acceptance, and the extravaganzas in the performing arts and sports certainly helped achieve this goal. They brought needed visibility at a time when people in both countries were unaccustomed to the idea of friendly human contact with a former adversary. With the McCarthy era and the Korean War barely two decades past, both sides needed to correct the distortion in the widely-held negative stereotypes. The image of America as a flabby, declining society was changed by the impressive display of American athletes winning event after event during the visit to China of the U.S. Track and Field Team. And Americans' perception of Chinese as unfeeling automatons was altered by a gymnastics competition at Madison Square Garden, during which the Chinese team's piano player came to the rescue of an American gymnast whose music tape broke just before her performance; with no rehearsal—in fact, without ever having seen her routine—the Chinese pianist enthusiastically improvised an accompaniment.

The theme of "friendship" so dramatically highlighted by the latter example was pervasive in this period and was constantly emphasized by both sides. During their visits the Chinese were inevitably asked what impressed them the most. The invariable answer was a refreshing confluence of diplomacy and truth—"the friendliness and generosity of the American people and their warm welcome to us."

While Americans are generally considered to be open and enthusiastic, the warm welcome was almost ensured by the personalities (and, most likely, careful coaching) of the Chinese who were chosen to represent their country. They were extraordinarily effective, multi-talented goodwill ambassadors. Each seemed to have been handpicked for his or her cheerful personality and ability to charm everyone in sight as well as for athletic or artistic talent. Not only could they play ping-pong or juggle twenty-five plates while standing on their left toe, but they could sing "Home on the Range" at the drop of a hat. Spectators who stayed on after the completion of the gymnastic competitions were treated to renditions of American folk tunes by the gymnasts, and the musicians who accompanied the Shenyang Acrobats serenaded the departing audiences with "Turkey in the Straw" played on traditional Chinese instruments.

Of course, the visibility of high-profile exchanges had negative aspects as well. Right-wing extremists threw dead rats at the Chinese ping-pong players from the stands of Cobo Hall in Detroit, religious fundamentalists carried picket signs comparing Mao and Hitler, and an unknown culprit exploded a tear-gas cannister in the Chicago Opera House as the Shenyang Acrobats were performing. During the ping-pong matches at Maryland University's Cole Field House several protests came together at once. On one side of the stands sat Tricia Nixon, representing her father. Across the way sat about two hundred Taiwan sympathizers. Up in the bleachers sat a group of American college students. Throughout the games there was a tremendous cacophony as the Taiwanese loudly and persistently called for the Chinese team members to defect, while the American students, unhappy over President Nixon's resumption of the bombing of Haiphong Harbor, chanted "Nixon bombs Haiphong, Tricia watches ping-pong."

But whether to applaud or oppose, large crowds attended such events in both countries, thus meeting one of the major goals of the exchanges—to reach as many people as possible. Indeed, the National Committee and its early cosponsors (such as the U.S. Table Tennis Association and the New York City Center of Music and Drama) deliberately set low prices on tickets for performances and competitions both to ensure that costs would not prohibit anyone from attending and to assure large turn-outs. The objective in those days was exposure, not profit. Even when the National Committee sponsored smaller, professional exchanges, they tended to be projects that would draw large audiences or that had a potential ripple effect, such as delegations of journalists or education policy makers.

The initial exchanges received extensive media coverage and public attention. The ping-pong entourage traveled in two planes: one for the Chinese and American teams and accompanying personnel, the other for the press corps. All the major newspapers and news magazines were represented, and an ABC camera crew filmed the entire three-week tour. In addition, local press swelled the numbers of reporters, editors, cameramen,

and producers at each stop. Two American escorts worked full time coordinating press activities. Media interest remained high during this stage, achieving a level matched only by Deng Xiaoping's American visit in February 1979.

The Americans were not the only ones caught up in the media frenzy. Two Chinese camera crews, one working on a TV documentary, the other on a film, accompanied the ping-pong team and the Shenyang Acrobats in 1972. Xinhua (New China News Agency) and other correspondents were legion. It was a heady experience indeed for this author to be greeted throughout China in 1973 with "Oh, I know you. You're the one who was in the ping-pong documentary."

Thus, while tens of thousands of Chinese and Americans attended the sports and performing events, hundreds of thousands more saw them on television or read about them in newspapers or magazines. This extensive media coverage and public attention were central to the key objective of this period: building popular support for the U.S.-PRC relationship.

#### *Political Pressures: 1974-75*

After the initial leap forward there was a sudden decrease in exchanges—the National Committee sponsored or helped facilitate eight exchanges in 1973 but only two in 1974 and two in 1975. This was a period of overt politicization of the exchange process, reflecting a major internal struggle in the Chinese leadership in which the U.S.-China relationship was an important weapon. American leaders may have been prepared to insulate the exchanges from the political problems between the two countries, but their Chinese counterparts saw exchanges as a way of pressuring America into greater movement on the political front. Americans who met with Chinese leaders at this time were often told that it was not convenient to broaden the exchange process until the American government altered its policies on the Taiwan issue.

Not only was the exchange process not broadened, but serious obstacles were placed in its path, primarily by the Chinese. The composition of American professional and academic delegations was challenged, raising the thorny issue of the sending side's right to select its own delegation members and a country's sovereign right to exclude anyone it chooses. Only a few weeks before the arrival of the first U.S. tour of a performing arts company, the Chinese government demanded that the song "We Will Surely Liberate Taiwan" be sung and its words printed in the playbill. At a time when the U.S. government still recognized Taiwan and when local officials (who would be featured at opening ceremonies in each locality) had to be mindful of the feelings of various constituents, this was viewed as an unwarranted intrusion of politics into a cultural event. Five months later, in a show of support for Third World countries championing Puerto Rican independence, the Chinese refused to issue a visa to the mayor of San Juan,

who was to be deputy leader of a delegation of American mayors. On each occasion both sides stuck to their "principles," and the resulting confrontations led to the postponement of these projects. They were, in fact, undertaken later (the performing arts tour in 1978 and the mayors' trip in 1979), but only after considerable expenditure of time and money and much irritation on both sides. It was later learned that the crisis over the performing arts tour had been deliberately created by Jiang Qing, who was, for a time, the dictator of cultural policy in China.

This was not the first intrusion into the exchange process by the widow of Mao Zedong. Indeed, it seems she was involved from the beginning. In 1973 the American Swimming and Diving Team was maneuvered into giving an impromptu exhibition in Beijing in addition to its two scheduled performances. When the accompanying escorts protested that the team was tired from a visit to the Great Wall, they were told that the performance had been requested by a very high official, and, indeed, the chairman of the Sports Commission attended. They were not told until later that the request came directly from Jiang Qing, who appeared incognito, wanting a "peek" at the Americans. It is assumed that she played a similar role during the visit of the Philadelphia Orchestra. In a command meeting immediately after a midnight arrival in Beijing, an exhausted Philadelphia Orchestra leadership was requested to change its program to include Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (not in the orchestra's repertoire at the time) rather than the Fifth, which had been rehearsed specifically for the China tour. The orchestra was told not to be concerned that they had no sheet music; indeed, the Chinese dusted off and flew up the Shanghai Orchestra's scores of the Sixth Symphony and merged them with the equally dusty Beijing Orchestra scores to provide enough copies for the performers. While the Chinese were never specific about the reasons for the change, the sinologists accompanying the orchestra all agreed that the request likely came from Jiang Qing herself.

Neither the changes in schedules nor the intrusion of politics into cultural events seemed to effect the U.S. government's policies, but they did affect the National Committee, resulting in a fundamental restructuring of the organization. There was growing concern at the Committee that its education and exchange programs were becoming increasingly incompatible and that the integrity of the educational programs could suffer as a result. The board, while agreeing that both functions remained vitally important, believed that the continuity of the Committee's visible role in the exchange relationship was particularly desirable at that stage of U.S.-China relations. This assessment led to the decision to assist the Asia Society in developing a major new program to assure an effective nationwide educational program on China and U.S.-China relations in line with the National Committee's past efforts. The Committee thus took a preemptive step to ensure that its education program did not become hostage to the political climate of the time.

Even the vaunted Chinese slogan of the first period, “friendship first, competition second,” sometimes fell by the wayside during this second period of political pressure. During the 1975 Chinese Women’s Basketball tour, one American team decided to take advantage of the spirit behind “friendship first.” Videos of previous matches had shown the Chinese always stopping to help up opponents who tripped or to make certain that an opponent who had fouled them was all right. On orders of their coach, the American team members purposely committed more than the ordinary number of fouls, hoping to slow down the Chinese players. By half time, the Chinese had caught on to this tactic. From then on, if an American player suddenly tripped and fell, the Chinese player just jumped right over her and went on (usually) to make a basket. All pretense of friendship was dropped, and the spirit of competition led the way to a Chinese victory.

### *Substance over Form: 1976–78*

It should not be assumed that the high-profile exchanges of the early periods were just media hype, designed only to “win friends and influence people.” Another objective was to open communication, with emphasis on fostering enduring ties among professional colleagues and working toward eventual collaboration and joint projects in a range of fields. Whether it was mayors, molecular biologists, or volleyball players, each project included workshops, master classes, seminars, briefings—opportunities to exchange information. There was systematic exploration of and reporting on the academic and scientific topology of China. And all the exchanges were designed to introduce professional colleagues to one another and to encourage them to continue and expand the process of interchange on their own.

It was not until this period, however, that the seeds of the initial contacts began to bear fruit. Once introduced to each other through the auspices of the National Committee or the CSCPRC, professional associations began to establish independent relationships. The American Metals Society instituted a series of exchanges with its Chinese counterpart. The Chinese and American amateur basketball federations arranged matches among themselves, and soon even professional National Basketball Association teams were traveling to China. Chinese who met American colleagues during survey exchanges began to be invited to professional association meetings.

As the need for the “public relations” function of the high profile exchanges lessened, as other vehicles for performing arts and athletic exchanges were created, and as the opportunities for substantive interaction increased, the National Committee began to change its focus. While it had from the beginning sponsored professional exchanges, the emphasis had been on the high-profile activities. Now the Committee began to concentrate on bringing together groups of professional colleagues in less spectac-

ular but more substantive areas—international relations, governance, urban planning, economic management and development, communications, and education administration.

In addition to institutionalizing these relationships, these years saw a tentative move away from seeing exchanges as part of the political dynamic and toward accepting their intrinsic substantive and educational value. While the standard political slogans warning the United States of the menace of the “Polar Bear” and criticizing U.S. policy toward Taiwan were still espoused, delegation members tended to be more professional and less political.

Even the exchanges of this period, however, were mostly focused on observing and learning techniques, rather than on truly understanding the inner dynamics of the two societies. A group of Chinese mayors and municipal administrators spent most of their time in the United States lifting up manhole covers to look at underground cables instead of exploring the human aspects of city administration. And a delegation of young American political leaders who went to China seemed more concerned with shopping for saddles in Inner Mongolia than with discussing the political dynamics of an autonomous region. The constraints were primarily on the Chinese side. Vestiges of the Cultural Revolution were still strong enough to inhibit Chinese visitors to America from asking the more philosophical questions and from responding to such issues when raised by Americans in China.

### *Broadening and Deepening: 1979–the Present*

Normalization and China’s “open door” policy gave rise to conditions in China that have had a great impact on the exchange process. It began to be broadened and deepened with respect to the areas and issues covered and the people and organizations involved. Shifts in the political relationship and, perhaps even more important, internal political shifts in China have been reflected in the way in which exchanges are perceived and conducted. The “Four Modernizations” course on which China has embarked has made it possible for both sides to engage in broad discussions and cooperative programs on issues related to China’s social agenda. Discussions no longer focus on the techniques alone, but on the values inherent in them. In a way, the Chinese have once again faced the old issue of *ti* (form) versus *yong* (function) and this time seem to have resolved it in favor of both.

The evolving freedom in China to focus on social issues and their impact was forcefully illustrated by a senior Chinese official’s response during a 1980 visit to the perennial question, “What are your impressions of America?” “Before coming to the United States,” he answered,

I had read and been told much about it—about the many social ills, the moral degeneration, the quest for money and power, the oppression of minorities. But now that I have seen your country with my own eyes, I can make more valid judgments. It is true that when I look at America I see many problems—the crime, the injustice, the wastefulness. But it is also true that



yours is a dynamic society that at least recognizes that such problems exist and, at many levels, is working to resolve them. Then I look at my own country, which I have always been told is following the correct path, and I see a society that is stagnant, that lacks the dynamism that I find in the United States, that is afraid even to consider making changes. And it makes me begin to question my values and assumptions.

Exchanges are not designed to convert the visitors to the hosts' social structure or way of thinking. But, as is clear from the above example, they can and do legitimately challenge both American and Chinese preconceptions about the other's society. A year after returning to China this official became the head of a major ministry. His American experiences were important in helping shape the decisions he made in his new position with respect to opening up to, access to, and treatment of the West.

When new issues have to be addressed and new relationships established, it helps to have those in authority lead the way. When governors, mayors, cabinet ministers, or other—to borrow a favorite Chinese phrase—"responsible persons" participate directly, the chances for institutionalizing or at least supporting similar opportunities for others are greatly increased. Thus the National Committee's continuing commitment over the years, grown even stronger during this period, has been to provide opportunities for the involvement of key policy makers. Normalization made it possible for Chinese government officials to visit the United States, and the National Committee facilitated many of those trips.

### **Postnormalization Changes in Sino-American Exchanges**

Since normalization in 1979, a tremendous number of players have jumped onto the exchange bandwagon on both sides of the Pacific. In the early days there were only a few, well-defined exchange channels in each country. Americans interested in a particular aspect of Chinese life or society had a specific organization with which to work. The same was true for Chinese coming to the United States. Now a bewildering array of both long-established and newly formed organizations, encouraged by the success of the exchange relationship and by decentralization and the more relaxed atmosphere in China, are not only ready but eager to be involved in the exchange process. This is certainly a pattern more consistent with our pluralistic society and the way we customarily handle cultural exchanges with most other countries. But it brings with it much greater competition—for identifying and gaining access to the most influential bureaucracies or officials and then establishing *guanxi* (the all-important Chinese word meaning "relationship" or "connection") with the right group, and for a share of the decreasing funds available for such activities from both the public and private sectors.

Other striking changes between the pre- and postnormalization periods relate to the number of exchanges, the number of people involved, and how the balance has shifted. From the beginning, one of the American

aims was to strike a rough balance in the numbers of exchanges in each direction within the government-facilitated exchange packages (those run by the National Committee). While this was eventually accomplished, a great deal of activity took place outside the facilitated programs. Generally, it was China-bound. In 1971, even before the return visit of China's ping-pong team to the United States, several Americans, carefully selected by the Chinese, had visited the PRC. The numbers grew so rapidly that by the time diplomatic relations were normalized tens of thousands of Americans had been to China, either as tourists or as guests of one of the Chinese organizations authorized to host "foreign friends." Such was not the case for travel in the other direction. Fewer than 800 Chinese came to the United States before 1979; almost all of them were members of delegations or diplomatic personnel. Since the early 1980s, however, the Chinese have rushed through the "open door" in such numbers that more Chinese are now coming to the United States each week than came in each of the years between 1972 and 1978. The number of Chinese coming here still does not equal the 200,000 Americans visiting China annually, but most of the latter are tourists and businessmen. Comparing the numbers involved in exchanges of delegations, the situation is not nearly as asymmetrical as it once was, and in fact is probably weighted in favor of Chinese coming to the United States. (While it was once possible to keep an accurate record of the exchanges taking place and even to keep lists of people traveling to and fro, so much is going on in so many different quarters that it is now virtually impossible to keep track, and even the Chinese embassy and consulates in the United States are not aware of all the activity taking place).

The tremendous increase in the number of Chinese coming to the United States has created unprecedented problems. One is arranging general professional programming and hospitality. It used to be a fairly simple matter to set up appointments or briefings at any institution in the country. People were eager to make these contacts and learn more about their Chinese colleagues. Now, however, the tide of Chinese visitors has worn their hosts weary, especially in the popular cities of New York, Washington, D.C., Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, and even more so in the most prestigious institutions, government organizations, and corporations that the Chinese always want to visit. (It is only very recently that Chinese higher education delegations have not felt disappointed if their itineraries omitted the meccas of Harvard, MIT, Stanford, and the University of California, Berkeley.) Americans want to share in professional interchange, but there is just so much time one can devote to visitors. The problem is compounded both by familiarity (the Chinese are no longer new or a curiosity) and by the perception that there is often little tangible gain from endlessly gracious hospitality. The challenge, therefore, is to find places that have not been inundated by Chinese visitors and then to convince the Chinese that there are sound professional and personal reasons to deviate from their requested itinerary. Indeed, when virgin territory can be found—Heber Springs, Arkansas;

Tampa, Florida; Indianapolis, Indiana; Honesdale, Pennsylvania, all places few Chinese have visited—the quality of the program is enhanced, certainly on a personal level and often on the professional level, because the Americans are so much more interested. The hosts have not yet become jaded; they do not find it an imposition to show still another Chinese delegation through their school or factory or institution.

The same thing has undoubtedly happened in China, especially in the major coastal cities and at such prominent institutions as Beijing and Qinghua universities or the Shanghai No. 1 Machine Tool Factory. But there is at least one important difference. Most Chinese units and enterprises have “foreign affairs offices” designed to handle such visits. While a few American institutions and agencies have similar offices, they are neither as well staffed or as well funded.

### **Funding the Programs**

Funding, or rather the lack of it, is the main problem resulting from the increase in bilateral traffic. Foundation grants and private contributions were the sole sources of income for the National Committee in its early years. After the successful conclusion of the table tennis project, the National Committee began receiving grants for exchanges from the U.S. government—at first from the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, then from the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) when that agency took over the bureau’s functions. This early funding was unrestricted, allowing the Committee to determine how the money would be allocated among its programs.

In the mid-1970s, other government agencies such as the Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Humanities began to provide support to the Committee, but such support was generally earmarked for specific projects. At about that time USIA funding also became project specific. Foundations, too, became increasingly reluctant to give general support. Some had been providing money for Chinese programs for several years and felt it time to move on to new areas; others had by then established their own programs with China to which they now allocated the bulk of their resources.

As the number of organizations involved in Sino-American exchanges grew, the government and, to a lesser extent, the foundations, came under pressure to spread the limited funding around. And in addition to the increased number of American institutions bidding for the same scarce resources, the Chinese themselves have recently entered the game. Foundations and even some U.S. government agencies now receive requests to fund exchange programs from Chinese institutions as well as from Chinese scholars currently residing in the United States.

A third source of funding has been the business community. In the late 1970s, as the Chinese “open door” policy increased possibilities for trade, American companies interested in developing business ties with China became a logical source for funding exchanges. Thus, the Coca-Cola Company, Gillette, Mobil, and Pan American Airways underwrote the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s 1979 tour of China, the first major cultural exchange after normalization. Control Data helped underwrite the costs of the “Treasures of the Shanghai Museum” exhibition in 1984. As early optimistic hopes for booming China business prospects recede, however, corporate support for exchanges becomes increasingly difficult to obtain.

There is no foreseeable way to resolve the problem of funding; and the situation is likely to get worse rather than better as Gramm-Rudman-Hollings budget restrictions, inflation, and ever greater numbers of petitioners all take their toll.

### **Supporting the Programs**

The exchange program, viewed from the perspective of fifteen years, has been an undisputed success, going far beyond what anyone would have predicted when those first American ping-pong players were invited to China. The rapid growth and size of the Sino-American connection and the continued emphasis it receives in both countries has been largely dependent on the enthusiasm and support of three key groups.

First, both the Chinese and American public are eager to expand the relationship. In his classic study *Scratches on Our Mind*, Harold Isaacs explored the love/hate relationship and the fascination China has always held for Americans. A more recent poll showed that along with winning the lottery and dining at the White House, visiting China is at the top of the average American wish list. Conversely, in China the United States is seen as the land of milk, honey, and high technology. With fewer government restrictions on travel and study abroad, America has become the magnet attracting most Chinese going overseas.

Second, the two governments view exchanges as an integral part of the Sino-American relationship. From the beginning, they have used exchanges to further the foreign policy objective of improving relations. Even though private organizations were responsible for implementing and administering all of the early exchanges, there was substantial government support. National Committee (and CSCPRC) projects were endorsed by both governments in periodic high-level consultations and were described as “government facilitated.” These programs were provided with funding, security (at the insistence of the Chinese), and access to senior officials. Every major group during the first two periods, for example, was received at the White House. President Nixon greeted the ping-pong team in the Rose Garden and later watched the Wu Shu team perform there, gave a reception for the Shenyang Acrobats in the Blue Room, and spoke to the

Chinese journalists (the only journalists he met with during the darkening days of Watergate) in the Oval Office. President Ford met the basketball players. Were it not for this early cooperation, it is doubtful that the programs would have been as successful.

Once the relationship was normalized, the governments used official exchanges to stabilize it. The staying power of entrenched bureaucracies (both Chinese and American) is legendary; giving government agencies a major stake in the game helped to institutionalize the relationship more quickly. By June 1986 there were 27 bilateral agreements between Chinese and U.S. government agencies.

The third key area of support for the growth and continued emphasis on Sino-American exchanges comes from the private sector organizations that administer and implement them. The National Committee, one of the original organizations involved in the exchanges, has been discussed, and mention has been made of other agencies that began working on exchanges prior to normalization. But there are now scores of organizations running exchanges in the United States and China. Some have been set up specifically for that purpose (e.g., Columbia University's Center for U.S.-China Arts Exchange and its Educational Services Exchange with China); others have integrated exchanges with China into their ongoing programs (e.g., the Institute of International Education and People-to-People International). Some are nonprofit; others are not.

States/provinces and cities have entered into the process through the "sister" relationships. Aimed chiefly at helping to stimulate local trade with China, these relationships generally include a heavy dose of culture and education. The first state/province relationship agreement was signed between Ohio and Hubei in June 1983; that same year San Francisco and Shanghai became the first to sign sister-city agreements. There are now twenty-two state/province and thirty city relationships, with several more pending. More than fifty professional associations have academic or educational exchanges with the Chinese. International organizations such as the World Bank, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have made major commitments of funding and manpower to China that have greatly increased the exchange flow. Large numbers of educational institutions (universities, high schools, and even grade schools and summer camps) have set up exchange programs with China. Once established, these entities usually seek to keep the momentum going.

So many diverse elements in both China and America are engaged in the Sino-American exchange relationship that it is increasingly difficult to manipulate it for political purposes. The brouhaha over the defection of the young tennis player Hu Na is a good example. It occurred after the fall of the Gang of Four and after normalization of relations between the two countries. By that time both governments had signed an official cultural exchange agreement, and it was the governments that directly confronted

each other—although the National Committee, which was implementing some of the official exchange programs, was also caught up in the imbroglio. The Chinese were understandably angry that the teen-age girl had been given political asylum when she could have merely been granted permission to remain in the United States, yet they carefully modulated their reaction. Only the official exchanges that had been specified under the 1982–83 Implementing Accords of the U.S.-China Cultural Agreement were called off; the many other exchange activities taking place in the private sector were unaffected, including the 10,000 Chinese students who were at that time studying in America and the major art exhibition arranged between Shanghai and San Francisco.

## **The Future**

There is little doubt that the current high level of exchange activity will continue. Three factors, however, limit an ever-increasing number. The first, already discussed, is funding.

Second is the issue of reciprocity and mutual benefit, terms the Chinese are fond of using. During the first three stages of exchanges, American participants frequently complained that while the Chinese were always eager to educate others about China (especially its successes), they never seemed to evince much interest in the United States. That was a phenomenon of the Cultural Revolution mentality. Today, the Chinese are intensely curious about everything American, yet they are often reluctant to get into specific detail about the way things work (or don't work) in China. A perception has developed in the United States that Americans go to China to teach, and Chinese come here to learn. American participants in bilateral conferences often come away disappointed that there has been relatively little truly candid exchange of views. This has become a serious problem affecting the exchange relationship, one that must be resolved if the process is to mature successfully. While the situation has improved greatly in recent years, the Chinese must become even more open and willing to provide genuine access to their society if they want to continue receiving such treatment from others. The Americans, on the other hand, must recognize that the problems they experience are often cultural, and take time to work through. Americans are apt to be outspoken about their problems; Chinese are not. In light of the experience of the Cultural Revolution and the uncertainty about the future course of present national policies, most Chinese are understandably uneasy about discussing their problems in depth.

The third factor inhibiting the growth of exchanges involves the Chinese shift away from the principle of self-reliance (stressed especially strongly during the Cultural Revolution) to the current posture that because China is "poor, backward, and developing," America (and other rich, industrialized nations) should be generous. This attitude takes many forms, for example, the expectation of scholarship grants and tuition waivers, free

access to American technology, or assessing exorbitant fees for services and facilities needed by foreigners in China. The Chinese must realize that in the long run it is counterproductive to "squeeze" foreigners wishing to bring a performing company to China or to make a film, set up a business, or invest money there.

Assuming these obstacles can be overcome, we can project a continuing increase in exchange activity, although unfortunately, the language barrier presents real constraints on a full flowering of exchanges. Many more projects will be based on local, ad hoc initiatives rather than on national programs, particularly if China maintains its current policy of decentralization. Individual internships rather than groups will likely make up a larger proportion of the activity. Many exchanges will be for longer periods and increasingly will involve professional dialogue as part of an ongoing process. At the same time, it will continue to be important to give senior officials, who do not have the luxury of spending a year or even a month away from their jobs, the opportunity to participate in survey exchanges to gain a better understanding of what is going on in the other country.

At present we are in a transitional stage in the relationship. By and large, the days are gone when Americans in China were stared at and followed by large numbers of people and Chinese were a curiosity in the United States. Television and documentary crews no longer routinely accompany delegations. Security personnel become involved only for the highest-level visitors. The process has become both more substantive and more routine. Chinese and Americans are not only looking at the structures and processes in each other's country, but are also exploring the concepts and values they embody. Yet we have not quite reached the stage where Sino-American exchanges are viewed in the same light as similar programs with other countries. Many people attended the recent performances of the Central Ballet Company of China not because they were balletomanes but because they were curious to see a group from China performing a basically Western art form.

Perhaps exchanges never will, or should, be valued just for their intrinsic worth. It can be argued that exchanges with China should always be given special treatment. The U.S.-China relationship is relatively stable at present, and exchanges contribute to that stability by building solid ties among leaders and professionals in a wide range of fields. But the political relationship is still fragile, and many uncertainties lie ahead: about China's future direction after Deng; about how to handle the results of American economic assistance to China, which may help create a major competitor in the world market; and about the consequences of America's contribution to China's military modernization. All of these are valid concerns, and all are areas in which exchanges can play an important role.

## Notes

\*The views expressed are those of the author, who has been a staff member of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations since 1971. However, the comments and suggestions of several current and former colleagues at the National Committee were very valuable and greatly appreciated.

1. Like the National Committee, the CSCPRC was founded in 1966 (at that time it was called the Committee on Scholarly Exchanges with Mainland China). A joint venture of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Social Science Research Council, the CSCPRC had a specific mandate to explore and encourage scholarly and scientific exchange between the two countries. With its sponsorship of the September 1972 visit of a Chinese medical delegation, the CSCPRC began to assume the role for which it had been created.

Additional comments on the National Committee, as well as on the CSCPRC and the Friendship Association, are to be found in the chapter by Joyce Kallgren. In addition to this volume, there are several articles and a recent book that examine aspects of the exchange process. An excellent description of U.S.-China exchanges covering the 1971-75 period is provided in Douglas P. Murray's "Exchanges with the People's Republic of China: Symbols and Substance," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 424 (March 1976). Lucian Pye gives a thoughtful analysis of the exchange relationship up to 1976 in "Building a Relationship on the Sands of Cultural Exchanges," in *China and America: The Search for a New Relationship*, ed. William J. Barnds (New York: New York University Press, 1977). Education exchanges and academic relationships, particularly since normalization, are covered in the comprehensive study by David Michael Lampton et al., *A Relationship Restored: Trends in U.S.-China Educational Exchanges, 1978-1984* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1986).

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