In January 1979, the United States reopened full diplomatic relations with China, ending almost thirty years of near-complete isolation between the two countries. Since the early 1970s, a cluster of American non-governmental organizations with close ties to official policymakers—bodies that included the National Committee on US-China Relations (NCUSCR), the Asia Society, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the US-China Business Council, and the major philanthropic foundations—had tentatively begun to rebuild links with Chinese elites. In China, they worked closely with such quasi-non-governmental organizations as the Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), established in the early 1950s to handle “people-to-people” diplomatic contacts, and various research institutes, such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. From the mid-1970s, the NCUSCR took on much of the task of handling the growing number of short-term exchange visits, which soon expanded to include not simply sports and cultural events but students and delegations of various kinds of Chinese experts, including intellectuals, academics, diplomats, and policy advisers.¹

In so far as China still possessed any experts on the United States, after a quarter-century of virtual non-communication, most if not all needed to familiarize or reacquaint themselves with that country. Slowly and cautiously, links between China’s America-watchers and the rather small corps of US China hands old and new gradually and tentatively came into existence, the beginning of what would by the second decade of the twenty-first century be far more extensive and wide-ranging networks and dialogues. In the late 1980s these ties, then still relatively thin and

vestigial, nonetheless played a significant role in moderating the impact of the events of June 1989. Even as most involved talked past each other, dialogue and communication continued. The episode marked one of the first occasions when the slowly solidifying architecture of Track Two institutions and individuals on both sides of the Pacific that had been constructed since the mid-1970s helped to mitigate a major crisis in the Sino-American relationship.

The most prominent Chinese organization handling academic exchanges with the West was the Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA), a task it had undertaken since the 1950s. Returning from China in 1972, the China specialist Roderick McFarquhar reported to Chatham House: “They issue no publications, have no research fellows, and . . . have only a minuscule library.” CPIFA’s main function was apparently to invite distinguished foreigners, both academics and politicians, such as the British labour politician Denis Healey and the top American China specialist John King Fairbank to visit China. After Mao’s death, the arrest of the Gang of Four, and the gradual return to power of Deng Xiaoping, a definite thaw began in China’s relations with the outside world. In early 1977, Arthur H. Rosen, president of the NCUSCR, reported to Bayless Manning, executive director of the CFR: “The Chinese have belatedly (and unexpectedly) given us the most encouraging response ever to our annual package of exchange proposals.” Three years after first accepting an invitation “in principle,” a CPIFA delegation finally intended to visit the United States. The National Committee hoped that these officials would be able to take part in “one or more informal conferences” while in the United States, possibly in conjunction with the Council. The sixteen-person CPIFA delegation, several of them distinguished former diplomats, did indeed visit the Council in July 1977, meeting for three hours with nine CFR members and staff, including Manning and Doak Barnett. Its tour, the first such by a group of Chinese international affairs

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2 Roderick MacFarquhar to Andrew Shonfield, 20 December 1972, and other material in File 3/6/CHIb Chinese People’s embassy, Royal Institute of International Affairs Papers, Chatham House Archives, London.

specialists, funded by the Kettering Foundation, David Rockefeller, Chase Manhattan Bank, and the Compton Foundation, was generally perceived as marking a step forward in Sino-US relations.4

One major innovation that began in 1984 was a series of binational conferences, the U.S.-China Dialogue, co-hosted by the NCUSCR and CPIFA. Around thirty to forty top-level American and Chinese elite leaders would meet for three days in private sessions that gave them an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues in confidence. Many of the personnel would remain the same each year, though specialists on particular issues would also be brought in. The expectation was that these would take place approximately once a year, alternating between the United States and China. Part of each meeting would be devoted to “the global strategic situation, Asian security issues, and the Northeast Asian balance of power.” The remainder would focus on a particular theme that was particularly salient to current Sino-American relations. The objective was “to develop a higher level of mutual understanding in both American and Chinese leaders” that went “beyond the exchange of policy statements.”5

The first of these meetings was held at the Tarrytown Conference Center in upstate New York, a location deliberately chosen for its seclusion, so that the group could spend all their time together, including meals and recreation. Eleven top Chinese officials, academics, and policy advisers met with a group of twelve Americans, including Winston Lord, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, who had previously headed the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff; former Defense

4 See “Meeting for Delegation of Institute of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China,” July 6, 1977, and attached information, Folder 8 China 1975-1979, Box 50, CFR Papers. On the delegation’s tour of the United States, see “Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs Makes First Visit to America,” U.S. China Relations: Notes from the National Committee 7:2 (Summer 1977), 1-3; and Rosen to Phillips, January 3, 1978, File 3778 National Committee on US-China Relations 1977-1978, Box 632, Series Grants, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Papers, Rockefeller Archive Center [hereafter RAC], Tarrytown, NY.

5 “Binational Symposium to Begin This Fall,” U.S. China Relations: Notes from the National Committee 14:2 (Spring-Summer 1984), 4-5.
Secretaries Harold Brown and Robert McNamara, the latter recently retired from the World Bank’s presidency; the former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft; and other such luminaries. Present, too, were five China specialists with close ties to and in some cases experience in government: A. Doak Barnett of the Brookings Institution, Lucian W. Pye of MIT, Michel Oksenberg of the University of Michigan, Robert Scalapino of the University of California at Berkeley, and Richard Solomon of the Rand Corporation. During their stay in the United States, the Chinese participants also visited San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC. In the latter city, they met with Vice President George W. Bush, the secretaries of state and defense, the national security adviser, and several prominent senators. Unfortunately, at the Defense Department Han Nianlong, the delegation leader, greatly irritated Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger by “delivering a half hour monologue” on the subject of Taiwan and then reverting to the issue again.6 Reporting on the initial dialogue, Oksenberg and Solomon noted that the Americans represented a more diverse range of positions than the Chinese, who rarely strayed far from their government’s official line. There were however divisions among the Chinese “foreign policy and strategy contingent,” with military representatives more disturbed by the potential Soviet threat and favoring greater cooperation with the United States, while the foreign ministry group tended to emphasize China’s independence. Oksenberg and Solomon felt that these two factions agreed more than they differed on most issues. While welcoming the stronger US defense posture, for the most part the Chinese wished to maintain “an independent, non-aligned” position, rather than allying themselves with the United States or even cooperating on defense issues. They also welcomed Soviet-American efforts to negotiate arms control agreements. The Chinese criticized US “hegemonistic behavior” in Latin America, South Africa, the Middle East, and Taiwan, and made

token though not necessarily convincing protests over the continued presence of US troops in South Korea. They emphasized that the unresolved situation of Taiwan was the greatest “obstacle” to smooth Sino-American relations, and opposed any encouragement of “self-determination” or “independence” for Taiwan. While some Chinese speakers “exuded confidence” that there was widespread American popular sympathy for closer ties with China, the Americans warned that in fact “public support . . . for strong Sino-American ties was fragile and not rooted in a sound understanding of China. The mutual benefits that accrue to the two societies continually have to be spelled out.”

The second such dialogue took place in Tianjin in October 1985. Besides discussing strategic and security issues, the group focused upon international economic problems and the domestic political and economic situations in both the United States and China. Eight prominent Americans, including David Rockefeller and seven former top officials, among them McNamara, Brown, and former Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal, plus the head of the National Committee and the same five academics, met with fourteen Chinese businessmen, officials, diplomats, and academics. After the conference the Americans spent three days in Beijing, meeting with several senior leaders, including President Li Xiannian, Communist Party Secretary Hu Qili, Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian, Yang Jingren, Minister of the Nationalities Affairs Commission, and Rong Yiren, Chairman of the China International Trade and Investment Corporation. Several of the Americans, together with the directors of the National Committee, then made an extended tour of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. On the urging of McNamara, a former World Bank president, this meeting paid more attention to international economic issues, particularly the financing of

8 “U.S.-China Dialogue (Continued) and Board Trip to Xinjiang,” U.S. China Relations: Notes from the National Committee 16:1 (Spring-Summer 1986), 1-2.
China’s modernization and reform policies; it also focused on the global and Asian strategic situation and internal developments within China.\footnote{Oksenberg and Solomon, “Proposed Agenda for the Second Sino-American Dialogue,” Folder 1 National Committee on US-China Relations, Box 67, Series 1, Robert S. McNamara Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. See also McNamara’s handwritten notes on this meeting, ibid.}

Those present discussed the regional strategic situation in Asia and the broader international scene at considerable length. Meeting a few months after the reformist Mikhail Gorbachev had come to power in the Soviet Union, the Chinese were unclear whether this augured well or ill for Sino-Soviet relations. For the most part, they feared that he intended to revitalize Soviet policy. Many of the Chinese condemned the intensifying Soviet-American arms race and favoured arms control measures, even while doubting that these would eventuate. Beginning a discussion of Chinese domestic politics, Ambassador Han Nianlong, the group’s leader, told the Americans that “in world affairs, China is not a super power.” Since 1979, economic development had been its foremost task. He emphasized: “Foreign policy won’t change. Independent open door policy will not change,” except possibly in the direction of “open[ing] even wider.” He discussed in some detail economic difficulties that reform was encountering. Oksenberg mentioned the bureaucratic difficulties, rigidities, and instabilities that American businessmen seeking to trade with and invest in China often encountered, asking whether the Chinese present could discuss their country’s future economic plans in detail, giving concrete figures. Chai Zemin, China’s first ambassador to the United States, called for the relaxation of US discrimination and trade controls against China, and deplored growing American protectionist sentiment. He pointed out that China had a significant trade deficit with the United States. Chai also urged the United States to use its influence with Taiwan to persuade the island to reach an arrangement with the mainland, which was prepared to “make even more liberal concessions to Taiwan than Hong Kong.”

While noting that Sino-American relations in the previous two years had been “more stable and tranquil” than before, Doak Barnett felt more progress was needed. He called for more high-level exchanges, as well as expanded academic links and
tourism; increased trade; greater cooperation in science and technology; and the recognition that US and Chinese objectives in Southeast and Northeast Asia were “convergent” and that the two countries had “certain shared security interests.” On Taiwan, Barnett warned that the United States lacked any “ability to force pace” and thought the “chances for rapid movement to negotiations are slim to non-existent.” Zhang Wenjin, another former ambassador to the United States and Canada, agreed with Barnett that Sino-American relations were now on a more even keel than immediately after normalization, and noted how the two shared “common interests” in Afghanistan, Vietnam, and elsewhere. He hoped the United States and China could cooperate in efforts to open each other’s markets. Zhang also suggested that Americans needed to become more familiar with the complexities of the Chinese political system. Victor Li of the East-West Center in Hawaii warned that “in many important ways, our two societies do not understand each other. We don’t communicate well.” Moreover, “US public opinion toward China is volatile and can influence policy.” Scalapino, while believing that China and the United States had many interests in common and posed no threat to each other, highlighted growing “nationalism” in the United States and significant anti-US bias in the Chinese press and Chinese United Nations votes. Lucian Pye likewise felt that China and the United States had “different ways of thinking, profoundly different memories,” and were each “living with our respective, peculiar nationalism.” Richard Solomon inquired: “How long can we sustain a bilateral relationship without a sense of larger purpose, of larger understandings, of overriding shared interests?” In his view, “the US and China are still searching for a stabilizing environment, and we must find an overriding basis for the relationship.” Summing up, both NCUSCR chairman Raymond Shafer, a former governor of Pennsylvania, and Han Nianlong agreed that, despite possessing some shared interests, China and the United States had a somewhat precarious relationship and needed to continue a wide range of efforts to understand each other and defuse existing points of contention. In Han’s words: “In an uncertain world, if we can retain exchanges, hope will continue.”

Even during the Dialogue, there was a sense that communication was less than perfect. Reflecting on this meeting, the National Committee confessed to disappointment that even in off-the-record meetings the Chinese participants were “still inhibited by cultural and ideological constraints” and were less “open and responsive” than the Americans wished. Whereas Chinese, at least those from the older generation, “tend[ed] to speak very broadly about concepts, principles, and the world as it should be and are reluctant to be confrontational except on major policy issues,” the Americans generally wished “to talk more concretely about the world as it is and expect quick responses to questions that Chinese like to ponder or obtain consensus on before commenting.” The Americans felt that things might improve if they included some more outspoken early to mid-career Chinese “rising stars,” as well as a few officials, whom up to then they had excluded, thereby restricting themselves largely to retired officials who were now government advisers. Even so, they felt there had been “some very good interaction, especially during meals and outside the formal sessions.” National Committee members also enjoyed their meeting with the economic reform champion and Politburo member Hu Qili, finding him “a cosmopolitan, articulate man who impressed the group with his confidence, intelligence, and relaxed manner.” President Li Xiannian, then in his late seventies, they found “quite lively and outspoken,” with an “attractive combination of charm and toughness.” Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian, by contrast, “did not reveal anything new or particularly interesting.” Those National Committee board members, Rockefeller and McNamara among them, who went on to Xinjiang were struck by “the sense of urgent economic development” in the province, “traditionally one of China’s most backward and economically deprived regions.”

The third dialogue was held at the Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin, in April 1987. In late 1986, widespread protests in China by students demanding greater democracy and supporting radical reformers had brought the ouster of Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, a leading liberal who had disregarded demands by other officials that he expel the radicals from the party.

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Criticisms of ‘bourgeois liberalism’ brought fears that China might abandon the path of reform. There were also concerns that Chinese economic mechanisms and institutions were characterized by structural rigidities and over-regulation, impeding efficiency and further progress. These issues were expected to loom large at the subsequent dialogue. In March 1987 Rosen of the National Committee and Michael Aho, staff economist at the Council on Foreign Relations, visited China and had several days of meetings with top economic and financial officials in Beijing. Rosen reported that, despite recent upheavals, the atmosphere in Beijing had been “very much ‘business as usual.’ In all discussions, there seemed to be a determined effort to assure us that some American press reports are misleading and that the criticisms and expulsions are directed not at intellectuals but at Party members.”

The American group of participants included, as usual, McNamara, Blumenthal, and Brown; Robert Hormats of Goldman Sachs, previously a deputy secretary of state; Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, an intelligence expert; and two former national security advisers, Brent Scowcroft and Robert McFarlane. The economist Aho, who was not a China expert, joined Barnett, Oksenberg, Scalapino, and Harry Harding of the Brookings Institution at the meeting, for which Aho prepared a report on the economic questions raised during his recent visit to China. Tellingly, its title was “Economic Issues: More Questions than Answers.” Aho suggested that the pace of change and economic growth was slowing, at least temporarily, as the Chinese began to place greater emphasis on “stability,” while assorted bottlenecks and systemic barriers also impeded rapid change.

A second set of US-China dialogues that began in mid-1986, alternating between Beijing and the United States, was co-hosted by the Kettering Foundation and the American Studies Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Li Shenzhi, director of the Institute, who headed the Chinese delegation, insisted that the Chinese

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present should include both “a senior delegation and a second delegation of the ‘successor generation’” of Chinese intellectuals. The first Kettering dialogue took place in autumn 1986 over ten days in three different US locations: the Wingspread Conference Center at Racine, Wisconsin; Washington, DC; and New York City. On the suggestion of the Chinese involved, it focused upon the difficult issue of the future of Taiwan, which was beginning to rank increasingly high in Sino-US relations. Despite misgivings on the part of the US State Department and at least one leading American scholar of China, who felt the subject was so sensitive the United States should leave well alone, foundation executives decided that since the Chinese themselves had proposed the topic, their wishes should be respected.

In Washington, the Chinese met with various members of the US Congress, to give them some understanding of the political ramifications of the Taiwan issue. In New York, they met with academics and media representatives. Instead of a “joint memorandum” by the group, Harold Saunders of the Kettering Foundation wrote eight pages of “Reflections” on the meeting that tried to convey both the American and Chinese positions. According to Li Shenzhi, Deng Xiaoping in Beijing, who had “apparently personally approved Chinese participation,” later received a copy of this document. This spoke of American hopes that, rather than continuing their present “estrangement,” through “peaceful political processes” Taiwan and the mainland would ultimately be able to develop a “new long-term relationship.” Such an outcome would be jeopardized by “political steps on Taiwan toward separation and/or the threat or use of force by China.” The Chinese, for their part, wished to accomplish “reunification” through peaceful means. They feared “that the situation on Taiwan might run out of control, forcing China to use armed force,” a move with the potential to destroy the Sino-US relationship. “China does not want this to happen.” Mathews suggested that an “ongoing dialogue” might focus on trying to

influence Taiwan toward “a mutually advantageous long-term relationship with China.” He recommended efforts to build further contacts, economic and otherwise, between Taiwan and China, and other measures that “might contribute constructively to reducing fears in Taiwan” of any dealings with China.\(^\text{15}\)

**The Events of 1989**

Although Taiwan would give continue to trigger intermittent crises in Sino-US relations, more immediate problems arose when Chinese reforms encountered problems and popular discontent and dissent grew in China. In May 1989, former party chairman Hu Yaobang died, an event that gave the impetus for spontaneous demonstrations by students in Beijing demanding greater democracy, who occupied Tiananmen Square, remaining there until early June 1989, when the Chinese military forcibly drove them out, events covered by media from around the world. As the student occupation continued, at the end of May 1989 the Council hosted a round table by three Chinese and one US scholar. These were the well-known Chinese journalist Liu Binyan, then visiting Harvard on a fellowship; the film director Chen Kaige; Orville Schell, an American political scientist and journalist who held a research fellowship at the University of California at Berkeley; and Liu Baifang, who worked on Random House’s Chinese-American co-publishing projects. In April 1989, Liu Binyan had publicly criticized the Chinese government for preventing the Chinese dissident physicist Fang Lizhi from accepting invitations to attend scientific gatherings in the United States, and then blocking his attendance at a banquet hosted by President George W. Bush on a visit to Beijing that spring.\(^\text{16}\) Initially, this meeting was planned as a film showing, but it was subsequently decided to “focus it directly on current developments in China.” The ultimate title was “The Political


\(^{16}\) See material in File 7, Box 524, CFR Papers.
Upheaval in China,” a roundtable meeting attended by 66, including Winston Lord, recently returned from China after almost four years as ambassador, several NCUSCR members, and a substantial number of businessmen, foundation executives, and academics. At this meeting William Hyland, editor of the Council’s journal, *Foreign Affairs*, “greatly disturbed” David M. Lampton, the new president of the NCUSCR, and indeed those Chinese present, by suggesting that the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union had “greatly diminished the importance of China in U.S. calculations” and “really ma[de] the opening to China little more than an historic ‘marriage of convenience’ that now no longer serves much of a purpose.” Lampton, who hoped Hyland was “just being provocative,” protested, but the suggestion was symptomatic of growing American disillusionment with China.17

A few days after the Council roundtable, the Chinese military moved and cleared Tiananmen Square and Beijing of the demonstrating students, while Fang and his wife took refuge in the US embassy in Beijing. In mid-June, Lord addressed a crowded lunchtime Council meeting on “China and America: Great Walls and Open Doors,” drawing standing ovations for his presentation of the issues involved.18 Soon afterwards, *Foreign Affairs*, published a lengthy article by Lord on “China and America: Beyond the Big Chill,” that also served as the text for a further small round table session on China, restricted to sixteen people, in October 1989. Most of those present were journalists or Council staff, though Richard Holbrooke, a former assistant secretary of state for East Asia, also attended.

Despite recent events, Lord—more in sorrow than in anger—defended the Sino-American relationship, arguing: “Not only has the United States derived enormous benefits from this relationship, but in the process it has encouraged and strengthened the very forces for greater openness and freedom in China that shone so brightly last April and May.” He praised President George H. W. Bush’s efforts to maintain relations with China, while expressing “profound sadness” that Deng Xiaoping, an “old friend,” had chosen this course. Lord praised the students and demonstrators

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18 See material in File 33 Winston Lord, Box 525, CFR Papers.
for choosing the route of peaceful protest and trying to work within the system, and argued that the Chinese leadership “could have maintained, indeed enhanced, its authority and legitimacy through rather modest conciliatory gestures.” Many Chinese officials would, he argued, have preferred policies of conciliation. Indeed, the Chinese leadership had “lost the respect, confidence and credibility they had garnered during the past decade. . . . They have squandered their special standing in world affairs. They have shaken the view that China’s entry into the international economic, security and intellectual systems should be encouraged and facilitated.” He was, however, “confident that, however grim the interlude, a more enlightened leadership will emerge within a few years,” and would once again manage to “rewrite history.” Lord even hoped that the events of 1989 might have accelerated China’s movement toward democracy, pluralism, and openness. In the short run, however, much of the progress in Sino-American relations over previous years would be squandered, and the atmosphere would deteriorate. Arms sales and military exchanges were suspended, as were all top-level government contacts, and numerous business, scientific, and cultural programs. Ultimately, Lord expected such programs to resume, but believed that in the short term this would not be possible. He nonetheless called on China to make modest conciliatory gestures, such as reviving exchanges of students and others, that would help the United States to regain confidence in the Chinese, and ensure that China was not “totally isolate[d].”

Lord nonetheless believed that, in the long term, grounds for optimism existed, not least because “[a] vast network of official, professional and personal contacts has been created. The key Chinese interlocutors,” he believed, “are precisely those elements who supported—and will support—the aspirations for a freer, more open society. They are shackled now from expressing their view, but they are eager to resume cooperation and will do so once a progressive regime takes hold.” China’s leaders were already trying to regain access to foreign capital, technology, and markets. Lord anticipated the emergence of a more moderate Chinese government, which would be the signal for the United States to “move vigorously to energize a wide range of contacts and programs that are now on hold. This will not be a favor to China but rather to ourselves.” He anticipated that, as relations between the United States and the Soviet Union improved, China would be one of several “new
centers of wealth and stability” that would emerge in a more multipolar international system. The United States and China would continue to have a shared interest in maintaining global and regional balances of power, in Asia and elsewhere. They also needed to cooperate in efforts to resolve conflicts and tensions in Indochina, Korea, and South Asia, and on numerous other issues, including Chinese military modernization. Ultimately, he believed, China would have to allow greater political and intellectual freedoms to their own people and show more concern for human rights of every kind.

Meanwhile, Lord warned, the United States faced “ambiguities and tough decisions” in dealing with China. “Our strategic imperative is to preserve a long-term relationship. Our moral imperative is to project our principles as we survive this cold season of suppression.” Hoping that the “Big Chill” in Sino-American relations would be lifted relatively soon, Lord warned that, “[e]ven when a warmer climate returns, the journey will be complex.” Depicting the parameters of the relationship, he stated:

Our two nations will share important security concerns, but we will not be allies, and we will differ on many international issues. We will strengthen ties of amity. But we will face inevitable tensions as we mesh two continental giants with vastly contrasting histories, cultures, stages of development and values. We will cultivate cooperation. But we can hardly hope for harmony.

Urging Americans to have “a steadier vision” of China, he recalled how in the past American perceptions had veered dramatically between “romance and hostility. . . . During just the past half century, the Chinese have appeared, successively, as beleaguered allies and implacable foes, as yellow hordes, red guards and blue ants, the angelic Maoist man and the diabolical Gang of Four, budding capitalists adorning magazine covers and beastly communists crushing students.”

19 Lord, “China and America: Beyond the Big Chill,” Foreign Affairs 68:4 (Fall 1989): 1-26, quotations from 1-2, 4, 5, 6, 12, 25-26
Lord’s article, on which he had consulted Oksenberg, was just one example of how, after Tiananmen, the public-private networks of American China watchers that had developed over the previous two to three decades around the major think tanks and foundations functioned to mitigate the impact of June 4, 1989, and to help rebuild the Sino-American relationship. The Asia Society quickly organized meetings in New York with Peter Geithner, the Ford Foundation’s representative in China, and two different panels of leading China experts: the first included Anthony Kane and Robert Oxnam of the Asia Society, David Lampton of the National Committee on US-China Relations, and Andrew Nathan of Columbia University, and the second Harry Harding, Winston Lord, and Roger Sullivan of the US-China Business Council. The Asia Society’s Washington Center continued its standard press off-the-record briefings. At the Houston Center, Anthony Kane, director of the China Council, “delivered a special talk on the political situation” in China in June 1989. In Los Angeles, the Asia Society’s Southern California Center received briefings on events in China from the journalist Jay Mathews, Los Angeles Bureau Chief for The Washington Post, and Jonathan Pollack of the RAND Corporation. For the most part, those involved in these briefings, though shocked, still sought to rescue the relationship, and were unwilling to write off China completely. Oxnam recalled that he “strongly condemned the Tiananmen massacre—in television interviews, in an address to some four hundred people who packed an auditorium at my twenty-fifth reunion at Williams College, and in comments for a thousand people at the Asia Society’s annual dinner.” Simultaneously, though, he urged that it was essential that the United States should “remain engaged with China, not suspending most-favored-nation trading privileges, instead working to achieve human rights through tough negotiations on specific cases.”

The National Committee on US-China Relations followed a similar trajectory. At the end of March Lampton, who had just visited China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, predicted “a bumpy period” in Sino-American relations, “in which an increasingly

21 Oxnam, A Fractured Mind, 29.
besieged Chinese leadership is confronted with an increasingly assertive America.”

Two weeks later, Lampton produced a draft paper on “U.S.-China Relations” that suggested that, despite difficulties over Taiwan, protectionism, Chinese ‘dumping’ of exports, intellectual property, birth control, Chinese weapons sales, Tibet, and human rights, “Sino-American relations are fundamentally sound.” Strategic reasons, China’s need for investment capital, and the fact that China’s economy was the “fastest growing country market in the world,” meant: “Interest, not sentimentality . . . will keep Sino-American relations in a progressing (albeit erratic) mode.” Just who would succeed Deng Xiaoping remained unclear, Lampton pointed out, and significant political debates were in progress over how best to combine political reform with social stability. These tended to make Chinese policies unpredictable. Yet Lampton’s “prognosis” was that “U.S.-China relations, like Washington’s ties with many other countries of the world, will become an exercise in continual conflict management. The honeymoon may be over, but divorce is not imminent.”

By late May, as the student occupation of Tiananmen Square continued, the NCUSCR was sufficiently alarmed by developments in China to hold a conference call of its directors. With the outcome of the protests still unclear, the Committee decided against cancelling any planned programmes, but planned a special briefing on June 6, and tentatively envisaged several other events over the next two months that would seek to elucidate interpret events in China. Even before the crackdown, a scheduled talk on May 30 by Wan Li, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, was cancelled when he cut short his trip and returned to Beijing to help deal with the crisis. Qian Qichen, China’s Foreign Minister, likewise called off a planned visit. The NCUSCR Committee had planned to send five groups to China in June 1989, and to host several Chinese delegations. These trips were quickly abandoned, as were several cooperative programs. Like other

22 Lampton to Members of the Board of Directors, March 31, 1989, Folder 4 National Committee on US China Relations, Box 67, Series 1, McNamara Papers.
organizations involved with China, the Committee issued a statement deploiring the recent bloodshed, but reaffirming its determination to work with individuals and organizations in China that shared a commitment “to healthy Sino-American relations, ongoing dialogue, and efforts at mutual understanding.” Like the Asia Society, in spring 1989 the National Committee was swamped with requests for information on events in China, which became still more of a torrent in June. One the evenings of June 6 and 7, the National Committee organized briefings at the Harvard Club in New York, at which the current and past presidents, David Lampton and Arthur Rosen, took part in panel discussions on the China situation. In mid-June, John C. C. Chan, Hong Kong’s secretary of trade and industry, spoke at the National Committee on the likely impact of recent events on Hong Kong, scheduled to return to China in 1997. Three top academics from Taiwan also attended a National Committee breakfast meeting in July 1989, answering questions on how the crackdown in China would affect Taiwan domestically and in its relations with the mainland and the United States.²⁵

One of the more interesting encounters during this period was a visit in late June by four Soviet scholars from the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, hosted by the National Committee as part of an exchange program involving Soviet, American, and Chinese scholars. David Lampton and Jan Berris of the National Committee, together with Terrill Lautz of the Luce Foundation, Thomas Robinson, now at the American Enterprise Institute, and Donald Zagoria, discussed the May 1989 Sino-Soviet summit meeting between Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping and the international implications of the recent crackdown. Americans and Soviets alike agreed that “a China committed to an outward-looking and open policy is important to the maintenance of stability in Asia.” Given the interdependent nature of many of the problems facing the world, “a stable China” was

essential. Therefore, neither China’s neighbors nor the United States had “an interest in China’s isolation.”

In early July, with support from the Johnson Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Henry Luce Foundation, the NCUSCR convened a major conference on “China in Flux” in the Wingspread Conference Center at Racine, Wisconsin. Around forty conferees, who included most of the leading American China watchers, anticipated “an extended period of economic and political turmoil” in China, with oscillations in policy, and possibly no clear direction at the top and no obvious successor to Deng Xiaoping. They concluded that, while the United States must demonstrate persistent “strong displeasure” and protest against recent events, major strategic and economic interests were also at stake. Little, moreover, was to be gained by “isolating China in a way that fosters instability or would impose hardship on the Chinese people.” If possible, scholarly, cultural, and educational exchanges should continue, and businesses should be free to keep operating in China. Most present agreed that the United States should resist pressures by various Chinese groups to make it “an active partisan in Chinese politics.” The conference recommended that, when taking action on China, the United States seek to act in conjunction with international organizations and with its allies. There was some skepticism about the value of economic sanctions, given that such measures had usually been ineffective. At the same time, most conferees wanted to make it clear to Beijing’s leaders how strongly other countries deplored recent events. They therefore thought it “essential to make concerted, protracted, and systematic efforts to show disapproval of Chinese government policies,” while expressing concern for their Chinese friends and associates who might be at risk.

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In August, the National Committee’s Board of Directors tentatively decided to continue with exchanges and dialogue, in a cautious and exploratory manner. The National Committee also quietly dispatched Lampton and Barnett on a fact-finding trip to China and Hong Kong, to assess whether such programs were still feasible. They had around 28 meetings in Beijing, 12 in Shanghai, and 12 in Hong Kong, with a wide array of Chinese and American academics, government officials, businessmen, and others. The two concluded that a difficult period was in store for both China and Sino-American relations. While they encountered a wide range of responses to the 1989 events, they were alarmed by suggestions from a number of Chinese that exchanges had facilitated foreign subversion, which in turn had been largely responsible for the student demonstrations. They felt that many Chinese underestimated the impact outside China of media coverage of these events. Barnett and Lampton also found disturbing charges that, through radio broadcasts, sanctions, and the like, other nations were “intervening” in China’s internal affairs. They thought China’s elite deeply divided, and anticipated two to three years of economic problems and political difficulties and instability in China, as different factions within the elite fought for predominance. They expected Sino-American relations to deteriorate further for a while before bottoming out. The two also observed a great deal of cynicism among many Chinese toward their government’s latest political campaign. At that time many Chinese academics they knew, particularly those from the research institutions, were undergoing investigation for subversion, and Lampton and Barnett found the atmosphere in Beijing and Shanghai decidedly repressive. Nonetheless, almost all those Chinese they met, including those who opposed US government policies, were adamant that the channels of Sino-American intellectual

RAC; and David M. Lampton, *China and U.S.-China Relations in the Wake of Tiananmen* (New York: National Committee on US-China Relations, September 1989), in Folder 2 National Committee Reports, Box 69, Series 1, McNamara Papers.  

exchange must remain open. Lampton and Barnett therefore recommended that exchanges continue, though possibly at a reduced level, since they believed some areas were still too sensitive for anything productive to come out of them. They thought the National Committee should not restrict itself to simple “logistical” functions, but should continue publishing conference reports and other materials on China that might include criticisms of Chinese policies.29

The whole apparatus of American non-governmental organizations interested in China policy had always worked rather closely together, a practice they continued after Tiananmen. In what was clearly a decidedly coordinated approach, the major foundations likewise maintained their commitment to China. After the July 1989 Wingspread conference, Terrill Lautz of the Henry Luce Foundation discerned “a strong consensus on the value of continuing private sector programs with Chinese counterparts, but conditioned on the behavior of China’s government. In other words, resumption of these programs will depend more on their actions than on ours.”30 William McAlpin of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund met with Lampton before the latter visited China, and likewise congratulated him on the report of the recent National Committee conference on “China in Flux.” Before visiting Beijing himself in October 1989, McAlpin received a copy of Barnett and Lampton’s report on their own trip.31 The Rockefeller Foundation and Rockefeller Brothers Fund both remained active in China despite the events of June 1989. The presidents of both organizations publicly expressed outrage over the suppression of student unrest, but continued their financial support for Chinese programs, arguing that to cut back on

30 Terrill Lautz to Lampton, July 11, 1989, File 8148 National Committee on China Relations 1989-1990, Box 1350, Series Grants, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Papers, RAC.
these would be counterproductive. The Ford Foundation, which from the late 1970s onwards had begun spending over $1 million annually on China-related projects and activities, a rate almost double that of the previous few years, did likewise. Most of these funds were intended to support exchanges of people, conferences, and seminars, that involved relationships with Chinese individuals and organizations. In 1979 it established an exchange programme with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing that focused largely on international relations, law, and economics, with a substantial policy-related emphasis. In partnership with CASS, in 1987 the Ford Foundation established an office in Beijing, which it kept open even after the military suppression of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of June 1989. Peter Geithner, who headed the Ford Foundation’s China Office from 1987 to 1992, stated that his organization sought to encourage the success of reforms in China. . . . We are contributing to China as it is in the hopes of making it like we would like it to be.”

The National Committee’s efforts at communication and understanding therefore continued. The Fourth US-China Dialogue meeting, initially planned for June 1989, was still scheduled for early 1990 in Beijing. The occasion provided an opportunity for a group of prominent Americans to meet with their Chinese counterparts, and have some unusually frank exchanges. Led by Raymond A. Shafer, president of the National Committee, the American group also included Robert McNamara; James

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34 Bullock, *The Oil Prince’s Legacy*, 165; and Zi, *The Destiny of Wealth*, 172-177.
Lilley, the US ambassador; former US Army chief of staff John Wickham; David Lampton; Colin Campbell, president of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund; Janet Shanberge, the managing director of Kamsky Associates, a Beijing-based merchant bank; and the China specialists Mary Bullock, Harry Harding, Nicholas Lardy, Michel Oksenberg, and Robert Scalapino. The Chinese side included thirty top-level officials, academics, and diplomats, active or retired, many of them top-level advisers to the Chinese government. Besides having three days of “remarkably candid off-the-record plenary discussion” with each other, the Dialogue participants also met Premier Li Peng, widely held to be responsible for the events of June 1989, State Councillor Li Tieying, and Vice Foreign Minister Liu Huaqiu. The American Dialogue group was also able to meet with other Chinese individuals and organizations with whom they had many years’ worth of contacts. They held briefings for the American communities in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. On their return to China, the group provided further briefings to federal agencies and Congress on the situation in China.

All present spoke as individuals, rather than representatives of their organizations, and no statements, conclusions, or recommendations were issued. Some at least of the Chinese sought to play on Cold War fears by warning the United States that the Soviet Union remained a dangerous adversary. They also argued that the United States needed China, to maintain stability in Asia by counterbalancing Japan and assisting in Korea, and as a trading partner. The Chinese placed most of the blame for the “deadlock” in Sino-American relations on the American imposition of sanctions on China, which they treated as intervention in China’s internal affairs, and called for these to be lifted. Robert McNamara retorted that he believed that the Cold War was ending, while the Soviet economy was in crisis. The Chinese needed to recognize that they lived in an interdependent world. Other Americans rebutted suggestions that Japan represented a strategic threat to the United States. One American inquired whether Leninist systems had become “obsolete” in the modern, technological world. One American, probably James Lilley, anticipated at least two to three difficult years in Sino-American relations. Praising President George Bush and others such as ex-President Nixon, Kissinger, Lawrence Eagleburger, and Brent Scowcroft for displaying “great courage” in trying to halt “further deterioration” in
Sino-American relations, he warned that since Tiananmen, “the world thinks differently about China.” China was, in his view, undergoing three transitions: a leadership transition, the transformation from a planned to a mixed economy, and broad modernization. Pragmatically, he suspected that the best course might just be to wait for a while, until the atmosphere improved.

Besides condemning American sanctions, Chinese participants challenged the American interpretation of human rights, saying that economic and social rights were equally important, while “[s]ocialism is not doomed to failure.” Americans were repeatedly accused of inference in China’s internal affairs. Americans warned that it was impossible to separate technology from political and cultural ideas. One warned specifically that the United States had “greater power than China—China is a potential regional power.” One American also affirmed that the United States had an interest in a stable China, a country that embraced not just economic but also political reform, because instability in China would spill over into the international system. Another said that the Chinese leaders had displayed “callousness” toward their own people, with no “remorse” or “regret,” and that American sanctions were therefore justified as a way of sending a message. One Chinese hotly denied that the country was a “one-party dictatorship.” Another disputed the American view that China had gone backwards since June 1989, stating that the government was still committed to reform, and was merely correcting a few mistakes. One Chinese keynote speaker emphasized how determined China was that reform and opening up would continue. Americans highlighted problems that foreigners faced when trying to do business in China, that needed to be addressed.

On its third day, the Dialogue broke off for a meeting with Premier Li Peng at Zhongnanhai. Shafer and McNamara both emphasized that American views of China had changed dramatically in the past year, due both to humanitarian concerns and to the belief that China was abandoning its policies of economic reform and opening up. They warned that political pressures meant President Bush had little room for maneuver on Chinese sanctions. Li Peng defended China’s policies, saying that he was anxious to restore good relations with the United States, but that people in
China were demanding stability. In his view, “the PLA brings freedom to the people” by opposing efforts to overturn socialism “in the name of human rights.”

When the sessions resumed, one American warned that Chinese harassment of the foreign press was highly “counterproductive,” since it would merely further discredit China. Often, the talks seemed to resemble a dialogue of the deaf, with some of the younger Chinese present particularly defiant. “War? Big sticks? Impose a blockade?” said one. “We have had all this in the past and we are still here. And the Chinese people are doing very well! . . . You are disappointed in China’s not going capitalist. It is not yours to be disappointed.”

As the meeting ended, Harry Harding summed up the American position. He felt Sino-American relations had reached an “impasse,” and might well deteriorate further before improving. Each side blamed the other for the deadlock, and on both sides major obstacles existed to repairing the situation. Harding nonetheless discerned some reason for optimism, inasmuch as both governments stated that they still “assign[ed] great value” to the Sino-American relationship. The conference itself had demonstrated that Chinese and Americans still wished to talk to each other, while few Americans appeared willing to “isolate China.” Given the destruction of the Berlin Wall and Soviet withdrawal from Europe, he doubted that any renewed Soviet threat was likely to propel China and the United States back into each other’s arms. If China could make significant progress on such matters as releasing the physicist Fang Lizhi, who was at that time living in the US embassy, or show greater flexibility on other outstanding human rights and political reform issues, this might boost Sino-American relations, something that Chinese concessions on international issues, such as Cambodia, Korea, or arms sales to the Middle East, would probably not accomplish.

Harding had recommendations for both the American and Chinese sides. He called on Bush to begin trying to rebuild the former American consensus on China policy, through public statements of his position and close cooperation with Congress. Americans needed, he thought, to realize that the existing Chinese government was extremely unlikely to apologize for Tiananmen or even provide any accurate data on the crisis. The Bush administration should therefore make it clear that it believed
some Chinese “reversal of history” on these events would ultimately transpire, but focus more on future developments within China. Americans should try to look dispassionately at China and gauge just what level of economic and political liberalization could realistically be expected. China, for its part, needed to demonstrate in practice, not just rhetorically, that its commitment to economic and political reform was unchanged and it was still internally stable.

Responding to Harding at length, Chai Zemin, the first Chinese ambassador to the United States after normalization, urged the American participants to be “positive,” “seek truth from facts,” “see things from a friendly perspective,” and try to “move forward.” Rebutting Harding, Chai proclaimed: “If anyone feels that the verdict on Tiananmen will be reversed, this is not a friendly attitude.” The United States was at fault, since it had “wantonly interfered” in China’s internal affairs. The previous three days had indeed demonstrated, Chai continued, how much “[t]he U.S. side still clings to its prejudices.” He urged Chinese and Americans to focus on their common interests, since good Sino-American relations were valuable in terms of stabilizing both the international system and the Asian and Pacific region, as well as facilitating bilateral cooperation in a wide range of fields, including trafficking in narcotics. Using extremely undiplomatic language, the former ambassador assailed US criticisms of China and the recent sanctions, stating highly emotionally that the Chinese and Americans had “different interpretations of June 4th. You feel it was a big mistake and say to us, admit it! We feel that this is a preposterous remark. Would any other big city let itself be paralyzed? . . . The aim is to shut us up, to say that all this is a smokescreen.” Defiantly, he continued:

The Americans feel they have won the Cold War and want China to adopt the capitalist model (if not the American model) and if we don’t do this then China is out of step. China is not isolated—we do not feel the isolation. There are more than 100 countries in the world and how many oppose us in a blatant manner? The majority are dealing with us. What are the manifestations of isolation? We do not feel the difficulties. We don’t feel the problems are serious or intractable. . . . China has never yielded to foreign pressure and we
value our independence. The Chinese people have chosen the CCP and socialism... We overcame the USSR/USA blockade in the 1960s. We will overcome the problem.

According to the rapporteur, Chai repeated all these points, highlighting the Communist Party’s positive achievements. He reserved harsh condemnation—“They are no longer citizens of China!”—for those Chinese students in the United States who supported sanctions against China and sought to remain in the United States. Agreeing with Chai’s “wonderful, fair presentation,” the economist Yong Longgui, who served on the Committee to Draft the Basic Law for post-1997 Hong Kong, likewise assailed the Americans and the US Congress for raising the question of the future of Hong Kong, which he characterized as entirely an internal Chinese issue. Attacking Harding for mentioning Hong Kong, he demanded that all references to Hong Kong should be removed from the U.S.-China Dialogue report. Suggesting that the “impasse” of sanctions be set to one side, an American suggested that future Sino-American relations should focus less upon strategy and more upon such issues as the environment, drugs, family planning, health, and agriculture. He anticipated a more decentralized relationship, with “fewer official and more private linkages” and a new focus upon the local level. He recommended that in future, China and the United States should “not take such rapid insult with each other. While we can’t rebuild the harmony of the 1980s, we can be realistic.” Another American warned that Chinese failed to understand that, even though the events of June 4, 1989 had done no actual harm to American interests, “values” and “human rights” were part of American foreign policy. In an interdependent world, they could not be considered a purely internal matter. He was nonetheless “relatively optimistic” that the younger generation of Chinese and Americans would manage to restore the relationship.

For some, though, American criticism rankled bitterly. One Chinese speaker fiercely assailed the idea that human rights were not simply an internal affair, with one proclaiming: “Man is not the basis of law, the state is.” Another Chinese warned the Americans that the changes then in progress in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe “will not be as good as you expect; they are heading toward long-term turmoil.”
Chinese were following a different path toward reform, one that did not necessarily accord with American preferences, but that suited China’s own circumstances. “In some sense,” he warned, “Americans are out of step—hegemonism, power politics, sanctions, these are anachronistic. Enhance mutual equality and respect, not pressure.” Chinese national pride was very much at stake. As the final session ended, he challenged: “It is a mistake if you think there will be a reversal of verdicts on Tiananmen or that we will adopt a market economy—you will be totally disappointed. . . . We have our own principles and our own sentiments. ‘China is a rock, not bean curd!’ We are not afraid.”

With the conference drawing to an end, one Chinese remarked that both sides had been “very candid,” evidence that the meeting had been a success. He confessed: “I didn’t realize that events in China had such an impact on our friends and that our friends don’t understand our policies and our situation.” While regretting that too much of the sessions had been devoted to “complaints” from the Americans, he welcomed the fact that the dialogue represented “an open channel” between the two countries. In his closing remarks, Governor Shafer likewise praised the conference for providing an opportunity for extremely frank dialogue, on issues far more sensitive than those on which previous such meetings had focused. Listing the major points of difference dividing between the two sides, Shafer anticipated that, given Chinese near-incomprehension of the American position, restoring the Sino-American relationship would be a difficult and time-consuming business. Given how many interests the two countries had in common, Shafer nonetheless believed that it was essential that such efforts should continue. Wrapping up the meeting, a subdued Han Nianlong, President of the Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs, noted that the conference had heard “frank opinions” rather than “hypocritical opinions.” Rather sadly, he continued: “It is hard to see a person’s heart. Opinions differ, but I am optimistic. I feel uncomfortable—it is so regrettable.” Looking back to his Institute’s past dealings with the National Committee, and the past “controversies” that had made them “good friends,” Han hoped that all present would work to restore Sino-American bilateral relations.
The next morning, the American group met with State Councillor Li Tieying in the Great Hall of the People. Lampton brought up American educators’ concerns, including the treatment of Chinese university students and scholars in the social sciences and humanities in the aftermath of June Fourth. Such harassment and intimidation was liable, he warned, likely to jeopardize American educational exchanges with China. So, too, would recent political campaigns directed against “bourgeois liberalization” and “peaceful evolution,” which likewise frequently targeted Chinese academics. If these policies continued, American universities and foundations would look elsewhere. Colin Campbell, president of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, told Li of American universities’ frustrations in working with the Chinese government on student exchanges, with regulations often opaque and unclear, particularly in terms of whether such students could remain in the United States. He also complained that foundation executives were concerned about their ability to work directly with the Chinese institutions and individuals to whom they made grants. Li responded by stating that the current difficulties in Sino-American relations were only temporary. Since World War II, he argued, China and the United States had never been strategic “rivals.” Instead, China had “followed an independent foreign policy and has not stationed troops abroad.” China was continuing to maintain domestic stability and economic reform. He offered some flexibility on allowing self-funded Chinese students to enter American universities and on permitting Chinese students who wished to remain in the United States to do so. Otherwise, he condemned as “traitors to the Chinese cause” those Chinese students who were publicly advocating US sanctions on China. The ideological campaigns he defended as “designed to acquaint Chinese students with their country. . . . They should love the PLA and serve it. They should learn to contribute to the country; learn ethical teachings.” Adjustments in curriculum were, he said, normal in any educational system, but China did not intend to remove any particular disciplines from the universities. Scholarly academic exchanges were not in any way restricted.

Steven Roberts, a senior writer for *U S News and World Report*, the one journalist in the group, warned Li that students in the United States were trained not just to serve the state but also to “think for themselves. An educated person is one who criticizes society and loves it.” Chinese students in the United States would learn this. He
also protested against the Chinese restrictions on foreign journalists. An intransigent Li promptly responded that he was “impertinent!” Describing Roberts’s comments as “not in conformity with the atmosphere here,” Li stated that China’s “openness is unprecedented.” He also complained that many foreign journalists had broken Chinese laws in June 1989. Another American suggested to Li that China should start trying to explain its policies to overseas media representatives, an idea that appealed to him. More controversially, the same interlocutor asked whether “political study” in China had any value. Asked to clarify his statement that Chinese students overseas who had taken part in anti-Chinese demonstrations would not be punished, and his characterization of those who opposed the Chinese government as “traitors,” Li stated that only the “very small number” of students who continued to attack the government, advocating its overthrow and the imposition of US sanctions, were ineligible for pardon.

The group’s final meeting was with Vice Foreign Minister Liu Huaqiao. He purveyed the standard Chinese government line, that good Sino-American relations were extremely important to both sides; that both sides “shared significant long-term interests”; nothing had changed in the relationship; China was stable and its people peaceful and contented; and US sanctions should be lifted immediately. He hoped that China and the United States could put their differences to one side and resume good relations, based on non-interference and the three Sino-US communiqués. Told that George Bush had already expended all his political capital in efforts to prevent any further deterioration in relations, Liu replied that the United States was to blame for the downturn in relations and had done too little to restore the relationship after June 1989.

Liu’s attitude was just one example of how, in the words of the National Committee’s newsletter, both Chinese and Americans seemed to agree only that “in the long run, healthy U.S.-China relations are in the interest of both countries. Otherwise, their attitudes reflected the two countries’ very different histories, values, and experiences. McNamara, Wickham, Roberts, and Lampton subsequently conducted a briefing on US-China relations in the Jiangguo Hotel, at which they made it clear that these were currently deadlocked. Lampton and Jan Berris conducted similar briefings in both
Shanghai and Hong Kong. The Americans involved in the Dialogue left Beijing believing that China’s elite was uncertain how to cope with all the demands, challenges, and changes involved in modernizing the economy, while maintaining political stability, and feared “no one else has any idea how to accomplish this either.” They predicted a turbulent path for both China’s future and for Sino-American relations.  

The National Committee later concluded: “No minds were changed on either side, but the value of this Dialogue was deeper understanding of each other.” The non-China scholars among the Americans gained “sharper perception of Chinese sensitivity to the issues of sovereignty, national pride, and alleged Western interference in Chinese affairs, as well as the intensity of their fear of chaos and their desire for stability.” Even some Chinese were apparently affected, with one Chinese former “resolute hardliner” overheard commenting to another that he now understood that Americans were “so deeply involved in current Chinese affairs” because they “truly care[d] about China and about the relationship.”

On returning, in April 1990 Shafer and Lampton published an op-ed piece on their experiences in the *Christian Science Monitor*, publicly stating their conviction that despite current difficulties in the relationship, the United States must remain engaged with China.

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Lampton organized a special dinner briefing on the China and Hong Kong trip to for around two dozen of the National Committee’s corporate members, suggesting that the NCUSCR might bring a group of leading Chinese industrialists to the United States, to meet with their American counterparts. He also wished to discuss pending trade legislation in Congress, aimed at pressuring China into changing its domestic policies, something Lampton clearly believed would be counterproductive. With pressure rising in Congress to remove Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status from China until that country improved its performance on human rights, Lampton testified in his private capacity that doing so would merely penalize the Chinese people, while making the government more resistant to change. It would also, he warned, “be a torpedo hit below the water line for Hong Kong.” Furthermore, removing MFN would probably strengthen the hand of Chinese opponents of Deng Xiaoping’s policies of economic reform in the internecine political struggles then in progress within the Chinese political elite and weaken progressive supporters of political reform.

The National Committee continued to host delegations of influential Chinese figures. Throughout 1990, exchanges of views continued, and the tone became more moderate. In spring 1990, a group of five Soviet specialists from the Beijing Institute for International Studies visited the United States, to take part in a Dialogue on Sino-American relations organized by the Kettering Foundation. Soon afterwards, three American Studies specialists from the Chinese Academy of Social

Wickham also published accounts of their visit. Harding, “Pressure Won’t Break This Impasse,” Los Angeles Times (April 6, 1990), and Wickham, “The Chill in Sino-American Relations,” Signal (M17 1990), Folder National Committee on US-China Relations General 1990, Box 132, Barnett Papers.


Sciences came to the United States for a further Kettering Dialogue, in which Lampton participated. In both cases, the National Committee arranged additional programs for the Chinese visitors, to make their views known to a wider spectrum of Americans than the rather restricted number attending these Dialogues. The first group attended public forums in Providence, Rhode Island, New York, and Washington, while the second spent an extra week in Washington and New York, meeting academics and government officials, including leading congressional critics of China.

Of the first group, the National Committee reported that they took part in “frank and forthright discussions,” during which they “listened attentively and thoughtfully to a variety of critical views about China’s domestic situation and the U.S.-China relationship. In turn, they responded in a direct and open manner.” By the time the second group arrived in late 1990, Iraq had invaded Kuwait, and China had voted in favor of resolutions condemning Iraq’s actions and authorizing a US-led campaign to remove Iraq from Kuwait. The visiting Chinese experts took this as evidence that, while common fears of the Soviet Union no longer drove China and the United States together, China was still strategically important to the United States. Again, the group’s meetings with congressmen and other Americans on China and Sino-American relations found some common ground, but also “substantial areas of disagreement.” But the two sides were at least talking to each other.40 Such contacts continued. In January 1991, former Chinese foreign minister Huang Hua led a delegation of seven Chinese diplomats and former ministers to the United States. The National Committee organized a private, off-the-record breakfast for them, which gave an opportunity for a genuine exchange of views.41 In March 1991, with Sino-American Relations still in crisis, the National Committee also hosted a delegation of senior Chinese foreign policy officials, who met with various members of Congress.

40 “Joint Programs with the Kettering Foundation,” *U.S. China Relations: Notes from the National Committee* 20:1 (Winter 1990-1991), 11.
and their staffers to discuss sensitive issues, including human rights in China and trade.\textsuperscript{42}

The Fifth US-China Binational Dialogue was held in Racine, Wisconsin, in June 1991. Chai Zemin, whose impassioned defense of Chinese policies had been such a feature of the previous year’s gathering, notable for the “high temperature” and “high voices” of those involved, led a delegation of Chinese academics and government officials to the United States. Reporting on this meeting, Shafer noted that the previous year those present had found “little agreement beyond our shared commitment to the relationship itself. This year,” he continued, “that commitment remains but the temperature is lower, along with the voices, and we find areas of agreement that should not be overlooked.” These included a consensus that the world was now characterized by numerous power centers, making multilateral dialogues essential. Economic development and arms control were two areas that both sides agreed needed to be addressed; the Americans would have liked to include “discussions on human rights concepts.” Chinese and Americans also concurred that their bilateral relationship was significant to each, as well as the world; that its condition was “precarious”; and that the pending decision on China’s MFN status would have a major impact on the relationship. They also agreed that Sino-American educational, scientific, technological, and cultural cooperation were extremely important and should continue. In terms of disagreements, the Chinese tended to view the United States as a power in decline, while the United States considered China to be unstable. The two sides also took different views of human rights, with the Chinese prioritizing basic human needs over civil rights, and placing stability and order well above individual freedoms.

As the meeting ended, Shafer was modestly optimistic, believing that both sides had a commitment to maintaining the Sino-American relationship. He suggested that they should seek to move forward on arms discussions; restore high-level contacts across a broad range of areas, using “consultation, rather than megaphone diplomacy”;

preserve China’s MFN status; and expand economic relations. Towards the end of the meeting, Lampton pragmatically urged the Chinese to devote more attention to the US Congress, given its major role in the making of policy, and to improve China’s abysmal public relations practices. Like Shafer, he also urged the resumption of high-level exchanges. Lampton observed that at this meeting, it was the Americans who pushed issues—including human rights, trade imbalances and market access, and nuclear proliferation—that they believed China should address. The Chinese delegates, for their part, “were largely in a defensive, reactive mode, arguing against American aggressiveness but not really advancing either a policy or intellectual agenda of their own.” He also noted great uncertainty among the Chinese as to the global outlook for Communism and on the future international situation in Asia, including the security role of the United States.43

June 1989 was the first and—though others would succeed it—to date indisputably the worst crisis to disrupt the smooth workings of the developing Sino-American relationship. By comparison with the current situation, at that time, the assorted Track Two dialogues that had come into being as forums where Chinese and US elites could talk relatively frankly to each other in confidence were still in their infancy. It may well be that those involved often spoke at rather than to each other. Yet the fact that such non-official (or quasi-non-official) communications continued was in itself evidence that in both the United States and China influential groups valued the relationship and sought mechanisms to steer it so as to mitigate conflicts and resolve tensions. Like Winston Churchill, they believed that “jaw, jaw” was better than “war, war.” By the second decade of the twenty-first century, far more extensive

networks of overlapping and intertwined bilateral dialogues linked the United States and China, as did a wide array of multilateral exchanges. Whether this greatly reinforced fabric of institutional and personal connections possessed the strength and resilience to address successfully the new challenges and uncertainties facing Sino-American relations following Donald Trump’s surprise election victory remained an open question.