Nixon's Trip to China and His Media Policy

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Yao Zhang

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This thesis titled
Nixon's Trip to China and His Media Policy

by
YAO ZHANG

has been approved for
the Department of History
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

________________________________________
Chester J. Pach Jr.
Associate Professor of History

________________________________________
Benjamin M. Ogles
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Abstract

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Director of Thesis: Chester J. Pach Jr.

This thesis reviews the Nixon administration’s media policy and its China policy. It focuses on exploring how the Nixon administration made Nixon’s trip to China in February 1972 a well-known public event. Using archival documents and other primary sources, this thesis examines the Nixon administration’s media approach during the rapprochement with China. It argues that media policy was always an important part of Nixon’s plan to improve relations with China. Nixon’s trip to China was not only a significant event in U.S.-Chinese relations, but also an ideal example to study the Nixon administration’s foreign policy and media policy.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Chester J. Pach Jr.

Associate Professor of History
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Introduction

In February 1972, President Richard M. Nixon made an official visit to the People’s Republic of China, the first time that a U.S. chief executive visited that nation since the establishment of Communist rule in 1949. After six days of intensive private meetings with the Chinese leaders including Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai, Nixon signed the “Shanghai Communiqué” with the Chinese government on February 28. This was the first official agreement that the two governments signed since 1949. The China trip was one of Nixon’s most significant foreign affairs achievements during his presidency. Some scholars even argue that the diplomatic significance of Nixon’s moves to improve relations with China should not be limited to his presidency. Journalist James Mann, for example, claims that both the content and the style of the Nixon administration’s contacts with China influenced U.S.-Chinese relations in the following two and a half decades.¹

There can be little doubt that Nixon’s China trip was also an extensively publicized event. Over a hundred journalists accompanied Nixon to China, and they sent back reports to the United States in a massive volume. Images from Nixon clinking glasses with Zhou Enlai to thousands of Chinese citizens shoveling snow on streets in Beijing were showed repeatedly on television. During the week, millions of people in the United States and around the world watched Nixon’s high-profile activities in China through television. Many people saw a promising prospect for U.S.-Chinese relations because of

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the friendly signals sent out through these reports. Others were impressed by Nixon’s ability showcased during the trip.

The U.S.-China rapprochement in 1969-72 has intrigued many scholars. In interpreting the origins of the rapprochement, existing literature has focused on the functioning of “triangular diplomacy:” Washington skillfully played “the China card” to win leverage over Moscow and “the Soviet card” over Beijing.² China scholars have also pointed out that Beijing’s fear over the growing Soviet threat and the need for a countervailing force compelled the Chinese to cooperate with the United States.³ From a realpolitik perspective, seeking a temporary relaxation of tensions with the United States was a rational choice for Beijing to defend against the Soviet threat.

Many scholars have paid attention to other aspects of the U.S.-China rapprochement. Some have focused on the diplomatic process: the exciting secret visits, the carefully planned back-channel contacts, and the long and delicate negotiations. In his *Negotiating with the Enemy: U.S.-China Talks during the Cold War, 1949-1972*, diplomatic historian Yafeng Xia reviews how the two sides prepared for the talks, set the issue-agenda, and bargained over vital areas of interests such as Taiwan, Vietnam, and Japan.⁴ Other scholars have emphasized the impact of specific individuals on the rapprochement. Historian Margaret MacMillan, for example, gives accounts of the major players in the

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U.S.-China rapprochement, including Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Mao Zedong, and Zhou Enlai, in her book *Nixon and Mao: the Week that Changed the World*. She argues that these particular individuals, combined with the right circumstances, were the driving forces of the U.S.-China rapprochement.

There is, however, one aspect of Nixon’s rapprochement with China that remains understudied: his White House’s media management during the rapprochement. As a major effort to obtain public support for the Nixon administration’s rapprochement with China, the White House’s media management had great historic importance. This was because that during the rapprochement with China, the Nixon administration paid at least equal attention to the public relations efforts—efforts to influence the media, in particular—as to foreign policy initiatives. Within the context of the Cold War, it was a bold move for Nixon to go to China. He had to overcome many obstacles, domestic and international alike. From 1949 to the beginning of the 1970s, the People’s Republic of China and the United States had no diplomatic relations and rare official contacts. Due to the long-sustained confrontations on the political, economic, and military fronts, the media exposure to each other had been consistently negative. Due to this hostility, there was strong opposition among the American public against improving relations with China. One of Nixon’s most important tasks was to win more public support for his China initiatives. An effective way to alter public opinion is to deliver positive information and images to the public through the media. Therefore, from 1969 to 1972, as Nixon moved carefully toward China, he sought to influence the news media and gain as many favorable reports as possible.
In addition, the rapprochement with China was an ideal example of how the Nixon administration’s media management team worked. Founding the White House Office of Communications, the Nixon administration had some unique characteristics in its news management system. Nixon’s especially strong hatred of the media had greatly influenced his administration’s media policy. Scholars have paid attention to the Nixon administration’s media management system. Both John Anthony Maltese in *Spin Control: the White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News*, and Joseph C. Spear in *Presidents and the Press: the Nixon Legacy*, discuss Nixon’s attitude toward the media and his administration’s media policy. However, neither of them connects the rapprochement with China to the Nixon administration’s news management policy.

With part of the archival sources on the Nixon presidency recently declassified, it is high time that one take a close look at how Nixon and his White House influenced public opinion on the administration’s China policy through media management. Also, as recommended by political scientist Marc Trachtenberg, there is a need to incorporate mass communication studies into a historical inquiry on government-media relations, that is, to reconcile theories on government public relations and public opinion with historical evidence.5

In the light of existing literature and based on newly declassified archival evidence, this thesis therefore explores Nixon’s China trip as a case study of his media strategy. It aims to address two general questions: how did the Nixon administration manage the

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media in regard to its China policy? What, if any, implications can one derive from this case to further our understanding of political communications during the Cold War?

While taking the developments of U.S.-Chinese relations as a broad context, this thesis focuses largely on how the Nixon administration publicized its China policy in order to influence public opinion and obtain more public support in the process. Since during the year from April 1971 to April 1972, U.S.-Chinese relations developed rapidly in a more open phase, the Nixon administration cultivated public relations intensively. The media arrangements during Nixon’s week in China helped make the visit a public event. Therefore, this thesis pays special attention to media strategies designed and employed by the Nixon administration to prepare a favorable public atmosphere for his China trip during the year from April 1971 to April 1972.

A central argument of this thesis is that influencing public opinion was always part of the Nixon administration’s plan to improve relations with China. Nixon’s trip to China in 1972 was planned to be a public event. To effectively alter public opinion about China, the Nixon administration employed almost all of its typical media tactics to gain favorable reports on Nixon’s China policy.

In evaluating the efficacy of Nixon’s media management, this thesis finds that the Nixon administration’s information management efforts made a moderate contribution to the success of the U.S.-China rapprochement. Maybe more importantly, they increased Nixon’s popularity and helped him win the 1972 election. Thus it is reasonable to argue that the efforts to publicize the president’s China policy received at least equal attention as the actual diplomatic maneuvers from the administration. Therefore, to examine how
the administration carried out Nixon’s China trip, as well as the results of the trip, it is important to explore the Nixon administration’s public relations policy, particularly its strategies in dealing with the media.

As a history study, this thesis uses records relevant to the topic. Based mainly on primary sources available in the National Archives and supplemented in part by Chinese-language material, this thesis probes into the interactions between Washington and Beijing in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Taking references largely from Nixon’s biographies and special studies on his media strategies, it examines Nixon’s motives in manipulating the media and the system that he established to influence presidential news reporting. Most information on the White House’s media arrangements on Nixon’s trip to China derives from primary sources. To examine the media’s reactions to the Nixon’s administration’s efforts, the study also reviews news coverage of Nixon’s China initiatives.

The first chapter provides a review of the Nixon administration’s media policy. It suggests that Nixon’s attitude toward the media was largely drawn from his previous experiences with them. Reviewing these experiences during his political career, it finds that Nixon had remained suspicious and hostile to the media; furthermore, he believed that the hostility was mutual. Bringing the attitude with him to his presidency, Nixon started his first term with an unprecedented emphasis on public relations. He picked H.R. Haldeman to carry out his public relations directives and established a system for public relations. This chapter examines methods such as isolation, evasion, appeasing,
and intimidation employed by the White House communication team under this system. It concludes that not all of Nixon’s media directives were carried out successfully.

The second chapter examines the Nixon administration’s political intentions and concerns in its efforts to improve relations with China; it also traces the Nixon administration’s early preparations for the rapprochement. Reviewing the developments of U.S.-Chinese relations from 1949 to 1969, it suggests that the U.S.-China rapprochement was necessary because of the changing world situation and domestic requirements. Due to the U.S. setback in Vietnam and declining power in the world, both U.S. leaders and the public had gradually formed an idea that changing relations with the communist countries—particularly China—might help them end the unpopular Vietnam War. On the other hand, from 1949 to 1969, China had been through the transition from allying with the Soviet Union to having serious disputes with it. Because of China’s unique position in the Cold War, the Soviet-Chinese conflict brought about opportunities for the U.S.-China rapprochement. This chapter also examines Nixon’s foreign policy experiences that prepared him to carry out the rapprochement. It suggests that Nixon was flexible in executing U.S. China policy because of his realistic views in foreign policy; it also argues that Nixon’s reputation as an anti-communist gave him advantages moving toward China. Finally, this chapter reviews the first steps in the U.S.-China rapprochement from 1969 to April 1971. During this period, the Nixon administration prepared for more direct high-level contacts through secret channels; it also gained more public support for its China ventures through consistent public benign gestures toward China.
The third chapter focuses on the Nixon administration’s efforts to implement a media policy to gain public support for the rapprochement while improving U.S.-Chinese relations from April 1971 to April 1972. To discuss how the administration carried out Nixon’s high-profile trip to China in February 1972, this chapter on one hand examines the series of diplomatic initiatives the United States and China undertook. On the other, it largely focuses on the Nixon administration’s media policy to maximize the publicity of its China initiative. Examining U.S.-Chinese relations chronologically, this chapter divides the year between April 1971 and April 1972 into three phases. It explores different media strategies in each phase, with the application of the general strategies discussed in the first chapter. The chapter ends with an assessment on the effectiveness of these media strategies employed by the Nixon administration.

In short, by integrating Nixon’s media management into the development of U.S.-China relations, this thesis attempts: first of all, to explore how and why Nixon decided to move toward normalizing relations with China; secondly, to address how and why Nixon was so concerned about the media’s reaction to his China policy; thirdly, to look at the decision making of Nixon, Kissinger, and Haldeman, in regard to their media management strategies and tactics; and finally, to examine how these strategies and tactics were actually executed with a particular emphasis on the White House’s manipulation of television broadcasting on Nixon’s China trip in 1972. The exploration of Nixon’s efforts to influence public opinion on his rather radical policy change toward China adds fresh insights into the studies of both the U.S.-China rapprochement and the Nixon administration’s media management system.
Chapter One

Nixon’s Media Policy: An Overview

Two years after the resignation of Nixon, journalism professor William E. Porter published his book, *Assault on the Media: the Nixon Years*, in which he gives a bitter account of Nixon’s media policy. He concedes that almost every president prior to Nixon fought the media in one way or another, but the Nixon administration “differed in the speed with which it moved to attack the media at many levels and in the intensity and scope of its well-orchestrated activities.” He further explains that “[from] the Nixon White House there emanated, for the first time, attacks intended to damage the credibility not of a single journalist but of whole classes of them; to intimidate publishers and broadcast ownerships; and, almost unthinkably, to establish in American jurisprudence the legality of censorship.”6 This chapter will explain why Nixon fought the media so vigorously during his presidency and how he did it.

Beginning with his early experiences as a politician, Nixon’s distrust and hatred of the media grew over time. Nixon believed that the media’s coverage of events in his career, from the Hiss case in 1948 to the “last press conference” in 1962, had contributed to his reputation as “Tricky Dick.” With a “New Nixon” image, he won the 1968 presidential election; however, his hatred of the media did not change, and he decided to take every possible step to control the media.

Nixon brought to the White House the tactics for dealing with the media that he learned from his experience. With the help of H.R. Haldeman, his chief of staff, Nixon built up a system to influence the media. Haldeman was a loyal manager of the Nixon

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administration. He helped isolate Nixon from the media, and he established the Nixon administration’s news management team. Directed by Nixon, this team developed a close monitoring system and several important tactics of managing the media. These tactics included isolation, or avoiding contacts between the President and the media; appeasing, or providing news to the media without giving them substantial information; evasion, or largely relying on the broadcast media to convey messages to the public directly; and intimidation and censorship, or strictly tracing the sources of information.7

To understand the Nixon administration’s media strategy while the president tried to improve relations with China, one must understand its general media policy. Therefore, in this chapter, I will specifically examine Nixon’s attitude toward the media and his administration’s system and strategies for influencing the media. Meanwhile, evidence will also show that Nixon’s decisions were not always carried out because not all of his aides agreed with his media policy.

I. Nixon and the Media

As much as other presidents, Nixon tried to influence media coverage of his actions partly because the media greatly shapes public opinion, which in turn, impacts policy making. Political scientist Samuel Kernell argues the 1970s was a turning point as politicians increasingly sought public support for their policies, known as “going public.”8 Such a transformation took place because by the 1970s, politicians realized that “[n]o longer [did] public support merely elect presidents.” Political scientist John Anthony Maltese asserts in Spin Control that “public support is a president’s most visible

source of ongoing political power.” As a result, policymakers were “increasingly susceptible to the influence of public opinion,” and a key to presidential power, is “the ability to harness (or manufacture) that opinion.”⁹ Within this context, Nixon and his White House staff were compelled to work with the media to influence public opinion.

The characteristics of the media reinforced the necessity to manipulate presidential news reporting. As political scientists David L. Paletz and Robert M. Entman point out, the media, often driven by profits, see drama as a “defining characteristic of news.”¹⁰ As a result, Maltese suggests that “good-faith debate within the administration is sometimes depicted as serious dissension among the ranks. Furthermore, stories about real conflicts increase the tension between those at odds and make the president look like a poor manager.”¹¹ Nixon certainly realized the media’s—especially the broadcast media’s—interest in drama. Thus he once complained that for the media, “progress is not news—trouble is news.”¹² Furthermore, as will be pointed out below, the Nixon administration relied on the broadcast media to convey messages directly to the public. And that created further tensions between the White House and the press. Maltese also points out:

> As presidents became more adept at taking their message directly to the people—thereby performing an end run around intermediary interpreters—reporters became less willing to accept the strict ‘ground rules’ that presidents had once proffered for access. In the process, the adversarial aspects of the presidential-press relationship were emphasized.¹³

As a result, the Nixon administration had to face a tense relationship with the journalists.

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¹¹ Maltese, Spin Control, 2.
¹² Paletz and Entman, Media Power Politics, 17.
¹³ Maltese, Spin Control, 5.
Except for the reasons stated above, the Nixon administration’s resolve to influence presidential news reporting was largely drawn from Nixon’s experiences and attitude toward the press. Nixon had developed a bitter opinion of the media; his antagonism toward the media often entrapped him in a “siege mentality” which led him to believe that the press always wanted to sabotage him. Nixon considered journalists “to be liberal, biased, elitist, [and] arrogant.” He saw himself as a “lonely crusader” carrying out his policies, and he believed that the media was deliberately against him. Thus his attitude toward the media was full of distrust and hatred. William Safire, a speechwriter during Nixon’s first term, said: “I must have heard Richard Nixon say ‘the press is enemy’ a dozen times.”

Nixon’s disdain for the media could be dated back to the 1940s, when he began his political career as a member of Congress. In 1948, Nixon’s fervent efforts on the Alger Hiss case gained him national prominence; it was also from that case that he learned the basic tactics of media manipulation. More importantly, he began to be convinced that the liberal Eastern establishment, especially the Eastern media, disliked him. As Nixon later wrote in his memoirs:

> While there is no doubt that my reputation from the Hiss case launched me on the road to the vice presidency, it also turned me from a relatively young congressman, enjoying a good but limited press, into one of the most controversial figures in Washington, bitterly opposed by the most respected and influential liberal journalists and opinion leaders of the time.

In 1969, he recalled, “Seventy-five percent of those guys hate my guts. They don’t like to be beaten” as in the Hiss case.

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14 See, for example, Porter, *Assault on the Media*, 4.
Nixon gained more experience with the media during his 1950 senatorial campaign against Helen Gahagan Douglas. After several months of heated campaigning, Nixon won the election overwhelmingly.\textsuperscript{17} Although having wide support from the California press, Nixon also received allegations that he conducted an extreme campaign; thus he was given the nickname “Tricky Dick.”\textsuperscript{18} The Eastern media, especially the \textit{New York Times} and the \textit{Washington Post}, had limited reports on the Nixon-Douglas race. The \textit{Washington Post} was pro-Douglas, and it published some “vigorous attacks” against Nixon by columnists Marquis Childs and Drew Pearson.\textsuperscript{19}

Nixon’s famous “Checkers speech,” from which he learned the power of television, reinforced his hatred toward the media. In 1952, when Nixon was the Republican candidate for vice president, he was accused of having accepted illegal campaign contributions. Some newspapers such as \textit{The Washington Post} and \textit{The New York Herald Tribune} urged him to resign. In response, on September 23, he made a speech on television and radio. Although he was nervous as usual and was “suddenly overwhelmed by despair” before the speech, he managed to give an emotional address that won him much sympathy and support from the public. As Nixon described in his memoirs, Dwight Eisenhower, the Republican presidential candidate, was campaigning in Cleveland that night. He watched Nixon’s televised speech with his wife, Mamie, and thirty friends and staff members. When the program was over, there was “a brief silence,” and Mamie “was sobbing and several others were holding back tears.” Then suddenly, “the audience in the auditorium below, which had been listening to the speech on a radio hookup, began to

\textsuperscript{18} Small, \textit{The Presidency of Richard Nixon}, 11, 13.
\textsuperscript{19} Porter, \textit{Assault on the Media}, 10.
chant, ‘We want Nixon! We want Nixon!’” After the speech, the Republican National Committee (RNC) received 160,000 telegrams and 250,000 letters which were 350 to 1 in favor of Nixon’s retention. The great public support Nixon had received convinced all 107 members of the committee to support him. Although having appealed to many people, the Checkers speech was considered by the press as a “mawkish and maudlin” performance. Noted journalist and columnist Walter Lippmann wrote, “That must be the most demeaning experience my country has ever had to bear.” Accordingly, Nixon was further convinced of the press’s hostility toward him. He later wrote, “I regarded what had been done to me as character assassination, and the experience permanently and powerfully affected my attitude toward the press in particular and the news media in general.” On the other hand, because of the speech, Nixon learned the power of using television to address the public directly.

At his “last press conference” in November 1962, Nixon openly expressed his disdain of the media. Having lost the presidential election against John F. Kennedy, Nixon lost again in the election for governor of California. The press conference took place right after the election. Standing in front of the reporters who “were waiting for a traditional concession statement from him,” Nixon declared:

I leave you gentlemen now and you will write it. You will interpret it. That’s your right. But as I leave you I want you to know—just think how much you’re going to be missing. You won’t have Nixon to kick around anymore because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference.23

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20 Nixon, RN, 103, 105.
22 Nixon, RN, 108.
This was certainly not Nixon’s last press conference, although most people believed his political career was over. Less than a decade later and with his deep-rooted hostility toward the media, he became president.

As time went on, Nixon’s suspicion of and antagonism toward the media deepened. With a successful, managed image of a “New Nixon,” he won the 1968 presidential election. However, Nixon never believed that the hostile attitude of the media had changed because of his success. As a matter of fact, when Nixon became president, the relationship between the White House and the media had already been strained because of the Vietnam War. The seemingly endless war caused large-scale anti-war movements domestically; the media also criticized the White House for being incapable of ending the war. Before vacating the White House, President Lyndon B. Johnson expressed his concerns by asking, “Would the new President be resolute in the war or would he be ‘bullied by that Goddamned New York Times?’”

There was a short honeymoon between the Nixon administration and the media (especially with newspapers) after Nixon took office. Shortly after Nixon’s inauguration, Director of Communications Herbert Klein announced that “truth will be the hallmark of the Nixon administration.” However, Nixon got angry with the media in November 1969, after he gave “the great silent majority” speech. This speech was a great success for Nixon, but there were strong voices against his ideas in the media. For example, former U.S. Ambassador at-large, W. Averell Harriman, expressed strong reservations on ABC News. This incident further convinced Nixon that “[t]he majority of New York and

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Washington newspaper reporters, news executives, columnists, and opinion-makers are liberals,” and were greatly different from him.26 In Nixon’s mind, if reporters, “whether in television or print journalism, were not conspicuously with him, they were against him.”27 After the speech, the White House’s relatively friendly attitude toward the media was replaced by the “old” distrust and antagonism.

Thereafter, Nixon’s war on the media—started two decades earlier—would resume its momentum and intensity. One visible tendency was that the president personalized almost every piece of negative news reporting or commentary on him. William Safire said, “He took everything critical as a personal blast at him; when he read a by-line, the writer came to life in his mind, grinning evilly at him.” Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. also pointed out that Nixon “incredibly manages to conceive himself as the pitiful and helpless victim of a media conspiracy;” because of this observation, he viewed Nixon “by cast of mind and temperament to be a man to whom the most trivial criticism is intolerable.”28

It would, however, be too simplistic to assume that Nixon would merely be complaining about being victimized by the media. Driven in part by his intolerance of the media’s criticism, he and his White House staff were determined to mount an offensive against the media to gain favorable reports.

II. H.R. Haldeman

Once in office, Nixon hand-picked his chief communication strategist to oversee the presidential image. In the first half of 1960s, Herbert Klein was in charge of Nixon’s

26 Spear, Presidents and the Press, 40-41.
27 Donovan and Scherer, Unsilent Revolution, 113.
28 Spear, Presidents and the Press, 41.
press relationship and served as one of Nixon’s closest aides. However, in the 1968 campaign, he was replaced by H.R. Haldeman, who later became Nixon’s White House chief of staff. A former California advertising executive, Haldeman was now doing “the job of juggling people, paper, and press in a manner that protected Nixon’s privacy.”

To many, Haldeman functioned as a “gatekeeper and broker rather than a policy advocate.” Haldeman himself was aware of his position; he later wrote, “I envisioned my job at the White House as that of a manager, and was determined to be the best manager a president ever had. That meant I had to be tough. I was tough.”

Haldeman was noted for his fanatical working style. He was a rigid man who “hated anyone who challenged his authority.” He was often accused of isolating Nixon by building up a “Berlin Wall” around him. Haldeman read almost all documents before they were sent to the president; he screened Nixon’s phone calls and made schedules for him, deciding with whom he would meet. However, Nixon himself allowed, or even directed, Haldeman to construct such a screening system around him, because it fitted his personality and working style. Nixon, described by Kissinger as “painfully shy,” was very uncomfortable having small talk with unfamiliar people, “especially if they were in a position to rebuff or contradict him.” Thus Nixon based his communication on written memos rather than face-to-face talks. And he was satisfied that Haldeman helped him avoid troublesome meetings and saved his time.

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29 Ibid, 69.
30 Maltese, Spin Control, 21.
31 Spear, Presidents and the Press, 70.
One of Haldeman’s roles was to oversee public relations initiatives and nurture the president’s image. It is important to point out that Nixon often made media policies himself, and Haldeman and the media team would carry them out. James Keogh, a former speechwriter, commented that “the chain of command” of the Nixon administration’s “communication efforts,” “ran directly to Haldeman” and “ultimately to the President himself.” Haldeman shared Nixon’s dislike and distrust of the media. United Press International journalist Helen Thomas said Haldeman “always seemed to fear that we reporters would commit some grievous social faux pas. He stood arms crossed like a bouncer, and glared at us as if we were potential rowdies.” Haldeman’s intimidating style left a strong impression on reporters.

At the White House, Haldeman brought with him the experiences and strategic assets he had gained out of the 1968 presidential campaign. To ensure the quality of the campaign management, he had formed a media and public relations team, which contained several former advertising professionals, such as Dwight Chapin, Larry Higby and Ronald Ziegler. Working with Haldeman, they “helped put together the most impressive media campaign in history to that point,” according to historian Melvin Small. Nixon’s well-planned television appearances during the campaign, for example, were pivotal in winning the election. A CBS executive on the Nixon team commented, “Without television, Nixon would not have a chance… of being elected because the press would not let him get through to the people.” Meanwhile, Nixon’s media team led by Haldeman had successfully shielded him from journalists and their probing questions.

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33 Spear, Presidents and the Press, 70.
According to a reporter, “the press corps calls [Nixon] ‘[t]he cardboard man’ because we can’t see past the façade of the candidate. I’ve never met the real Richard Nixon.”

As Haldeman’s power increased, Herbert Klein’s role became less prominent in the administration. He was the assigned director of the newly established Office of Communications. His original responsibilities—traveling with Nixon and giving press conferences—were largely taken over by Ronald Ziegler. At the beginning of Nixon’s first term, Klein assumed responsibilities for the larger coordination of news management; for cultivating relations with local editors, publishers, and broadcasters; and for scheduling interviews and television appearances. However, Klein’s allegedly soft attitude toward the media disappointed or even displeased Haldeman and Nixon. In addition, as John Maltese points out, Klein, “known for his cluttered desk and his tendency to be late for meetings—may also have been too disorganized for their tastes.”

As a result, Nixon found Klein a liability for his news management team and decided to exclude him from the inner circle. By then, Haldeman had become the operative leader of Nixon’s media team.

III. Nixon’s Tactics to Influence Media

If Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger formed a “two-man” team in managing the administration’s foreign policy, he and Haldeman formed a “two-man” team in public relations. Nixon made the plan, and Haldeman made sure the plan was carried out properly. Indeed, Nixon and Haldeman put unprecedented emphasis on

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35 Maltese, Spin Control, 19.
public relations, aiming to gain wider public acceptance of Nixon’s policies. Almost every policy would be executed as a public relations event. Klein described the Nixon administration’s obsession with public relations management:

The tempo for such interest in a particular field stems from the top, and in this case it was the President and his chief of staff, Bob Haldeman. With their interest apparent, the PR effort soon covered both first- and second-rank men (and sometimes the younger third echelon) in every area of the White House. On too many occasions, interest in promotion of a program exceeded interest in details of substance.37

Besides Nixon and Haldeman, the person who directed Nixon’s public relations programs was Jeb Stuart Magruder, the full-time public relations director. Once in the White House, Magruder realized the prevailing attitude in the administration toward the media was being tough, and he was “willing to accommodate it.” Under Haldeman, he took several approaches to intensify the administration’s public relations activities. Through the establishment of the Weekly News Calendar and a news monitoring system, Magruder “added PO (presidential offensive) to PR and embraced the concept of ‘Game Planning’—setting long-term public relations goals on major policy issues.” In early 1970, Magruder was appointed deputy director of the Office of Communications, and he gradually turned the office into a public relations branch.38 In early 1972, Magruder was replaced by former Washington Post journalist Ken Clawson, who became director of the Office of Communications after Klein eventually left in 1973.

Another important figure in Nixon’s public relations efforts was Charles Colson, who served as the primary public relations manager of the 1972 reelection campaign. Colson started serving in the Nixon administration in 1969. In 1971, as planned by the

37 Klein, Making it Perfectly Clear, 108.
38 Maltese, Spin Control, 62.
President’s special assistant Fred Malek, Colson took over Klein’s operations. In a March 17, 1971 memorandum, Malek explained:

Klein has responsibility for chairing the Plans Board which coordinates communications policy, overseeing the administration’s relations with the media, and acting as a top administration spokesman on key issues. Chuck Colson will complement this policy-oriented function with operational responsibility for the developing and execution of detailed public affairs strategies within the framework laid out by the Plans Board and for supervising day-to-day communications activities within these strategies.  

Both Nixon and Haldeman endorsed his proposal.

As time went by, Colson became so important in the Nixon administration that he once boasted, “I was the only guy on the whole White House staff that could walk into the President’s office without Haldeman’s OK.” Colson was a tough aide who in 1972 said that he would “walk over my grandmother if necessary” to get Nixon reelected. He always carried out every presidential directive, no matter how irrational it was. As Haldeman wrote, “Colson encouraged the dark impulses in Nixon’s mind and acted on those impulses instead of ignoring them and letting them die.” However, Colson claimed that he was following the orders from the President.

The Nixon administration’s media policy was an integral part of its public relations plan. There can be little doubt that the most important objective of the media policy was to gain favorable reporting on the president. To this end, Nixon placed a great deal of emphasis on news watching, news controlling, and perhaps more importantly, news reshaping.

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41 Maltese, Spin Control, 83.
Nixon’s White House had built up a monitoring system of the media. Supervised by Nixon’s important speechwriter, Patrick Buchanan, Lyndon (“Mort”) Allin edited the “Daily News Summary” for the administration. Under the direction of neither Klein nor Ziegler, the news summary was an independent operation. The purpose of such an arrangement was to keep it “factual and independent.” However, the news summary was often accused of being biased, as Buchanan and Allin paid more attention to negative reports. This reinforced Nixon’s conviction that the media hated him. Shortly after Nixon took office, Haldeman asked Klein and Ziegler to establish “a Special TV News Section” to monitor television reporting on presidential news. Nixon was also very sensitive to the attitudes of individual journalists. For example, in a twenty-six-page list of reporters and columnists, the White House categorized their attitudes toward the administration—“friendly,” “neutral,” or “unfriendly.” These summaries and lists served as a base of Nixon’s management of the media.

As stated above, the Nixon administration’s media tactics fell into four categories. Functioning simultaneously, these approaches ensured that the administration influenced presidential news reporting as much as possible.

Largely due to his personality, Nixon isolated himself from the media on purpose. With Haldeman’s help, the president reduced phone calls and face-to-face meetings as much as possible. Nixon flew to Camp David and Key Biscayne as frequently as possible; an important reason was because it was easier to avoid journalists there. Furthermore, Nixon’s aides made public appearances so rarely that some journalists could not distinguish Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, Nixon’s two most powerful

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assistants. By isolating himself and his White House staff from the media, Nixon believed that he could prevent leaks to the media that could harm policymaking.

Understanding that the media would not acquiesce to the administration’s isolation approach, the administration tried to appease reporters. To cater to their appetite for information, the White House would provide them with “something to write about.” It “would be nothing controversial or unfavorable, but it would be something.” “Give the press a lot of copy,” Nixon instructed his aides, “then they won’t have too much to squeal about.”

A twenty-nine-year-old White House staff member, Ronald Ziegler, was chosen for the task. As White House press secretary, Ziegler was thought by Nixon and Haldeman to be young and manageable. Haldeman later explained that “Nixon wanted someone as press secretary who would transmit to the press what the president wanted transmitted to the press. He did not want someone… [acting as] an alterego to the president in terms of spokesmanship.” More than that, in Nixon’s original plan, Ziegler would simply be a White House spokesman instead of a press secretary. By making such an arrangement, Nixon and Haldeman “wanted to send a message to the press that they hold the press in ‘a certain contempt.’”

Ziegler accomplished his job well. He managed to give reporters the least amount of information in press briefings. He only answered reporters’ questions in a general way, refusing to give them any specifics. Sometimes he even gave them erroneous or incomplete information. Klein commented on Ziegler’s style in his own way: “Ziegler

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43 Spear, *Presidents and the Press*, 73.
44 Ibid, 65.
zigzagged so much that he badly undercut the credibility of government and the White House Newsmen kidded about ‘Zieggeries,’ which mean obfuscating answers.”

Ziegler developed a number of methods to deal with the media. Whenever Ziegler anticipated that a press briefing would be troublesome, for example, he would start the briefing after eleven o’clock. He made this arrangement because he knew that the wire services and broadcast reporters had to meet their 11:45 deadlines, so they would not have time for more details of the news. When the presidential party traveled by airplane, he forbade the press pool from leaving their section. However, the White House staff could go to the press section freely to distribute handouts or issue statements. Ziegler’s practices lived up to Nixon’s expectations for a press secretary, as well as his media plan.

Nixon believed that he could limit the influence of media by evasion. It was most obvious when he deliberately reduced presidential press conferences. Nixon held thirty-nine presidential press conferences during his presidency, while his predecessors such as Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson held twenty-four to thirty-six press conferences per year. Johnson held over forty press conferences in 1966. In 1972, the Washington News Committee of the Associated Press Managing Editors Association complained that the situation had gone so badly that “President Nixon has come close to killing off the presidential press conference as a public institution during his term in office.” There were various reasons for Nixon’s action. His personality might be a reason that he felt uncomfortable speaking in front of “hostile” journalists. More importantly,

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46 Franklin, “Public Relations in the White House,” 215.
47 Spear, Presidents and the Pres, 76-77.
shunning press conferences fitted his media plan. A press conference, according to Spear, is the “least controllable confrontation between presidents and press.”50 Although most questions in televised press conferences were not tough, Nixon and his aides were still afraid of facing unwanted questions. In 1972, when the president’s assistant on domestic affairs, John Ehrlichman, was asked in a television interview, why the president was reluctant to meet the press, he answered, “Well, [the president] doesn’t get very good questions at press conferences, frankly. He goes in there for half an hour; he gets a lot of flabby and fairly dumb questions, and it doesn’t really elucidate very much.”51 To Nixon, reducing press conferences meant leaving the press fewer chances to speculate on his policy initiatives or sabotage his image.

Aware that negative reports may create unfavorable public opinion, an important theme of the Nixon administration’s media policy was to send messages to the public over the heads of the press. In a document in September 1970 written by Nixon in the third person, Nixon declared:

> The fact that [Nixon] now survives this with 55-60% approval by the people… The key to all this, of course, is that RN… has ignored them and talked directly to the country by TV whenever possible. He has used the press and not let the press use him. He has particularly not allowed the press, whenever he could avoid it, to filter his ideas to the public.52

Therefore, in Nixon’s opinion, addressing the public by television should be used as the most important way to send out information.

The White House news management activities were thus designed primarily to fit television broadcasting rather than print reporting. Haldeman stated clearly in a

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50 Spear, Presidents and the Pres, 79-80, 8.
51 Ibid, 84.
52 Maltese, Spin Control, 46.
memorandum, “The President wants you to realize and emphasize to all appropriate members of your staff that a press conference is a TV operation and that the TV impression is really all that matters.” Nixon’s first televised news conference was purposely scheduled at 9:00 PM. Maltese commented that the time was “in the middle of prime-time viewing hours and so late that it was ‘nerve-rackingly difficult’ for the Eastern morning newspapers to cover the story. The scheduling also made it difficult for television newscasts to dissect the conference, since the story was ‘old’ by 6:30 the next evening.”53 Similarly, when publicizing other presidential events, reaching television viewers became the primary goal of the Nixon administration, which, used television as much as possible. Nixon made frequent appearances on television, sometimes as often as every three days.54

Nixon put great efforts into cultivating his image in front of the cameras, because he believed that it would directly influence public opinion toward him. He tried to shape his image as a president “who was never ill, never discouraged or troubled, who knew he had his people—the silent majority—behind him, who was in complete control of all situations and was never wrong.” However, with very little professional knowledge about the broadcast media, Nixon could not accomplish the goal alone. According to Haldeman, Nixon did not know how to operate a tape recorder alone.55 Therefore, he needed television experts to help him sell the “New Nixon” to the public.

As television played increasingly important roles in Nixon’s media manipulation plan, he needed some special television assistants other than Haldeman. At the end of

53 Ibid, 44.
54 Spear, Presidents and the Press, 86.
55 Ibid, 94, 92.
1969, he first raised the idea of putting “a part-or-full-time TV man on our staff for the purpose of seeing that my TV appearances are handled on a professional basis.” As a result, in 1970, the White House hired a Los Angeles television producer, William Carruthers, as a part-time television consultant. But Nixon wanted to establish a full-time White House Television Office. In 1971, the new office started to take charge of Nixon’s day-to-day appearances on television under the direction of Mark Goode, a colleague of Carruthers in Los Angeles.

In addition to television, Nixon and his media management team saw radio as an efficient tool to address the people directly. Nixon had proved to be very successful in using radio since his 1960 presidential debate. After the debate, polls showed that he won support from radio audiences while losing television viewers. Nixon depended heavily on radio during his 1968 and 1972 election campaigns; he also made some statements through the radio during the first term. Nixon’s emphasis on using the radio was partly because both he and his aides believed that his voice sounded good on radio; more importantly, radio had advantages over television because it did not require the administration to work on the president’s look.

Intimidation was an integral part of Nixon administration’s public relations efforts. One of the most noticeable approaches was to plug information leaks, known in the Nixon White House as “plumbing.” The White House traced and punished the sources of leaks fanatically. For instance, on July 24, 1971, based on a leaked memorandum, the *New York Times* published an article about Washington-Moscow Strategic Arms

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58 Ibid, 123.
Limitation Treaty (SALT) talk. To find out who leaked the information, Nixon ordered Ehrlichman to “line up everybody that had access to the memo and get them polygraphed.” Nixon, commented Haldeman, used polygraph “ruthlessly.” He set up a polygraph system under which “everybody who had access to the secret documents [had to] sign an agreement ahead of time that they [would] take a polygraph test.” Such a heavy-handed approach aimed to further control the flow of information by intimidating potential leakers. Furthermore, when negative presidential news reporting occurred, the Office of Communications under Magruder would generate large amounts of letters-to-the-editor and telephone calls of complaints. The goal was to “create the image of strong grass-roots support for the administration” and to discredit the media.

However, it is difficult to say that Nixon’s media policy was always effective, because Nixon often encountered different opinions on media policy and not all of his directives were carried out. Kissinger, for example, did not always agree with Nixon’s media plan regarding foreign policy. Kissinger did not agree with Nixon’s decision to keep the media ignorant. In contrast, he believed that “[one] of the most important functions of the Presidential Assistant is to explain the President’s policies and purposes” to the media and the public. Besides, he suggested that in Washington, journalists served as part of the government functions. To some extent, therefore, he became a professional leaker. He would send anonymous letters to reporters and editors to provide inside information. He had fairly good relations with reporters such as Joseph Alsop.

Kissinger’s actions enraged Nixon and created tensions between the two. Not only

60 Maltese, *Spin Control*, 72.
Kissinger, but other White House staff sometimes ignored Nixon’s directives. As Ziegler said, “Presidents are human beings. … If they feel they are being treated unfairly, they’re going to respond that way. You know, ‘why should we let that guy go on Air Force One if he [treats us unfairly in print]?’ I got a lot of those memos. But where I felt it was right, I’d still put the guy on the airplane.” He concluded that “reality” was different from Nixon’s wishes: “look at the press attendance list. You see the difference?”

IV. Conclusion

Nixon’s strategies and practices in managing presidential news reporting were largely derived from Nixon’s own experiences with the media. Once in office, he made special efforts to influence presidential news coverage as much as possible. The specific objectives he and his news team designed, the strictly selected specialists they recruited, and the various tactics they employed forged and sustained a unique system of public communications.

It was within this context that Nixon and his news team would try to manage the media’s reporting on the U.S. rapprochement with China in the early 1970s. They would take Nixon’s trip to China in February 1972 as a good chance to nurture public relations. It seemed that the Nixon administration put at least equal emphasis on publicizing its China policy domestically and developing relations with China. In order to have maximum publicity and obtain more public support, it used almost all the tactics to influence the media.

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62 Maltese, *Spin Control*, 51-52
Chapter Two


During the first two years of Nixon’s presidency, the United States and China slowly improved relations through secret contacts, which eventually led to the Chinese invitation in April 1971 for Kissinger to visit China. During his career, Nixon had gradually modified his earlier foreign policy mindset; by the time he took office, he was determined to make changes in the U.S. Cold War approaches. The Nixon administration hoped to end the Vietnam War by improving relations with the Soviet Union and China. Nixon and his aides saw opportunities to pull off the rapprochement with China first because the Chinese were having disputes with the Soviets and worried about Soviet threat. However, it was not easy to complete this task. Within the context of the Cold War, there had been little, if any, diplomatic, economic, or cultural contact between Washington and Beijing since 1949. As a result of this long-time isolation, U.S. public opinion was largely hostile toward China. From 1969 to 1971, the Nixon administration gradually carried out a new China policy. At the same time, to prepare for more open U.S.-Chinese contacts, it consistently tried to reshape public opinion toward China.


By the time Nixon took office in 1969, U.S.-Chinese relations had been dominated by the Cold War confrontations but also had begun to thaw. Due to the unique role it played in the Cold War, China would be willing to improve relations with the United States in response to the deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union. Political scientists Andrew J. Nathan and Robert S. Ross claim: “During the Cold War, China was the only
major country that stood at the intersection of the two superpower camps, a target of influence and enmity of both.” Being the largest and most powerful country between the two superpowers, China “found itself in the uniquely dangerous position of being alternately wooed and threatened by both superpowers.” The two decades between the late 1940s and late 1960s witnessed the transition from the Soviet-China alliance to Soviet-Chinese confrontation. Concerned about Soviet aggression, Chinese leaders were willing to ease their antagonism towards the United States to win some leverage over the Soviet Union. Thereafter, during this period, U.S.-Chinese relations slowly moved in a more friendly direction.

When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took over China in 1949, its leaders decided to stand against the United States in the Cold War. After the Truman administration chose to support the Nationalist regime led by Jiang Jieshi, China chose to side with the Soviet Union. On June 30, 1949, Mao Zedong issued a “lean-to-one-side” statement in which he announced that China had “a special bond” with the Soviet Union. China’s siding with the Soviet Union caused animosity in the United States. In January 1950, the U.S. State Department evacuated all U.S. official personnel from China. The official relationship between the two countries was cut off until the 1970s. A month later, China and the Soviet Union signed an alliance treaty in which the Soviet Union agreed to support China with military and material aid.

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64 Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 50.
The Korean War aggravated U.S.-Chinese hostility, especially in the eyes of the people of the two nations. The United States and China portrayed each other as an enemy. While the Chinese were depicted by U.S. media as having killed “our boys,” Beijing’s propaganda stirred up hatred of “U.S. imperialists” among ordinary Chinese people. The dispatch of the U.S. Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait was perceived by the Chinese as an open act of intervention. Washington imposed a total economic embargo against China. The trade restrictions, which were not loosened until the late 1960s, were even harsher than those against the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

U.S. public opinion toward China became worse after the Korean War began. A January 1951 Gallup Poll found that a majority of the population supported sending military aid to protect Taiwan from the communist threat. At the same time, opinion soundings showed that there was “overwhelmingly nationwide support for continued recognition of the Nationalist Government and opposition to recognition of the Chinese Communists or their admission to [the] UN.” According to historian Leonard A. Kusnitz, from 1951 to 1952 there were “at least seven different occasions” at which “a majority of the public” told interviewers from the National Opinion Research Center that “United States airplanes should…bomb Communist supply bases inside China.” There were also strong anti-Chinese voices in the media. A November 1950 *New York Times* article ridiculed China’s actions in the Korean War: “the Chinese Communists can hardly expect

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that, having failed to demand their way into the United Nations, they can [now] shoot their way into it by an assault on United Nations forces in the field.”

The Dwight D. Eisenhower administration pledged to “hold the line” against communism, thus it continued to undertake an aggressive approach toward China.\footnote{Gaddis, \textit{Strategies of Containment}, 125.} Following this rule, the United States became involved in two Taiwan Strait crises. In December 1954, the United States signed a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan, suggesting that both sides “consult together on steps to be taken in the event of an external threat against the island of Taiwan or the ROC-held Pescadores islands in [the] Taiwan Strait.”\footnote{Holdridge, \textit{Crossing the Divide}, 8.} The People’s Republic quickly denounced the treaty and called it an attempt to “legalize” the “U.S. occupation of Taiwan.” Then China started the bombardment to the nationalist-controlled offshore islands. The first Taiwan Strait crisis ended in August 1955, when U.S.-Chinese ambassadorial-level talks started. The second Taiwan Strait crisis unfolded on August 23, 1958, when the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) launched a sudden and intensive artillery barrage of the nationalist-controlled Jinmen Island. In the following six weeks, the bombardment persisted with the same intensity. Fearing the escalation of the crisis, the Eisenhower administration sent U.S. naval vessels to help protect the supply lines between Taiwan and Jinmen. On October 6, Beijing publicly called for a peaceful solution to the crisis. Then the PLA gradually reduced the bombardment and eventually ended it.\footnote{Chen, \textit{Mao’s China and the Cold War}, 163-165.} The two crises consolidated the U.S. role in the region; U.S.-Chinese relations further worsened.


\footnotetext{70} Gaddis, \textit{Strategies of Containment}, 125.

\footnotetext{71} Holdridge, \textit{Crossing the Divide}, 8.

\footnotetext{72} Chen, \textit{Mao’s China and the Cold War}, 163-165.
Also during the Eisenhower years, Washington and Beijing started a series of *de facto* diplomatic negotiations. Late in April 1955, when the first Taiwan Strait crisis was still underway, Zhou Enlai proposed to negotiate with the United States. The United States accepted the offer, and the two started a series of ambassadorial-level talks in Geneva in August. Soon thereafter, the two sides agreed to exchange detainees. The ambassadorial talks continued until June 1957, when Washington suspended the meetings indefinitely, terminating its only official contact with China.\(^73\)

Another important factor that might have influenced U.S.-Chinese relations in the 1950s was the changes in the Soviet-China partnership. From 1956, Mao started to worry about the intentions of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who denounced Stalin. The hostility between the two communist parties grew. In November 1957, the Soviet Communist Party accused the CCP of being “too aggressive.” In response, the Chinese started to anonymously attack the Soviets as “revisionists” and a “traitor of Leninism.”\(^74\) By 1959, the disagreements between the Soviet Union and China became apparent to Western observers, although few in Washington had expected the partnership would fall apart anytime soon.\(^75\)

Except for some optimistic expectations for the ambassadorial-level talks between the United States and China, U.S. public opinion during the Eisenhower years remained largely anti-Chinese. At the beginning of Eisenhower’s first term, polls showed that most people favored supporting Taiwan for an attack on mainland China. Meanwhile, eighty-


\(^{74}\) Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide*, 13.

\(^{75}\) Cohen, *America’s Response to China*, 188.
three percent of those asked in a poll agreed that “all allied trade with the People’s Republic of China should be halted.” Public opinion toward China slightly moderated after the ambassadorial-level talks began. A late August 1955 survey found that eighty-two percent of American people favored a meeting between Chinese premier Zhou Enlai and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles as a sign of further improvement of U.S.-Chinese relations.\(^7\) However, the overall attitude among the American public toward China remained negative throughout the 1950s.

When John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, the hostility between the United States and China continued. Kennedy escalated U.S. involvement in Indochina, which led to a deeper Chinese commitment to Ho Chi Minh’s communist forces in Vietnam. Beijing claimed to have a “lips and teeth” relationship with North Vietnam, and helped the North Vietnamese with a large amount of military and economic aid. The aid neutralized U.S. efforts to sustain the pro-American South Vietnamese government.\(^7\) Partly antagonized by Chinese actions, the Kennedy administration doubled its efforts to isolate China. It intensified economic sanctions against China, and even considered a preemptive action against China’s nuclear facilities. Even when the Chinese-Soviet split became public in 1961, Kennedy’s White House continued to exert political, economic, and military pressures on Beijing.\(^7\)

Public opinion toward China during the Kennedy years remained negative. On the sensitive issue of China’s membership in the UN, most Americans remained opposed. In October 1961, a Gallup poll found that sixty-five percent of the public was against

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\(^7\) Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, 63, 71, 74-75.
\(^7\) Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide*, 10-11.
\(^7\) Cohen, *America’s Response to China*, 187-188.
China’s admission to the UN. But a trend of opinion supporting mending the relationship with China also emerged among the public. In a March 1961 poll, over half of the American people favored improving relations with China.\textsuperscript{79}

Lyndon B. Johnson started his presidency by inheriting many of Kennedy’s foreign policies, including confronting China.\textsuperscript{80} Johnson was determined not to abandon South Vietnam, and he believed that China, perceived as the backing force behind Hanoi, must be contained. The Johnson administration’s perception of the Chinese-Soviet confrontation also affected its strategies in the Vietnam War. At first many of the high-level officials in the administration—including Johnson himself—believed that China was more aggressive than the Soviet Union in the communist bloc. Moreover, in 1963-64, it seemed that the North Vietnamese were more sympathetic toward the Chinese than the Soviets. Therefore, during this period, Johnson wanted to “promote Moscow’s conciliatory trend while isolating the more militant Chinese.” During his 1964 presidential campaign, Johnson said that “the diversity of the Communist world would offer new possibilities for world peace.” In September 1965, Chinese Defense Minister Lin Biao published an essay calling for world-wide revolutions against North American and European imperialism. American hostility against China reached its peak during the Johnson presidency. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, for example, compared the article with Hitler’s \textit{Mein Kampf} and alleged that it showed China’s expansionist ambitions.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} Cohen, America’s Response to China, 192.
As the Johnson administration’s efforts with the Soviet Union failed to bring the North Vietnamese to the negotiating table, its attitude toward China started to change. In a speech given on February 12, 1966, Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy signaled this changing policy, later known as “containment without isolation.” In the speech, Bundy suggested that Chinese leaders “have not wished to seek a confrontation of military power with us, and in any situation that would be likely to lead to wider conflict they are tactically cautious.” He asserted that the United States would continue to oppose Chinese pressures in Asia, but he also hoped that the administration would “over time, open the possibility of increased contacts with Communist China.” In July 1966, Johnson himself made a rather friendly gesture to China in a major address. He suggested that “reconciliation between nations that now call themselves enemies” was necessary for peace in Asia. Soon thereafter the administration loosened the ban on travel to China. By the end of 1966, a group of State Department personnel had been selected to establish “informal social contacts with the Chinese Communists;” the Department of Defense had also decided to support a two-China policy in the United Nations.82

Nineteen sixty-eight was a critical turning point in U.S.-Chinese relations. Being criticized for his unsuccessful Vietnam War policy, Johnson announced in the spring that he would not run for reelection. In August, the Soviet Union sent troops to Czechoslovakia to suppress the democratic trend—the “Prague Spring”—there; this action further convinced Chinese leaders of the Soviets’ potential for aggression. Seeing an opportunity to ease tensions with China, on September 17, 1968, the State Department sent a letter to China via the Chinese embassy in Warsaw, proposing a resumption of the

82 Ibid, 272-273.
ambassadorial-level talks. The Chinese replied that “it had always been the policy of the
People’s Republic of China to maintain friendly relations with all states.” By November,
the two countries agreed to resume the talks in Warsaw in February 1969, after the new
president took office.83

The American attitude toward China during the Johnson administration went
through a series of changes. At the beginning of the Johnson presidency, public opinion
toward China remained so negative that a May 1964 Gallup poll showed that fifty-six
percent of the Americans considered the People’s Republic of China as the main threat to
world peace.84 Starting in 1966, more positive voices toward China emerged. In a March
1966 Gallup poll, opposition to China’s admission to the UN fell twelve percentage
points since December 1965.85 In the same month, Senator J. William Fulbright’s Senate
Foreign Relations Committee held a series of hearings on U.S. China policy. Except for a
few conservatives, most scholars at the hearings called for improving relations with
China. A group of concerned scholars of Asia who attended the hearings placed an
advertisement calling for normalizing relations with China in the New York Times. This
advertisement, together with other articles and commentaries on the hearings published
by the newspaper, drew much public attention. In the same year, the Council on Foreign
Relations published a massive study on China policy; the authors that had contributed to
the study suggested the need to insert more flexibility into U.S. China policy.86 While
still opposing normalizing relations with China immediately, the public started to accept

83 See, “Warsaw Talks,” memorandum prepared by President’s Special Assistant on National Security Henry A.
Kissinger, February 11, 1969, National Security Council Files [Hereafter, NSC Files], Box 200, Nixon Presidential
Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
85 Kusnitz, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, 115.
86 Chang, Friends and Enemies, 273-274.
China’s seating in the UN. Gallup polls found that from 1966 to 1969, there was a continuously increasing trend of supporting Beijing’s admission to the UN—without expelling Taiwan.87

However, hostility toward China among the public still existed. Portrayed by U.S. media with titles such as “Roots of Madness,” the Chinese Cultural Revolution worsened China’s image among the American public. A March 1967 poll found that seventy-one percent of the population considered China as the main threat to the world, while only twenty percent pointed to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, a late 1967 survey indicated that China won the least American esteem among forty-eight nations.88

By the time Nixon took office, the Soviet-Chinese split as well as America’s Vietnam quagmire seemed to have opened up opportunities for U.S.-Chinese rapprochement. Meanwhile, a long-standing hostility and a series of armed confrontations placed great obstacles in the way of rapprochement; the American public still viewed China in two different ways. Nixon decided to take the opportunity to change U.S. relations with China. He was also aware of the challenges ahead—both international and domestic—if he was to transform Washington’s policy toward Beijing. Learning from his previous foreign policy experiences, Nixon prepared himself and his White House staff to improve relations with China.

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88 Ibid, 117.
II. Nixon’s Foreign Policy Views and Assets

Nixon had set foreign affairs as the top policy priority of his administration. The most significant foreign policy the administration undertook was changing U.S. approaches in the Cold War, including the relationship with China. The reasons why the Nixon administration emphasized foreign policy were not only because the pressures arising from America’s international problems, but also because Nixon believed that he could handle foreign policy better than domestic policy. The new president, indeed, had formed a new attitude toward China and had gained sufficient political assets to carry out his ideas.

As the president of the United States, Nixon had to lead a country whose confidence had been shaken in the previous decade. One of the most important causes of the turmoil was the Vietnam War. People started questioning the purpose of the war; many American people were sympathetic to the anti-war movement. Internationally, the war even caused criticisms from U.S. allies; furthermore, the rise of other centers of power including West Europe, Japan and China, and the expansion of the Soviet Union further weakened American influence in the world. Nixon, facing all these problems in his presidency, realized that the “power of the United States must be used more effectively, at home and abroad, or we go down the drain as a great power. Have already lost the leadership position we held at the end of WWII, but we can regain it, if fast!”

This belief was related to Nixon’s previous experiences in foreign policy. Nixon’s political career had been largely connected to foreign affairs; he had also showcased his ability in this field. As observed by historian and former policy advisor William Bundy, by the time Nixon entered the White House, he had “made a deep impression on two fronts”—one was political campaigning, and the other was foreign policy. Bundy maintains that before the presidential inauguration, Nixon’s “exposure to the world and to foreign leaders stood near the top among the political figures of his time.” For twenty years, he had managed to play a visible role in articulating U.S. Cold War policy: in 1949 he warned of the threat of a Communist China, and had a well-known kitchen debate with Khrushchev over the economic systems of capitalism and communism in the Soviet Union in 1959. Additionally, both in public and within the government, Nixon showed “a strong inclination to deal with problems by decisive action, violent and military if necessary, and not to be constrained by potential opposition at home or by the attitudes of allied countries.” In his foreign policy views, he had portrayed himself as a warrior against the communist threat and one who was willing to fight for his beliefs. However, Nixon was not too stubborn to change his views. As a matter of fact, over time, Nixon’s thoughts on U.S. foreign policy—especially China policy—had been constantly altered according to the changing world situations.

Compared to domestic politics, Nixon always had stronger interests in foreign policy. In 1965, Nixon told his friend Leonard Garment that he believed that “his life had to be dedicated to great foreign policy purposes;” it was not only because of the “importance of foreign affairs,” but also had a lot to do with his “pacifist mother’s

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91 Bundy, A Tangled Web, 3-4.
idealism.” Foreign policy, in his view, was about war or peace, thus it deserved more attention from the leader than domestic policy. In 1967, he said in an interview, “I’ve always thought this country could run itself domestically without a President. All you need is a competent Cabinet to run the country at home. You need a President for foreign policy; no Secretary of State is really important; the President makes foreign policy.” He also claimed that “the American economy is so strong it would take a genius to ruin it, whereas a small mistake in foreign policy could blow up the world.”92

In the first few years of his political career, Nixon formed his opinion on U.S. East Asia policy based largely on his anti-Communist stance. Having gained great fame from the Alger Hiss case in 1948, Nixon further linked that case to the postwar communist threat to American foreign policy, especially in China. During the Chinese Civil War, Nixon called for more military support to Jiang Jieshi’s Nationalist force. In 1949, he vigorously blasted Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson for “losing China.” When the Korean War broke out in 1950, Nixon fully supported Truman’s decision to intervene to prevent communist expansion. Meanwhile, he publicly blasted the January 1950 speech in which Acheson had omitted Korea geographically from the U.S. “defense perimeter” in East Asia, accusing the Truman administration of actually encouraging the North Koreans to start the war by the speech.93

As the vice president, Nixon continuously demonstrated a strong interest in shaping U.S. East Asia policy. He vigorously supported Eisenhower’s idea to employ nuclear threats against China and North Korea. He later suggested that threatening to attack

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China with nuclear weapons was the “crucial and perhaps the single decisive factor” in bringing the Korean War to a truce.\textsuperscript{94} In late 1953, Nixon made a visit to Asia where he gained direct knowledge of the situation in Southeast Asia, particularly Indochina. He also learned about China’s increasing influences in the region. At the same time, he developed personal relations with several Asian leaders through the trip.\textsuperscript{95}

From 1961 to 1968, Nixon paid much attention to U.S. policy in the deteriorating Vietnam War. In the spring of 1964, he took a long visit to Asia, stopping in South Vietnam. This trip convinced him that the situation in Vietnam was growing increasingly unstable, and if the United States did not respond effectively, the security of other Asian countries would be jeopardized. Therefore, he began to cautiously advocate for more U.S. intervention, especially air attacks on the North. At the beginning of 1965, he publicly supported U.S. naval and air bombardment of North Vietnam, but he opposed the involvement of U.S. ground forces in Vietnam or the undertaking of a nuclear attack. During another trip to South Vietnam in September, Nixon predicted that it would take two or three years to end the war. Later, he appeared in a TV interview and “strongly opposed” Congressman Gerald Ford’s suggestion that the United States should declare war on North Vietnam. Defining the “victory” in Vietnam as “an independent and secure” South Vietnam, Nixon insisted that the United States must obtain the goal through no concessions even in peace negotiations. In 1967, he visited South Vietnam

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid, 8.
\textsuperscript{95} Nixon, \textit{RN}, 136-137.
again, and concluded that the war was not likely to end in the American campaign season of 1968.\textsuperscript{96} 

During this period, Nixon developed more serious thoughts on changing U.S. China policy. In 1967, he talked with Jiang Jieshi in Taiwan and found it was “totally unrealistic” for the Nationalists to return to mainland China. He also found it important that “some new and direct relationship” between the United States and China was “essential” to the peace in Asia after the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{97} Upon his return, Nixon summarized these ideas in an article published in \textit{Foreign Affairs}. Admitting the growing Chinese influences in Asia, he emphasized the need to reintegrate China into the world community in the long term.\textsuperscript{98} But he also argued that Asian leaders “recognize a common danger, and see its source as Peking” and the United States should recognize “the present and potential danger from Communist China.” The article, as Bundy commented, was “carefully crafted,” not only with “eloquent generalizations to appeal to moderate and liberal sentiment,” but also with “specific proposals that were distinctly more cautious and appealing to conservatives.”\textsuperscript{99} 

Thus, Nixon entered the election year of 1968 with a more moderate foreign policy attitude than he had before. Developments in the Vietnam War further modified his view. The Tet Offensive conducted by the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese Army from January to February 1968 aggravated the situation in Vietnam. Americans who watched the image of the Vietcong attack the U.S. embassy in Saigon, supported stronger actions

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\textsuperscript{96} Bundy, \textit{A Tangled Web}, 15-17.
\textsuperscript{97} Nixon, \textit{RN}, 282-283.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid, 285.
\textsuperscript{99} Bundy, \textit{A Tangled Web}, 17-18.
\end{footnotesize}
in Vietnam. But there were also increasing skepticism and discontent with the Johnson administration’s handling of the war. Late February polls showed that most Americans disapproved Johnson’s Vietnam policy and thought it had been a mistake to send American troops to Vietnam.\footnote{Chester J. Pach Jr., “Tet on TV: U.S. Nightly News Reporting and Presidential Policy Making,” in Detlef Junker and Daniel S. Mattern, ed., \textit{1968: The World Transformed} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 69, 77.} Under this circumstance, Nixon’s view in the war remained moderate. On March 5, he told a New Hampshire audience that “the war can be ended if we mobilize our economic and political leadership,” and he pledged “new leadership” to “end the war and win the peace in the Pacific.” However, he refused to provide any detail of his “secret plan to end the war”—a tag given by the media. At the same time, he redefined victory as an “honorable” peace that “would not be regarded as a defeat.”\footnote{Bundy, \textit{A Tangled Web}, 20-21.}

By the time of his election, Nixon had appeared as a hawk in foreign policy, a “true believer” in containing communist threats. It seemed that Nixon understood maintaining a hard-line image would be beneficial to his attempts to make breakthroughs in foreign policy. Few Americans could question Nixon’s anti-communist credentials when he moved toward the Soviet Union and China. More importantly, the new president seemed to have believed that his staunch anti-communist attitude would be a strategic asset in dealing with his communist adversaries and ameliorating the worsening situation in Asia. “I call it the Madman Theory,” Nixon once explained to Haldeman, “I want the North Vietnamese to believe that I’ve reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war.”\footnote{Small, \textit{The Presidency of Richard Nixon}, 61.}
Although having no clear-cut plan to end the Vietnam War except for continuing the negotiations with North Vietnam that had started during the Johnson administration, Nixon was ready to make some breakthroughs in his administration’s foreign policy.\textsuperscript{103} The person Nixon chose to carry out his initiatives was Henry A. Kissinger, a Harvard political scientist. The two men forged a “Nixinger” foreign policy system which greatly influenced Nixon administration’s Cold War politics. For one thing, Nixon and Kissinger adopted a more realistic, less ideological approach, than the previous administrations. Both Nixon and Kissinger decided to base foreign policy on a realistic assessment of the international situation, and they were committed to constructing détente with the Soviet Union and rapprochement with China.\textsuperscript{104} For another, through the “two-man system,” Nixon and Kissinger excluded almost any other agency from the making of foreign policy. Since both had little trust of the federal bureaucracy, particularly the State Department, Nixon and Kissinger would seize every opportunity to avoid the involvement of State Department officials who they believed only cared about their own interests. Undoubtedly, these characteristics helped Nixon and Kissinger move toward China and avoid potential disagreements on the rapprochement with China.

It is important to note, though, that the Nixon-Kissinger collaboration was not altogether smooth. Kissinger always felt insecure about his position in Nixon’s White House because he was treated as “an exotic wunderkind—a character, an outsider.”\textsuperscript{105} He threatened to resign several times when Nixon failed to grant his request for more

\textsuperscript{103} MacMillan, \textit{Nixon and Mao}, 119.
\textsuperscript{105} MacMillan, \textit{Nixon and Mao}, 53.
Nixon, on one hand, disliked Kissinger’s hunger for power. On the other hand, he was clearly aware that Kissinger was only his appointee who did not have independent power base in the administration. Nixon was also jealous that Kissinger received so much praise from the media. He was especially agitated in 1972, when journalists such as James Reston and Joseph Kraft started to refer Kissinger as a “miracle man” and “the second most powerful man” in the world.

It was clear that Nixon was intent on changing his predecessors’ foreign policy in general and policy toward China in particular. As a result of the serious problems the United States faced at the beginning of Nixon’s presidency, a change in the Cold War stance of the United States was necessary. Nixon’s interest and ability in foreign policy, especially his credentials in opposing communism, had made him the figure to possibly pull off this task. The realistic attitude in foreign policy shared by Nixon and Kissinger enabled the Nixon administration to change its Cold War stance and achieve a rapprochement with China. On such a sensitive issue as communicating with China, the highly centralized “Nixinger” system helped keep the information secret. Therefore, the communications with China did not meet unnecessary opposition, and Kissinger was able to make his secret trip to China.


Nixon and Kissinger decided to carry on “triangular diplomacy” to change U.S. relations with the Soviet Union and China. As stated before, by 1969, public opinion had trended toward easing tensions with China. Based on this trend in the public opinion,

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106 See, for example, Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 380-381, 388.
Nixon and Kissinger felt that it would be less risky to approach the Chinese first, rather than the Soviets. Therefore, the Nixon administration decided to resume the ambassadorial-level talks with the Chinese in Warsaw. Meanwhile, as opposition against China still existed among the public, Nixon approached China very cautiously. Based on a series of intelligence reports on China, the Nixon administration also believed that the Chinese would be in favor of a U.S.-China rapprochement. In order to understand Beijing’s intentions, on February 5, 1969, Kissinger directed an interagency review of the current status of U.S.-Chinese relations.\(^{109}\) A Special National Intelligence Estimate 13-69 report dated March 6 pointed out that starting from 1966, Mao’s Cultural Revolution had led the country into turmoil. Driven by extremist ideas, China’s diplomacy encountered obvious setbacks in Western Europe as well as in Asia. The radical left had taken over the Chinese Foreign Ministry and as a result, China was involved in diplomatic incidents with thirty-two countries.\(^{110}\) The aggressive propagation of Mao Zedong thought by Chinese embassies and students provoked negative reactions abroad. Chinese relations with Britain, Indonesia, India, and Burma deteriorated.\(^{111}\) Chinese leaders began to fear that their country would be isolated in the world.\(^{112}\) More importantly, another assessment entitled “The USSR and China” asserted on August 12, 1969 that, as the Chinese-Soviet antagonism grew deeper, the Chinese realized that their national security was at stake. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968,


China listed the Soviet Union as the top threat ahead of the United States. In September, Zhou Enlai told the Albanian military delegation that the Soviet Union had violated Chinese borders over 2,000 times in the past twenty years; the U.S. intelligence community saw Zhou’s address as evidence of imminent escalation of the Soviet-Chinese dispute. Based on this research, Nixon administration officials believed that to avoid being threatened by both the Soviet Union and the United States, Chinese leaders should recognize the need to ease tensions with the United States—the less threatening enemy by then.

In the first few months of 1969, however, Nixon did not make any initiative toward China. This period of Nixon’s presidency was, as described by Kissinger, “full of contradictory tendencies.” Nixon did not make a clear plan on his China policy. The Chinese canceled the Warsaw discussions in January, and an early opportunity for direct U.S.-Chinese contact vanished.

Nixon showed a great deal of caution in approaching the Chinese as well. One of his chief concerns was how the media might react to his China venture. In a February 1 memorandum to Kissinger, Nixon commented that “we should give every encouragement to the attitude that this Administration is ‘exploring possibilities of rapprochement [sic] with the Chinese.’” This, he then stressed, “should be done privately and should under no circumstances get into the public prints from this direction.”

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114 Ibid.
115 Kissinger, White House Years, 168.
116 Memorandum from President Nixon to his Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), February 1, 1969, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 7.
Partly because of such a concern, at his first presidential news conference Nixon announced that “[until] some changes occur on [the Chinese] side… I see no immediate prospect of any change in our policy.” He made it clear that his administration was only prepared to plan a long-term change in China policy at the time.\footnote{The President’s News Conference of January 27, 1969, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Richard Nixon: 1969 (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), 16.} On March 1, at a meeting with French President Charles de Gaulle, Nixon did not talk about any explicit China policy.\footnote{Memorandum of Conversation between Nixon and de Gaulle, March 1, 1969, National Security Council Files, President’s Trip Files [Hereafter, President’s Trip Files], Box 447, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.} The message he conveyed to de Gaulle was, as Kissinger recorded later, that “in the short term there would be no change largely because of the unsettling impact of such move on the rest of Asia,” especially on Taiwan and Japan; but over the long term —ten years, for example—“we would have more communications with China, especially after it began to make progress in nuclear weapons.” Kissinger also commented that“[this] indirect reply by Nixon was a sure sign that he meant to keep his options open…. At best, it reflected the reality that the new Administration had no clear-cut plan.”\footnote{Kissinger, White House Years, 170.}

Nevertheless, by the end of the first year of his presidency, Nixon had figured out another approach to solve the Vietnam problem. He started to believe that improving relations with the Soviet Union and China would help bring the war to an end. “The great issues are fundamentally interrelated,” Nixon once told Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, “Crisis or confrontation in one place and real cooperation in another cannot long be sustained simultaneously.”\footnote{MacMillan, Nixon and Mao, 121.} Nixon decided to carry out his promise in the election...
campaign that he would enlist “political, economic, and diplomatic” pressures on the Soviet Union to help end the Vietnam War.\footnote{Bundy, 	extit{A Tangled Web}, 75.} He believed that he could make a deal with the Soviet Union: if the United States made concessions in trade and private economic dealings, the Soviet Union would in turn agree on the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks and solutions in Vietnam. On October 20, Nixon had a private meeting with Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin. In the meeting, Nixon told Dobrynin that “[if] the Soviet Union found it possible to do something in Vietnam, and the Vietnam War ended, the U.S. might do something dramatic to improve Soviet-U.S. relations, indeed something more dramatic than they could now imagine.”\footnote{MacMillan, 	extit{Nixon and Mao}, 121-122.} Meanwhile, he realized that changing relations with China would impose pressures on the Soviets and thus gain more bargaining space in the negotiations. At the same meeting with Dobrynin, Nixon warned, “Within ten years, China will be … capable of terrorizing many other countries. The time is running out when the Soviet Union and the United States can build a different kind of world…. The only beneficiary of U.S.-Soviet disagreement over Vietnam is China,” he concluded, “and therefore this is the last opportunity to settle these disputes.”\footnote{Nixon, 	extit{RN}, 406.}

Meanwhile, the unexpected Soviet-Chinese military clashes along their border had brought opportunities for the first move between the Nixon administration and China. In early March 1969, Chinese and Soviet troops started a dramatic fight over the possession of a small island in the Ussuri River. The confrontation greatly increased the antagonism between the Soviets and the Chinese. Evidence showed that after the clashes started, top
Soviet leaders deliberated on the possibility of a nuclear strike on China.\footnote{NIE 11-13-69, “The USSR and China,” August 12, 1969, in Tracking the Dragon, 545.} Chinese propaganda also deprecated the Soviet Union. On March 17, the Chinese Communist Party newspaper *People’s Daily* attacked the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and called the Brezhnev Doctrine an “out-and-out fascist theory.”\footnote{Kissinger, *White House Years*, 165-166.}

By mid-1969, after seeing the Soviet Union’s aggressive actions in the continuing Soviet-Chinese confrontation, Nixon’s White House concluded that it had become easier to convince the American public that the Soviet Union was the more aggressive communist power than China and that the strategic interests of the United States would not be served if the Soviet Union initiated large-scale attacks on China.\footnote{Response to National Security Study Memorandum 14, August 8, 1969, note 1, *FRUS*, 1969-1976, 17, 56.} The Nixon administration slowly but surely saw an opportunity to pursue “triangular diplomacy:” a shaken China might be willing to move toward the United States. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union would be greatly alarmed due to the possible U.S.-China rapprochement.\footnote{Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 146.} To a large extent, these assessments were right. As William Bundy maintains, from mid-1969 to December 1970, “it was the Chinese at least as much as the Americans who took the initiative” due to their fear of Soviet aggression. The U.S.-Chinese rapprochement also pushed Moscow to have a summit with the United States in 1972.\footnote{Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, 523.}

In the summer of 1969, Nixon started a campaign of persuasion not only to send signals to Beijing but also to prepare public opinion for a possible U.S.-China rapprochement with his round-the-world trip. In Guam, he made a famous speech that later was summarized as the Nixon Doctrine. In the speech, Nixon indicated the
American attitude toward the Soviet nuclear threat against China. He declared that the
United States “shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation
allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security.”129 At
almost every stop, Nixon expressed to foreign leaders that the United States was ready
for open communications with Beijing. On the airplane from Indonesia to Thailand,
senior staff member of the National Security Council John Holdridge was asked to draft a
message to the Chinese, proposing some face-to-face discussions.130 In his later meetings
with Pakistani President Yahya Khan and Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu, Nixon
asked them to convey the message to China. Nixon explicitly told Ceausescu that “if it is
in your interest and the interest of your government, we would welcome your playing a
mediating role between us and China.”131

The Nixon administration also picked up the pace regarding public persuasion in its
China policy. After internal evaluations, on July 21, 1969, the State Department decided
to loosen restrictions on Americans traveling to China.132 On August 8, Secretary of State
William Rogers openly expressed Washington’s willingness to talk with China:

We recognize, of course that the Republic of China on Taiwan and Communist China on the mainland are facts of life. We know, too,
that mainland China will eventually play an important role in Asian and Pacific affairs—but certainly not as long as its leaders continue to
have such an introspective view of the world…. This is one reason why we have been seeking to open up channels
of communication. Just a few days ago we liberalized our policies

129 Chang, Friends and Enemies, 288. During his visit to China, Kissinger showed Zhou satellite photos of the Soviet
military buildup along the Chinese border. He, however, did not offer the Chinese military protection against possible
Soviet invasion.
130 Holdridge, Crossing the Divide, 31-32.
131 Report from Saunders to Kissinger, September 2, 1969, in Editorial Note, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 52; Memorandum
of Conversation between Nixon and Ceausescu, August 2, 1969, in Editorial Note, ibid, 52.
132 Press Release, Department of State, July 21, 1969, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files Country Files—Far East
[Hereafter, Kissinger Country Files], Box 86, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park,
Maryland. Also see Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, July 11, 1969, note 5, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 47.
toward purchase of their goods by American travelers and toward validating passports for travel to China. Our purpose was to remove irritants in our relations and to help remind people on mainland China of our historic friendship for them…. 133

Hence, by the end of the summer, the Nixon administration had sped up its efforts to approach China unilaterally through secret channels and public declarations, expecting Beijing to respond favorably. 134

China seemed slow in responding to Washington’s overtures. An important reason was that at this time, the possibility of a Soviet-Chinese war became imminent again. The Chinese, facing the threat of the Soviet attack, reopened the Soviet-Chinese border negotiations. As Kissinger explained to Nixon on September 23, this move reduced Beijing’s willingness to normalize relations with the United States. 135 Given this prospect, on October 8 Holdridge recommended that Washington should work immediately on establishing a direct communication channel with Beijing. With such a channel, the United States could convince the Chinese that it would not necessarily be an enemy of China but, instead, would consider making several good-will moves such as helping China confront Russia, evacuating troops from Southeast Asia, and reducing forces in Taiwan. 136 Further steps were taken to assure the Chinese on the U.S. stance in the Soviet-Chinese disputes. On September 5, in a public speech endorsed by Nixon and Kissinger, Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson declared that the United States would not stand with the Soviet Union in the Soviet-Chinese conflicts because “long-run

133 Kissinger, White House Years, 181-182.
134 Memorandum of Conversation, September 9, 1969, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 80-81; Record of a Telephone Conversation between Rogers and Richardson, September 13, 1969, in Note 2; Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, September 25, 1969, ibid., 91.
135 Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, September 23, 1969, ibid, 86-87.
136 Holdridge to Kissinger, October 8, 1969, ibid, 104-105.
improvements in our relations [with Communist China] were in our own national interest.”

Later, Nixon ordered all U.S. diplomats to answer “Soviet probing of our position on Communist China” by saying that “we deplore the idea of a Soviet strike against Chinese nuclear facilities or any other major Soviet military action.”

On September 9, Kissinger indicated to the U.S. ambassador to Poland, Walter Stoessels, that he should look for chances to tell his Chinese counterpart that the United States was ready for some serious talks. It took Stoessels three months to find an appropriate opportunity. On December 3, Stoessels conveyed the message to Chinese chargé d’ affaires Lei Yang. Before the “serious talks” took place, Nixon and Kissinger decided to keep their initiatives secret, especially from the Soviet Union. Kissinger wrote to Rogers in December that “[Nixon] has asked that under no circumstances should we inform Dobrynin of the talks or their content.” Stoessels and Lei Yang met twice, on December 11 and January 8, 1970. At the meetings, Stoessels clearly expressed Washington’s willingness to talk with Beijing on the Taiwan question, the most critical issue in U.S.-Chinese relations. Beijing seemed to be convinced: in February 1970, both the Pakistani and Romanian channels sent back-channel messages from China, expressing its willingness to have high-level talks with the United States. In response, Nixon maintained in his first foreign policy report that China “should not remain

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139 Ibid, 148.
140 Telegram, Embassy in Warsaw to the Department of State, January 24, 1970, RG 59 , SN 70-73, General Files of the State Department, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
isolated” and disavowed any U.S. “hostile coalition” against either China or the Soviet Union.\(^\text{142}\)

The U.S. and Chinese ambassadors were scheduled to meet in Warsaw on May 20, but the meeting did not take place because of the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, following the Cambodian coup against Prince Sihanouk. On May 18, the New China News Agency announced it was “no longer suitable” to resume the Warsaw talks due to the United States’ “brazen” act in Cambodia.\(^\text{143}\) On May 20, Mao Zedong published an announcement in which he referred to the “American imperialists” as a “paper tiger” and called people all over the world to unite against the United States.\(^\text{144}\) As a result, use of the Warsaw channel was suspended.

Nixon and Kissinger attributed the failure of the Warsaw channel to the State Department’s bureaucratic politics. Thus they sought to build a more private and direct channel. With Nixon’s endorsement, in mid-June 1970, Kissinger personally ordered the U.S. military attaché in Paris, General Vernon Walters, to convey a secret message to his Chinese military contact proposing the establishment of a new channel connecting directly to the White House.\(^\text{145}\) Beijing did not reply directly but in July, it released American Bishop James Walsh, who had been sentenced as a spy in 1958. Meanwhile, China released information that another American detainee, Hugh Redmond, had


\(^{144}\) Mao Zedong, “Unite the World People, Defeat American Imperialists and Their Flunkies” *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao Zedong’s Manuscripts since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China], Volume 13 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian, 1998), 96-98.

committed suicide in Shanghai. In October, Mao sent a friendly signal to the United States by inviting American journalist Edgar Snow to attend the celebration of China’s National Day. In his meeting with Snow, Mao said that Nixon would be welcomed to China as either the president or a tourist. Although Nixon did not notice Mao’s gesture, he expressed his wish to visit China in his lifetime in an October issue of *Time* magazine. By this time, Nixon had also developed more thoughts about the Taiwan problem, especially about China’s entry into the UN—a sensitive issue that had drawn massive attention from the public. In November, Nixon told Kissinger, “It seems to me that the time is approaching…when we will not have the votes to block admission. The question we really need an answer to is how we can develop a position in which we can keep our commitments to Taiwan and yet will not be rolled by those who favor admission of Red China.”

In addition to the Paris channel, Nixon formally asked Pakistani President Yahya Khan to convey a personal letter to China, raising the question of high-level talks between Washington and Beijing. At a meeting with Khan on October 26, Nixon reiterated that the United States would not team up with the Soviet Union against China. On December 8, Zhou Enlai replied with a hand-written letter that “[in] order to discuss the subject of the vacation [*sic*] of Chinese territories called Taiwan, a special envoy of President Nixon’s will be most welcome in Peking.” Nixon and Kissinger

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148 Holdridge, *Crossing the Divide*, 41-42.
151 Telegram From the Embassy in Pakistan to the Department of State, December 14, 1970, ibid, 247-248.
soon sent back a positive answer and suggested that the meeting in Beijing should not be limited to the Taiwan problem. However, it would “encompass other steps designed to improve relations and reduce tensions between our two countries. With respect to the U.S. military presence in Taiwan, however, you should know that the policy of the United States Government is to reduce progressively its military presence in …East Asia and the Pacific as tensions in this region diminish.” Despite showing Nixon’s intentions to withdraw U.S. ground troops in Asia, the last sentence of the reply, as Kissinger commented, “was designed to encourage Chinese interest in a settlement of the war in Vietnam.”

On January 11, 1971, another Chinese message from Zhou arrived in Washington via the Romanian channel. The message suggested that “since President Nixon had already visited Bucharest and Belgrade, he would also be welcome in Peking.” Nixon further signaled his good intentions to the Chinese by emphasizing at a February 17 news conference that the U.S. air strikes against North Vietnamese camps in Laos “[presented] no threat to Communist China,” and were “directed against the North Vietnamese.”

As a formal meeting between high officials from the United States and China became more likely, Nixon worried a lot about public opinion toward a rapprochement with China. “We have the problem,” Nixon suggested, “of convincing our own people that there’s a good strong reason to change our position.” The “ping-pong diplomacy” more or less relieved Nixon’s concerns. On April 6, the Chinese surprisingly invited the

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American ping-pong team, which was then playing in Japan, to visit China. Zhou Enlai met with the American players in China, making headline news both in China and the United States. What would later become known as Beijing’s “ping-pong diplomacy,” Holdridge explained to Kissinger on April 9, would invariably mobilize American public opinion in support of a U.S.-China rapprochement.\footnote{Holdridge to Kissinger, April 9, 1971, \textit{FRUS}, 1969-1976, 17, 289-290.} Holdridge was proven right by the public opinion polls, which found that a majority of the public favored the recognition of China, as well as China’s entry into the UN. Shortly thereafter, Beijing intensified its overtures to the American public by lifting travel-to-China restrictions on U.S. passport holders and inviting American senators Jacob Javits and Mike Mansfield for an official visit to Beijing.\footnote{Ibid, 290.}

The Nixon administration wasted little time in responding to Beijing’s overtures. Through a National Security Decision Memorandum 105, dated April 13, Washington decided to consider granting U.S. visas to PRC citizens and further relaxed restrictions on trade with China.\footnote{National Security Decision Memorandum 105, April 13, 1971, \textit{FRUS}, 1969-1976, 17, 297-298.} Finally, on April 27, another hand-written letter from Zhou was delivered via the Pakistani channel. Zhou suggested that China was prepared to receive a special envoy—“for instance Mr. Kissinger,” or the Secretary of State, “or even the President”—in China.\footnote{Message from the Premier of the People’s Republic of China Chou En-lai to President Nixon, April 21, 1971, ibid, 300-301.} Soon after, Nixon decided to secretly send Kissinger to China in July.\footnote{Record of telephone conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, April 21, 1971, NSC Files, Box 1031, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.}
IV. Conclusion

After two years of back-channel communications and public overtures, the United States and China reached the point of direct high-level contacts. Kissinger’s secret visit on July 9-11, 1971 would pave the way for Nixon to meet with top Chinese leaders in February 1972.\(^{161}\)

The break-up of the iceberg in the U.S.-China rapprochement was partly a result of the transformation of the world situation. Starting from the 1960s, the United States faced a series of problems, including the growing involvement in the unpopular Vietnam War. These problems required U.S. leaders to change Cold War policy and to work with the Soviet Union and China to solve the Vietnam problem. The developments of the U.S.-Soviet-Chinese relationship brought opportunities for the U.S.-China rapprochement. Because of the Soviet-Chinese conflict, China became willing to reassess its relationship with the United States. Public opinion in the United States also started to support improving relations with China. Thus, by the time Nixon took office, a rapprochement with China became a necessity.

Nixon was the right person to pull off the task. A realist in foreign policy, Nixon had realized that a rapprochement with China would be beneficial to the United States. From his experiences, Nixon had gained great skill in handling foreign affairs; he also had built up anti-communist credentials. Together with Kissinger, the “two-man team” pushed for a courageous foreign policy action.

From 1969 to 1971, the Nixon administration cautiously moved toward China. On one hand, through secret channels, the two countries established contacts and agreed to

\(^{161}\) Kissinger, *White House Years*, 733-743.
have some high-ranking official meetings. On the other, via a series of public persuasion campaigns and friendly gestures, the Nixon administration managed to obtain more public support for the rapprochement. By April 1971, the groundwork for the U.S.-China rapprochement had been laid. From 1971 to 1972, the Nixon administration needed to intensify its efforts through both secret contacts with the Chinese and the publicity of its China policy to prepare for more open U.S.-Chinese contacts and eventually for Nixon’s visit to China.
Chapter Three

The Making of the Week that “Changed the World”

During the year following the Chinese invitation in April 1971, as U.S.-Chinese relations developed rapidly, the Nixon administration took numerous steps to further influence the media’s coverage of Nixon’s China policy. After a few preliminary visits by other White House officials, Nixon visited China in February 1972. The Nixon administration understood that the radical change in its China policy required great public acceptance. Thus in the year between April 1971 and April 1972, to gain public support for his China policy and win the 1972 election, Nixon intensified the efforts to influence the media’s coverage of his China initiatives.

U.S.-Chinese relations from April 1971 to April 1972 went roughly through three phases, with each revolving around some major events. Accordingly, the Nixon administration’s media plan had different goals and tactics at each phase. The first phase, from April to July 1971, was generally about Kissinger’s secret trip to China. To achieve the most dramatic effect of Nixon’s announcement of the trip afterwards, the White House’s media manipulation tactic was to keep extreme secrecy. During the second phase, which involved Kissinger’s second trip and the visit of Deputy National Security Adviser, Alexander Haig, the administration’s media plan aimed to prepare for Nixon’s trip. During the third phase, the media plan focused largely on Nixon’s summit meetings in China with the extensive use of television broadcasting.

This chapter, therefore, will focus on these three phases by looking at the Nixon administration’s media strategies pertinent to its China initiative and comparing them
with Nixon’s general media policy. More specifically, it will examine what messages Nixon’s White House attempted to deliver to the American public through media and how they were expected to support Nixon’s domestic and foreign objectives.

I. Kissinger’s Secret Trip

On July 15, 1971, Nixon announced in a televised speech that he would visit the People’s Republic of China. Although shocking to the public, such a trip was not a sudden decision. As a matter of fact, it was a result of several months of U.S.-Chinese contacts and more directly, a result of Kissinger’s secret trip to China in July. From April to July, the United States and China had been planning for Kissinger’s trip through secret channels. Both recognized that the greatest challenge was how to keep information related to the trip confidential until the last minute. The extreme secrecy helped the Nixon administration avoid potential opposition against moving toward China. More importantly, without secrecy, Nixon’s announcement would not have the same impact on the public.

Shortly after receiving Zhou’s April message, Nixon decided to send Kissinger to China as his emissary. On May 10, through Pakistani ambassador to Washington Agha Hilaly, Kissinger sent an accepting message to China, proposing a preliminary meeting between him and Zhou. It read, “It is anticipated that the visit of President Nixon to Peking could be announced within a short time of the secret meeting between Dr. Kissinger and Premier Chou En-lai. Dr. Kissinger will be prepared to come from June 15 onward.” Stressing the importance of secrecy, it said, “[for] secrecy, it is essential that no

162 See, for example, Memorandum of Conversation between Kissinger and Zhou, July 9, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 359-397.
other channel be used. It is also understood that this first meeting between Dr. Kissinger and high officials of the People’s Republic of China be strictly secret.” Kissinger later explained the reasons for the emphasis on secrecy in his memoirs. On one hand, it was due to the fear that the meeting might end in failure; on the other, it was because that “we knew that if an announcement were made before a visit we would be caught between those who wanted a catalogue of concessions and others who wanted guarantees of our intransigence.” The Nixon administration was afraid that it would cause disagreements among foreign countries—the Soviet Union, Taiwan, and Japan, for instance—and “[some] countries might have attempted to preempt our visit, others to thwart it.”

Through secret channels, the United States and China decided the visiting dates. On May 29, Zhou Enlai replied to the May 10 message. On June 2, Hilaly personally delivered Zhou’s message to Kissinger in the White House. In the message, the Chinese accepted Kissinger’s preliminary trip and endorsed his requirement for secrecy. They also suggested that Kissinger’s visit take place on June 15-20. Pleased with the Chinese message, Nixon invited Kissinger for a glass of brandy to celebrate the historic moment. On June 4 Kissinger handed Hilaly his reply in which he proposed July 9-11 as his visiting dates. On June 11, China accepted the dates proposed by Washington. As soon as the visiting dates were agreed upon, both countries started to make arrangements for the secret trip.

164 Kissinger, White House Years, 725.
166 Kissinger, White House Years, 727.
168 Kissinger, White House Years, 728.
To insure complete secrecy, the U.S. plan was to send Kissinger on an “information trip” to Asia. Nixon and Kissinger decided to continue relying on the secret Pakistani channel to go to China. Thus Kissinger secretly summoned U.S. ambassador to Pakistan Joseph Farland, who was asked to make arrangements to transport Kissinger to China from Pakistan. On June 30, Ron Ziegler announced the schedule for Kissinger’s trip: he would go to South Vietnam for a “fact-finding mission” on July 2-5; then he would visit Thailand, India, and Pakistan; on the way back to the United States, he would stop by in Paris to consult with American ambassador David Bruce.

Nixon and Kissinger cautiously considered the strategies for talking with the Chinese. A week before his trip, codenamed “Polo,” Kissinger prepared a briefing book with his staff in which they discussed the tentative subjects of the upcoming meeting. They argued that the talks should concentrate on “the fundamentals of the international situation” and the common concerns of both nations, such as Taiwan, the Soviet Union, and Indochina. At a July 1 meeting, Nixon asked Kissinger to “build three fears” into his talks with the Chinese: (1) Continuing his “mad man theory:” Nixon wanted Kissinger to stress that if pressed he would “turn hard on Vietnam;” (2) Kissinger should reinforce the Chinese fear of “a resurgent and militaristic Japan;” and (3) Stressing the Chinese fear of the Soviet threat, Nixon thought Kissinger should keep implying a “possible move towards the Soviets.” On the subject of Taiwan, Nixon instructed Kissinger not to leave any impression that they were selling out.

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171 Ibid.
At this point, Nixon began to worry that Kissinger’s secret trip to China might attract more public attention to Kissinger instead of himself. When Kissinger came back, Nixon complained to Haldeman, he would be the “mystery man” and take the entire spotlight.\footnote{Haldeman, \textit{The Haldeman Diaries}, 317.} Therefore, Nixon tried to play down Kissinger’s secret trip. In order to be the first American leader to visit Beijing, Nixon had requested that Kissinger visit places other than China’s capital. However, in the messages to the Chinese before his visit, Kissinger did not mention the issue of a different city. Nixon, according to Kissinger, had read all these messages before they were sent out, but he did not complain about the choice of the city. As a result, Kissinger still went to Beijing.\footnote{Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 734.} At his last meeting with Kissinger before the latter’s departure, Nixon indicated that “the communiqué resulting from the visit should not include names” to leave him as the only U.S. leader to sign any official documents.\footnote{Memorandum for the President’s File, July 1, 1971, \textit{FRUS}, 1969-1976, 17, 355.} Other than Kissinger, Nixon also wanted the Chinese to confirm that they would not invite any other U.S. political figure to China before his 1972 visit.\footnote{Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 734.}

At the same time, Beijing sent subtle messages to both government officials and the public at large in preparation for Kissinger’s visit. Headed by Zhou Enlai, a special coordinating group was formed among high-ranking officials. To obtain support from top leaders, Mao instructed Zhou to brief the Politburo on the preparations for the meeting with Kissinger. To avoid the potential public shock after Kissinger’s visit, Zhou ordered the preparation of a policy paper, which was to be released after Kissinger’s visit became
publicly known. Mao also ordered the release of the transcript of his October 1970 talk with American journalist Edgar Snow to the press.\textsuperscript{177}

On the night of July 1, Kissinger left the United States. The plan was to make the trip as boring and low-profile as possible so that he could “shake off” the media.\textsuperscript{178} But at each stop, Kissinger tried to “soften in advance the impact” of Nixon’s forthcoming announcement on his China visit. In his talks with Asian leaders such as Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Kissinger explained U.S. motives in approaching China, stressing the needs of the “global equilibrium.”\textsuperscript{179} When Kissinger arrived in Pakistan, he claimed that he had got severe stomach flu and cancelled his schedule from July 9 to 11. Kissinger was worried about going to China alone without any guarantees. As recalled by Pakistani President Yahya Khan, he was asked to accompany the nervous Kissinger to China. “I told him,” said Yahya, “that I’d send one of my generals along, if he wanted moral support, but I personally could not go. Chou En-lai had given me his word that he would look after him.”\textsuperscript{180} On the morning of July 9, Kissinger flew secretly to China from Pakistan.

Kissinger’s plane arrived at a military airport in Beijing on the afternoon of July 9. Much as Kissinger had planned, he secured an agreement with Zhou at their first meeting that the most significant achievement of the first encounter between the two countries would be the “comprehension by each side of the fundamental purposes of the other.”

\textsuperscript{177} Excerpts, speech, Zhou Enlai, at the meeting on foreign affairs, May 30, 1971, Zhou Enlai Nianpu [The Chronicles of Zhou Enlai], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Central CCP Archives, 1997), 459-460; speech, Zhou Enlai, at the enlarged Politburo meeting of the Central Committee, 18 June 1971, ibid, 463-463. Mao’s talk with Snow is talked about in Chapter 2; Mao told Snow that Nixon would be welcome to China as either a president or a tourist.

\textsuperscript{178} MacMillan, \textit{Nixon and Mao}, 187.

\textsuperscript{179} Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 736.

\textsuperscript{180} MacMillan, \textit{Nixon and Mao}, 190.
Both men recognized the need to put aside ideological differences and focus on their mutual concerns such as Taiwan, Indochina, and the Soviet Union. The first meeting between Kissinger and Zhou lasted for seven hours, at which neither of them talked much about controversial issues. Taiwan, for instance, was only mentioned briefly. Instead, Kissinger spent much time explaining U.S. policy in Indochina, particularly his secret talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris. Zhou stated his general agreement with Nixon’s Kansas City speech on July 6, which outlined the administration’s foreign policy, especially toward China. The first meeting ended near midnight that day, and the two had “neither settled anything” nor even discussed the joint announcement of Kissinger’s visit.

While focusing more on the disputed issues over Taiwan, Indochina and the Soviet Union at the second meeting on July 10, Kissinger and Zhou had a lengthy discussion about Nixon’s visit to China. Zhou suggested that Nixon visit China in the summer of 1972, but Kissinger explained that would be too close to Nixon’s presidential reelection. Finally, both agreed on spring 1972. Later that night, the two sides tried to draft a joint announcement of Kissinger’s visit. However, there were some major disagreements: the Chinese wrote in their draft that Nixon solicited the invitation from China; while the Kissinger side suggested not setting the normalization of U.S.-Chinese relations as the only purpose of Nixon’s visit. As the disagreements remained, the Chinese asked for

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182 Kissinger, White House Years, 748-49; Memorandum of Conversation between Kissinger and Zhou, July 9, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 359-397.
some time to reconsider the wording of the announcement, thus the meeting ended abruptly without any agreement.  

Next morning, to Kissinger’s surprise, the Chinese spokesman for the negotiation, Ambassador to Canada Huang Hua, brought a new draft and the talks resumed. The new draft, according to Kissinger, was so close to the American needs that they “could accept it with a change of only one word.” In the last hour before his departure from Beijing, Kissinger talked with Zhou again. They decided to set Paris as the future place of contacts.  

Kissinger flew back to Pakistan that afternoon and visited Iran later. In Tehran, he sent Nixon a telegram that read “EUREKA”—the code word indicating the success of the secret trip. On the early morning of July 13, Kissinger arrived in California and met with Nixon who was anxiously waiting there.  

On the night of July 15, on television, Nixon revealed Kissinger’s secret trip and announced his decision to visit China. The joint announcement between the United States and the People’s Republic of China declared:

Premier Chou En-lai and Dr. Henry Kissinger, President Nixon’s Assistant for National Security Affairs, held talks in Peking from July 9 to 11, 1971. Knowing of President Nixon’s expressed desire to visit the People’s Republic of China, Premier Chou En-lai, on behalf of the Government of the People’s Republic of China, has extended an invitation to President Nixon to visit China at an appropriate date before May 1972. President Nixon has accepted the invitation with pleasure.

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In the announcement, Nixon also stressed that the rapprochement with China “will not be at the expense of our old friends.” Also, it was “not directed against any other nation.”\(^{188}\)

The announcement, although brief and stilted, did “speak for itself” and shocked the world.\(^{189}\)

Throughout Kissinger’s trip, the most noteworthy information management tactic used by the White House was to keep extreme secrecy. As stated above, Nixon and Kissinger had asked the Chinese to keep information confidential at the beginning. They also exercised strict control over the information domestically. The Congress was not informed; few within the administration except for Nixon, Kissinger, and Haldeman knew anything about it. Even Secretary of State Rogers was not informed until July 8.

Before Kissinger’s departure for the Asian trip, Haldeman had explained to Rogers that Kissinger had to stop in Pakistan because Yahya would hand him a private message from China.\(^{190}\) On July 8, instead of explaining their previous preparations to Rogers, Nixon lied to his Secretary of State that Kissinger received the invitation from Beijing after he arrived in Pakistan, and the visit was a last-minute decision. To Nixon and Haldeman’s pleasure, Rogers accepted the explanation and responded positively.\(^{191}\)

Except for a few incidents, the media was successfully kept ignorant as well. On July 8, Washington received the news that *New York Times* columnist, James Reston, would visit Beijing during the days Kissinger was there. To Nixon, a leak of information to the *New York Times* could ruin his whole media plan. Thus Reston must not know that


\(^{189}\) Kissinger, *White House Years*, 758.


\(^{191}\) Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 316.
Kissinger was in China, neither should he see Kissinger in Beijing. The Chinese helped Nixon solve this problem. When Reston and his wife arrived in Guangdong, a southern province of China, their official guide told them that there was a “change of plans.” They had to stay in that area for two more days, after which they went to Beijing by train on the evening of the tenth, arriving on the twelfth.  

Reston did not meet with Zhou Enlai until August 5, twenty days after Nixon’s announcement. Another incident occurred on the morning that Kissinger took off from Pakistan, when a stringer for a London newspaper happened to notice the unusual atmosphere in the airport. He asked a policeman what was going on and the latter told him: “It’s Henry Kissinger; he’s going to China.” The reporter sent the information back to London immediately, but the editor of that newspaper did not believe the story. Having avoided leaking information to the media accidentally, all Nixon had to worry about was intentional leaking within the administration. In a letter to Haig on July 11, Kissinger stressed the importance of maintaining secrecy. Ironically, Nixon and Haldeman were worried that Kissinger would leak the information. They decided that there would be no backgrounders by Kissinger and that Kissinger had to “quit seeing anyone from the Times or Post on any basis, including the columnists.”

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195 Letter from Kissinger to Haig, July 11, 1971, NSC files, Box 1031, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
An important reason for Nixon’s emphasis on secrecy was to obtain the most possible dramatic impact of his announcement.\textsuperscript{197} Nixon’s television announcement should be the very first chance to reveal Kissinger’s China trip. Anything that might interrupt the plan was not acceptable. Before leaving for China, for example, Kissinger had suggested that Nixon hold a press conference to reveal his plans for approaching China. “Press conference, shit,” Nixon replied, “I wouldn’t call a press conference.” Instead, he decided to announce his China initiatives in a prime-time televised speech. “Let the world rock,” Haldeman added, “[drop] the bomb and leave.”\textsuperscript{198}

They did exactly that. There were no preliminary announcements, no press briefings, and no congressional notifications. Only a few key countries—including the Soviet Union and Taiwan—were informed within an hour before airtime.\textsuperscript{199} On the afternoon of July 15, the White House announced that the president was going to make a “major statement” on all nationwide television and radio networks. However, the White House refused even to give a hint on the subject of the speech.\textsuperscript{200} To mute anticipated negative voices, before Nixon’s speech, Kissinger called several important political figures including the Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield, Governor of California Ronald Reagan, and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, asking them not to comment on the subject to the media before talking to Nixon.\textsuperscript{201}

\textsuperscript{197} Bundy, A Tangled Web, 233.
\textsuperscript{198} Dallek, Nixon and Kissinger, 289.
\textsuperscript{199} Haldeman, The Haldeman Diaries, 316; Kissinger, White House Years, 760.
\textsuperscript{200} Kissinger, White House Years, 759.
Almost immediately after the announcement, the White House took a series of steps to explain and publicize Nixon’s China policy. On July 19, Nixon explained the process of approaching China and the necessity of maintaining secrecy at a bipartisan leadership meeting and then a Cabinet meeting.\textsuperscript{202} On the same day, Kissinger held a news conference, giving out limited details of his trip. Nixon wanted to take the announcement as an opportunity to sell his image, in Kissinger’s words, to “[embellish] the drama into an epic poem.” The White House decided to convince the public it was Nixon’s heroic determination and acts that made the historic rapprochement with China happen.\textsuperscript{203} In a memorandum from Nixon, Kissinger was asked to feed the media with the similarities in characteristics and backgrounds between Nixon and Zhou. These similarities included “strong convictions, cool, unflappable,” and “a tough bold strong leader.”\textsuperscript{204} To strengthen Nixon’s image of creating history with his colleagues, the White House even made up a story of Nixon, Kissinger, and Rogers planning the trip to China in the White House Lincoln Sitting Room.\textsuperscript{205}

The first response to Nixon’s speech was astonishment. “If Mr. Nixon had revealed he was going to the moon he could not have flabbergasted his audience more,” the \textit{Washington Post} commented. “It is very nearly mind blowing.”\textsuperscript{206} After the first shock, the Nixon administration received widespread support even from its Democratic rivals.

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\item Haldeman, \textit{The Haldeman Diaries}, 322.
\item Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 761.
\item Transcript of Telephone Conversation between Kissinger and Haldeman, July 20, 1971, Kissinger Telcons, Chronological File, Box 10, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
\item Kusnitz, \textit{Public Opinion and Foreign Policy}, 137.
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Mansfield said that “I am astounded, delighted and happy.”\textsuperscript{207} The White House was apparently satisfied with these reactions, as a CBS report said that “top [White House] aides are scarcely able to conceal their delight on [Nixon’s] announcement, especially what it does to the [Democrats].”\textsuperscript{208} The media, being surprised that Nixon was the one to pull off the rapprochement, hoped that a more friendly China would press North Vietnam for an agreement with the United States.\textsuperscript{209} “The politics of surprise leads through the Gates of Astonishment into the Kingdom of Hope,” wrote columnist Max Lerner.\textsuperscript{210} Columnist Joe Alsop also commented almost immediately that the rapprochement with China was a “most brilliant move.” Noted conservative publishers such as William Knowland of the \textit{Oakland Tribune} and Felix McKnight of the \textit{Dallas Times Herald} voiced support for the announcement as well.\textsuperscript{211}

Not surprisingly, in the first few days after Nixon’s speech, criticism also poured in. As Kissinger recalled, a few liberals alleged that the Nixon administration was “needlessly antagonizing the Soviet Union” by approaching China.\textsuperscript{212} But the major disapproval was from the conservatives and the China lobbyists who accused Nixon of being soft on the communists and abandoning Taiwan. Nixon and Kissinger reassured them that the rapprochement with China was beneficial to U.S. policies toward Moscow and Hanoi.\textsuperscript{213} Because of these persuasion efforts, an August 6 memorandum from Haig to Nixon’s special assistant Bruce Kehrli pointed out that “the more reasonable

\textsuperscript{208} Memorandum from Jon M. Huntsman to Haldeman, July 19, 1971, Staff Member and Office Files [Hereafter, SMOF], H.R. Haldeman, Box 82, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
\textsuperscript{209} Haldeman, \textit{The Haldeman Diaries}, 324.
\textsuperscript{210} Aitken, \textit{Nixon}, 429.
\textsuperscript{211} Telephone Conversation Transcript between Nixon and Kissinger, July 16 and 19, 1971, Kissinger Telcons, Chronological File, Box 10, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
\textsuperscript{212} Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 761.
\textsuperscript{213} Haldeman, \textit{The Haldeman Diaries}, 321-322.
conservative leaders” had been responsive to the contacts from Nixon and Kissinger.\footnote{Memorandum from Haig to Kehrli, August 6, 1971, SMOF Files, H.R. Haldeman, Box 83, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.} Ronald Reagan, for example, had expressed his approval.

In general, Nixon’s decision to visit China won him widespread support and increased his popularity. The move toward China showed the public that Nixon was a “master of foreign policy.”\footnote{MacMillan, \textit{Nixon and Mao}, 202.} Partly due to that, an August poll indicated that Nixon received significantly more support than his assumed Democratic rival in the 1972 presidential race, Senator Edmund Muskie. While two months earlier, the public was 41-39 in favor of Muskie.\footnote{Bundy, \textit{A Tangled Web}, 240-241.} However, it would be wrong to assume that public opinion toward China was completely changed by Nixon’s moves. Fifty-six percent of Americans still saw China as the world’s most dangerous nation in an August poll.\footnote{Kusnitz, \textit{Public Opinion and Foreign Policy}, 138.}

With the public more supportive in response to Nixon’s announcement, the White House felt more confident in accelerating its triangular diplomacy. The Soviet Union, as Kissinger suggested, was “suddenly anxious to create the impression that more serious business could be accomplished in Moscow than in Peking” because its leaders were concerned about confronting the United States and China.\footnote{Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 766.} In a secret talk with Kissinger on July 19, Soviet Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Dobrynin suggested a U.S.-Soviet summit in Moscow in early 1972.\footnote{Bundy, \textit{A Tangled Web}, 241.} Therefore, by moving toward China, Nixon and Kissinger gained an advantage in dealing with Moscow.
On the other hand, the announcement caused some disappointments abroad, mostly in Taiwan and Japan. Immediately after the announcement, Taiwan’s ambassador to Washington James Shen, lodged a “strong protest” and expressed “profound regret.” He asserted that Nixon’s secret move toward Beijing should “hardly be described as a friendly act” toward Taipei. Nixon’s announcement, in particular, heightened Taiwan’s concerns over the U.S. stance on the upcoming UN vote, which would determine Chinese representation. There was also increasing fear that the United States would abandon the alliance with Taiwan.220 In Japan, since there was only a vague preliminary notice given shortly before Nixon’s announcement, Prime Minister Eisaku Sato knew nothing about the content of the announcement. Having little time to respond to the announcement, the Sato government was condemned vigorously by the Japanese media for having a weak relationship with the United States.221

Kissinger’s trip to China was a result of U.S.-Chinese secret communications; after Nixon’s announcement, the U.S.-Chinese rapprochement moved into a more open phase. In the process of making the trip, the most important tactic the Nixon administration used to influence public opinion was keeping extreme secrecy. It helped the White House not only avoid potential objections, but also made Nixon’s announcement as dramatic as possible. Nixon’s decision to go to China won him general support and increased his popularity. But there were still opposition both at home and abroad. Therefore, the Nixon administration had to take further diplomatic and public relations steps to obtain more support.

221 Bundy, A Tangled Web, 240.
II. Preparing for Nixon's Trip

Soon after Nixon’s July 15 announcement, the contacts between the United States and China became frequent. Nixon decided to send Kissinger to China for an interim visit, preparing for his own trip to China.222 Through messages and face-to-face talks in Paris between Kissinger and Chinese Ambassador to France Huang Zhen, Washington and Beijing fostered an unprecedented direct channel of communication. In these communications, the two sides not only discussed technical issues of Nixon’s visit, but also frequently exchanged information about each other’s policies toward the Soviet Union.223 At an August 16 meeting with Huang, Kissinger proposed February 21 or March 16, 1972, as the starting dates of Nixon’s China visit.224 But Beijing decided to announce the date after Kissinger’s interim visit.225

In his exchanges with Huang, Kissinger discussed details of his second trip. The Chinese, commented Kissinger, “even in the millennia of their history,” had never “encountered a Presidential advance party.” Thus it took Kissinger some time to convince them why it was necessary for such a large advance party, whose size, as Kissinger told Zhou, should be almost equal to the presidential contingent. Concerned about the reactions in North Vietnam, Beijing rejected Kissinger’s proposal that Ambassador David

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222 Memorandum From the Defense Attaché in France (Walters) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), July 19, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 463-464.
224 Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, August 16, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 476.
225 Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, September 13, 1971, ibid, 481.
Bruce, who was known for having facilitated the Paris talks between Washington and Hanoi, accompany Kissinger to China.\textsuperscript{226}

On October 5, the White House announced that Kissinger’s second China trip would take place on October 16. The visiting dates coincided with the UN voting on Chinese representation. Hence Rogers opposed the dates, worrying that it would interferre with the U.S. strategy in the vote. However, neither Kissinger nor Ambassador to the UN George Bush believed that the result would be decisively affected. Furthermore, as Kissinger asserted, “we could hardly change the date of a visit agreed to for two months without some cost to our new relations with Peking.” Therefore, Kissinger’s visit dates remained unchanged.\textsuperscript{227}

Meanwhile, the White House intensified its preparations for Nixon’s visit. Many of these arrangements were related to public relations concerns. For example, deputy assistant to the President Dwight Chapin suggested to Haig that the arrangements for Nixon’s itinerary in China would affect “press logistics and communications.”\textsuperscript{228} A few days before Kissinger’s visit, Nixon had Kissinger express his wish to the Chinese to limit his visit to four days without additional stops, unless the Chinese agreed on the television broadcasting plan.\textsuperscript{229} Finally, Nixon agreed to visit Hangzhou and Shanghai besides Beijing. It is possible that Nixon agreed to go to Hangzhou because he hoped to meet Mao there.\textsuperscript{230} Nixon intended to bring Pat Nixon to China as he had on his other major foreign trips. He explained that “in terms of public reaction” in the United States,

\textsuperscript{226} Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 769.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid, 774-776.
\textsuperscript{228} Memorandum from Chapin to Haig, September 9, 1971, Kissinger Country Files, Box 88, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
\textsuperscript{229} Haldeman, \textit{The Haldeman Diaries}, 364.
\textsuperscript{230} MacMillan, \textit{Nixon and Mao}, 300.
“people contact is more important than meetings,” and Mrs. Nixon “would be one way to get some good people pictures” to win more public support at home.\textsuperscript{231} During his second visit, Kissinger would have to figure out these issues with his Chinese hosts.

One of the most important arrangements the White House made was the media plan. The Nixon administration had many internal discussions about the media plan for Nixon’s trip, including a general coverage plan, the size of press corps accompanying Nixon to China, and whether to install a ground station in China to transmit signals. In the first discussion about the media plan on September 10, Nixon, Kissinger, and Haldeman thought that they should “permit the minimum amount of coverage possible within China” because this would bring “much better coverage” and help “maintain the aura of mystery.” They believed that if Nixon came back from China with some agreements without letting the public know how he reached them, his trip might look more dramatic and heroic. If no agreements were reached, a low-profile trip would be less devastating to Nixon’s image. Only Ziegler supported the ground station which would enable live coverage and direct film transmission.\textsuperscript{232} But the next day, Haldeman told Kissinger—who was about to have another meeting with Huang—not to “foreclose the possibility of a ground station” or make any decision on the press plan until his interim trip to China. Haldeman also proposed that the minimum number of media personnel to China be 150.\textsuperscript{233} Yet when Kissinger informed the Chinese of the number the next day in Paris, they were “clearly taken aback even by the minimum [100]

\textsuperscript{231} Haldeman, \textit{The Haldeman Diaries}, 364-365.
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid, 352.
\textsuperscript{233} Memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, September 11, 1971, Kissinger Country Files, Box 88, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
number.” Thus Kissinger did not mention the ground station. By this time, however, Haldeman had been convinced that live coverage of Nixon’s activities in Beijing would be beneficial to publicize the trip. In that case, a ground station would be necessary.

On October 6, Ziegler, along with Nixon’s special consultant on media and foreign relations, John Scali, and Ziegler’s aide Timothy Elbourne, submitted a total of 178 media personnel covering television, film, radio, photograph, and written reporting of Nixon’s trip. They also asserted that installing a ground station in Beijing was “vital,” because it was not only indispensable to “adequate news coverage,” but also “crucial to provide an instant, secure, and necessary communication for the President and his party.” They pointed out that without a ground station, more news personnel would be needed, and news transmission would be delayed. The next day, Scali personally explained to Chapin that instead of providing twenty-four hours a day live broadcasting, a ground station would only be used for live broadcasting of selected events. He also pointed out that the ground station was not new in Nixon’s overseas travels. The determination to install a ground station was strengthened when the White House found out that Beijing, eager to regain international recognition, “may be quite willing, indeed anxious, to make possible widespread television coverage.” As a matter of fact, Beijing’s actions proved

234 Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, September 13, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 482.
236 Memorandum from Ziegler, Scali and Elbourne to Chapin, October 7, 1971, President’s Trip Files, Box 500, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
237 Memorandum from Scali to Chapin, October 8, 1971, Kissinger Country Files, Box 87, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
238 Memorandum from Scali to Chapin, October 8, 1971, ibid, Box 87, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
this assumption later: the Chinese decided to buy a ground station by themselves and installed it in Beijing for the Americans.\textsuperscript{239}

In addition to the ground station, Nixon’s media management team also expected Kissinger to make other communication arrangements during his upcoming trip to Beijing. Kissinger was to discuss the establishment of a network pool production and transmission center in Beijing. Also, the White House wanted Kissinger to persuade Beijing to allow 140 to 251 news personnel to go to China with Nixon. Meanwhile, the White House stressed that the general rule of media strategy was to give the media enough freedom without impairing “attainment of vital foreign policy objectives.”\textsuperscript{240} It was based on this rule that while Nixon was in China, the White House strictly limited the media’s access to the progress of the summits until an agreement was reached.

From August to October, to further prepare for his China trip, Nixon took several approaches to set the rules for the media. Not all of these attempts succeeded. Nixon continued to limit the liberal media’s access to the administration by intimidating them. For example, since Reston wrote a negative \textit{New York Times} article after coming back from China, Nixon had warned Kissinger not to see him “at any time.” He even personally “zapped” Reston “pretty hard” in a news conference by saying that nothing Zhou Enlai told Reston had not been told to Kissinger in much greater detail. However, Kissinger did not stop meeting with Reston, and he even suggested that Nixon do an interview with Reston. In October, Nixon became increasingly worried about his rivalry with Kissinger over the media’s attention when journalist George Sherman of the

\textsuperscript{239} Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 1050.
\textsuperscript{240} Memorandum from Ziegler, Scali and Elbourne to Kissinger, October 9, 1971, Kissinger Country Files, Box 87, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
Washington Star implied in an article that Kissinger was “dominating the making of all foreign policy.” He even feared that Time might choose Kissinger as the “Man of the Year.” Regarding negative reporting, Nixon was also dissatisfied that Fred Malek and Charles Colson were unable to eliminate “anti-Nixon” news coverage on the TV networks.241 On October 15, reporter Ted Lewis wrote for the New York Daily News that Nixon’s forthcoming trips to Beijing and Moscow were “basically showman stunts” and the results would never meet the expectations. As a result, Haig made a personal call to Lewis in order to “set him straight.”242

On October 16, Kissinger took off for the interim visit to China. As Nixon’s advance party, he and his team took the same route planned for Nixon, stopping in Hawaii and Guam. On October 20, Kissinger arrived in Beijing. No media accompanied him to China. The Chinese press, on the other hand, reported on Kissinger’s visit. On the day Kissinger arrived, the People’s Daily listed members of the welcoming committee; some of them were high-ranking officials. The same newspaper’s October 21 report on Kissinger’s visit included two photographs of Kissinger with Zhou—the first time an American official was pictured with a Chinese leader in two decades.243

As Kissinger put it, the purpose of his advance trip was to arrange for Nixon’s trip and to draft a communiqué.244 Most details concerning Nixon’s visit were worked out rapidly. The Chinese accepted February 21, 1972 as the starting date of the trip. A ground

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242 Memorandum from Haig to Haldeman, undated, President’s Trip Files, Box 500, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
243 Kissinger, White House Years, 779; also see Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, October 29, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 519.
244 Kissinger, White House Years, 780.
station and a network pool production and transmission center were approved. A “bare-bones” number for the presidential party was also agreed upon. Back in Washington, Nixon was anxious about these arrangements and constantly wired instructions to the advance team. On October 20, he instructed Kissinger to make sure that the Chinese would allow “two private head-to-head meetings” between him and Mao “with no one in attendance other than interpreters,” and between him and Zhou “under identical circumstances.” On October 21, Nixon further emphasized to Haig that Kissinger must not be present at his private meeting with Mao. Haig commented to Kissinger on October 22 that the Sherman story mentioned above must have aggravated Nixon’s anxiety.\footnote{Editorial Note, \textit{FRUS}, 1969-1976, 17, 495-496.} However, Kissinger never got a complete confirmation that Mao would meet with Nixon.

Other than spending more than twenty-five hours discussing the world situation, Kissinger and Zhou focused fifteen hours of their meetings on drafting a joint statement, later known as the “Shanghai Communiqué.” Different from other statements, the communiqué clearly listed the fundamental differences between the United States and China. On the toughest issue—Taiwan—Kissinger finally agreed to state, “The United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Straits maintain there is but one China. The United States Government does not challenge that position.” At that time, Kissinger acknowledged, this was the best possible wording that he could have accepted without being depicted by the media as selling out Taiwan. Kissinger and Zhou left the paragraph of the U.S.-Taiwan defense relationship open; and it was Nixon’s task to agree on the final wording of the communiqué during his February 1972 China trip. The draft of the communiqué indicated the two nations’ strategic thinking on the
rapprochement. As Kissinger later suggested, although the communiqué showed the “explicit, sometimes brutal disagreements” between the two countries, it did give emphasis to “the common positions—the concern with hegemony (a euphemism for Soviet expansionism), the commitment to normalize relations.”

While in Beijing, Kissinger heard that on October 25, the United Nations General Assembly voted to admit the People’s Republic of China and expel Taiwan. China also obtained Taiwan’s seat in the Security Council. To Rogers and Bush, who had been trying to keep Taiwan’s seat, this was a big loss. For months, the United States had been endorsing the “two-China policy.” On August 2, Rogers announced that the United States supported the seating of China at the General Assembly while opposing any action to expel Taiwan. At a September 16 news conference, Nixon expressed the same idea. However, by the time Kissinger was about to set off for his second trip to China, he and Nixon were convinced that Taiwan could not be saved. “I think,” Kissinger said, “the votes are set now.” Nixon concurred.

As the White House had anticipated, the UN vote triggered bitter and widespread reactions. Conservatives such as Reagan and Buckley expressed their disappointments, and Nixon had to ask Kissinger to calm both men down. There were also voices in the Congress calling for retaliation against the UN and countries voting to expel Taiwan. Rogers showed sympathy with these voices. In a statement on October 26, he welcomed

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246 Kissinger, *White House Years*, 780-784.
248 The President’s News Conference, September 16, 1971, Kissinger’s Country Files, Box 86, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
China to the UN but said that the United States “deeply regrets” the expulsion of Taiwan. Although confirming that the administration would not reduce funds for the UN, he suggested that “there has to be some hard thinking by member nations” on whether the UN was “living beyond its resources.” To preempt public criticism of the President, Ziegler issued a harsher statement the next day, declaring that Nixon was “outraged” by the “spectacle” of “cheering, handclapping and dancing” at the UN after the voting. Meanwhile, Kissinger, who came back to Washington on the 26th, complained that Rogers had deliberately pushed the UN vote to the 25th to downgrade his trip and blame him for the Taiwan loss. Rogers, on the other hand, accused Kissinger of being too soft on China.251

Soon after Kissinger came back from China, the Nixon administration started planning for the second advance trip, which was set to solve technical problems for Nixon’s visit. Haig suggested to Kissinger in a November 5 memorandum that the trip should take place “as late as possible” after December 1 “to provide us with as big a gap as we can have between it and the UN vote,” as well as “to reflect a more appropriate and conservative attitude with respect to the visit itself.”252 At the end of November, the White House decided to set the trip between January 3 and 10, 1972. The advance party would visit cities where Nixon would stay to survey different sites in each city.253

At the same time, the Nixon administration’s media preparation continued. One of Ziegler’s tasks was to select media personnel accompanying Nixon to China. Hundreds

251 Ibid, 369; Memorandum from the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, November 26, 1971, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 595-598.
252 Memorandum from Haig to Kissinger, November 5, 1971, President’s Trip Files, Box 499, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
253 Letter from Haig to Walters, November 28, 1971, ibid, Box 499, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
of applications arrived in the White House.\textsuperscript{254} As the number of the journalists going to Beijing with Nixon was limited, it was “envisioned that a large press pool will accompany the President to Guam, and the remainder of the press corps will go to Hong Kong.”\textsuperscript{255} To ensure worldwide coverage, the White House also decided to bring a few representatives from the United States Information Agency and Voice of America to China.\textsuperscript{256} The designation of media slots indicated the determination of the White House communication team to obtain the maximum effect of publicizing the China trip. Nixon and Haldeman believed that print media had only a negligible public impact, while the broadcast media “could change perceptions in a matter of minutes.”\textsuperscript{257} Therefore, the broadcast media were emphasized overwhelmingly in the selection process. Finally, the total of 87 slots was designated as follows: print journalists and photographers took 44 slots. There were 22 correspondents from the daily newspapers around the country, 6 from wire services, and 6 from national magazines. Journalists from \textit{Newsday} and the \textit{Boston Globe} were excluded because they frequently published negative reports about Nixon. Three columnists—moderate Joseph Kraft, and conservatives William F. Buckley, Jr., and Richard Wilson—were allowed to go. The \textit{Reader’s Digest}, which had not covered the White House frequently but had been friendly to Nixon, was given a slot. The remaining 43 slots went to the broadcast media with 18 to correspondents, and the rest to technicians and camerapersons. Since an advance technical group would go to

\textsuperscript{254} See, for example, Letter from Kissinger to Thomas Vail, Publisher and Editor of the \textit{Plain Dealer}, November 9, 1971, ibid, Box 500, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
\textsuperscript{255} Memorandum for the Record, November 23, 1971, ibid, Box 499, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
\textsuperscript{256} Memorandum from Leslie Janka (NSC Staff) to Haig, December 23, 1971, Kissinger’s Country Files, Box 88; Memorandum from Holdridge to Haig, December 29, 1971, ibid, Box 500, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
\textsuperscript{257} Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 1049.
Beijing earlier, the numbers of the broadcast personnel outnumbered the print press by almost three to one.\textsuperscript{258} Additionally, there was an official documentary crew which would film the whole visit.\textsuperscript{259}

On January 3, Haig led the second advance team to China. Other than convincing China to accept all the technical arrangements for Nixon’s visit, Haig was to “reassure the Chinese that the United States was firmly on their side against the Soviet threat” and “downplay the bombing campaign that the United States was carrying on against North Vietnam.” Besides, he “was to see if he could get some modification in the wording in the communiqué on Taiwan” by submitting to Zhou a new draft on the Taiwan issue in the communiqué. Zhou only promised to consider it before Nixon’s visit.\textsuperscript{260} The painfully long discussions about Taiwan between Nixon and Zhou in Beijing in February proved that the Chinese were not persuaded by Haig to make many compromises.

From August 1971 to February 1972, the Nixon administration made a series of preparations for Nixon’s visit. The two advance trips solved most of the major problems for the trip: the Americans reached consensus on the world situation with the Chinese, a communiqué was drafted, and most of the technical requirements were met. At the same time, the Nixon administration tried to manage the media response to Nixon’s upcoming China visit, aiming to win public support for its China policy. Because of these efforts, by the time Nixon’s trip took place, a Harris poll found seventy-three percent of the public

\textsuperscript{258} Speer, \textit{Presidents and the Press}, 98.
\textsuperscript{259} Memorandum from Chapin to Haldeman, February 14, 1972, SMOF, H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 92, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
was supportive to the trip, and over a half of the public expected an official U.S.
recognition of China soon.\(^{261}\)

### III. Nixon’s Visit to China

After careful planning and execution, on February 21, 1972, Nixon arrived in
Beijing, starting his historic trip to China. The trip ended the mutual isolation between the
two countries; the agreements reached in the “Shanghai Communiqué” laid the
foundation for the normalization of relations. Nonetheless, for the Nixon administration,
one big success in domestic politics was in media policy. Influenced by the White House,
the U.S. media publicized Nixon’s China policy, increased his popularity, and most
importantly, helped him win reelection. The emphasis on television broadcasting, in
particular, helped Nixon convey his image to the public as directly as possible.

In February 1972, Nixon and his White House staff increased their efforts in
preparing for the China summit. “I know of no Presidential trip,” Kissinger wrote in his
memoirs, “that was as carefully planned nor of any President who ever prepared himself
so conscientiously.”\(^{262}\) To know more about China and Mao, Nixon summoned the
former French Minister of Cultural Affairs, André Malraux, who claimed to be a China
expert after meeting with Mao once. In addition, the CIA, State Department and NSC
prepared backgrounders for Nixon, providing information about Mao and Zhou, the
historical disputes between the United States and China, and extracts from books and
articles on China.\(^{263}\) Nixon studied these materials carefully, especially during the last

\(^{261}\) China News Summary No. 16, February 22, 1972, SMOF, H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential
Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

\(^{262}\) Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1051.

week before the visit. Meanwhile, he held a series of private conversations with Kissinger on the strategies of negotiating with the Chinese.

Before taking off on the morning of February 17, 1972, Nixon had a departure ceremony at the White House, in which he met Congressional leaders briefly. As Haldeman described, Nixon “received a standing ovation” and good wishes from everyone, “even including [Senator] Fulbright,” who was critical of Nixon’s foreign policy. Nixon gave a short address, wishing that the future would remember the trip as the inscription the Apollo 11 astronauts left on the moon: “We came in peace for all mankind.” The White House communications team meticulously planned the ceremony; even the platform and Nixon’s microphone were positioned carefully. As anticipated, there was full media coverage—print, photograph, and television—of Nixon’s departure remarks. The coverage of the departure turned out to be very positive. All the three major television networks—NBC, ABC, and CBS—gave 40-50 minutes live reports on it; they all noticed that Nixon was “relaxed, enthusiastic, and possessing great rapport.” CBS’s news commentator Charles Collingwood anticipated that Nixon would make “one of [the] most remarkable trips.” Partly resulting from the positive reporting by the networks, the public also had high expectations of the trip, as Nixon wrote in his diary, “there was almost a religious feeling to the messages we

264 Haldeman, The Haldeman Diaries, 410-411.
265 See, for example, Conversation Between President Nixon and his Assistant for National Security Affairs, February 14, 1972, FRUS, 1969-1976, 17, 661-672.
266 Haldeman, The Haldeman Diaries, 411.
267 Kissinger, White House Years, 1053.
268 “Departure Ceremony for the President’s Trip to the PRC,” undated, SMOF H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 92, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
269 Memorandum from Mott Allin to Warren Higby, undated, ibid, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
received from all over the country, wishing us well.”270 After stopping in Hawaii and Guam, on the morning of February 21, the Nixon party stopped in Shanghai, where they took on Chinese navigators. At 11:30 AM, local time, Nixon arrived in Beijing.

Nixon’s arrival in Beijing was undoubtedly one of the most important scenes in the White House’s media plan. As early as October 1971, Nixon had directed that there ought to be “a good welcome” for the purpose of television broadcasting. There must be “masses of Chinese people somewhere,” and he must “have some chance for pictures with the people.”271 Yet there is no evidence that either Kissinger or Haig got any assurance on the arrival ceremony from the Chinese during their preliminary trips. On February 6, the Newsweek East Asia correspondent James Pringle wrote in an article that the Chinese had told a U.S. official that there would only be a “normal head of states welcome” for Nixon.272 Such a possibility worried Nixon. On the plane from Guam to Shanghai, he called Haldeman. His arrival in Beijing had to be “flawless,” the anxious President indicated, “since that [would] be the key picture of the whole trip.”273 Haldeman thus asked Kissinger and Rogers to stay in the plane until “the handshake had been accomplished.”274

When Nixon’s plane arrived at the airport in Beijing, Zhou Enlai was waiting outside. Nixon was aware of Zhou’s humiliating memory that U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles refused to shake his hand at the 1954 Geneva Conference. Nixon decided to replace the negative image with his arriving handshake. According to

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270 Nixon, RN, 559.
271 Haldeman, The Haldeman Diaries, 364.
273 Haldeman, The Haldeman Diaries, 412.
274 Kissinger, White House Years, 1054-1055.
Haldeman’s plan, Kissinger and Rogers were kept on the plane when Nixon stepped out of the aircraft and shook hands with Zhou. Thus Nixon let “no other American distract the viewer’s attention.” The Nixon administration was a little disappointed, though, because the Chinese welcome was not as high-profile as they had expected. After leaving the airport, Haldeman still hoped that “the real welcoming ceremony involving photogenic Chinese multitudes might be awaiting” at Tiananmen Square. However, as Haldeman pointed out, the Nixon party drew “virtually no public attention at all” on the way to China’s state guest house.

The arrival ceremony was widely reported by the media. The major television networks gave live broadcasting of Nixon’s arrival. They noticed the “absolute correctness” of the arrival ceremony. The most important image, Nixon shaking hands with Zhou with no other American officials in the picture, was shown. NBC commented that Zhou gave Nixon a “cordial” handshake. Some media also correctly interpreted the handshake as in contrast to Dulles’s refusal to shake Zhou’s hand in 1954. But the media, much like the White House staff, was more or less disappointed in the “coolness” of the ceremony. NBC commented that Nixon’s arrival ceremony was the “model of coolness.” ABC described the arrival ceremony as “correct but restrained.” Journalists noticed that there were no welcome crowds on the streets. ABC’s correspondent Howard

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275 Ibid.
276 Haldeman, The Haldeman Diaries, 412.
277 China News Summary No. 12, February 21, 1972, SMOF H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
279 China News Summary No. 23, February 25, 1972, ibid, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
Tuckner asked whether there would be more people coming out to welcome the Nixon party; his interpreter told him that “it was an ordinary day” and there would be no special welcome on street. 281 NBC journalist John Rich also learned from the Chinese people at Tiananmen Square that there was no advance word to ask them to welcome the Nixon party at the square.282

Soon after the Nixon party settled down, Zhou suddenly appeared and told Kissinger that “Chairman Mao would like to see the President.” Kissinger, as he later described, played it “somewhat cool,” and asked for Zhou’s permission to bring his aide Winston Lord.283 Then he went into Nixon’s room “breathlessly” and told him about Mao’s request for a meeting.284 Although surprised, Nixon and Kissinger found the requested meeting with Mao exciting. Lord recalled, “It was going to send a clear signal to the world and to the Chinese people that Mao personally was behind this visit and the historic importance of the event. So this was obviously very good news, even if it was a somewhat unorthodox way to proceed with the leader of the Free World.”285 With Lord and a Secret Service agent, Nixon and Kissinger soon went to meet with Mao.286

Nixon’s conversation with Mao lasted for over an hour, much longer than planned. Nixon tried to talk about specific issues concerning U.S.-Chinese relations, while Mao waved him off: “Those questions are not questions to be discussed in my place. They should be discussed with the Premier. I discuss philosophical questions.” Mao dismissed

281 China News Summary No. 12, February 21, 1972, SMOF H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
283 Kissinger, White House Years, 1057.
284 Nixon, RN, 560.
286 Kissinger, White House Years, 1057.
Nixon’s attempts to talk about issues such as Taiwan, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam: “All those troublesome issues I don’t want to get into very much.” At last, Nixon concluded that the United States and China “can find common ground, despite our differences, to build a world structure in which both can be safe to develop in our own ways on our own roads.” Mao asserted that “[it] is all right to talk well and also all right if there are no agreements.” The conversation, although brief, was considered important by the American participants. “The more we began to think about it,” Lord recalled, “the more we examined the transcript of the meeting, we realized that Mao had hit the key issues…stating the basic Chinese positions, which gave us a framework to enlarge and flesh out over the next few days.” There is little evidence of Nixon’s reaction to Kissinger’s presence at the meeting with Mao, although both he and Rogers hoped to meet Mao again. But the second meeting with Mao did not happen in the end.

During Nixon’s meeting with Mao, Haldeman was concerned about the media coverage back in the guest house. Nixon was supposed to have a plenary session with Zhou at the Great Hall of the People at 4:30 PM. The TV networks planned to have live coverage of the session, and the press corps was on the way to the guest house to cover Nixon’s departure for the session. Without knowing when Nixon would be back, Haldeman, Ziegler, and Chapin could not announce Nixon’s meeting with Mao either; so they could only postpone the plenary session. This created “intense speculation” among the journalists, but no one suspected that Nixon was meeting with Mao. The nerves of the White House communication team were relieved when Nixon came back around 4:00

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PM. The Plenary session, being pushed back for half an hour, took place at the Great Hall in the evening.\(^{289}\)

Informed by Ziegler, the media was excited by “the [great] surprise meeting” between Nixon and Mao.\(^{290}\) The Chinese provided photographs and video footage of the Nixon-Mao meeting. Using these photographs and footage, American media gave very positive coverage of the meeting.\(^{291}\) ABC’s Howard K. Smith said that the meeting “seemed very friendly.” Historian James Thomson from Harvard University commented on ABC that it was “amazing” that Nixon was invited to Mao’s private enclave which was very “unusual.” The *Chicago Tribune* commented that the Nixon-Mao meeting indicated that “Peking is just as interested in agreements that will lead to détente as is Washington.”\(^{292}\) Columnist Joseph Kraft wrote in the *Washington Post* that “Mao’s endorsement may well mortgage the future and strongly influence future Chinese leaders to view the US in a friendly fashion” and that hope “alone justifies the trip.”\(^{293}\)

After the plenary session between Nixon and Zhou, the Chinese hosted a banquet for the Nixon party. The friendly banquet was “like a dream scene” to American media.\(^{294}\) TV networks provided several hours of live coverage; the newspapers printed symbolic photographs of the banquet, such as Nixon using chopsticks and clinking glasses with Chinese officials. The NBC evening news commented that the banquet was


\(^{290}\) China News Summary No. 12, February 21, 1972, SMOF H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.


\(^{292}\) China News Summary No. 13, February 21, 1972, SMOF, H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

\(^{293}\) China News Summary No. 19, February 23, 1972, ibid, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

\(^{294}\) China News Summary No. 13, February 21, 1972, ibid, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
“fascinating.”295 The comments were overwhelmingly positive.296 CBS commentator Eric Sevareid said that “everything seemed to thaw out at the banquet.” The toasts Nixon and Zhou made at the banquet, NBC commented, showed “how extraordinary friendly things had become despite ritual mention of differences.”297

In the next few days, Nixon devoted most of his time to meeting with Zhou. The purpose of these meetings was two-fold. On one hand, Nixon needed to explain his administration’s foreign policy to the Chinese. On the other, Nixon had to negotiate with the Chinese on the final wording of the communiqué, since it was crucial to have “a formal expression of the new relationship” between two countries that had had “no diplomatic ties, and no framework for dealing with each other” for two decades.298 Reaching an agreement with China became especially important for the Nixon administration as all the media were watching every move Nixon made in China closely.

The progress of the Nixon-Zhou meetings was kept secret from the media until the “Shanghai Communiqué” was announced. There was no media briefing on the substantive content of the talks; the media could only speculate on the meeting’s progress based on a few “controlled leaks.” As the week in China went on, the media became more frustrated due to lack of information. Some journalists such as CBS correspondent Dan Rather showed sympathy to the White House, which “in all fairness” did warn that the news would be scarce in China.299 Others were irritated. John Chancellor of NBC, for

296 Haldeman, The Haldeman Diaries, 416.
297 China News Summary No. 12, February 21, 1972, SMOF, H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
298 Kissinger, White House Years, 1066.
299 Special Report: “Correspondent’s Debriefing” on China Trip, March 9, 1972, SMOF, H.R. Haldeman Files, Box
example, criticized the White House vigorously on February 24. The American people
deserve more information on these “most important talks” since the end of World War II,
Chancellor averred.\textsuperscript{300}

Besides the private meetings with Zhou, Nixon had other activities in Beijing,
including attending a gymnastic show and ballet performance and sightseeing at the Great
Wall, Ming Tomb and Forbidden City. Coverage of these activities would show
Americans what the president was doing in China. As planned by the White House,
“people contact” during the trip was more important than official meetings in publicizing
the trip. By showing images of Nixon appreciating Chinese culture and interacting with
Chinese people, the White House tried to convince American public that a new
relationship between the American and Chinese people had been established.

The media helped convey this message. Television networks gave live coverage to
most of these activities; newspapers covered them intensively too. Although regarding
sightseeing as “a waste of time,” Nixon appeared enthusiastic all the time in front of the
media. One of the most symbolic sightseeing events in Beijing was at the Great Wall.
Symbolizing “the great strength of the Chinese nation,” MacMillan argued, the Great
Wall “itself was too good a photo opportunity to miss.” Nixon took the opportunity to
make memorable remarks. When asked what he thought of the Wall, he answered
solemnly: “I think that you would have to conclude that this is a great wall and it had to
be built by a great people.”\textsuperscript{301} Some reporters only quoted the first half of Nixon’s answer

\textsuperscript{118} Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

\textsuperscript{300} China News Summary No. 22, February 24, 1972, ibid, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National
Archives at College Park, Maryland.

\textsuperscript{301} MacMillan, \textit{Nixon and Mao}, 276, 283-284.
and ridiculed it. 302 Journalists praised the Wall for becoming the bridge connecting the two peoples. 303 The New York Times journalist Max Frankel noticed that the television coverage at the Great Wall was carefully arranged: “the artillery of the US media [was] fully emplaced by the time [Nixon] drove up to be memorialized in command of the international high ground… It had somehow been arranged so that the scene would be splendidly lit by a sharp-angled sun.” Frankel also pointed out that Nixon was well aware of these arrangements, because as he moved, he apparently knew where the cameras were. 304

During the five days in Beijing, Pat Nixon’s activities also drew a lot of media attention. As Nixon had planned, Mrs. Nixon was responsible for interacting with Chinese people while he was having private meetings with Chinese leaders. Before going to China, Mrs. Nixon had dutifully studied Chinese culture and history, read Mao’s poetry and other Chinese literature, and prepared for possible questions from the media. 305 Her preparations turned out to be worthwhile in China. Both the broadcast and the print media reported Mrs. Nixon’s activities such as visiting a Chinese kitchen, school and commune; and they were impressed by her polite and enthusiastic attitude. NBC correspondent Barbara Walters commented that Mrs. Nixon acted as a “wonderful

303 China News Summary No. 21, February 24, 1972, SMOF, H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
304 China News Summary No. 23, February 25, 1972, ibid, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
305 MacMillan, Nixon and Mao, 276.
“goodwill ambassador” who was “at ease, charming and warm.” United Press International called Mrs. Nixon the “TV star” of the China trip.

As Nixon’s stay in Beijing approached the end, the media became more eager to hear any information about an agreement between Nixon and Zhou. On February 25, the last day in Beijing, the Nixon party held a banquet for the Chinese. The media had been expecting that Nixon and Zhou would mention the progress of the private talks in their toasts. However, journalists were disappointed because the toasts of Nixon and Zhou contained little substantive content. The media saw these cautious addresses as “an indication of lack of progress.” The NBC evening news commented that the atmosphere of the banquet was “somewhat cooler” than the previous one.

On the morning of February 26, the day the Nixon party headed to Hangzhou, Nixon and Zhou approved the final wording of the communiqué. After sightseeing in Hangzhou, Nixon suddenly called an impromptu news conference. He apologized for the lack of information in the past few days; he asserted, “Had we yielded [to pressure for news], the inevitable result might have jeopardized what we’ve accomplished…. Getting here was a long road and had to be handled with great discretion.” At the end of the news conference, Nixon showed some good will to the journalists by inviting each of them for an individual photo with him.

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306 China News Summary No. 19, February 23, 1972, SMOF, H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

307 China News Summary No. 22, February 24, 1972, ibid, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

308 China News Summary No. 24, February 25, 1972, ibid, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.


The next day, the Nixon party went to Shanghai, where the United States and China released the “Shanghai Communiqué.” In the communiqué, the two countries stated their views on the issues of Indochina, Korea, Japan, and South Asia. The two agreed to move toward the normalization of relations. The paragraph on which the two sides struggled most was still about Taiwan. The Chinese reaffirmed that “[the] Taiwan question is the crucial question obstructing the normalization of relations between China and the United States; the Government of the People’s Republic of China is the sole legal government of China.” The United States agreed to declare:

all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position. In reaffirms its interest in a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves. With this prospect in mind, it affirms the ultimate objective of the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and military installations from Taiwan. In the meantime, it will progressively reduce its forces and military installations on Taiwan as the tension in the area diminishes.\textsuperscript{311}

In the “Shanghai Communiqué,” the United States and China made contrasting statements. However, these statements, as Kissinger remarked, “served to highlight the revolutionary change in the Chinese-American relationship embodied in the views that the two sides expressed in common.”\textsuperscript{312}

The effects of the “Shanghai Communiqué” were explosive to the media. In Kissinger’s words, the media was “maddened by a week without briefings, driven around the bend by endless banquets and deadly toasts, perhaps convinced in their hearts that nothing good could possibly come of a Nixon initiative,” and “fell on the Shanghai Communiqué like tigers on raw meat thrown into their cage.” Many reports of the

\textsuperscript{311} MacMillan, \textit{Nixon and Mao}, 343-344.

\textsuperscript{312} Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 1085.
communiqué immediately appeared on the media. The first response was that the Nixon administration had sold out Taiwan. The *Washington Post* commented that “weighing the concessions made by the President, many observers here feel that the Chinese got the better of the bargain….Chinese officials appeared pleased by the outcome of the discussion.” The *Philadelphia Inquirer* used a famous headline: “They Got Taiwan, We Got Eggroll.” *Newsday*’s headlines read: “Goodbye Waves; Waves of Shock” and “Consensus – US Paid High Toll for Diplomatic Bridge to China.” Similar unfavorable headlines appeared in the *Boston Globe* (“Nixon Makes Concessions on Taiwan, Pledges Pullout”) and the *Philadelphia Bulletin* (“Nixon Flying Home; Yielded on Taiwan.”) The broadcast media’s attitude was cautious: NBC commented that neither the United States nor China won via the communiqué; and even if any side won, it was too early to tell. However, John Chancellor noted, the communiqué was definitely a loss for the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan.

However, after a few days, “the lurid headlines calmed down,” particularly after Nixon reiterated that the U.S. commitments to Taiwan were largely “unaffected” in the arrival statement in Washington. The *Christian Science Monitor* commented that “what President Nixon agreed to was what he was doing anyway ” and“ nothing is changed” as long as the defense treaty with Taiwan remained. A *Washington Post* editorial defended Nixon against accusations of selling out Taiwan.

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313 Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1091.
315 Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1092.
On February 28, Nixon left Beijing and arrived in Washington D.C. the next day. Important political figures including “all chiefs of diplomatic missions” were invited to Andrews Air Force Base for the welcome ceremony.318 There was full media coverage of the arrival ceremony, including live television broadcasting of the entire ceremony.319 The ceremony was enthusiastic. “My God,” journalist Hugh Sidey of Life said, “it’s like the arrival of the king.”320 Indeed, the general tone of the media coverage was ceremonial, which met the requirements of the White House.

The Nixon administration expected to further publicize the summit after coming back from Beijing. As Nixon pointed out, “[the] media fell completely silent about China within about a week after we returned.” While acknowledging that the impact of the television coverage of the trip still lasted, Nixon stressed that “the factors of personal conduct, dignity and, of course, the boldness of the move to go to China in the first place will be forgotten unless we continue to hammer them home.”321 Thus the Nixon administration insisted on making follow-up media plans in the month following Nixon’s visit. The White House communication team took several approaches to appeal to different groups of the public. Having the election ahead, Nixon hoped to strengthen his image as the master of foreign policy who made a breakthrough by going to China. For this reason, at the Cabinet meeting and the Congressional Leadership meeting on February 29, Nixon stressed that he and Zhou did “99 per cent of the talking,” implying that Kissinger played a minimum role during the visit. He also asserted that he and Zhou

318 China News Summary No. 28, February 26, 1972, SMOF H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
319 “Arrival Ceremony Andrews Air Force Base,” undated, ibid, Box 92, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
320 MacMillan, Nixon and Mao, 321.
321 Franklin, Public Relations in the White House, 269.
had some similar characteristics: “Whenever he said anything particularly tough, he became much cooler.” In March, both Nixon and Haldeman asked Kissinger to stress to the media that Nixon’s personality made the trip successful and it was Nixon’s idea that the United States and China issued contrasting statements in the communique.

In the middle of March, Dwight Chapin went to California and had several media interviews with the Los Angeles Times, the Daily Trojan and the Trojan alumni magazine on the issue of his China trip with Nixon. However, the result did not turn out very satisfactorily. Chapin found the Los Angeles Times especially insulting and annoying. Chapin complained that the journalist, who later wrote in the report that Nixon had little sleep during his China trip because he was kept up due to Zhou’s strange working hours, misunderstood him and “missed the whole point.” To make up for the unsuccessful interview, Chapin wanted to write a complaining letter to the editor and then “take a paragraph in the letter to make a positive point about the President and hopefully they would print the letter in the Letters to the Editor section in the paper.” Haldeman approved this idea.

Mrs. Nixon was also asked by the White House staff to be interviewed about her reflections on the China trip. The White House made several plans to involve her in the publicity of the China story including an ABC interview, which was at last dropped by the administration. Mrs. Nixon was asked to discuss “generally” the manner of selecting the state gifts to China in a small press tea party; and she did interviews with women’s

323 Ambrose, Nixon, 519.
324 Memorandum from Chapin to Klein, March 15, 1972, SMOF, H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 94, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
magazines including *Ladies Home Journal, Glamour* and *Redbook*, with the theme of “The People of China.” As time went by and the Moscow summit was approaching, Scali suggested delaying the TV special and waiting until the Moscow summit was over. By that time, he reasoned, Mrs. Nixon could do a joint program about the trips to China and Moscow. Months later, Pat Nixon held a preconvention news conference, at which she talked about her husband’s foreign policy and the trips to China and the Soviet Union. Given another four years in the White House, she promised, Nixon would “top his trips to Peking and Moscow.” Her performance at the news conference was praised as “superb” by journalist Sarah McClendon.

However, compared to the preparation for Nixon’s China trip, the administration’s follow-up media plans after the trip were unsystematic and limited in its effectiveness. As Nixon had rightly pointed out, the media lost interest in China almost immediately after Nixon’s trip. The effects of the Nixon administration’s attempts to further publicize the trip were very limited.

### IV. Conclusion

The year of 1972 can be considered as the peak of Nixon’s presidency. In this year, Nixon successfully had summits in Beijing and Moscow, which helped him to practice “triangular diplomacy.” The first of the two summits, Nixon’s February visit to China, ended twenty years of mutual isolation between the United States and China. Visiting China also became one of Nixon’s most important achievements in his foreign policy.

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325 Memorandum from Stephen Bull to Haldeman, March 15, 1972, ibid, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
326 Memorandum from Scali to Haldeman, March 15, 1972, ibid, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
From April 1971, the Nixon administration cooperated closely with the Chinese government to arrange for the visit.

From the beginning, Nixon had decided to have maximum publicity of his trip to China. Haldeman wrote in his diary, “from our viewpoint, and the P concurs in this, we need maximum coverage in order to get the benefit from it, especially in the short term.”328 By “short term,” Haldeman apparently referred to Nixon’s reelection in 1972.

To maximize the impact of the media coverage, the Nixon administration greatly emphasized television broadcasting throughout the trip. But it is important to point out that the Nixon administration did not employ many new media strategies in Nixon’s trip to China. For example, as stated above, the ground station for live television broadcasting had been used in Nixon’s previous visits abroad. What made the publicity of Nixon’s China trip a television extravaganza, to a large extent, was that for the first time ever, the American public was able to see on television a U.S. president in China.

However, it is difficult to pin down the real impact of the publicity of Nixon’s trip. The Gallup poll found that ninety-eight percent of American public was aware of the trip, higher than any event in its history.329 But there are also other pieces of evidence suggesting that not as many viewers as expected were watching television coverage of Nixon’s trip. A New York Arbitron survey found out that sixty million people watched Nixon’s arrival in Beijing, which was close the average amount of public attention to news on Sundays.330 Meanwhile, conservative voices against Nixon’s trip and the

329 Ibid, 321.
330 China News Summary No. 22, February 24, 1972, SMOF H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
Shanghai Communiqué could still be heard. Patrick Buchanan threatened to resign because he thought that Nixon had made a deal with a communist regime and sold out Taiwan. William F. Buckley, Jr. publicly criticized the communiqué, and announced his support for Ohio Congressman John Ashbrook, a Republican who tried to challenge Nixon for the Republican nomination for the election.331

Nonetheless, the results of Nixon’s trip to China were generally positive on several levels. On the diplomatic level, the China trip was the important first step to establish Nixon’s détente policy with the communist world. Partly due to the Beijing summit, in May 1972, the summit between the United States and the Soviet Union was held in Moscow. The two countries signed a major arms limitation agreement, SALT I, in which both countries formally promised to limit the production of nuclear weapons temporarily. The trip also prepared the American public for the normalization of relations with China. A March 1972 Gallup poll showed that most people were impressed by Nixon’s China trip and were convinced that there would be an opportunity to improve relations with China. In the same poll, more people tended to describe Chinese people with favorable adjectives.332 An April Minnesota poll found that thirty-one percent of residents changed their impressions of the Chinese people, with twenty-nine percent “more favorably inclined” toward China than before the visit.333 The media’s positive reporting on the Chinese people certainly contributed to this change of attitude.

333 Kusnitz, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, 139.
Besides foreign policy successes, the trip to China in some sense served Nixon’s own aim. Nixon’s biggest success in 1972 was winning reelection. The China trip might have contributed to his victory in the election. After the trip, Nixon received a fifty-six percent approval in poll, the highest rating he had enjoyed since the beginning of 1971. Nearly seventy percent of the public believed that the China trip would be useful to world peace.\footnote{The Gallup Poll, March 9, 1972.} At the end of the trip, a New Hampshire housewife said: “RN has just re-elected himself.”\footnote{China News Summary No. 28, February 26, 1972, SMOF H.R. Haldeman Files, Box 118, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives at College Park, Maryland.} Undoubtedly, the publicity of Nixon’s visit to China helped build his image as a master in foreign policy and convinced the American people that Nixon was making efforts to end the Vietnam War, which was crucial in helping him win reelection.
Conclusion

On January 26, 2009, former President Jimmy Carter made a guest appearance on “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart.” When the host mentioned that Nixon “opened up China,” the former president said, “No, he didn’t open up China.” “He went to China, and he declared there was one China, but he didn’t say which one,” Carter claimed, “and for seven more years, the ‘one China’ was Taiwan. And it was only thirty years ago this month that I and Deng Xiaoping declared that the China was the People’s Republic of China. So Nixon did not open up China.” The host asked, “So you did.” “Absolutely,” Carter asserted.336

There may be some truth to Carter’s assertion. Indeed, Nixon’s trip to China in 1972 did not accomplish the mission of normalizing U.S.-Chinese relations. Scholars have pointed out that as early as July 1971, Kissinger had promised to Zhou that Nixon would normalize relations with China during Nixon’s second term.337 Shortly after the reelection, however, Nixon was so preoccupied with the Watergate scandal that he did not have enough time to implement his plan on China. In the mid-1970s, China went through a leadership shift as well, when both Zhou and Mao died in 1976. Thus for half a decade, U.S.-Chinese relations improved little. For this reason, some scholars argue that Nixon’s China initiatives were merely a diversion to temporarily alleviate problems the United States was facing. Stephen Ambrose asserts that in one sense, “Nixon’s China opening was but another chapter in the long history of ever-shifting realignments in the

337 See, for example, Mann, About Face, 33.
world balance of power; by no means did it mark a permanent change.\textsuperscript{338} Nevertheless, Nixon’s accomplishment in “going to China” carries historical significance of its own in several respects.

The thaw in U.S.-Chinese relations was a result of the transformation of Cold War power relations. Determined to fight against “the Sino-Soviet bloc,” the United States cut diplomatic relations with China in 1950. From the late 1940s to the late 1960s, American leaders made inconsistent attempts to exploit the differences between the Soviet Union and China.\textsuperscript{339} Unofficial negotiations between the United States and China took place on several occasions. However, in the first twenty years after the establishment of China’s communist regime, U.S.-Chinese relations were dominated by mutual isolation and military conflict.

The opportunity to improve U.S.-Chinese relations came after the mid-1960s, when the Soviet-Chinese conflict became obvious. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Beijing called Brezhnev the new czar, maybe even the new Hitler; this rhetoric was even stronger than Western protests.\textsuperscript{340} Watching the massing of Soviet troops along the border, Chinese leaders started to seek security by approaching the United States. On the other hand, the United States, experiencing the relative decline of its world power, was eager to end the Vietnam War. At least some Americans were ready to treat the Soviet Union and China differently and possibly alleviate tensions with both countries.

\textsuperscript{338} Ambrose, \textit{Nixon}, 517.
\textsuperscript{339} Chang, \textit{Friends and Enemies}, 1, 3.
\textsuperscript{340} Ibid, 286-287.
Nixon was one of those Americans who had justified their views on the Cold War. William Bundy claims:

The story of Nixon’s presidential career, his years of preparation, is not only an account of the personal development of an extremely energetic and intelligent American of his generation, but a study of what the American nation itself went through, especially in East Asia, in the first twenty-five years of the Cold War.341

Starting his political career as an anti-communist, in the 1940s and 1950s, Nixon believed that the United States should take a tough stance against China. In 1960s, he saw how the Vietnam War deteriorated and called for “peace with honor” through realistic solutions. He was also convinced that the United States should realize China’s growing influence in Asia and should develop a new relationship with it. However, even in his famous *Foreign Affairs* article, Nixon tried to appeal to both the liberals and the conservatives by keeping his arguments moderate.

Having formed a realistic view of the world situation, Nixon devoted much of his presidency to the realpolitik maneuvers of “triangular diplomacy.” In a June 1972 speech, Nixon explained his thoughts clearly. The summits in Beijing and Moscow were successful, Nixon claimed, but “[too] many people in the media” were praising them “for the wrong reasons.” He said:

> As we look at what happened with the Chinese and Soviets, the reason China and the United States finally got together is not because we or they finally reached the conclusion that we had been mistaken. It was because at this juncture in history there were very fundamental shifts in the world balance of power that made it imperative that they look elsewhere, and useful to us to have better relations with them. Mao and Zhou, he continued, “make no decisions on a personal basis. They do it only on cold calculation, which is true of most world leaders.” Talking about “triangular diplomacy,” he suggested, “So—did we go to China to play against the Soviets, and vice

versa? We have to say no. If we ever said yes, they’d have to react the other way.”

Finally, he concluded:

Most of the media approved the China initiatives, and were even quite glowing about the Russian ones. I’m convinced that as a result of what we have done, the chances of having a more peaceful world fifty years from now are substantially increased. But this would not have been done with woolly-headed idealism. If we’ve come this far, it’s because we have not been belligerent; we have avoided exacerbating the problem by engaging in a shouting match. … [It] isn’t being for peace that matters. It’s finding an effective method of doing something about it that matters.342

To Nixon, détente was by no means the end of the ideological confrontation between capitalism and communism. It was merely the most effective way to solve the problems the United States faced in the world.

Sharing Nixon’s realistic world view and distrust of the State Department, national security adviser Henry Kissinger helped Nixon carry out “triangular diplomacy” initiatives. He and Nixon developed a particular way to approach the Chinese. As James Mann concludes:

[Nixon and Kissinger] relied heavily on secrecy. They were often willing to let Chinese leaders set the terms, conditions and setting for negotiations, especially by conducting high-level meetings almost exclusively on China’s turf. The Nixonian diplomacy was intensely personalized. It circumvented the ordinary processes of government, allowing Chinese leaders to concentrate on a single top-ranking U.S. official with whom they would do business, an individual like Kissinger who could be cultivated and flattered.343

This style was due to the mutual isolation in the U.S.-China relationship, it was also because Nixon and Kissinger wanted to avoid as much interference from the State Department as possible.

343 Mann, About Face, 52.
After the first few months of uncertainties, Nixon and Kissinger made their strategy of dealing with China. Mann points out:

The Nixon administration devised and articulated the main themes that came to dominate American thinking about China: Close relations with China could help America to deal with the Soviet Union; Washington and Beijing should work together to settle arrangements throughout East Asia; and, meanwhile, the United States should not and would not challenge China’s Communist Party leadership.344

The Chinese, having heated military clashes with the Soviets in 1969, began to respond to the American requests for communication. Thus from 1969 to 1971, the United States and China slowly came to an agreement on high-level meetings.

After Nixon’s revelation of his decision to visit China, the administration picked up the pace to publicize the president’s China policy. From April 1971 to April 1972, the media plan was an integral part of the Nixon administration’s rapprochement policy. In addition to galvanizing public support for the administration’s China initiatives, these media strategies served Nixon’s personal political purpose. Nixon’s rapprochement with China, particularly his trip in 1972, offered him an opportunity to strengthen his image as a master of foreign policy. Portraying himself as a strong, prudent, and visionary president in a time of foreign policy crisis (largely as a result of the Vietnam War) would leave a powerful impression on the “silent majority” of the American people. In the first few years of his presidency, Nixon had established a system that could carry out his media initiatives.

Nixon himself was the mastermind behind the White House media relations system. Along with his resolve to change his Cold War tactics, his established perception of and attitude toward the media guided his media policy. Largely due to his unpleasant

344 Ibid, 50-51.
experiences with the media, Nixon had developed a profound dislike and distrust of the media. His over-sensitivity and anxiety over negative reporting and public criticism drove him to deliberately influence the media. He summarized his attitude in his memoirs:

Since the advent of television as our primary means of communication and source of information modern Presidents must have specialized talents at once more superficial and more complicated than those of their predecessors. They must try to master the art of manipulating the media not only to win in politics but in order to further the programs and causes they believe in; at the same time they must avoid at all costs the charge of trying to manipulate the media. In the modern presidency, concern for image must rank with concern for substance—there is no guarantee that good programs will automatically triumph.345

With the help of H.R. Haldeman, Nixon made isolation, appeasement, and evasion general rules of the administration’s media strategy. The Nixon administration started the daily news summary and the White House Office of Communications. More importantly, as John C. Spear argues, Nixon brought the use of television and public relations to a new level:

The use of television and the attendant public relations gimmickery [sic] as a means of projecting the image that a president, or a presidential candidate, is indeed presidential did not begin with Nixon. The notion was born in the 1950s, but it was considered vaguely offensive. It gradually gained acceptance and is now considered appropriate, necessary and nothing to be ashamed of.

That was Nixon’s major contribution:

[Nixon] brought PR out of the closet, put the seal of approval on television and imagery as political tools. Before Nixon took office presidents used television haphazardly and unscientifically and seldom recognized it as a way of evading the meddlesome press. It is now viewed as the primary means of manipulating public opinion directly, without the press filter. Before Nixon image specialists were relatively few in number and lightly regarded, they now rank among a president’s most important advisers.346

345 Nixon, RN, 354.
346 Spear, Presidents and the Press, 236-237.
The Nixon administration applied these rules of dealing with the media to the rapprochement with China.

To Nixon, the rapprochement with China was a diplomatic initiative as well as an opportunity to advance his image as a statesman. His trip to China, historian David Greenberg argues, burnished this image “to its highest gloss.” The bulk of this thesis is devoted to examining how the images of “Nixon in China” were projected. To conclude, the maneuvers were largely successful. Former American ambassador to Italy Clare Boothe Luce predicted that the single sentence “He went to China” would “someday mark Nixon’s place in the history books.” Although Nixon’s foreign policy achievements did not surpass Watergate as his most well-known legacy, his rapprochement with China is still seen as a major hallmark of his presidency.\(^\text{347}\) The public remembers Nixon’s China initiatives, probably as he wished, through the images he created: his handshakes with Zhou and Mao, friendly glass-clinking at the banquets, and Pat Nixon’s red coat on the snow-covered Great Wall.

In 1972, the Nixon administration, as Charles Colson described, came “as close to managing the news as you can do.”\(^\text{348}\) After the summits in Beijing and Moscow, Nixon got “a free ride” from the media during his 1972 reelection campaign.\(^\text{349}\) As a result, he won the election with a wide margin. The administration’s media strategy was generally helpful in publicizing Nixon’s China initiatives. And after Nixon’s China visit, it seemed to remain effective for awhile.


\(^{348}\) Maltese, *Spin Control*, 3.

After Nixon’s visit to China, Kissinger visited China for several other times.
Through the meetings between Kissinger and Chinese leaders, the United States and
China strengthened their strategic ties. In May 1973, the two countries set up liaison
offices in Washington D.C. and Beijing. The liaison offices, scholars comment, were
“closely equivalent to Embassies in everything but name.”350 After Nixon’s visit, the
economic and cultural exchanges between the United States and China also grew.351
Therefore, the Nixon administration’s rapprochement carried great importance in
changing the Cold War situation and for the future normalization of U.S.-Chinese
relations.

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